

# **Middle-level Bureaucrats:** *profile, trajectory and performance*

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**Enap**

**Middle-level Bureaucrats:**  
*profile, trajectory and performance*

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# FOREWORD

Bureaucracy, defined as a permanent non-elected body of administrative civil servants, is one of the institutional pillars that supports the efficient functioning of the democratic system and the existence of rule of law. Its effective performance ensures the relevance and sustainability of all stages of government administration cycles. In keeping with worldwide tendencies, Brazil has sought to strengthen its body of civil servants in such a way that they may increasingly play a protagonist role in the elaboration and implementation of government policies for sectors that are strategic for the country.

In its role as a disseminator and producer of knowledge in the field of public administration, the National School of Public Administration (Escola Nacional de Administração Pública – ENAP) seeks to contribute to this strengthening process through the conduction of studies and research that can support the decision-making process and broaden theoretical and practical knowledge on related themes. The research that orientated this book on middle-level management in the Federal Government is a contribution in that direction. Its various chapters seek to portray the performance of public agents situated in intermediate levels of the governmental administrative hierarchy and analyze their role in designing public policies. This collection of articles is highly relevant as it meets part of the demand for studies targeting the complex functioning of the Brazilian State, in addition to expanding knowledge regarding this important segment of public administration which has hitherto received little attention in Brazil.

The results presented are the result of a successful collaboration between ENAP and the ABC University (UFABC) and of the valuable efforts

of researchers of the Applied Economics Research Institute (Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada - Ipea), the University of Brasília, the João Pinheiro Foundation (FJP) and the Getúlio Vargas Foundation (FGV). This partnership brought together a group of experts on Public Policy and Government Administration whose articles make up the nine chapters of this book.

The knowledge set out on the pages that follow is destined for academics, public administration students and government managers interested in improving government actions.

It is in fact an important portrait of the management body that intermediates the relations between the top-level managers of the Executive Branch that are responsible for planning and elaborating directives and guidelines, and those public agents that are in direct contact with the citizenry in the provision of public services.

The consolidation of this book is part of an ongoing effort on the part of ENAP and its partner organizations to systematize scientific knowledge concerning public policy management. Above all, it is an important step towards the development of new research projects in the sphere of public administration as they are essential to the debates on the Brazilian state.

Happy reading!

Gleisson Cardoso Rubin  
President of Enap

# INTRODUCTION

*Pedro Luiz Costa Cavalcante*  
*Gabriela Spanghero Lotta*

Over the last few years, Brazilian literature has sought to cover different themes and approaches in order to gain a better understanding of how the state works. Although there has been some progress in the research on the decision-making processes associated to public policies, academics in this field and the respective literature have only recently turned their attention to the implementation stage of policies, in a bid to understand how the various actors involved interfere with the process of putting policies into effect.

Bureaucrats in public administration systems are a highly relevant set of actors in the conduction of policy implementation processes. In this context, public bureaucracy is understood to be the permanent body of state civil servants, that is, non-elected actors that play a central role in the conduction of public affairs, whether they are career civil servants or otherwise. The role of the bureaucracy in the decision-making and policy execution process has increasingly become the object of study of a number of Brazilian and international academics. However, most of the studies that investigate the performance of the bureaucracy concentrate on those that occupy posts in higher echelons or on street-level bureaucrats, that is, those that interact directly with the beneficiaries of a certain public policy. Middle-level bureaucrats (MLB), however, have been studied far less in the literature, especially Brazilian literature, and consequently it is still unclear how they operate and to what extent they interfere in public policies (HOWLETT, 2011; PIRES, 2011; OLIVEIRA; ABRUCIO, 2011).

The importance of this particular segment of the bureaucracy lies in its position as the link between the upper echelon and those that execute public policies. Thus it is one of the main agents responsible for connecting the stages of policy formulation and policy implementation. In spite of often going unnoticed, the middle-level bureaucrat performs as a highly relevant and essential actor. To ensure that the formulated policies are into practice, the middle-level bureaucracy has the primordial task of translating decisions into actions. Despite its great relevance, its place in the intermediate position of organizational hierarchies means that the MLB exists in a kind of theoretical limbo as there are very few studies that have actually managed to establish a concept for it or understand its specific features, performance or importance to public policies.

This lack of clarity in literature and on the part of the state itself, with regard to these actors, often ends up nurturing a negative public opinion on the functioning of the public sector. This negative perception, however, does not correspond to the reality of bureaucracy as will be shown in the course of this book. Thus, it is of central importance to identify and describe the occupants of such intermediate administrative posts and what they do, not only to dispel some of the myths that exist about the state, but also to design better policies for the selection and management of people entering public service. These were the main reasons that the ABC Federal University (UFABC), the National School of Public Administration (ENAP) and the Institute of Applied Economic Research (Ipea) joined forces to conduct this research, that is, to find out who the middle-level bureaucrats in the federal government are and what they do.

In that vein, it is hoped that the research titled 'Middle-level bureaucracy in the federal government', whose results are set out in this book, will advance the discussion on the state and public policies currently in course in Brazil. To that end, this effort has been made in an exploratory perspective. Distinct analytical strategies have been adopted with a view to widening the scope of the approaches. In other words, the methodological choices for this research were based on a vision of the complementary nature of the qualitative and quantitative schools in the field of Social Sciences (COLLIER; BRADY; SEAWRIGHT, 2004).

Research work was carried out in the course of 2014 by researchers from different institutions who, as part of their professional trajectories, had previously sought to study bureaucrats in distinct fields or from different perspectives. This collaboration of different researchers and different institutions made it possible for the research to progress considerably not only in terms of the use of alternative methodologies, but also with regard to the adoption of approaches to the different fields and themes of public policies. Thus, after an intense initial process of review, analysis and debates, the researchers were able to jointly design a research project with three distinct stages: a bibliographical survey, the elaboration, administration and analysis of a survey and five case studies targeting different public policies. The results of this ensemble of research strategies are laid out in this collection of articles on the middle-level bureaucracy of the Brazilian federal government.

First, in order to provide theoretical support for the elaboration of this research, an extensive survey of available Brazilian and international literature on middle management bureaucrats was undertaken. This inventory/review was elaborated by Gabriela Lotta, Roberto Pires and Vanessa Oliveira, and resulted in the first chapter of this book titled 'Middle-level bureaucrats: a new look at old actors producing public policies'. Based on the perusal and synthesis of more than 70 articles, the main findings in literature and the gaps therein were identified, and some theoretical and methodological pathways for the development of the research were structured. Thus this chapter provided precious support for the designing of the two other analytical strategies.

The second quantitative stage made use of information collected, by survey<sup>1</sup>, from occupants of commissioned positions of free appointment and discharge who were nominated to such posts at the level of Directors or Special Advisers (*direção e assessoramento superior - DAS*)<sup>2</sup> or posts with

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<sup>1</sup> We wish to express our thanks to Antonio Capelo and Eveline Santos for their attentive and efficacious work as research assistants elaborating the survey that provided supporting information for the elaboration of the early chapters of this book.

<sup>2</sup> DAS positions are occupied by both career and non-career civil servants. The Decree nº 5.497, dated July 21, 2005, reserves different percentages of DAS positions levels 1 up to 4 (the highest level being 6) exclusively for career civil servants.

an equivalent nomenclature<sup>3</sup> in federal government administration. The survey contained questions identifying the profile, professional trajectories and performance of MLBs. Chart 1 below sets out details of the hierarchic levels of those posts as well as the main activity associated to them. Levels DAS 6 and above (101.6 and 102.6) are usually occupied by the executive secretaries of ministries or by ministers of state.

**Chart 1: Hierarchic levels of DAS posts in the Federal Government**

DAS - 101.6	Secretary of a purposive organ Heads of Autarchies and Foundations Under-secretaries of administrative bodies under the aegis of the Presidency of the Republic
DAS – 102.6	Special Advisor
DAS – 101.5	Chief of Staff of a Minister of State Head of Department Legal Advisor Internal Control Secretary Under-secretary for Planning, Budget and Administration
DAS – 102.5	Special Advisor to a Minister of State
DAS – 102.4	General Coordinator
DAS – 102.4	Advisor
DAS – 102.3	Coordinator
DAS – 102.3	Technical Advisor
DAS – 102.2	Head of a Division
DAS – 102.2	Assistant
DAS – 102.1	Head of a Section, intermediary assistance
DAS – 102.1	Technical Assistant

Given that the focus of this research is the middle echelons of the federal bureaucracy, the survey contemplated posts at DAS levels from 1 to 5.

<sup>3</sup> In terms of equivalence, there are the regulatory agencies, the Brazilian Central Bank, the National Mineral Production Department (DNPM) and the National Intellectual Property Institute (Inpi), all of which have specific posts which are hierarchically the equivalent of DAS as determined by Edict nº 186 (Ministry of Planning, Budget and Management - MPOG), dated August 17, 2000; Normative Instruction nº 3 (MPOG), dated January 12, 2010; Act nº 9.986, dated July 18, 2000; and Decree nº 6.944, dated August 21, 2009.

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This represents the intermediary segment that is hierarchically situated between the top level of the Executive Branch (secretaries and ministers) and the majority of civil servants (approximately 96%) who do not have DAS posts. The specific survey results have been published by the National School of Public Administration (ENAP, 2014).

The second chapter of this book – *Middle-level bureaucracies in government sectors: similarities and differences* – was based on data obtained from the survey. Its authors, Pedro Cavalcante, Marizaura Camões and Márcia Knopp, through the use of parametric and non-parametric statistics, make a comparative analysis of four big government sectors (social, infrastructure, economic and central bodies.) on three dimensions (profile, trajectory and performance). The results of this innovative approach confirm the premise of heterogeneity, not only in the composition but also in the performances of middle echelon bureaucrats within the government. For example, differences in professional profiles and trajectories can be noted, as well as uniformity in terms of patterns of interaction and performance directed at the organization's internal activities.

The third chapter – *Influencing the decision-making process: what is the explanation for middle-level bureaucrats' protagonist role?* – also relies on information gleaned from the survey to measure the determinants of middle echelon bureaucrats' influence on decision-making processes. Making use of the multivariate regression model, Alessandro Freire, Pedro Palloti and Rafael Viana present results that corroborate their central hypothesis, namely that the level of the post is a crucial variable in understanding the degree of influence of middle-level bureaucrats in Brazil. However, their results also suggest that the degree of influence is also conditioned by the location and type of activity the MLB is engaged in.

Although the quantitative approach provided a broad and general analysis of the important aspects of MLBs, it was necessary to add a qualitative stage to this research in order to investigate other aspects of the performance of these bureaucrats and find answers to certain questions raised by the survey.

The qualitative studies (Chapters 4 to 8) address five separate federal government sectors and policies and endeavor to capture these actors' self-

descriptions and/or narratives in order to produce more detailed descriptions of their performance. Albeit they do not represent every possible situation that exists in the sphere of federal government, the cases in question can offer different and relevant contributions insofar as they cover a considerable range of distinct situations and therefore address the issue of the complexity of the areas of public policies and their consequent effects on the profiles, trajectories and performances of the middle-level bureaucrats.

Firstly, the different cases sought to contemplate the most important government sectors: the social sector (*Bolsa Família* – Family Allowance), infrastructure (the Growth Acceleration Program –PAC), environment (*Bolsa Verde* – Green Allowance), economic (Federal Revenue) and a government body (Senasp). Some cases were selected because they involved arrangements to articulate policies (*Bolsa Verde*, Senasp and PAC), one was more concerned with organizational and sectoral management (Federal Revenue) and another is a hybrid (*Bolsa Família*). Another aspect taken into account was the maturity of the organizations and policies being studied, ranging from the older and mature (Federal Revenue) to much newer programs in which the institutionalization process is still under construction (*Bolsa Verde*).

The fourth chapter – *Implementing innovation: Middle-level bureaucracy of the Bolsa Família Program* – is dedicated to the analysis of middle-level bureaucrats that work in the Ministry of Social Development and Fight Against Hunger's National Department for Citizenship Income (*Secretaria Nacional de Renda da Cidadania - Senarc*), which also runs the *Bolsa Família* program. Vanessa Oliveira and Gabriela Lotta argue that one of the most important elements for obtaining an understanding of MLB performance is the process of selecting highly qualified personnel. This selection process ends up determining the degree of autonomy enjoyed by these bureaucrats as they become qualified interlocutors that enjoy the legitimacy to implement innovations and carry out any interaction needed to ensure that a program is duly constructed and put into effect. With time, however, that very autonomy restricts these managers' powers of innovation insofar as the program begins to work well, becomes institutionalized and acquires high visibility.

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The fifth chapter – *Activism in the bureaucracy? The middle-level bureaucracy of the Bolsa Verde Program* – written by Rebecca Abers, analyzes the performance of middle-level bureaucrats involved in the *Bolsa Verde* Program. The author argues that because of its inter-ministerial design, adapted from the *Bolsa Família* program, the *Bolsa Verde* relies on the performance of a team that is capable of acting among government bodies and agencies to ensure the existence of a complex flow of information and financial resources between Brasília and the program's field units, as well as its capacity to adapt the policy to a series of very different realities. Another argument presented is that the performance of these bureaucrats is guided by their commitment to collective projects; this makes their motivation very similar to that of civil society activists. However, such activism has two distinct aspects: at the same time that they endeavor to carry out creative actions, they also seek to institutionalize the program to ensure its continuity. The author shows the ways in which these middle-level bureaucrats handle this duality.

The sixth chapter – *Inside the PAC: from the formal arrangements to the interactions and practices of its operators* – analyzes middle-level bureaucrats inserted in the Bureau of the Growth Acceleration Plan (Sepac). Based on interviews and live observations of situation-room meetings, Roberto Pires analyzes the unifying role that these bureaucrats play in order to make feasible projects that involve various ministries, federal entities and even private sector organizations. As the author observes, the importance of middle-level bureaucrats in the PAC lies in their position at the center of vertical flows with their superiors, and horizontal flows with actors in other ministries. MLBs are responsible for boosting such interactions, which in turn lead to the production of agreements and greater agility in processing and referral, generating positive results for all those involved in programs associated with the PAC.

The seventh chapter – *Middle-level Bureaucracy in the Brazilian Federal Revenue Department: selective insulation and construction of bureaucratic capabilities* -, by Lucas Ambrózio, addresses the case of middle-level bureaucrats working in the Brazilian Revenue Department. Based on interviews with the MLBs of this institution in Brasília and one

of its state agencies in São Paulo, and on an analysis of the survey data gathered in the sphere of that body, this author argues that being one of the Federal government's oldest entities and given the nature of the policy that coordinates its activities, the Revenue Department tends to be a more stable and insulated bureaucracy. However, he defends the thesis that there is a selective insulation process installed in that body consisting of: i) political shielding marked by its low level of interaction with political institutions; ii) a typically Weberian organization with rationality and hierarchy, as well as the aforementioned stable bureaucracy; and iii) its functional insertion due to its strong interaction with external actors associated to resources that are strategic for the department.

The eighth chapter – *Middle-level bureaucrats' dilemmas in the context of a poorly articulated policy: the case of the National Public Security Department* –, analyzes the managers responsible for the National Public Security Department (Senasp) attached to the Ministry of Justice. Authors Letícia Godinho and Larissa Peixoto argue that the performance of these bureaucrats occurs through varied and everyday negotiating and articulating processes that are of fundamental importance to the production of national public security policy, which is held to be “loosely articulated”. They also show that it is in the course of the MLBs' negotiations and articulation among the various actors that the agency makes its presence felt, in other words, in the spaces where decision and innovation prevail and that mark the performance of these bureaucrats in policy construction.

The book's concluding chapter – *Profiles, trajectories and relations; forging a comprehensive analysis of federal government middle-level bureaucrats* –, by Gabriela Lotta and Pedro Cavalcante sets out to make a cross-referenced analysis of the theoretical, qualitative and quantitative findings with the aim of understanding, from a transversal perspective, some of the conclusions on the trajectories and profiles of bureaucrats, as well as examine questions that continue unanswered, which point to the need for a new research agenda.

We hope that this collection will contribute towards enabling a better understanding of the Brazilian state, especially its bureaucracy, given that current knowledge about MLBs is very limited and their relative invisibility

tends to nurture the myth that the “state is overstaffed”, “civil servants are unqualified” or that they “have low productivity” or even the opinion that the positions are filled without regard for technical criteria and merely on the basis of party-political considerations.

Finally, we hope that this book will make a contribution not only to academics interested in the workings of government and its bureaucracy, but also to society at large and especially to public management staff responsible for the formulation and implementation of public policies, especially those engaged in personnel management.

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# CHAPTER 1 – MIDDLE-LEVEL BUREAUCRATS: A NEW LOOK AT OLD ACTORS PRODUCING PUBLIC POLICIES<sup>1</sup>

*Gabriela Spanghero Lotta*

*Roberto Rocha Coelho Pires*

*Vanessa Elias de Oliveira*

This chapter aims to present the results of a review of the national and international literature on middle-level bureaucrats (MLBs). MLBs are the actors responsible for intermediary management in public and private bureaucracies (such as managers, directors, coordinators and supervisors). The systematization of the literature in this chapter was oriented from a public policy perspective. In other words, our review is intended to improve the understanding of the existence and performance of these actors, as well as their influence on the production of public policies and government actions.

Public policy studies have gained ground in recent years, but in spite of the expansion of research in Brazil over the last few decades, the field of public policies still suffers, to a certain extent, from considerable organizational and thematic fragmentation (FARIA, 2003). Furthermore, gaps are visible when we examine the space available to this literature for expanding the forms of analysis of the state's action by including new actors and analytical models. Research has shown how traditional models used to interpret mechanisms for intermediating interests such as pluralism, Marxism and elite theory are incapable of addressing the increasing complexity of processes notably subject to non-hierarchic interventions, to “a low degree of formalization in the exchange of information and resources and the participation of new actors” (FARIA, 2003).

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<sup>1</sup> This work was carried out with the invaluable assistance of trainees and undergraduate research scholarship holders. We wish to register our gratitude to Eveline Ribeiro dos Santos, Cleiton Duarte and Luiz Fernando Biscardi and to the CNPQ for the financial support it provided for this research.

Through attempts to elucidate the characteristics of policy production processes, expressions such as ‘issue networks’ and ‘policy communities’ have been put on the agenda, as have questions of diversity of the actors involved and the patterns of relationship among the various areas, among others. However, it seems that this new agenda is still centered on prevaillingly empirical analyses of decision-making processes, with very little attention paid to implementation processes.

Our analysis of the public policy literature revealed how little importance has been attributed to the implementation stages of policy, as witness the relatively limited number of works on that subject since the appearance of Lipsky’s memorable work on street-level bureaucracy (1980). This is especially true in the Brazilian academic production addressing the issue. There is a considerable gap to be filled in the Brazilian empirical studies of the various factors and elements that influence the implementation stages, although there have been some pioneering works focusing on *policy networks* (MARQUES, 2003; CARPIM, 2003), the importance of learning and knowledge (FARIA, 2003) and the incorporation of bureaucrats’ values (MEIER; O’TOOLE, 2007; LOTTA, 2010).

This limitation in the literature includes the attention dedicated to the role of different bureaucracies in the process between the formulation of policies and their implementation.

As Oliveira (2009) has shown, most of the research targeting public bureaucracy in Brazil has been centered on the upper echelons and more specifically that of the federal bureaucracy and the way it performs in public policy production processes (GOUVÊA, 1994; SCHNEIDER, 1994; LOUREIRO; ABRUCIO; ROSA, 1998; LOUREIRO; ABRUCIO, 1999; BRESSER PEREIRA, 2007; OLIVIERI, 2007). Other works have targeted the so-called street-level bureaucracy (LIPSKY, 1980), which implements those policies ‘centrally’ designed by the upper echelon (LOTTA, 2010) (OLIVEIRA; ABRUCIO, 2011, p.2).

Nevertheless, there have been very few studies directed at gaining an understanding of the intermediate bureaucracy that manages the street-level bureaucrats and constitutes the link between them and the policy formulators (Howlett, 2011; Meier, 2009; Pires, 2011; Oliveira; Abrucio, 2011). This middle-level bureaucracy is composed of managers, executives,

supervisors, and agents charged with making the strategies elaborated by the upper echelons operational (Pires, 2010).

It consists of a set of actors situated at the very heart of policy implementation processes but hardly considered at all in the analytical models. Pioneering studies in the 1970s tended to focus their attention on decision-making processes alone and regarded implementation as a hierarchic (top-down) process. In that light, the bureaucrats were obviously subordinated to the decision makers and it was presupposed that there was a separation of administrators and policies and that the translation of decision into actions was automatic (Hill; Ham, 1993).

The following decades witnessed a greater emphasis on policy effectiveness and the perception that certain factors were leading to failures in implementation processes (Pressman; Wildavsky, 1984, Gunn, 1978, Sabatier; Mazmanian, 1979). Bottom-up analysis revealed that the actors directly responsible for implementation should be regarded as key elements. Lipsky (1980) showed that street-level bureaucrats are civil servants (police officers, teachers, health professionals, etc.) that work in direct contact with service users and directly affect the quality and performance of government-provided services and access to them. The bottom-up approach strongly challenged the extant vision centered on hierarchy and suggested that implementation should be seen as a continuous and integral part of any policy process involving negotiation between those wishing to put the policy into practice and those on whom the actions depend.

In the light of those extreme positions, there was little concern to understand this set of social actors or the fact that “because they occupy an intermediate position, the middle-level bureaucrats (...) are actually situated in a kind of conceptual ‘limbo’ between the top-up and the bottom-down approaches” (Pires, 2011, p. 4). In turn, Oliveira (2009), Pires (2011) and Oliveira and Abrucio (2011) have pointed out that there is considerable heterogeneity among the actors that occupy intermediary positions, referred to as the “middle-level bureaucracy”. Such variation is due not only to sector-related and institutional contexts, but also to the nature of the administrative posts they occupy. Acknowledging that means recognizing the need for consistent comparative efforts to obtain an

empirical characterization of the respective profiles to enable us to construct more precisely defined concepts that embrace both their generalities and their specificities.

Apart from the theoretical relevance of the study object, in the empirical sphere it is now possible to observe a process of middle-level bureaucracy expansion in Brazil. In the period from 1997 to 2012 there was a strong increase in the number of posts associated with these intermediary positions in the bureaucratic hierarchy, namely, a 107% increase in DAS 4 positions and a 91% increase in DAS 5 posts. That expansion in the intermediate levels surpassed the expansion registered for the other DAS levels (1, 2, 3 and 6) and the overall average percentage increase in DAS positions (27%). Such a notable expansion in the management segment suggests that the middle-level bureaucracy may have been the target of important transformations and become increasingly important for government activities in recent years.<sup>2</sup> These points of theoretical uneasiness reveal the need to broaden our understanding as to who exactly these actors are, what they do, how they perform, with whom they have relations and how they influence the management of public policies. This is the line of investigation proposed in this paper, based on a systematic review of the literature on the theme in various fields of knowledge applied to public policy management.

The next section describes the methodology used and the procedures adopted to systematize and analyze the material followed by the results. Attention is focused first on the definitions of “middle-level bureaucrats” and their operationalization, as well as a characterization of the context, evolution and roles undertaken by these actors and the dilemmas

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<sup>2</sup> Posts associated with senior advisory and direction positions in the Federal Government administration occupied by appointment or nomination (*cargos de direção e assessoramento superior*- DAS) and posts of a special nature (*cargos de natureza especial* - NE) are structured in 6 DAS levels, whereby DAS 1 is the lowest level and DAS 6 the highest. The NE posts are superior to the level of DAS 6. From the structural standpoint, DAS levels 1 to 3 correspond to the lower echelon positions, DAS levels 4 and 5 to the middle echelon and DAS 6 and the NE positions, to the upper echelon.

involved in the construction of their identities and modes of action. Later, we systematize the three main approaches or perspectives (structural, individual and relational) used in analyzing the performance and influence of middle-level bureaucrats on public policy production processes. We conclude by offering a synthesis of the main elements, identified through bibliographic review, that simultaneously underscore the importance of focusing on this particular social actor and contribute towards closing the gap in the debate on public policies, indicating a future agenda for research on middle-level bureaucrats.

## Methodology

For analysis purposes we searched academic databases to identify all material on the theme published in Brazilian and international journals with a Qualis<sup>3</sup> rating of A or B in the fields of political science, social sciences, public administration, and applied and interdisciplinary social sciences. A selection was made of those most relevant for our public policy analysis and we defined a set of 64 periodicals. Each one was searched using the key words 'bureaucracy', 'manager', 'bureaucrat', 'administrator' and 'director,' always in association with 'public organizations', 'public administration', 'state' or 'public policies' for the international material and their respective translations in Portuguese for the Brazilian literature search.

85 articles were extracted from the total set and screened for their pertinence to the theme in focus. The result was a set of 6 Brazilian articles and 28 international ones.

An additional search was conducted in the CAPES<sup>4</sup> portal using the key words 'middle-level bureaucrats', 'middle-level management' and

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<sup>3</sup> Qualis is a system adopted by the Brazilian academic community to rank national and international academic journals according to their relevance for their respective areas. Qualis A and B are the classifications of the most highly evaluated abstracts

<sup>4</sup> A Brazilian Federal Government portal that provides free access to renowned national and international publications.

‘bureaucratic behavior’. For each term the first 100 occurrences classified automatically in order of relevance were analyzed and a further 44 international articles were identified.

Other articles from the international literature on administration and political science, previously selected by experts on the theme, were added to form a final set of 83 articles<sup>5</sup>. All the articles were duly read and systematized based on the identification of the following elements: objective, central object, methodology, dependent and explanatory variable and main conclusions regarding MLBs.

We then sought to identify how the literature treats the MLB. On the one hand it was clear that different disciplines tended to focus on different aspects in their studies. While political science studies tend to attribute greater importance to MLB participation in decision-making processes (conflicts, coalitions, etc.), to their relations with external actors (like politicians, parties and citizens) and to the dilemma between control and the autonomy of the bureaucracies, studies in the areas of administration and psychology tend to underscore themes such as motivation, leadership, learning, feelings in regard to work, recruitment models and others associated with human resource management and, furthermore, to adopt approaches focused on administrative structures and processes. Themes associated with organizational structures, identities, the role of the professions, and organizational or occupational cultures are frequently addressed by sociologists.

Nevertheless, in spite of the wide variety of approaches found, the systematization was guided by the concern with the production and analysis of public policies, given that, as previously noted, it is a field of knowledge that has hardly ever focused on MLBs. Therefore, the interpretation of contents extracted from the literature review was oriented towards obtaining concepts and approaches that might broaden comprehension as to who the MLBs really are, what they do, how they perform and how they influence the design and implementation of public policies.

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<sup>5</sup> It has not proved possible to separate the articles according to fields of knowledge (political science, administration etc.) because a single scientific journal may be active in more than one field at the same time.

## **Middle-level Bureaucrats in Administration and Public Policies' literature**

This section presents the results of the systematization of the literature reviewed. First we focus on their context and evolution and describe the roles played by MLBs, the dilemmas present in the construction of their identities and their modes of operation. Three analytical perspectives are presented in the second part to provide an understanding of how MLBs perform in the production of public policies. The section closes with a presentation of some sector-orientated analysis.

### **Middle-level Bureaucrats: roles, functions and 'places'.**

This subsection offers a more detailed portrayal of what the literature has concluded in regard to MLBs. It is organized in three parts, each one presenting specific elements that the literature endeavors to systematize, namely: a) definitions and non-definitions of the MLBs; b) MLB roles identified by the literature, and c) MLB values and behavior patterns.

#### *a) MLBs in context: definitions and non-definitions*

A conclusion readily drawn from the literature concerns the ambiguity and the difficulty associated with defining precisely what constitutes a middle-level bureaucrat. For the purposes of simplification and operationalization, they are usually defined as those employees situated in the middle of an organization's hierarchic structure. That is, they are defined by eliminating the posts and offices associated with the administrative strata above and below them, or by focusing on the intermediate management level in any given administrative structure (such as directors, coordinators, managers, etc.).

Studies targeting private sector administration have tended to define middle-level bureaucrats as those occupying posts situated between the top group of strategic administrators (CEOs, for example) and the front line of the supervisory level (project coordinators, heads of divisions, etc.), above employees directly responsible for production (VIE, 2010). In

studies of public sector bureaucracies, however, the definition and use of the MLB concept has usually been focused on the intermediary categories in the structure of management posts. For example, Lewis (1992), in his study of middle-level bureaucrats (middle managers) in the United States federal government, delimited his analysis as referring to management posts identified as GS-13 to 15, whereby GS-16 to 18 corresponded with the category Senior Executive Service, and all those below 13 referred to the first [lower] line of management. In the case of the Brazilian federal government, that intermediate stratum refers to the posts at the levels of DAS 4 and 5 (in a scale that ranges from 1 to 6).

Nevertheless, the literature recognizes that such simplifications merely based on positions in the administrative structure, although necessary, fail to reflect the complexity of the intermediate levels. In the daily round of public and private organizations, there is a lot of confusion regarding the terms 'middle' and 'intermediate' and ambiguities in the definitions of who these middle-level bureaucrats really are.

That is because the intermediate levels of public and private organizations have undergone a series of transformations leading to instability in regard to functions, roles and the identities of the actors occupying such organizational spaces (THOMAS; LINSTEAD, 2002). Such transformations have been more intense in the private sector but have also occurred in the public sector, especially in the light of the New Public Management paradigm. In recent decades, movements such as downsizing, de-bureaucratization and managerialism have reduced the layers of hierarchy and flattened the organizational structures. New technologies have enabled administrators in the higher levels to monitor and conduct operations on the ground. Furthermore, teamwork methodologies, matrix structures, project-based structures and many other reforms have also reduced hierarchic structures and the numbers of intermediate posts - a tendency that may be a harbinger of an eventual extinction of MLBs (SOFER, 1974; VIE, 2010).

On the other hand, the intensity of the transformation process has created opportunities for these actors to reposition themselves in the private sector using the discourses of entrepreneurialism, leadership

and strategic engagement (Thomas; Linstead, 2002); or taking advantage of the expectation that “new public managers” will emerge in the public sector (Thiel; Steijn; Allix, 2005). Even though those authors consider that state reform processes have brought about changes that have an impact on the performance, profile and roles played by MLBs, the literature specifically addressing the public sector does not necessarily conclude that there has been any reduction of such functions, but rather that they have been transformed and acquired importance of a different kind. Thus, the complexity of the debate on middle-level bureaucracy and the difficulty to define and operationalize the concept can be readily perceived.

#### *b) MLBs’ roles and functions*

In regard to the roles and functions undertaken by the MLBs, we found distinctions between the studies targeting public bureaucracies and those targeting private sector organizations.

Mintzberg’s (1973) study of managers’ roles is probably one of the most influential in the debate on MLBs in the private sector. Unlike the classical administration studies that declared planning, coordination and monitoring to be essential management functions, Mintzberg, based on observational methodology, described this activity as being highly fragmented, varied, and based on short-term attempts to handle ongoing problems. Instead of carrying out typically administrative functions such as analytical thinking and actions, the role of middle-level bureaucrats can be defined on the basis of three broad functional categories: interpersonal, informational and decision-making. The interpersonal dimension suggests that management activity involves the ability to interact with superiors, subordinates and peers. The informational dimension calls attention to middle-level bureaucrats’ role in receiving, systematizing and disseminating relevant information for their organizations. Lastly, the decision-making dimension indicates their entrepreneurial and negotiating skills and the ability to deal with conflicts and allocate resources strategically (CHAREANPUNSIRIKUL; WOOD, 2002). Many recent studies have argued that, in the last few decades, the managerial role of the middle-level bureaucrat has been gradually drifting towards a greater emphasis on interpersonal

contact, dialogue and leadership activities rather than the traditional management of routine processes and bureaucratic controls (VIE, 2010).

Indeed, early administration studies targeting MLB behavior had already identified the fact that middle-level bureaucrats spend most of their working time in conversations, most of which are horizontal communications with their peers and a lesser proportion with their immediate subordinates (BURNS, 1954 *apud* VIE, 2010). In other words, “managers spend most of their time in conversation, and more often than not in face to face interactions. They do not seem to be overloaded with paperwork or formal meetings” (HORNE; LUPTON, 1965 p.32 *apud* VIE, 2010). According to Vie (2010) more recent studies have confirmed that those same patterns have been maintained in the private sector.

The dichotomy between technical and political aspects has been the object of relevant reflections in studies targeting governmental bureaucracies. The studies indicate that, insofar as they occupy intermediate positions, the MLBs play both technical-managerial and technical-political roles (PIRES, 2011). The former concerns the way bureaucrats translate strategic directives into routine actions within organizations by constructing standard procedures, managing services and, consequently, managing the implementing bureaucrats (WILSON, 1968; KAUFMAN, 1960; DALTON, 1959; CHETKOVITCH; KIRP, 2001; OLIVEIRA, 2009). The latter, technical-political role concerns the way these actors construct negotiations associated with the processes in which they are involved and to their relations with the upper echelons. In that light, it should be stressed that the technical-political role and its relevance depend directly on the position such bureaucrats occupy in the institutional design of the respective policies and, consequently, on the chain of actors that exists between policy formulation and policy implementation (ROCHA, 2003; BIANCCHI, 2002; SCHNEIDER, 1994).

Part of the literature views this aspect in different light, considering that recent changes in the state have undermined the idea of a technical-political dichotomy (HOWLETT, 2011; DEMIR; REDDICK, 2012) and suggesting that such bureaucrats need to be understood in the context of public policy production processes (HOWLETT, 2011). This last author has identified three movements in course that reinforce the importance of these actors:

1) The decentralization process operated by several countries in recent years has transferred important roles to bureaucrats situated in the lower and mid-levels of government bureaucracies and they have come to take responsibility for central policy decisions.

2) The emergence of collaborative government networks as a new form of governance has increased the scope of influence of intermediate bureaucrats, no longer of the top-down type alone, but also of the bottom-up type.

3) The New Public Management movement is focused on the service user and that fact has also boosted the voice of service delivering agencies and their managers who can now potentially exercise considerable influence on policy processes in organizational, technical and political terms (HOWLETT, 2011; WU; RAMESH; HOWLETT; FRITZEN, 2010).

Howlett's (2011) analysis of recent bureaucracy studies states that many of them have questioned the technical-political dichotomy as a way of understanding public policies. In that author's view, however, the literature has so far failed to provide a more in-depth characterization of the roles performed by intermediate bureaucrats and that lack constitutes what Meier (2009) has called "the missing variable" in public policy studies.

Some studies have concentrated on attempting to understand how, and in what circumstances, MLBs influence organizations' strategic decisions. Kelly and Gennard's (2007) qualitative investigation of private company directors found that those who manage to combine their specialized/technical insertion in the organization with generic managerial skills are the ones able to exercise the greatest influence because they endow their organizations' strategic leadership with concern, not only for technical considerations, but also for business aspects.

Analysis conducted by Currie and Procter (2005) targeting public hospitals show that MLBs frequently influence their organizations' general strategies. They state that MLBs "sell" ideas to their organization's executives and often take on responsibility for elaborating (and modifying) the detailed

contents of strategies defined in levels above them. The degree of influence of these intermediary actors can depend on their position within the organizational structure, on the level of conflict with the professionals responsible for conducting routine operations, and on their sensitivity in comprehending the strategic context in which the organization is situated (KURATKO *et al.*, 2005).

### *Behavior, values and motivation*

Another approach found in the literature targets the behavior of this bureaucratic group in organizational contexts, especially in the context of institutional reforms and changes. Most of the texts analyzed attempts to gain an understanding of the ways these bureaucrats' values have changed (or not) in the light of current reforms of state guided by New Public Management values.

One of the main instruments applied and analyzed is the Public Service Motivation (PSM) instrument and its variations, like Public Service Values (PSV), based on which the literature strives to measure the extent and nature of current changes in certain organizations (GAINS; JOHN, 2010; WITESMAN; WALTERS, 2013; MEYER *et al.*, 2013; JACOBSON, 2011).

Again in regard to employees' values and motivation, other studies make comparisons between middle-level bureaucrats working in public organizations and those in private enterprise and the third sector (LEE; WILKINS, 2011; CHEN; BOZEMAN, 2014; OLIVEIRA *et al.*, 2010). These authors state that public sector bureaucrats have distinct preferences, motivations and values that can lead to very different results from those in other organizations. The difference in values embraces not just what those in management positions think about salaries and benefits, but also their commitment to the public interest and their sense of responsibility (LEE; WILKINS, 2011). It also has to do with different "kinds of bureaucrats" characterized by their preferences and by the way they allocate their work time to different functions" (GAINS; JOHN, 2010). On the other hand, public managers tend to feel that their talents and skills are underused and that the work they do is less stimulating, which may affect the quality of the service they provide (CHEN; BOZEMAN, 2014).

**Figure 1. Typology of the middle-level bureaucracy’s influence**

	<b>Upwards</b>	<b>Downwards</b>
<b>Divergent</b>	Prioritizing alternatives	Facilitating adaptations
<b>Integrating</b>	Synthesizing information	Implementing the strategies as determined

Source: Floyd; Wooldridge, 1992 *apud* Currie; Procter, 2003.

Another question addressed by the research literature is that of MLB skills associated with their activities. The literature suggests these skills have as much to do with the bureaucrats’ personal characteristics as with their interpersonal interaction capabilities and that they are involved in middle managers’ influence upwards on the higher echelons (executive managers) and downwards on the street-level bureaucrats, as proposed by Floyd and Wooldridge (1992).

In those upward and downward interactions, in regard to the aspect of influence, there are two possibilities for the relations with the respective bureaucratic strata that depend on the stance taken by the MLBs in regard to their organization’s strategies or to the public policies formulated. The schematic representation in Figure 1 facilitates an understanding of those dimensions and the MLBs’ respective performances.

Floyd and Woodridge (1992) consider that the MLBs participate in both the “doing” and the “thinking up” of their organization’s action strategies and/or the designing of public policies. Thus, whenever they disagree with the upper echelons they prioritize alternatives which they personally consider to be more appropriate and/or important while, on the other hand, when they are in agreement, they are capable of synthesizing policy directives and transforming them into institutional actions. In their relations with the street-level bureaucracy, they can allow local adjustments to be made precisely when they are in disagreement with the stance defended by the policy or they can implement the strategies determined by the policy and ensure that the desired implementing bureaucrats perform as planned.

Thus the MLBs' performance is influenced as much by their organization's strategic objectives, which they translate into action plans, as by their own individual objectives (Currie; Procter, 2003, p. 1327).

Bacon *et al.* (1996) underscored two additional fundamental differences between public and private bureaucracies. Firstly, the evaluation of the services provided by the public sector is much more complicated because their ultimate purposes are not so easily measured as is the final profit of a private company. Secondly, public sector MLBs have to coordinate activities that transpose multiple boundaries of authority. The challenges posed by accountability in the public sector extrapolate the higher strata and shareholder levels of private organizations and embrace political actors, citizen interest groups as well as control bodies. Therefore, the MLBs in the public sector have to handle a more complex set of authority and sources of legitimacy.

**Chart 1. A Comparison of the characteristics of middle-level bureaucrats in the public and private sectors**

Public Sector Middle-level Bureaucrats	Private Sector Middle-level Bureaucrats
Focus is on commitment to the public interest and a feeling of responsibility (Lee; Wilkins, 2011)	Focus is on salary and benefits (Lee; Wilkins, 2011)
Perception that talents are not made full use of (Chen; Bozeman, 2014)	Perception that good use is made of skills (Chen; Bozeman, 2014)
Perception that the work is not very stimulating (Chen; Bozeman, 2014)	Perception that the work is stimulating (Chen; Bozeman, 2014)
Service evaluation is complex and ends are not always easy to measure (Bacon et al., 1996).	Service evaluation is simpler because the end in view is merely profit for the company (Bacon et al., 1996).
Managers need to coordinate activities that go beyond the frontiers of authority.	Managers keep within the frontiers of their authority.
Face accountability challenges in addition to peer control, interest group control and control bodies. Various sources of legitimacy and authority.	Control exercised by superiors and organization shareholders. Clearly defined sources of authority and legitimacy.

Source: Elaborated by the author

The differences among the motivations of civil servants can also be explained by institutional or organizational dimensions that have influenced the bureaucrats' perceptions through selection processes that favor certain profiles (Monteiro, 2013), through training processes and the development

of specific skills (Oliveira *et al.*, 2010), and through incentives and the forms of management adopted by the organizations (Wise, 2004).

On systematizing the indications detected in the literature, it was possible to identify the central questions and conclusions present, namely that:

- a) employees' values and motivations are relevant in any bid to understand their forms of action and policies' results;
- b) they are even more relevant when analyzing the position of managers who can influence their subordinates;
- c) the values and motivations of government bureaucrats differ from those in other organizations and are affected by institutional or organizational considerations; and
- d) reform processes have attempted to alter middle-level bureaucrats' values and motivations but have not always been successful.

## **Analytic perspectives on the performance of middle-level bureaucrats**

### *a) The Structural Perspective*

The structural perspective views the bureaucrats' performance as being a function of the place they occupy in the organizational structures and of the roles formally defined in the respective regulations. In that sense, MLBs could be perceived as mere 'cogs' in a mechanism and their actions as being pre-defined by a much broader organizational and normative structure (Wise, 2004).

This perspective is in alignment with the work of Max Weber insofar as it envisages the bureaucracy as if it were a system of impersonal domination. In this system, the agents of domination are quite distinct from the means of administration and hold no power over it; their conduct is determined by the sets of formal rules (statutes) that they obey. Furthermore, such agents are inserted in clearly defined hierarchical chains of command whereby those in superior levels determine the tasks that their subordinates will carry out. Thus, theoretically, the performance of bureaucrats in such organizations

does not depend on their individual characteristics, inclinations or passions, but rather they are the products of the formal norms and structures that define the organizations and are directly derived from the “logic of adaptation” (MARCH; OLSEN, 1984), whereby the agents identify their roles (based on the position they occupy within the structure) and understand the tasks and duties associated with them.

However, that structural approach does not offer any resources to support an analysis that might provide a specific understanding of the way MLBs perform. It suggests that the MLBs be viewed in the same light as other kinds of bureaucrats, based on their insertion in the organizational structure, the posts they occupy and the rules that regulate the way the organization functions. Furthermore, this approach contributes little to understanding the relations among the different bureaucracies and their consequences for public policy production, because the bureaucratic performance is seen as being tightly bound and predefined by the post occupied and its respective function in the organizational hierarchy.

#### *b) The individual action perspective*

A second analytical approach focuses on MLBs’ individual decisions and actions based on their rational calculations of possible rewards or sanctions. The Public Choice approach offered some of the earliest formalizations of models focusing on the possible ‘agency’ role of MLBs (Buchanan; Tullock, 1962). Their basic premise, unlike earlier approaches, is that bureaucrats’ actions are motivated by their desire to maximize their personal interests and benefits. Niskanen (1971) was one of the pioneers of this approach and proposed that bureaucrats should be viewed as agents that use instrumental means to boost their organization’s budget and human resources allocations. According to that model, in informational terms, these actors are in an asymmetrical situation as compared to legislative actors (or to those heading executive policies) because, in addition to their knowledge of outside demands, they have a monopoly of information on the costs of the services they provide. Therefore, bureaucrats will tend to guide their behavior in ways that ensure the increasing growth of their budgets and

resources even when that goes beyond what is effectively needed for the provision of the respective services.<sup>6</sup>

This rational-strategic interaction perspective became more sophisticated with the emergence of the ‘principal-agent’ model (Moe, 1984), which introduced a greater emphasis on the role of incentives and monitoring mechanisms in the relations among bureaucrats, politicians and ordinary citizens. Bureaucrats’ performances were seen as being a product of rational decisions, which in turn stem from the incentives provided and their expectations for control over ensuring that goals and objectives are indeed being achieved.

Thus, the bureaucrats’ actions in this perspective resemble the way markets work, given the intense competition that exists among the agents, each one looking after his or her own interests and establishing transactions on the basis of the respective incentives or constraints.

Breton and Wintrobe’s (1986) study of the way the bureaucracy worked in Nazi Germany is a convincing illustration of that argument.

Those authors report that the German bureaucracy was notable for its ambiguous formal regulations, poorly delineated lines of authority, organizations with overlapping functions and imprecise commands, all of which led to great confusion regarding jurisdiction and to the duplication of responsibilities. It would be hard to understand the bureaucrats’ performance on the basis of the regime’s norms and regulations. Nevertheless, as those authors assert, the effective implementation of the so-called ‘final solution’ to the ‘Jewish question’ was actually due to the dynamics of an internal competition among managers and bureaucrats of various agencies who attempted, separately, to push forward Hitler’s project in the hopes of recognition and for questions of personal loyalty. In this way, the authors effectively question the traditional image of an impersonal hierarchic bureaucracy in which the behavior of the bureaucrats is dictated

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<sup>6</sup> The Public Choice approach to analyzing bureaucrats’ behavior has been widely criticized because it limits the motivations of the agents to the mere maximization of their own interests. Various authors have argued against it and proposed a broader, more complex vision of civil servants’ motivations (see WISE, 2004 or the literature on ‘public service motivation’ – JACOBSON, 2011).

by the rules and orders of their superiors and instead propose a model based on competition and exchanges involving vested interests, enterprise and initiatives directed at furthering the progress of the objectives of their leaders or hierarchical superiors.<sup>7</sup>

Various studies of private sector organizations, including those of Kelly and Gennard (2007) and Kuratko *et al.* (2005) have been dedicated to understanding the entrepreneurial spirit and creative initiative of middle-level bureaucrats. These latter authors declare that the enterprising behavior of MLBs is apparent in a series of activities such as their endorsement, refinement or cultivation of action proposals originating from their superiors, as well as their identification, acquisition and allocation of the resources needed to carry out those proposals. At each of those moments, the MLBs perceive opportunities to interfere in the processes and redirect them in the light of their own interests and objectives within the organization.

In short, the individual action perspective makes it feasible to view the MLBs in a light that emphasizes their powers of initiative and their potential entrepreneurialism, contesting the passive role assigned to them by the structural approach. Nevertheless, even this approach still fails to fully understand the insertion of these bureaucrats in complex social networks.

### *c) Relational Perspective*

A third perspective in which to view middle-level bureaucrats' behavior emphasizes their relations with other social actors that surround them.

This perspective has emerged in recent years, based on models seeking to obtain a more comprehensive view of the state and its policies, given the multiple networks of actors involved, internal and external to the state, that are capable of altering the design and the results of the state's policies. Such new approaches, firmly anchored in the ideas of

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<sup>7</sup> Although the totalitarian nature of the German Nazi regime was an important factor, especially its emphasis on the loyalty of its bureaucrats, arguably the competitive pattern identified among them is applicable to many other bureaucracies in both the public and private sector.

social networks and governance, seek to understand the functioning of the state's bodies and agencies, not in the light of their formal structure or the individual propensities of the bureaucrats themselves, but rather in the light of how the structure and propensities are conditioned and altered by their multiple interactions with other state, private or social actors.

This approach is also present in some authors' analysis of MLBs' performance/behavior. The questions guiding their research have been directed at understanding how these bureaucrats interact with a network of actors that are internal and external to the state; how they influence and regulate the relations of the policy implementers themselves; how they mediate and mobilize the relation between formulation and implementation, and so on. In short, they conclude that such actors are a fundamental link between the rules and their enforcement in practice, between the world of policy and the final implementer who has a direct relationship with the end user, between the multiple agencies and their various understandings, in order to construct a consensus around the respective public policies.

In that light, the MLBs have been interpreted as being actors that interactively synthesize and disseminate information to both higher and lower levels of their organizations. Accordingly, their cognitive and communicational responsibilities are highly relevant given their structural positions, which lead them to be constantly in action among the actors that surround them, reconciling the different perspectives of those at the top and those at the base (in addition to those in the surrounding environment). Kuratko *et al.* (2005) state that those characteristics distinguish the MLBs from all the other bureaucratic actors and situate them in a highly privileged position for promoting innovation.

Another way of applying a relational perspective is to perceive MLBs as belonging to groups, coalitions or factions that share the same beliefs, values and intentions and that establish disputes with other groups either within the organization or between organizations. Their decisions and performances cannot be understood merely on the basis of their insertion in collective or interactive dynamics, that is to say, their relations with other actors involved in the very same policy. Narayanan and Fahey (1982)

analyzed those processes on the basis of a technical coalitions model, focusing on bureaucrats participating in coalitions and the disputes that arise among them. The authors found that the influence of the disputes is felt not only in the substantive sphere, but also in the symbolic realm.

In his analysis of five different clinics, Heimer (2013) shows that when policies are implemented by multiple agencies (or 'regulatory processes'), the organizations need to be capable of representing all sides involved – not only the policy demanders but also those that regulate them.

In such contexts, the middle-level bureaucrats play a fundamental role: they transmit information both upwards and downwards in the regulatory chain, in addition to facilitating adjustments to promote a better understanding of the correct role of each organization involved. In the process, practices of translation, re-adaptation and reclassification of the rules prior to their re-insertion into the local context are constantly being established. Thus the organizations form a kind of chain of regulatory nodes teaching subordinates how to cooperate with the regulators and vice-versa and it is precisely the middle-level bureaucrats that make it possible for such organizations to perform in that way.

Along a similar line of thought, Huising and Silbey (2011) assert that middle-level bureaucrats are responsible for interacting with their subordinates and ensuring their acceptance of the need to implement rules determined at higher levels. They suggest the bureaucrats' role is to unfold actions to fill the gap between the regulations and the real possibility of enforcing them, what they call 'regulating the regulations'. To that end, middle-level bureaucrats make use of several governance practices among them: making known the expectations that exist, questioning rules and practices, synthesizing what they have learned, and elaborating pragmatic adaptations to adjust general rules to local contexts. However, they also consider that certain conditions are necessary for the MLBs to achieve success, such as the existence of an external actor demanding results, transparency, guaranteed flexibility and the freedom to adapt the rules – in short, power of discretion.

Based on a survey of the implementers of an American social program, Keiser (2010) arrived at a similar conclusion and stated that the

central role of the MLBs is to interact with the implementing bureaucrats and other agencies to regulate interactions among them and guide the way implementation is carried out, constructing a consensus in regard to shared values.

The central idea of such perspectives is that the intermediate position the middle-level bureaucrats occupy enables them to create and regulate the relations among the various parallel agencies or between the higher and lower levels of the organizational hierarchy. That role means that the bureaucrats adopt strategic stances not just because they regulate relations already established, but also because they are centralizers of information.

Alexander *et al.* (2011) came to a similar conclusion based on their analysis of 765 actors participating in social networks offering advice and strategic information. Among those surveyed were top and middle-level bureaucrats and politicians drawn from 11 Australian municipalities. In their bid to discover whom the various segments of the state contacted when they needed advice or strategic information, those authors concluded that the MLBs are the main source of that kind of information not only for the politicians but for the upper echelons of the bureaucracy as well. Furthermore, they showed that the MLBs themselves seek out other middle-level bureaucrats when they need to obtain information, a phenomenon referred to as homophilia<sup>8</sup>. Even though the authors remark that the results varied among the municipalities (which shows that contextual aspects influence the relational configurations), they do clearly demonstrate the strategic nature of the position MLBs occupy, hence their central importance for the functioning of public organizations.

It should be stressed that, as Vakkuri (2010) has pointed out, when viewed in that relational perspective, the MLBs do not merely intermediate relations. They also carry out practices that make it possible for relations to be adapted and translated to suit the most varied contexts.

In a similar vein, Johanssen (2012), after conducting an analysis of middle-level bureaucrats engaged in infrastructure management, concluded

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<sup>8</sup> Concept employed in analysis of social networks applicable to groups of people with similar profiles and characteristics.

that certain types of agents involved in implementation perform as managers of negotiations, especially in the case of fragmented policies that involve multiple stakeholders. In this latter case they develop negotiating methods at their own discretion, thereby ensuring that the policies actually go into effect. Vakkuri agrees that certain positions oblige the MLBs to become the main negotiators among the stakeholders and it is their skills in negotiating with the different agencies and interests that enable the policy to achieve results.

**Chart 2. Showing the main authors associated with each perspective**

Structural Perspective	Individual Action Perspective	Relational Perspective
Weber (1981) Wise (2004) March and Olsen (1984)	Buchanan and Tollock (1962) Niskanen (1971) Moe (1984) Breton and Wintrobe (1986) Kelly and Gennard (2007) Kuratko <i>et al.</i> (2005)	Kuratko <i>et al.</i> (2005) Narayanan and Fahey (1982) Heimer (2013) Huising e Silbey (2011) Keiser (2010) Alexander <i>et al.</i> (2011) Vakkuri (2010) Johansson (2012)

Source: elaborated by the author

Descriptions of the three perspectives for MLB performance analysis clearly reveal their correspondence with the three main organizational principles – hierarchy, markets and networks – that have permeated the discussions on governance and the theory of the state. That would suggest that any analysis of MLB performance should be part of a broader analysis of the performance and actions of the state and of large organizations. Just as the organization and operation of the state has gradually become more complex, starting from a pattern in which hierarchical arrangements were predominant to become increasingly marked by a mixture of market and network principles, so the analytical perspectives used to interpret the behaviors and roles of the bureaucratic actors must also necessarily become more sophisticated. As the present review has made clear, the most recent analytical approaches have attempted to introduce a relational-interactive component to former perspectives that were limited to reflections on organizational structures or on the actions of individuals.

## **Middle-level Bureaucrats in action: sectoral analysis**

Based on the definition of who the middle-level bureaucrats are, where they perform and the theoretical perspectives they are viewed in, we can now make an analysis of some works addressing their performances in specific public policy contexts. There is a scarcity of analyses using sector-based approaches in the literature on middle-level bureaucracies. Thus, in addition to understanding how the sector-orientated analysis that were encountered make use of the theoretical discussions presented here, appropriating them (or not), we intend to observe how the MLBs are perceived in different organizational contexts based on the premise that it is not only different hierarchic positions that bring about different possibilities for their performance but also different fields produce different organizational cultures and logics, thereby affecting the bureaucrats' performance, as Oliveira and Abrucio (2011) have pointed out. In other words, the approach adopted here does not seek to account for all the existing sector-based analysis or to make an exhaustive review of that (incipient) literature, but rather to bring to light the possibilities for analysis based on specific sectors and the contributions they can make to the discussion.

In regard to the various areas of public policies, many of the sector-based studies that were found addressed education policies and the school environment, analyzing the role of school principals as MLBs that conduct the interlocution with the implementing bureaucrats, that is, those that interact directly with the population at large referred to in the literature as 'street-level bureaucrats'. The fundamental distinction between the school principals and the street-level bureaucrats is that the former take responsibility for team management, defining the ways that bureaucrats that interact with service users must perform. The principals' role has been boosted by the decentralization processes that many countries have been unfolding in recent years and which have led an increase in the degree of autonomy attributed to a series of public services. In the case of Canada, the studies show that it has transformed government-run schools into mere "accounting units" (CATTONAR, 2006) with local responsibility for ensuring good student performances.

In his reference to Pelage (1998), Cattonar (2006) reminds us that in France, insofar as they are the “heads of their establishments”, school principals are expected to go beyond merely ensuring satisfactory performance of their students and possess a series of different capabilities, embracing “administrative rigor, mobilization of human resources, managerial efficiency, commitment to results, and pedagogical responsibility and innovation” (CATTONAR, 2006, p. 188).

In that context it was found that one of the most important problems faced by MLBs in their daily routines was that of competition among schools, especially in the light of standard indexes determined for the entire country based on the application of nationwide examinations. Similarly, in England school principals have come to be viewed as “agents of change” in the school environment, a far cry from the 1980s when they were considered to be “mere members of the teaching body whose main function was to manage the other teachers” (CATTONAR, 2006, p. 188).

However, that author has also pointed out the great differences that exist among the governments of the various Canadian regions. While some provinces unfold policies designed to bring in good exam results, others are more concerned with the need to ensure greater parent participation in school management. Furthermore, such research has shown that there are differences among the perceptions of school principals in regard to the (new) role of schools “(...) accompanying other contextual variable such as schooling level, or the urban or rural location in which the schools they run are situated” (CATTONAR, 2006, p. 194).

Thus, the MLBs’ performances are not only influenced by the individuals’ profiles associated with their professional qualifications and life histories, but also to the context they perform in and the interactions they engage in, all of which fits in with what the relational perspective for the analysis of bureaucracies proposes.

In the Brazilian case, Santana *et al.* (2012) acquired a similar perception. Based on a questionnaire administered to 327 school principals in the state of Minas Gerais, they analyzed the degree of their satisfaction with their work and the quality of life in the working environment, measured by means of variables targeting their perceptions of whether they were

being properly rewarded for their efforts; health and safety conditions in their work; the balance between personal life and work, and other aspects. They were able to show that different educational regions present different levels of professional performance satisfaction among the school principals, which means that the environment in which they perform is not only important for obtaining good results for the school, but also for the degree of teams' work satisfaction.

Another aspect identified by the research survey administered to school principals concerns the perception that these bureaucrats carry out multiple tasks involving pedagogical administration, financial accounting, teacher supervision, keeping order internally and managing resources and external relations.

That 'multifunctional' profile of middle-level bureaucrats engaged in school environments corroborates one of the aspects highlighted by Currie and Procter (2003) in regard to another specific category of MLB, namely those working in the field of health services. In their observations of three hospitals in the United Kingdom, those authors demonstrated that among the most important characteristic of MLBs is their ability to handle different responsibilities on the one hand and to lead multidisciplinary teams on the other. Thus, hospital directors (in this case, of specialist clinics), just like the school principals, have to handle various street-level bureaucracies engaged in different areas of activity (nurses, laboratory technicians, nutritionists etc. in the case of the hospitals and teachers, administrative staff, cooks, etc., in the case of the schools).

The ability to handle different tasks and responsibilities and manage staff in different areas is associated with another characteristic of MLBs described by Currie and Procter (2003), namely, their mastery of the dynamics of the services they manage due to their technical knowledge, an essential asset that enables them to exercise leadership. That is coupled with their ability to establish dialogues with hierarchic superiors in the institutional bureaucratic structure and involves a certain degree of political skill, as Yesilkagit and Thiel (2008) have pointed out.

In turn, Pereira and Silva (2011), based on their observations of three Brazilian higher education institutions (*instituições federais de educação*

*superior* - IFEs), have identified four distinct managerial capabilities that are required of MLBs, namely cognitive, functional, behavioral and political skills. However, the capabilities officially required by the MLB selection processes are not always considered by the bureaucrats themselves to be truly essential to the execution of their daily tasks. That distance between the requirement and the reality was detected by Silva (2011) using two approaches to analyze school principals' construction of their identities; one was in the light of the official discourse and the other in the light of the discourse of the principals themselves.

In their analysis of clinical directors of hospitals, the authors identified an important factor in enabling an understanding of what can influence bureaucrat performance: some more cohesive corporate groups, such as that of doctors strongly influence the MLBs and impose their own objectives and perceptions on them. In the case of hospital directors, they not only have to manage the doctors but they themselves belong to the same category.

Thus, they underscore an important aspect, especially in the light of differences among public policy areas, that is, some professional categories have greater power than others to resist the commands of the MLBs when they are contrary to their own interests. Furthermore, whenever the MLB category and the professional category under their command overlap, the implementation of any policies or directives stemming from the upper echelons that the bureaucrats consider to be contrary to their own category's interests or their perceptions of how they should perform becomes even more difficult, because MLBs are "powerfully autonomous" .

Again it should be remembered that, irrespective of the wishes of the bureaucracies under their command, the MLBs may, of their own volition, elect not to follow the commands of their hierarchic superiors as Floyd and Wooldridge's (1992) study clearly shows.

In that sense, it should be stressed that too much autonomy for a middle-level bureaucrat may have deleterious effects. In the case of hospitals and, indeed, a considerable number of public services, a certain degree of autonomy is important to enable MLBs to make adaptations to local conditions, but too much can lead to great variations among the

results achieved by similar services, as shown by the analysis of public hospitals in the state of São Paulo conducted by Oliveira and Abrucio (2011). Furthermore, the centralization of decision-making in a series of public policies, a process that has been taking place more recently in several democracies that had previously promoted an intense decentralization in the 1980s and 1990s, has led to government regulation and control of public policies to ensure the achievement of efficiency and quality standards that require the reduction of autonomy afforded to the locally engaged bureaucracies (CURRIE; PROCTER, 2003, p. 1340).

In short, what the studies of the different areas of public policies have managed to show is that the characteristics that define this particular bureaucracy, even though they are present in all the different sectors in which it engages, are also subject to the influence of the contexts in which the respective organizations operate, on the one hand, and to the internal logic of each public policy area and the professional categories engaged in them, on the other.

## **Final Remarks**

Defined as being those that interact with both the higher echelons of the bureaucracy and the policy-implementing bureaucrats, endowed with technical knowledge that enables them to handle the latter as well as the skills needed to maintain technical and political dialogue with the policy-formulating bureaucracy, middle-level bureaucrats are key figures in the complex tangle of interactions associated with the implementation of public policies. In other words, focusing attention on the performance of these agents and the relations they establish as part of that performance enhances our ability to understand the processes of public policy production.

This article has endeavored to present precisely that perspective and has sought to systematize and underscore the different views promoted by the specialized literature to propitiate a reflection on middle-level bureaucrats. Three dimensions of the performances of these social actors have been analyzed, namely:

- (a) their roles, functions and 'places';

- (b) the perspectives in which they are analyzed (observed); and
- (c) their performances in sector-orientated public policies.

In each dimension every effort has been made to portray the diversity of approaches made and of the ways MLBs are treated as well as their performances and the ways they influence policy production by making comparisons between public and private sectors and different fields of the state's activities.

Two aspects revealed by the biographical review stand out. First it was apparent that just as, in the course of time, the way the state is organized and operated has become increasingly complex, abandoning a pattern in which hierarchic arrangements predominated to adopt patterns in which the principles of the market and the networks are intertwined, so the analytical perspectives must necessarily become more sophisticated to achieve a relevant interpretation of the performances of the bureaucratic actors involved. The literature review shows that the more recent analytical approaches have tried to introduce a relational-interactive component into the former (structural and individual-competitive) perspectives.

Second, an explanation has been offered for the gaps in the literature regarding the relevance and centrality of this particular actor. Paying greater attention to MLBs in the analysis of public policy production processes can lead to considerable analytical and interpretative gains. Understanding the performance of this specific segment of the bureaucracy in the various contexts and fields of public policy, their relations with the higher and lower echelons and the effects of their performances on policy implementation (and reformulation) is a challenge that the literature needs to face in order to obtain a broader understanding of the complex network of relations and interactions that involve such processes.

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## **CHAPTER 2 – MIDDLE-LEVEL BUREAUCRACIES IN GOVERNMENT SECTORS: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES**

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This chapter sets out to identify any possible similarities or differences among the bureaucrats who work in various federal government public policy sectors. The text addresses managers who occupy intermediate posts in the federal public administration structure who will be referred to as middle-level bureaucrats or MLBs. It is hoped that, in this way, progress can be made in identifying the characteristics of such professionals who play a key role in government policymaking<sup>1</sup> processes.

The government bureaucracy is widely recognized as being one of the institutional pillars that supports the state. For that reason, the literature on this subject has been making important contributions towards obtaining a better understanding of how civil servants perform while providing public services to the citizens. In view of the complexity of that provision, the respective studies embrace a wide range of different approaches such as the chronic discussion of the separation between policy (politics) and administration, the role of the bureaucracies in the light of administrative reforms and the question of professionalizing bureaucracies.

More recently studies have been focusing on investigating how bureaucracies function and the variety that exists in their composition. Such studies have predominantly focused two segments: street-level bureaucrats and those in the upper echelons of the government. The line of research that investigates the role in policymaking i.e. the formulation, implementation, evaluation and monitoring of public policies of bureaucrats occupying

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<sup>1</sup> Policymaking is understood here to be the set of stages that compose public policy processes, namely, establishing an agenda, and the formulation, implementation and evaluation of public policies.

intermediate, middle-management positions is still merely embryonic (Lotta; Pires; Oliveira, 2014). This chapter proposes to analyze that very segment, with its main concern being the identification of similarities and differences among middle-level bureaucracies within the sphere of government i.e. comparing the various sectors of government activity.

For decades, studies in the fields of political science and public administration have been trying to analyze the different patterns of interaction among the factors in public policy processes. In that sense, the literature has made progress towards gaining an understanding of the coexistence of policy subsystems within the overall policy system, making use of widely replicated analytical models such as advocacy coalition framework (Sabatier, 1999), epistemic communities (Haas, 1992) and public policy networks (Borzell, 1998). All such approaches have converged on a perception that understanding the functioning and the results of government actions presupposes recognizing the existence of a broad set of actors, characteristics and procedural norms that vary according to the policy issues involved.

Albeit to a lesser extent, this presupposition has been applied to more restricted analysis of bureaucracy studies. In the Brazilian and international literature, as the following section will show, it can be seen that research is increasingly revealing the heterogeneous patterns of these bureaucrats. The analysis is relevant insofar they contribute to producing a more reliable portrait of central aspects and permitting a better understanding of how these actors behave and, consequently, how public administration really works.

In the same direction, this chapter makes a comparison of profiles, trajectories and performance among middle-level bureaucrats in different government sectors. To that end, the research examined the results of the survey administered by the National School of Public Administration (ENAP) in collaboration with the Applied Economic Research Institute (IPEA) and the ABC Federal University (UFABC). The survey targeted civil servants in the posts of directors or advisors (DAS 1 to 5) and their equivalents in the Federal Executive Branch with the aim of describing essential aspects of such bureaucrats and obtaining information to support a characterization of MLBs. The theoretical support for the questions administered stemmed

from the literature on bureaucracy, particularly in the area of political science and public administration (ENAP, 2014).

Two important choices were made for the analysis presented in this chapter. The first was to focus on those occupying posts at the level of DAS 1 to 5 within the structure of the Federal Executive Branch who answered all the questions posed by the survey. That segment lies in the intermediary level of the bureaucracy insofar as their position is higher than that of the majority of civil servants who do not hold DAS positions or their equivalent, and yet they are below those holding DAS 6 posts, below Ministers and below positions of a special nature which have characteristics generally typifying what the literature refers to as the upper echelon or government leadership posts of a political nature (LOUREIRO; ABRUCIO; PACHECO, 2010; D'ARAÚJO, 2009). The second decision involves the division made by the government sectors. The overall set of ministries is divided up into four major groups: i) social, ii) infrastructure, iii) economic and iv) central departments (Table A in the attachment).

The data was subjected to descriptive analysis, variance analysis (Anova) and the chi-squared test in a search for possible response patterns among the sectors. The results of these exploratory analysis confirm some of the original premises. In regard to profiles, it was found that female participation was only on an equal footing in the social area and that the most highly qualified professionals were to be found in the infrastructure sector. Regardless of the sector, the greater part of the professional experience of those in the middle-level bureaucracy has been in federal public administration. However, while on the one hand civil servants in the social area have most of their experience in sub-national governments and non-profit organizations, on the other hand, bureaucrats in the economic and infrastructure sectors have spent more of their career in private enterprise.

In regard to activity and performance, the most relevant finding was that middle-level bureaucrats are concerned more with their organizations' internal activities and so their interaction is mostly with their superiors and their subordinates and peers rather than with external actors. What distinguishes the sectors is the fact that the action of the social sector is mainly directed towards citizens, municipalities and states whereas the

economic sector relates much more strongly to private sector entities. With regards to identifying aspects that influence nomination to their posts, middle-level bureaucrats in the social and infrastructure sectors identified party political affinities and their networks of relationships as more influential than any other criteria. On the other hand, middle-level bureaucrats in the economic sector and in central bodies of government see experience and technical competence as the most relevant criteria for determining their nomination.

In addition to the present introduction, this chapter has four parts. In the section that now follows we present the theoretical underpinning. The section is devoted to a comparison of the different aspects of the various areas of public policies within the state bureaucracy. Section three presents the methodological strategies and then follows a discussion of the empirical analysis. Finally, we delineate some conclusions and suggest a possible agenda for future research.

## **Profiles, trajectories and performance of bureaucrats in the current literature**

Based on the Brazilian and international literature, this section presents some work that discusses the profiles, trajectories and performance of bureaucrats. In consonance with the objective of the chapter, we seek to present the different approaches that describe similarities and dissimilarities of these actors in different sectors of government and in different areas of public policies. The idea is to provide a theoretical foundation for the empirical analysis focused on middle-level bureaucrats, although we have not restricted ourselves to it alone because of the aforementioned paucity of the literature.

### **The composition of the bureaucracy in the different sectors of the government**

The dynamics of posts filled by nomination and the factors that affect the makeup of the bureaucracy have been the object of some recent studies in Brazil and they have begun to raise some important propositions

on the subject. A considerable part of the studies analyzes those posts whose occupants participate in policymaking, which are generally those of directors or advisors at the level of DAS 4 or above.

Although there is no official classification or uniformity in the Brazilian literature, the Brazilian studies tend to consider positions at the level of DAS 5-6 and those of a special nature as management positions. In the structure of the federal administration, they occupy a position immediately below the ministers of state. However, according to D'Araújo (2009) the level of those posts actually varies according to certain factors such as the profile of their occupants, the form of management of the organization in question and the kind of leadership given by the minister in office.

Loureiro *et al.* (1998) state that the occupants of the upper echelon of the federal civil service can be considered as policymakers that have the characteristics both of bureaucrats and politicians. Thus, such a bureaucrat is a hybrid professional responsible for efficient management and, at the same time, for achieving the political objectives on the government agenda.

In her study of the elite of the Brazilian Central Bank, Olivieri (2007) also mentions this hybrid professional with a mixture of professional experience and skills (both technical and political) and capable of acting, not only in public policy formulation and implementation but also in market regulation. That author stresses that in the selection process for the top administrative positions in the Central Bank, technical criteria are of fundamental importance. However, nomination also depends on the personal relations that are established in a social network by the bureaucrat's circulation in other positions in public, private and academic institutions.

In regard to the dynamics of such posts, Praça, Freitas and Hoepers (2012), in a study embracing 69 federal government bodies and agencies, investigated the turnover of the occupants of DAS posts in the year 2010. One of their findings was that those with a policymaking role (defined by the authors as those occupying DAS levels 4 to 6) in the ministries are more affected by changes in the level above them than the rest of the bureaucrats.

However, the same research in its analysis of civil servants holding DAS posts in general (DAS 1 to 6) showed that changes in the head of the ministry or department do not necessarily result in changes in the

composition of the DAS positions. In the opinion of those authors, this result might be evidence that the ministers tend to value the expertise (measured by the length of time of public service) of those occupants of DAS posts already situated in their ministries. The authors also point to other evidence to support that affirmation.

During the period of the study (2010 – 2011), around 2% of the civil servants with DAS were affiliated to opposition parties (Brazilian Social Democracy Party and the *Democratas*)<sup>2</sup> and they were allocated in the Ministries of Finance, Health and Planning. Five percent of them held DAS 5 and 6 positions. In spite of the low figures, this is evidence of the valuation of experts over mere party political nominations. Praça's, Freitas' and Hoepers's study also states that this valuation had been detected by earlier studies in relation to the economic area of government. But their study suggests that the tendency could be extended to the bureaucracies of the social area, in this case, the Ministry of Health. Another interesting result they obtained was that, unexpectedly, the average rate of permanence of civil servants in positions of trust in the Presidency of the Republic, including the Civil Office of the Presidency (but not the Applied Economic Research Institute (IPEA), the Office of the Federal Attorney (AGU) or the Office of the Comptroller General (CGU)) is roughly the same as that for staff allocated to other government bodies.

In a study conducted in 101 federal government entities, Barberia and Praça (2014) showed that civil servants in Brazil with administrative expertise (the ability to handle the specifics of the bureaucracy) are more likely to be nominated to posts in the higher levels of the bureaucracy (DAS 5 and 6), especially in bodies in the infrastructure sector.

The same study suggests that political party affiliation is an important factor for nominations to posts in the higher echelons varying according to the sector of government. The sectors most prone to nominating persons

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<sup>2</sup> In that same period 4% (913) of those occupying DAS positions were affiliated to the Brazilian Labor Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores – PT) and a little under 2% (398) to the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (*Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro* – PMDB) – according to data available in Praça, Freitas and Hoepers (2012).

affiliated to the party in power (Brazilian Labor Party – PT) are infrastructure, legal policy<sup>3</sup>, and the Presidency. The economic and social areas have relatively fewer occupants of DAS positions affiliated to the PT.

Furthermore, according to the study, in certain sectors, agency expertise (i.e. specific knowledge of the policies of a given sector) is also an important factor for determining nominations to high level posts, particularly in the economic sector.

In the same vein, a study undertaken by D'Araújo (2009) obtained important data regarding the valuation of professional experience in those occupying positions of trust. The study found out that in the first Lula government, the percentage of those placed in high level positions of trust who had considerable prior experience in occupying posts as Directors or Advisors (DAS positions) were as follows: 52% in the case of DAS 5 posts, 39.6% in DAS 6 posts and 44.4% of those in positions of a Special Nature (NE). In regard to the period of the second Lula administration, it can be seen that 80% of those in DAS 5 and 6 posts and 90% of those in posts of a special nature (NE) had prior experience in occupying such posts. According to D'Araújo (2009), such data suggest a certain degree of stability in the staff allocations and that a significant proportion of the posts was not occupied by novices.

As regards turnover of individuals in the respective DAS posts, Lopez, Bugarin and Bugarin (2014) found differences between the economic and the social areas<sup>4</sup>. On calculating the rotation or turnover rates among those in DAS 4 to 6 positions for those two areas during the period 1999 to 2012, it was found that, most markedly after 2003, the rate in the social area was always higher than that in the economic area. As an illustration, in 2003,

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<sup>3</sup> The authors classify the following bodies as belonging to the legal policy area: the Office of the Federal Attorney General (*Advocacia-Geral da União* -AGU), the Office of the Comptroller General (*Controladoria-Geral da União*-CGU), the Office of the Federal Public Defender (*Defensoria Pública da União* -DPU), Federal Police Department (*Departamento de Polícia Federal* -DPF), the Federal Highway Police Department (*Departamento de Polícia Rodoviária Federal* -DPRF), the Ministry of Justice (*Ministério da Justiça* -MJ) and the Office of the Prosecutor General of the Republic (*Procuradoria-Geral da República* -PGR).

<sup>4</sup> The authors of the aforementioned study considered the economic area to consist of the Ministry of Finance (MF), the Ministry of Planning, Budget and Management (MP) and the Ministry of Development, Industry and Foreign Trade, and the social area to consist of the Ministry of Health (MS), the Ministry of Education (MEC) and the Ministry of Culture (MinC).

the turnover rate among those in DAS 4 to 6 in the social area was 76.1% whereas for the economic area it was 46.6%; in 2007 the two rates were 40.2% and 24.5% respectively and in 2011, 48.3% and 37.6%.

The same study also revealed that changes in the political party occupying the presidency lead to a reshuffling of the occupants of positions of trust and that the higher the post, the greater the degree of reshuffling. As an example, the study showed that the turnover rate of rotation in the first year of the Lula administration (2003) was 43% among those in DAS 1 positions and as high as 91% for those in DAS 6.

As it has been seen, certain factors appear to influence the composition of the bureaucracy. Among them, changes in the heads of the ministries, government, political party affiliation, and professional experience are prominent factors. Furthermore, there are differences among the government sectors in relation to such factors. The economic sector, for example, tends to value agency expertise as a criterion for nomination to high posts in the bureaucracy whereas the infrastructure, legal policy and entities associated to the presidency of the republic are more liable to nominate persons affiliated to the political party in office in the presidency. Regarding turnover rates of those in levels DAS 4 to 6, the social sector had higher rates than the economic sector.

In spite of the progress achieved by the studies, the literature making comparisons of the composition of the bureaucracies in different sectors of the government still has a small outreach and a strong emphasis has been given on those in DAS 4 to 6 positions with little or no attention being paid to those occupying DAS 1 to 3.

### **The discretionary powers of actors in the different public policy areas**

In the literature on public policies, several Brazilian and foreign authors have expressed their agreement with the idea that street-level

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<sup>4</sup> The authors of the aforementioned study considered the economic area to consist of the Ministry of Finance (MF), the Ministry of Planning, Budget and Management (MP) and the Ministry of Development, Industry and Foreign Trade, and the social area to consist of the Ministry of Health (MS), the Ministry of Education (MEC) and the Ministry of Culture (MinC).

bureaucrats play a highly important role in implementation processes insofar as they make decisions at their own discretion during their direct interaction with the citizenry (TUMMERS; BEKKERS, 2014; BRODKIN, 2007, 2011; LOTTA, 2012; PIRES, 2009).

The term ‘street-level bureaucrats’ was coined by Lipsky (1980) to designate civil servants who deal directly with the general public and represent the front line of government policies.<sup>5</sup>

Based on the premise that street-level bureaucrats are endowed with powers of discretion, recent works concentrated on a discussion of how that comes about and what the implications are for the various different areas of public policies with regards to the policies’ trajectories, results and designs.

In the field of health, Tummers e Bekkers (2014), in a research effort that involved 1,317 health professionals, showed that discretionary powers influence the bureaucrat’s disposition to implement a given policy. The moment a bureaucrat realizes that he or she is endowed with sufficient autonomy to adjust the policy to the citizens’ real needs and wishes, then he or she will tend to attribute greater significance or relevance to the policy and that positive effect of the discretionary powers will, in turn, boost the bureaucrat’s willingness to implement the policy in question.

In Brazil, the study of the implementation of a health program conducted by Lotta (2012) highlighted the role of the interaction between street-level bureaucrats and the policy beneficiaries. Her study showed that bureaucrats’ actions were unfolded on the basis of the relations they establish with other actors (service users and other professionals). The author defends the proposition that the said interaction is a possible modifier of the implementation process itself. That perspective of the inter-relation among the actors involved has been constantly present in the current papers addressing bureaucracy and we will get back to it in the next section.

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<sup>5</sup> According to Lipsky (1980), street-level bureaucrats are civil servants that provide access to government programs and provide services in the sphere of such programs. The classical examples of such bureaucrats as cited by the author are social assistants, police officers, teachers and health professionals.

In his investigation of the work carried out by inspectors associated to the Ministry of Labor and Employment, Pires (2009) sought to explain the variations encountered among the results of public policies in the light of the various implementation styles (punitive, educational, and punitive and educational), based on the literature that recognizes the role of the individual within the bureaucracy. The author defends the proposal that in the practice of implementation, there is a space for decision-making with regards to certain aspects of the policy in question.

Another discretion-related factor that was investigated is the influence of the New Public Management<sup>6</sup> on bureaucrats' behavior and performance. In a study conducted in Chicago, Brodtkin (2011) investigated the way in which New Public Management concepts and the discretionary powers of bureaucrats interact in the daily round of organizations. The study results showed that street-level bureaucrats not only respond to the incentives contemplated by the New Public Management but also make use of their discretionary powers to adjust themselves to such incentives by developing informal practices not even imagined by the policy's formulators.

In a study conducted in the State of Florida designed to show how the tools provided by the New Public Management disciplined bureaucrats, Soss, Fording and Schram (2011) argued that the decisions made by street-level bureaucrats do not stem exclusively from their individual preferences but are actually molded by their organizational routines, tools and regulations.

In view of all that has been set out above, it can be seen that the discretionary powers of bureaucrats are present in several public policy areas. Those authors stress that the unforeseeable nature of certain situations at during policy implementation creates decision-making spaces for those who are on the front line. Furthermore, it must be stated that the concepts of the New Public Management Movement do, indeed, have an influence on

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<sup>6</sup> This is a kind of label that came to be applied to myriad contributions from analysts, journalists and administrators. Outstanding among those related to the theme of this chapter was the so-called 'Performance Movement', which sought to build strategies that would make it possible to evaluate the quality of public actions by means of an objective measurement of the results obtained.

bureaucrats' decisions. Finally, the bureaucrats' actions can be explained, at least partially, by their interactions with the other actors involved and with whom they have relations. We will discuss that in greater detail below.

### **The context and relations of bureaucrats in the various areas of public policy**

As regards the analytical approach to the evaluation of bureaucrats' performances, it would seem that recent years have witnessed the emergence of a relational perspective that underscores the influence of context and interactions on bureaucrats' performance and behavior. This new approach is based on social networks and governance concepts and seeks to explain the workings of state organizations by means of multiple networks of actors inside and outside the sphere of the state itself. In that light, policy design and policy results would also be influenced by the various interactions among those agents (MARQUES, 2000, 2003; FARIA, 2003).

In this relational perspective, the role of the middle-level bureaucrats gains importance. They are usually defined as those occupying intermediate positions between the top and bottom levels of their organizations and as being endowed with technical and managerial skills that enable them to lead teams, and technical-political ones, that enable them to relate to and negotiate with the upper echelons<sup>7</sup> (PIRES, 2012).

Considering the intermediate position of MLBs, in which they maintain relations with superiors and subordinates as well as with external actors, it is feasible to suppose that they influence the interactions among the political agents in the field of public policy, as the relational approach suggests.

As an illustration of that affirmation, Alexander *et al* (2011) analyzed 756 top and middle-level politicians and bureaucrats in 11 municipalities in the state of Victoria, Australia. Their investigation sought to gain an understanding of the social networks that enabled those actors to obtain

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<sup>7</sup> However, when talking about middle-level bureaucrat, it is important to note that, in the literature, there are ambiguities and difficulties in defining the term, given the complexity of tasks undertaken by intermediate levels. Still, in the public sector, the definition that has been used in studies of this actor sticks to intermediate categories of structures of management positions.

strategic information and advice. In spite of the variation detected among the municipalities, the study showed that the MLBs are important sources of strategic information for politicians and top level administrators. The authors also revealed that the MLBs tend to seek out their peers when they need information or advice showing a certain degree of homophilia – a phenomenon whereby individuals' similarities generate relations among them (BOTTERO, 2005).

Keiser (2010) in a study targeting implementers of a social program in the United States came to conclusions that were convergent with those obtained in the aforementioned studies. The first finding was that the way street-level bureaucrats implement a policy is partly influenced by their awareness of the preferences and the behavior of other actors (their peers and hierarchic superiors) with whom they have dealings in the organization. Based on that presupposition, it would be up to the managers (or middle-level bureaucrats) to mediate the relations among those actors in order to align the way policy is implemented.

Johansson (2012) analyzed managers in the area of infrastructure in Sweden in an article with the suggestive title of 'Negotiating bureaucrats'. He portrays the context in which such negotiating bureaucrats operate and their dependence on constant interaction with citizens, organizations and stakeholders. It is their negotiating skills, their knowledge of other actors' points of view and their ability to influence those actors that enable them to ensure the continuity of the policies they endeavor to implement.

Managers' powers of influence also appear in the work of Currie and Procter (2005) in which they studied the British health system. The authors clearly reveal the influence of MLBs on their organizations' strategies. According to their study, the MLBs' most outstanding skill is their power of persuasion with which they persuade their hierarchical superiors to adopt their ideas and quite often take on responsibility for elaborating the contents of the strategies that they have helped to define.

Currie and Procter's (2005) study also identified another factor that affects bureaucrats' behavior and performance – the power of professional categories with strong cohesion, such as doctors. In the case, they analyzed the MLBs with themselves being in the professional category that they

manage (doctors). The authors state that other studies had previously pointed out the power of doctors in management positions to impose their own perceptions and interests in strategic changes in their organizations. In that light, the MLBs tend to function more as assistants to change processes rather than as leaders because they are unlikely to propose anything that would displease their own professional category.

Bearing in mind that different professional categories have different degrees of cohesion and autonomy, Currie and Procter's (2005) work introduced an important element to be considered when analyzing public policies by areas. It can be inferred that, depending on their interests, some professional categories may offer strong resistance to their managers' ideas.

All the research work mentioned above has shown the influence of interactions among the agents on the bureaucrats' behavior and performance and the importance of viewing their work in a relational perspective in order to understand their role in policymaking. Irrespective of which public policy area they operate in, the bureaucrats, and more particularly the middle-level bureaucrats, seem to gather relevant information that can support decision-making and to interact with a variety of other actors, negotiating and coordinating, managing and mediating relations.

In short, there is clearly great diversity in the approaches produced by the line of research that investigates bureaucracy. The overriding concern of this theoretical section is precisely to stress the existence of that variety in the Brazilian and international literature with the intention of supporting comparative analysis that can highlight differences and similarities among government sectors and public policy areas. It can be seen that to a considerable extent bureaucrats' profile, trajectories and performances have been thoroughly discussed, albeit the middle-level bureaucrats have not been the central object of the literature. One of the reasons for that is the lack of a precise and homogeneous typology of the MLB. Nevertheless, this theoretical referential has introduced some important elements to the empirical analysis of the aforementioned aspects. The next section will present the study's methodological strategy.

## **Methodological strategy**

Given the exploratory nature of the research, the study mostly makes use of descriptive data analysis. The empirical base is drawn from the survey administered as part of the Federal Bureaucracy Research project carried out by the National School of Public Administration (ENAP), the Applied Economic Research Institute (IPEA) with the collaboration of the ABC Federal University (UFABC). The survey questionnaire was made available online from April to June 2014 to be self-administered by the respondent. It gathered information on professional trajectory and work routines and activities of civil servants occupying positions of trust by nomination in the federal government. To be precise, the focus was on civil servants in posts at the levels of DAS 1 to 5 or equivalent positions with other names in different government entities of the federal public administration.

The questionnaire was designed to obtain a description of the socio-demographic and professional profile of middle-level bureaucrats in the federal government administration as well as information on their activities and behavior. For comparative analysis, it was found necessary to divide the broad set of government ministries and departments into four government sectors, namely the social, economic and infrastructure sectors and the central bodies. The division was based on what was used by the Federal Budget Department at the Ministry of Planning, Budget and Management – MP (BRASIL, 2012) and can be seen in the attachment to this chapter.

The survey targeted around 25 thousand civil servants<sup>8</sup> with characteristics required by the research profile but due to the unavailability of a complete list of e-mails, only 20 thousand (around 80%) were actually contacted. Around 9 thousand questionnaires were returned and after cleaning up the database, the final sample amounted to 7,223 respondents (that is 28.51% of the entire population of civil servants in the relevant categories). In spite of not using a randomized sample, the survey reached a

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<sup>8</sup> In addition to the DAS posts, the management positions in the regulatory agencies, the Central Bank, the National Department of Mineral Production and the Intellectual Property Institute were included as they are hierarchically equivalent to the DAS positions.

high percentage of the target population and, furthermore, was expressively representative of that population as can be seen from Table 1. Segmenting the population and the sample according to DAS levels and according to the four major sectors of government, a notable similarity between the percentages in the total population and in the sample group was revealed.

Out of 25,334 civil servants nominated to positions of trust, 19,587 were DAS 1 to 3 (77.32%) while 5,747 (22.68%) were DAS 4 or 5. The percentages in the sample group were very similar. Of the 7,223 respondents, 5,254 (72.73%) were DAS 1 to 3, while 1,969 respondents (27.27%) held posts at the levels of DAS 4 and 5. In regard to government sectors, the distributions in the total population and the sample group were very similar with the exception of the central bodies, which had a slightly higher presence of DAS 4 and 5 level bureaucrats than in the overall population of DAS level employees.

The research analysis used this database to make comparisons of the respondents in the different sectors of government in regard to the aspects investigated by the survey. In addition to comparisons of averages, variance analysis (Anova) was used, which is an inferential parametric test equivalent to the t test (for two groups) but capable of identifying differences among three or more groups (HAIR *et al.*, 2005). In every case, the presupposition of variance homogeneity among the groups was tested for. For one of the questions posed in the survey, given the type of scale of the multiple-choice responses, the chi-squared non parametric test was used to measure the differences among the sectors.

**Table 1: Occupants of DAS posts or their equivalent, by government sectors**

Govt. Sector	Population				Sample			
	DAS 1 a 3 (total)	DAS 4 e 5 (total)	DAS 1 a 3 (%)	DAS 4 e 5 (%)	DAS 1 a 3 (total)	DAS 4 e 5 (total)	DAS 1 a 3 (%)	DAS 4 e 5 (%)
<b>Social</b>	6201	1710	78,38%	21,62%	1539	535	74,17%	25,83%
<b>Infrastructure</b>	3800	1932	66,29%	33,71%	910	498	64,63%	35,37%
<b>Economic</b>	5179	850	85,90%	14,10%	1368	254	84,34%	15,66%
<b>Central Bodies</b>	4407	1255	74,26%	25,74%	1437	682	67,82%	32,18%
<b>Total</b>	<b>19587</b>	<b>5747</b>	<b>77,32%</b>	<b>22,68%</b>	<b>5254</b>	<b>1969</b>	<b>72,73%</b>	<b>27,27%</b>

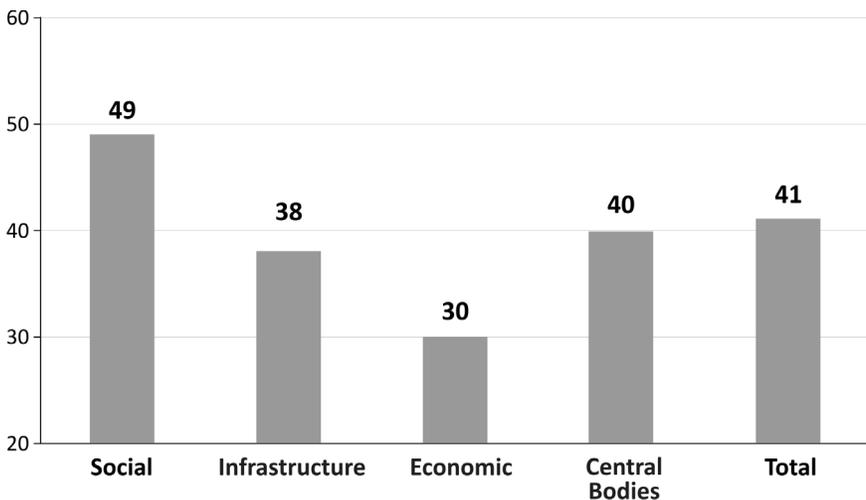
Source: Transparency Portal and Enap.

## Similarities and differences among the bureaucrats in different government sectors

### Profile and trajectory

This section sets out to present the comparative analysis of the profiles, professional trajectories and performance of federal government middle-level bureaucrats in their different sectors. It was intended to identify patterns of heterogeneity among the sectors in the averages of the indicators for the different aspects being investigated as the literature appeared to suggest (D'ARAÚJO, 2009; LOPEZ; BUGARIN; BUGARIN, 2014; BARBERIA; PRAÇA, 2014; CURRIE; PROCTER, 2005; KEISER, 2010).

**Figure 1: Female participation by sectors (%)**

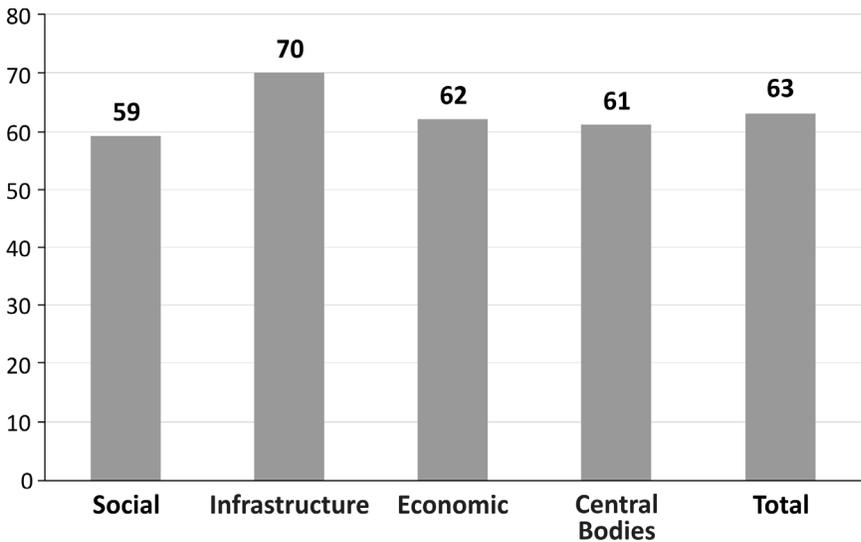


Source: Federal Government Middle-level Bureaucrats Survey – Enap/Ipea.

With regards to gender, significant differences can be seen in the profiles of respondents in each one of the four sectors as confirmed by the Anova test applied to the average percentages of women in each of the four sectors ( $F=55.49$ ;  $p<0.05$ ). While the average participation of women in the group that was analyzed is 42%, very close to the figure for the central bodies, nevertheless, Figure 1 shows that there is no uniformity among

the government sectors. On the one hand, in the infrastructure and, even more, in the economic sector, women are a minority but on the other, in the social sector the ratio of men to women is almost one to one. Their percentage participation is even higher than the total female participation in the Executive Branch as a whole (46%) and in the overall occupation of DAS posts (43%) (BRASIL, 2013). One explanation for women's outstanding representation in the social sector may have to do with the tendency for women to concentrate in professional careers involving the areas of care and assistance (education, social services, nursing, nutrition, etc) as various sociology and psychology studies have shown (SHIMADA; MELO-SILVA, 2013; SAAVEDRA *et al.*, 2004; ALMEIDA *et al.*, 2006).

**Figure 2: Percentage of those in DAS posts with postgraduate qualifications, by sector**

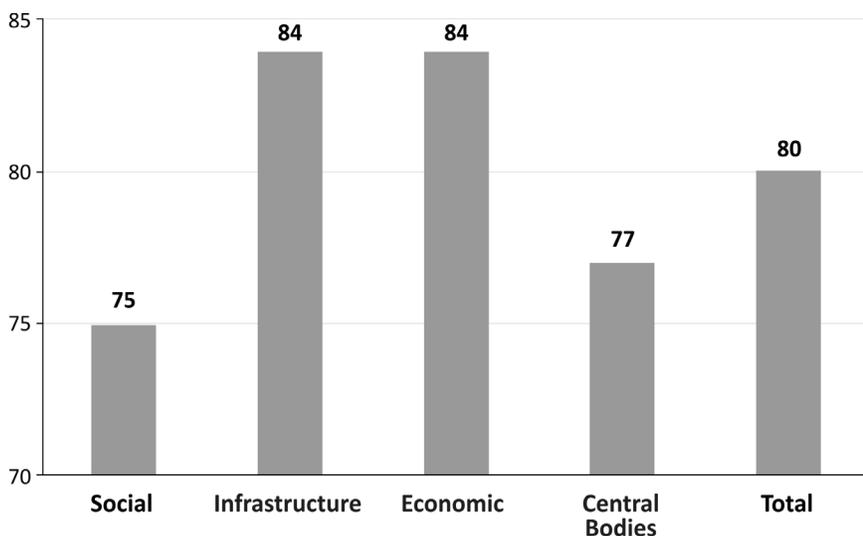


Source: federal government middle-level bureaucrats survey – Enap/Ipea.

Another important aspect for analyzing bureaucrats' profile has to do with their educational background. Figure 2 shows the percentages of civil servants in DAS positions that have a post-graduate diploma whether *lato* or *stricto sensu* (a Masters or a Doctorate). Generally speaking, the middle-level bureaucrats are highly qualified in all sectors and the overall

average percentage of those with postgraduate qualifications is 63%. Data shows that social and economic sectors as well as the central departments all have similar percentages, whereas the infrastructure sector has a higher percentage. Both analysis were confirmed by Anova tests, which means that there are no statistically significant differences among the averages for the three sectors, except between them and the average for the infrastructure sector ( $F=16.16, p<0.05$ ).

**Figure 3: Percentages of those in DAS level posts with employment bond, by sectors**



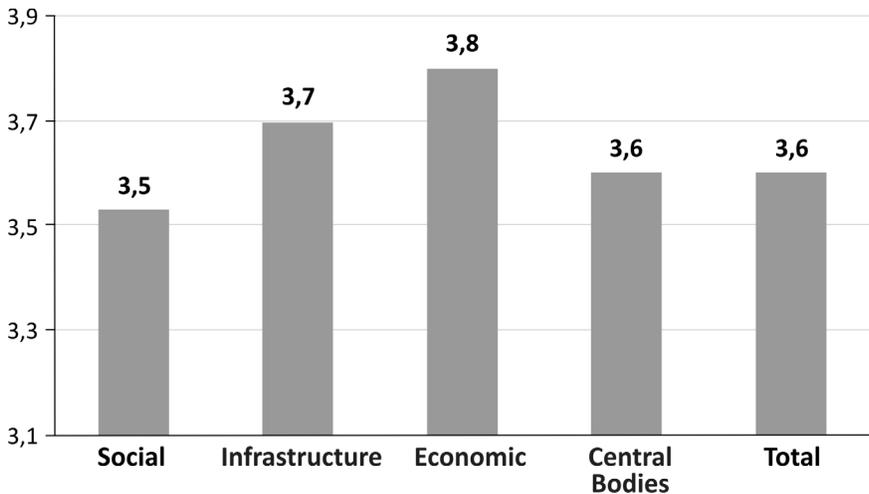
Source: Federal Government Middle-level Bureaucrats Survey – Enap/Ipea.

In regard to the bureaucrats' bonds with government<sup>9</sup> administration, the Anova test shows that there are statistically significant differences among the sectors for the percentages of those that are permanent civil servants occupying DAS posts ( $F=39.80, p<0.05$ ). Notably, the social sector and central departments have lower percentages than the average for the

<sup>9</sup> Bureaucrats in DAS positions may be either career or non-career civil servants. Career civil servants enter the public service through competitive exams, while non-career civil servants may only occupy posts in which nomination is discretionary, such as DAS. Also, career civil servants are protected by specific legislation after three years of service, which does not apply to non-career civil servants.

sample but close to the percentage for federal government as a whole in terms of those in DAS posts, which is around 75% (BRASIL, 2013). On the other hand, the economic and infrastructure sectors have much higher percentages than the sample and the DAS population as a whole. In other words, in these two last sectors, permanent civil servants predominate the occupation of DAS positions in the middle-level bureaucracies.

**Figure 4: Average duration of tenure of DAS positions, by sector**



Source: federal government middle-level bureaucrats survey – Enap/Ipea.

With respect to how long an employee has been in his or her present nominated DAS post, the variance analysis test showed that there were no statistically significant differences among the government sectors. Figure 4 displays the average time for which employees have been in their current DAS positions. Roughly speaking, the average time when the survey was being administered was practically the same as that of the current presidential mandate. That means most of them came to their DAS positions in the early days of the then current administration and by and large have held on to their positions throughout it. That finding is consistent with the information on all nominated posts and positions of trust displayed on the government's Transparency Portal.

The study also hoped to identify differences among the professional trajectories of the middle-level bureaucrats. To that end, it set out to map their experience in each of the following sectors: federal government administration, sub-national governments (states and municipalities), private enterprise and non-profit organizations.

Given the characteristics of the government sectors, common sense suggests that on the one hand bureaucrats in the social area of government would be more likely to have wider experience in sub-national governments and non-profit organizations, whereas bureaucrats in the infrastructure and economic sectors were more likely to have spent more time in private enterprise. Table 2 sets out their average number of years of experience in each area of professional activity and as can be seen, the expectations were confirmed. The Anova test confirmed the existence of statistically significant differences among the groups analyzed ( $p < 0.05$ ).

**Table 2: Average years of experience, by areas of professional activity and by sectors**

	Federal Government F=6,3	Sub-national Governments F=19,6	Private Enterprise F=9,1	Non-profit Organizations F=10
<b>Social</b>	14,0	2,3	4,1	0,8
<b>Infrastructure</b>	14,5	1,5	4,5	0,5
<b>Economic</b>	15,5	1,6	4,3	0,4
<b>Central Bodies</b>	14,3	1,3	3,6	0,5
<b>Total</b>	<b>14,5</b>	<b>1,7</b>	<b>4,1</b>	<b>0,6</b>

Source: Federal Government Middle-level Bureaucrats Survey – Enap/Ipea.

Generally speaking, federal government middle-level bureaucrats have very similar trajectories in terms of their areas of professional experience. In other words, civil servants who find themselves in DAS positions have a reasonable experience in the federal administration entity or body in which they are working and that result is convergent with the findings of D’Araújo (2009) and Barberia and Praça (2014). However, one interesting fact that was revealed was that the average time worked upon private enterprise by bureaucrats occupying DAS positions was greater than the average figure for experience in sub-

national governments and most of them have had little or no experience in non-profit institutions.

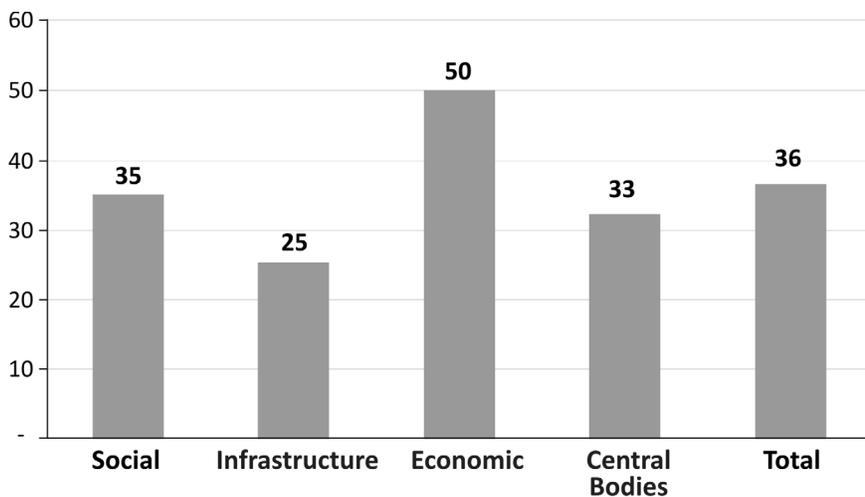
The most important results obtained in this aspect were the differences found among the government sectors. Firstly, as expected, bureaucrats in the social sector typically have spent more of their professional lives in sub-national governments and in non-profit organizations and have far less experience in the spheres of federal government and private enterprise compared to other sectors, especially infrastructure and the economic sector. These two last sectors, again as expected, were staffed with civil servants whose professional experience was just the opposite of those in the social sector. On average, they had more experience in the federal environment and private enterprise. As for the central departments sector, its middle-level bureaucrats showed a pattern of professional experience quite different from the three other sectors, with the average time spent being quite close to the overall average for the sample as a whole, except the average time spent in private enterprise, which was lower than the average figure for all the other sectors analyzed.

### **Nomination criteria and performance**

A comparison of the sizes of the teams subordinate to middle-level bureaucrats shows a significant effect of the sector on them ( $F=4.52$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). As figure 5 shows, the economic sector stands out with teams far bigger than in the other sectors and especially in comparison to the infrastructure sector.

A frequent dilemma for MLBs concerns the classic dichotomy between autonomy and control. When we compare the survey respondents' perceptions as revealed by the three questions on autonomy, it is once more possible to discern important differences in the patterns among the sectors. In the aspect of their autonomy to define adequate instruments and techniques, it can be seen that those in the economic sector have a significantly reduced perception of their autonomy in that aspect than those in the other sectors ( $F=4.14$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). This finding is probably related to the very nature of those entities classified as belonging to the economic sector as they already have well consolidated techniques and instruments

**Figure 5: Average number of persons in teams under MLBs, by sector**



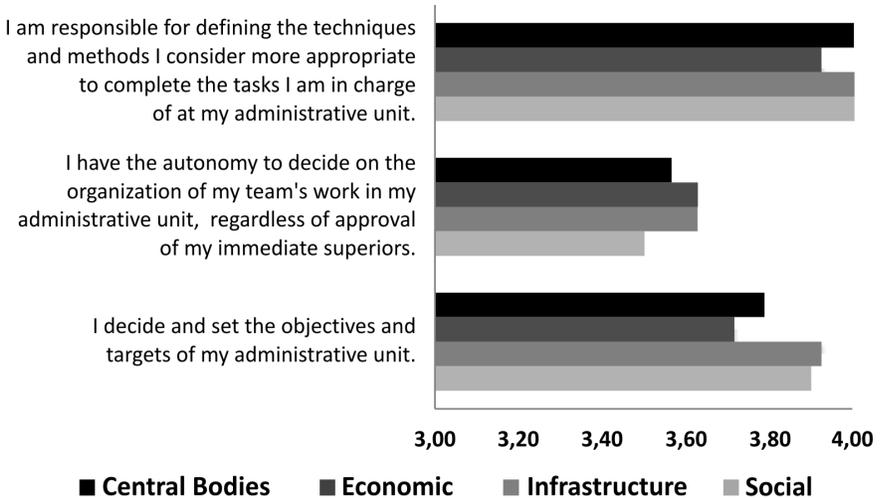
Source: Federal Government Middle-level Bureaucrats Survey – Enap/Ipea.

whose results enable them to make better measurements than other sectors. The same phenomenon can be observed in their perception of their autonomy to define goals and objectives for their units ( $F=11.13$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) and the possible explanation is similar. The sector already has a series of pre-established objectives in the macro context. The other question investigating whether they could organize their work without the need for the approval of their superiors showed a completely different result. In this case, it was the social sector that considered itself to have little autonomy in that direction ( $F=3.86$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), that is, their dependence on the approval of their immediate superiors was greater than in the other sectors.

The specialized literature also addresses the question of the influence exerted by the MLBs on the decision-making processes of their hierarchical superiors (CURRIE; PROCTER, 2005). Figure 7 illustrates the perception of the bureaucrats themselves in regard to their powers of influence and in this aspect, there was not much difference among the sectors. The application of the Anova test, however, revealed that the bureaucrats in the central departments have their ideas listened by more than the others ( $F=7.43$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). As regards their participation in meetings with the upper echelons, those allocated in the economic area perceived themselves as taking part

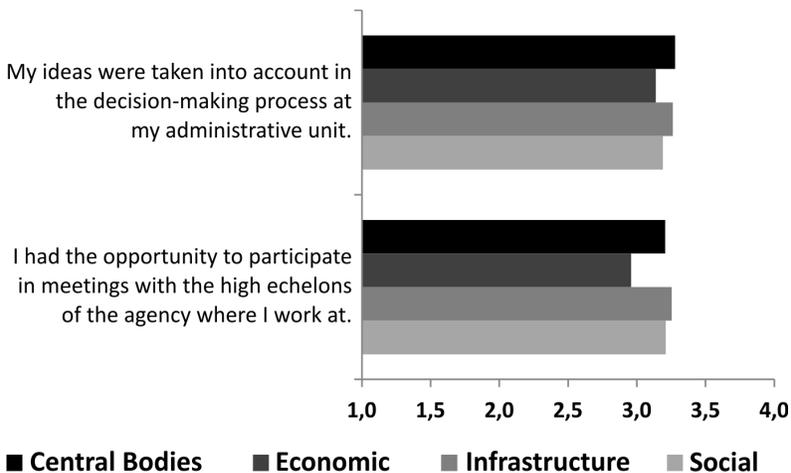
in them less frequently than the others ( $F=20.00$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) and that in turn may be a partial explanation for their perception of little autonomy mentioned earlier.

**Figure 6: Perceptions of autonomy by sectors**



Source: Federal Government Middle-level Bureaucrats Survey – Enap/Ipea.

**Figure 7: Perceptions of powers of influence, by sectors**



Source: Federal Government Middle-level Bureaucrats Survey – Enap/Ipea.

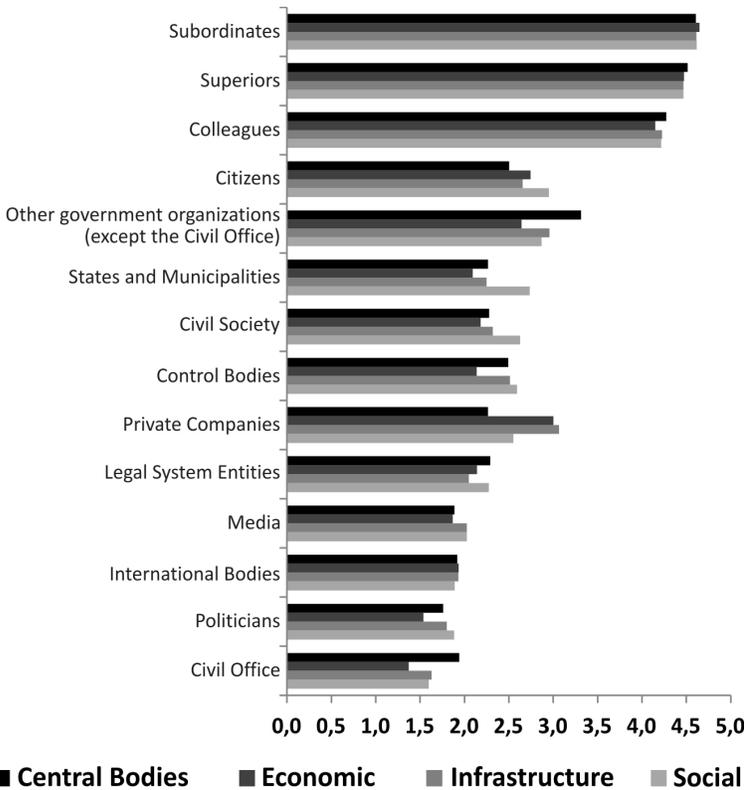
The theoretical references showed the importance of interactions with other agents in bureaucrats' activities and the role of their relations in enabling an understanding of their participation in policymaking (KEISER, 2010; JOHANSSON, 2012), regardless of the public policy area they are allocated to. Figure 8 clearly illustrates how the bureaucrats targeted by this research interact internally with their superiors and subordinates and to a lesser extent with their peers.

However, there are some sector differences in their interactions with external actors. The social sector interacts much more than the others with citizens, states, municipalities and civil society organizations ( $F=7.43, p<0.05$ ). That confirms the recent tendency to amplify participative mechanisms in Brazil's recent social policies, which have expanded exponentially over the last 20 years. One example of such mechanisms is the set of national conferences which, according to Avritzer (2012), represent the most outreaching participative public policy in Brazil and most of them are concerned with social policies. The economic and infrastructure sectors interact more frequently than the others with private companies. The economic sector has a low frequency of interaction with almost every other class of actors and that is probably due to the nature of the public policies managed by bureaucrats in that sector. Because they are essentially involved with regulation and articulation of other entities, the central departments have the highest frequency of interaction with other government organizations and with the civil office of the presidency.

One interesting aspect is that, in the social sector, the pattern of middle-level bureaucracy's interactions is more like the supposedly typical of the street-level bureaucrats, namely interactions with citizens and civil society, whereas in the economic sector, it is more like that of a member of the upper echelons of government, namely interactions with private companies. This finding makes it possible to infer the relevance of these bureaucrats' interactions with the main actors involved in policies related to their sectors.

The responses to the questions on activities revealed fewer differences among the sectors. Once again it was found that the middle-level bureaucrats dedicated themselves mainly to their organizations' internal

**Figure 8: Interactions**

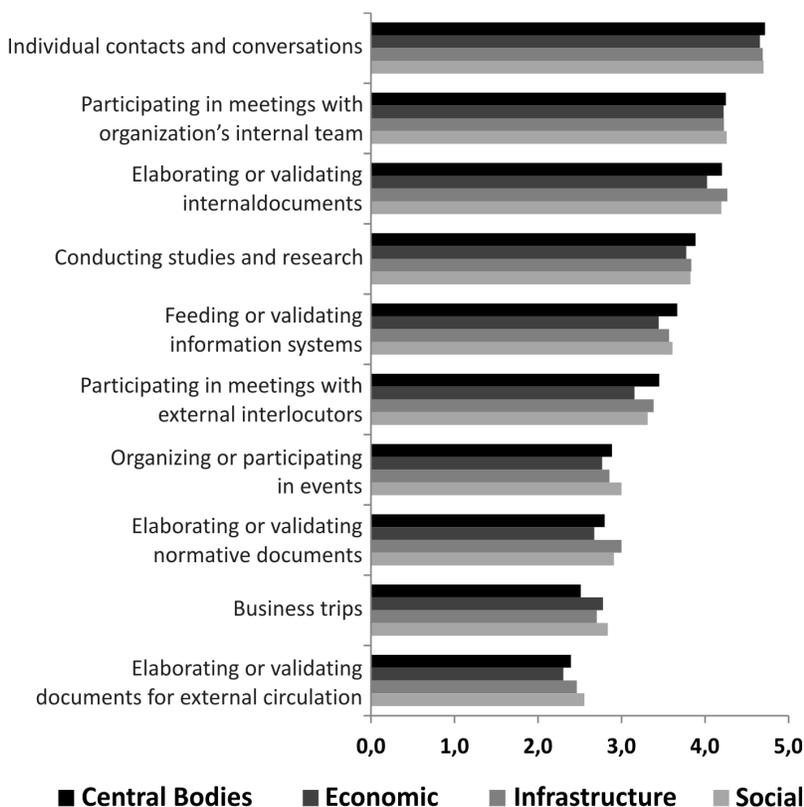


Source: Federal Government Middle-level Bureaucrats Survey – Enap/Ipea.

activities, the most frequent being individual contacts and conversations, meetings with internal teams and elaborating internal documents. Vie (2010) showed that the activities of middle-level bureaucrats in government are increasingly devoted to human relations, that is, managers immediately below the upper echelon of administration spend most of their time in conversations within their departments, even though they also spend considerable time in administrative activities. As figure 9 shows, the same tendency was confirmed by the present study sample. The responses to some of the items deserve closer attention. With the exception of the ‘business trips’ activity, the economic sector bureaucrats showed much lower frequency for all activities investigated than any other sector. In the case of the central departments’ bureaucrats, their perception of ‘business

trips’ revealed a low frequency. That probably has to do with the centralized nature of those organizations’ activities.

**Figure 9: Main activities undertaken, by sectors**

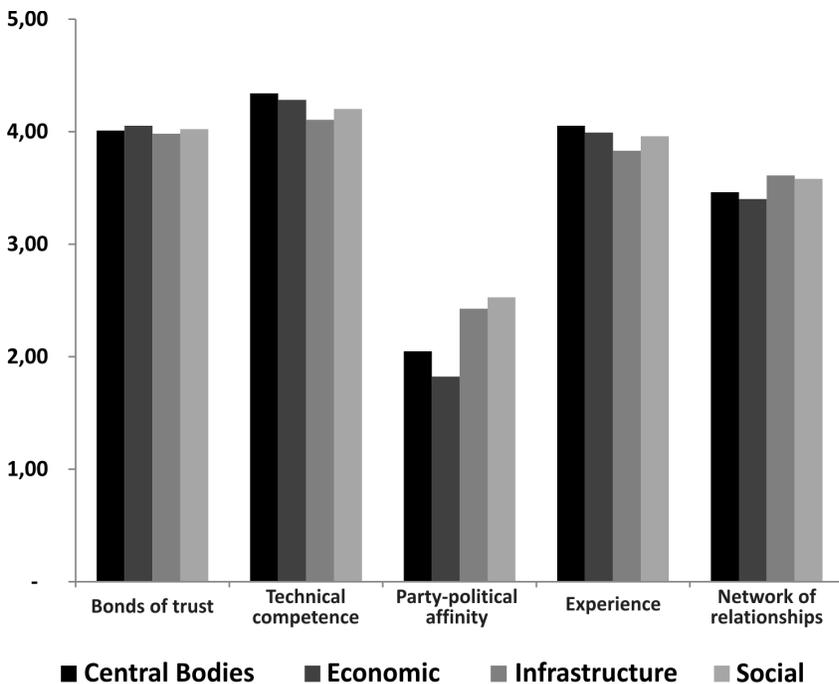


Source: Federal Government Middle-level Bureaucrats Survey – Enap/Ipea.

The survey also asked bureaucrats to identify the main factors influencing their nomination to posts in their organizations. The variance analysis showed that the differences among the sectors in regard to the item ‘bonds of trust’ were not statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). The least important factor in the eyes of the respondents was party political affinity; a finding convergent with the reports in the literature (PRAÇA; FREITAS; HOEPERS, 2012) which declare that bureaucracies tend to place a higher value on experience and competence than on party-political affinities when making nominations.

Some significant differences deserve to be mentioned. Those respondents allocated in the social and infrastructure sectors attributed greater interference in nomination processes to party-political affinities ( $F=190.23, p<0.05$ ) and to networks of relationships ( $F=16.17, p<0.05$ ) than those in other sectors, whereas those in the economic sector see party-political affinity as the least important criterion in determining nominations. This last result is contrary to Barberia's and Praça's (2014) findings that party-political affiliation influences nominations to the levels of DAS 5 and 6, especially in the infrastructure sectors and in the presidency of the republic and to a lesser extent in the social and economic sectors.

**Figure 10: Factors influencing nomination**



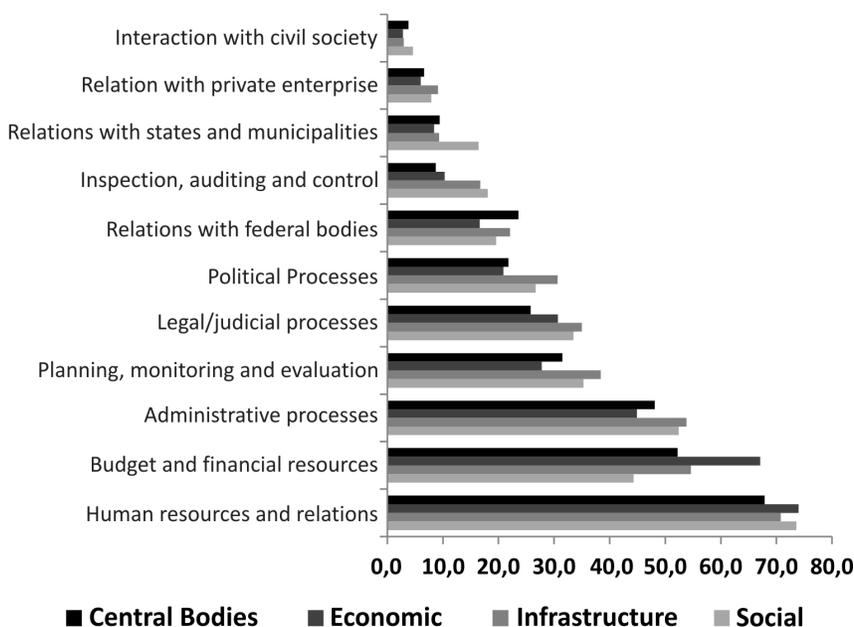
Source: Federal Government Middle-level Bureaucrats Survey – Enap/Ipea.

On the other hand, in regard to the criteria of technical competence ( $F=17.41, p<0.05$ ) and experience ( $F=14.11, p<0.05$ ), those in the infrastructure sector tend to see them as less important than those in

other sectors do. Central departments and economic bureaucrats attribute greater influence to both of these factors than those in the infrastructure sector do. The finding corroborates the results obtained by Olivieiri (2007), who identified technical competence as the number one criterion for nominations in the Central Bank which is a typical economic sector body.

Another item investigated by the survey of those occupying DAS posts or their equivalent in the various government sectors were the problems they have to deal with in their daily round. While some problems appear to stand out from others in a similar way in all sectors, it is worthwhile underscoring some of the details distinguishing the groups under analysis from one another. In the analysis of this item, the chi-squared test was used to verify frequency differences among the sectors. An account of some significant results is given below.

**Figure 11: Main problems, by sectors**



Source: Federal Government Middle-level Bureaucrats Survey – Enap/Ipea.

Although human resources and relations show up as the two most outstanding problems for all sectors, they are most evident in the social

and economic sectors. On the other hand, budget resources pose a more important problem for the economic sector than for the others. The social sector attributes the least importance to the problem of 'budget resources'. That is probably due to the fact that government departments in the social sector often have legally determined budget allocations and also that recent governments have strongly emphasized this sector.

The infrastructure and social sectors reported having greater problems with administrative processes, as Figure 1 shows.

## **Final Remarks**

To gain an understanding of how the state functions, there must be a due recognition of its great complexity. The same is true for any investigation of the public sector officials who are active in a variety of different areas and stages of public policy processes and, therefore, also present a variety of different characteristics and behavior patterns. Although the literature addressing bureaucracies makes little use of this type of comparison among the sectors, the theoretical review made it possible to map those works that underscore differences and similarities among the professionals working in different sectors of government and public policies including those situated in middle-level management positions.

In that sense, the data obtained by the survey contribute to confirm the hypothesis of complexity in regard to all the aspects analyzed here. With respect to the 'profile' aspect, female participation was only outstanding in the social sector and the economic sector presented the highest percentage of bureaucrats with post-graduate qualifications. In the aspect of professional trajectories, the item 'experience in the federal government' was the one that revealed the greatest similarity among the sectors, unlike other trajectory items where the differences were considerable. Similarities were also identified in the patterns of interaction and the main activities of middle-level bureaucrats which were largely directed at the public and internal activities. On the one hand, a strong relationship with the citizenry and sub-national governments can be observed in the social sector while on the other hand, in the economic sector, bureaucrats tend to have more

intense relations with private entities than the other sectors do. In regard to the factors influencing appointments to DAS positions, middle-level bureaucrats in the social and infrastructure areas are more likely to cite party-political affinity and networks of relationships as influential factors, while those in the economic and central bodies' sectors perceive experience and technical competence to be the key criteria.

The results of this research reinforce the original presupposition of the high degree of complexity of the public sector with all the relevant segments of the government work force being subjected to analysis. Again, the data used to make comparisons among different sectors of the government in which middle-level bureaucrats carry out their activities confirm this presupposition. The sample's representativeness and the broad approach of the survey have added information to this debate in order to support more in-depth research into the characteristics of middle-level bureaucracies. We believe that the results obtained and presented here will enable further progress to be made not only towards a fuller understanding of this segment but also towards supporting studies that set out to explain the effects that differences among bureaucracies have on the success of public policies. From a methodological standpoint, the main function of the present paper has been to present the data collected in an exploratory manner and, in that way, allow for future research to move forward in addressing the aforementioned challenges by using a variety of other methodological strategies.

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# ATTACHMENT

**Table A – List of Government Sectors**

Sector	Ministry or Government Body
<b>Social</b>	Ministério da Cultura (Ministry of Culture) Ministério do Desenvolvimento Social e Combate à Fome (Ministry of Social Development and Fight Against Hunger) Ministério da Educação (Ministry of Education) Ministério do Esporte (Ministry of Sport) Ministério do Desenvolvimento Agrário (Ministry of Agrarian Development) Ministério da Previdência Social (Ministry of Social Security) Ministério da Saúde (Ministry of Health) Ministério do Trabalho e Emprego (Ministry of Labor and Employment) Secretaria de Direitos Humanos (Human Rights Department) Secretaria de Políticas de Promoção da Igualdade Racial (Policies Promoting Racial Equality Department) Secretaria de Políticas para as Mulher (Policies for Women Department)
<b>Infrastructure</b>	Ministério das Cidades (Ministry of Cities) Ministério Ciência, Tecnologia e Inovação (Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation) Ministério das Comunicações (Ministry of Communications) Ministério do Meio Ambiente (Ministry of the Environment) Ministério de Minas e Energia (Ministry of Mines and Energy) Ministério dos Transportes (Ministry of Transport) Secretária de Aviação Civil (Civil Aviation Department) Secretária de Portos (Ports Department)
<b>Economic</b>	Ministério da Agricultura, Pecuária e Abastecimento (Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Supply) Ministério do Desenvolvimento, Indústria e Comércio Exterior (Ministry of Development, Industry and Foreign Trade) Ministério da Fazenda (Ministry of Finance) Ministério da Pesca e Aquicultura (Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture) Ministério do Turismo (Ministry of Tourism) Banco Central do Brasil (Brazilian Central Bank)

<p><b>Central Bodies</b></p>	<p>Ministério da Integração Nacional (Ministry of National Integration)</p> <p>Ministério da Justiça (Ministry of Justice)</p> <p>Ministério do Planejamento, Orçamento e Gestão (Ministry of Planning, Budget and Management)</p> <p>Ministério das Relações Exteriores (Ministry of Foreign Affairs)</p> <p>Secretaria de Assuntos Estratégicos (Department of Strategic Affairs)</p> <p>Secretaria de Comunicação Social (Department of Social Communication)</p> <p>Secretaria de Relações Institucionais (Department of Institutional Relations)</p> <p>Secretaria-Geral da Presidência (Office of the Secretary General of the Presidency)</p> <p>Casa Civil (Civil Office)</p> <p>Presidência da República (Presidency of the Republic)</p> <p>Advocacia-Geral da União (Office of the Federal Attorney General)</p> <p>Comissão de Ética Pública (Public Ethics Committee)</p> <p>Conselho da República (Council of the Republic)</p> <p>Conselho de Defesa Nacional (National Defense Council)</p> <p>Conselho de Desenvolvimento Econômico e Social (Social and Economic Development Council)</p> <p>Conselho de Governo (Council of the Government)</p> <p>Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Industrial (National Industrial Development Council)</p> <p>Conselho Nacional de Desestatização (National Denationalization Council)</p> <p>Conselho Nacional de Integração de Políticas de Transporte (National Council for for Transport Policy Integration)</p> <p>Conselho Nacional de Política Energética (National Energy Policy Council)</p> <p>Conselho Nacional de Segurança Alimentar e Nutricional (National Council for Food and Nutritional Security)</p> <p>Defensoria Pública da União (Office of the Federal Public Defender)</p> <p>Controladoria-Geral da União (Office of the Comptroller General)</p> <p>Vice-Presidência da República (Vice Presidency of the Republic)</p> <p>Gabinete de Segurança Institucional da Presidência da República (Office of the Presidency for Institutional Security)</p> <p>Gabinete Pessoal do Presidente da República (Office of the President of the Republic)</p>
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# CHAPTER 3 – INFLUENCING THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS: WHAT IS THE EXPLANATION FOR MIDDLE-LEVEL BUREAUCRATS’ PROTAGONIST ROLE?<sup>1</sup>

*Alessandro de Oliveira Gouveia Freire*

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The analysis of public policy production has increasingly become the object of research efforts conducted with different approaches embracing aspects like the political interplay that precedes their formulation, the role of historical processes in defining formats, the effects of institutional choices on the results obtained, and others (OLIVEIRA; ABRUCIO, 2011). Irrespective of the analytical approach adopted, the middle-level bureaucracy that intermediates relations between the upper echelons of administration and the street-level bureaucracy (PIRES, 2012) has emerged in the specialized literature as a key actor in policymaking processes.

This bureaucratic *corps* consists of a set of professionals responsible for conducting intermediation between the technical and the political spheres. While on the one hand they act as advisors to members of the upper echelons of the administrative hierarchy in the decision-making process, on the other, they are directly responsible for negotiating and articulating the processes of the internal work of their governmental organizations. The work of these government agents situated in the middle

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<sup>1</sup> We wish to thank Pedro Cavalcante, Marizaura Camões and Márcia Knop for their valuable contributions to the production of an earlier version of this article. The suggested reading proffered by Letícia Godinho, Gabriela Lotta and Diogo Fonseca were also highly relevant for the development of this research. Finally our thanks go to participants in the seminar held on the occasion of the launching of the research entitled ‘Middle-level bureaucrats: profile, trajectory and performance’, which took place on December 5, 2014 at the National School of Public Administration (Enap) in Brasília for their criticisms and suggestions.

of their organizations can be synthesized into a few central actions such as the “endorsement, refinement and conducting” of entrepreneurial opportunities that frequently originate from the lower levels of the organization and that need to be translated and defended and require the “identification, acquisition and destination” of the resources needed to ensure the execution of innovative procedures in the organizations (KURATKO *et al.*, 2005). Therefore, the occupant of a post in the middle echelon of a public or private organization acts as a catalyst or enabler, an agent responsible for unfolding transformational actions within the ambit of public or private bodies and agencies, connected, as they are, to various different strata of their organizations.

In the sphere of their internal and external interactions, these actors can play the role of articulating social networks involving other actors in the public bureaucracy, politicians and members of society at large. In the view of Alexander and collaborators, that role is conditioned by the format of the networks established in each context and especially by the extent to which the middle-level bureaucrat’s relations with senior bureaucrats are permeated by hierarchic considerations or by autonomy (ALEXANDER *et al.*, 2011).

This chapter sets out to gain an understanding of the factors that might explain the influence exercised by such civil servants on the policymaking process due to the access and recognition afforded them by their hierarchic superiors. To that end it makes use of original data gathered by a survey run by the National School of Public Administration in collaboration with the Applied Economic Research Institute (Ipea) and the ABC Federal University (UFABC) targeting the occupants of posts by appointment or nomination in the federal government (ENAP, 2014).

In addition to this present introduction, the chapter presents a synthesis of the main findings published in the specialized literature on public bureaucracy with a special emphasis on the Brazilian bureaucracy. Following that comes a presentation of the data used in the research work and an explanation of the main hypotheses that were used to orientate the organization of the empirical model. Finally the results obtained by the statistical model are discussed and some of the study’s conclusions are commented on.

## The decision-making process and the middle-level bureaucracy

As Oliveira (2008) has made clear, most of the Brazilian research on bureaucracy has targeted the upper echelons, especially that of the federal bureaucracy, and how it performs in the formulation of public policies (GOUVÊA, 1994; SCHNEIDER, 1994; LOUREIRO; ABRUCIO; ROSA, 1998; ABRUCIO; LOUREIRO, 1999; OLIVIERI, 2007). However, there have been some studies that have endeavored to understand the role played by bureaucrats that actually implement policies “at the end of the line”, in other words, those actors that operate the policies formulated by the upper echelons. This latter bureaucracy is usually referred to as “street-level bureaucracy” (LIPSKY, 1980). However there is little or no understanding of those actors that are situated in between the policy formulating elite and those that put the policies into effect. In other words there is little knowledge on the middle-level bureaucracy which plays an important role in the political results of policy implementation (OLIVEIRA, 2008; OLIVEIRA; ABRUCIO, 2011). Among those pertaining to the middle-level bureaucracy are coordinators, managers, supervisors, directors and other actors of organizations that are charged with the responsibility of translating strategies formulated by the senior echelons to make them accessible to those who will actually be implementing the public policy (PIRES, 2012).

Pires (2012) and Oliveira and Abrucio (2011) underscore the fact that this group of bureaucrats in an intermediary position is varied and heterogeneous. The diversity among them embraces institutional aspects associated to the different sectors of government as well as the nature of the posts they occupy and the functions they perform. That points to the importance of comparative analyses to identify what features they have in common, as well as their specificities, as a means to obtaining an understanding of who these actors really are and what exactly they do.

According to the study conducted by Pires (2012), generally speaking, most middle-level bureaucrats that occupy intermediate positions carry out one of two kinds of functions: either they have a technical-managerial function or they have a technical-political one. The first is related to activities

and actions they carry out to translate the strategic directives into ordinary operations usually carried out within the organizations such as procedures for purchasing and managing services for example (WILSON, 1968; OLIVEIRA, 2008). The technical-political function refers to the negotiations and bargaining they have to engage in as part of their relations with the upper echelons and with their subordinates in the street-level bureaucracy. It is in this latter aspect that their position and their relations with actors engaged in all stages of policy formulation and implementation makes them so important (ROCHA, 2003; BIANCCHI, 2002; SCHNEIDER, 1994).

Thus, any analysis of how middle-level managers perform requires an understanding of who they are, what they do and with whom they interact and negotiate, bearing in mind that even though they are inserted in an institutional structure, they do have the power to interfere in the formulation and implementation of a public policy; something the literature refers to as their “discretionary power” (LOUREIRO, 2010; LOTTA, 2010; PIRES, 2012; OLIVEIRA; ABRUCIO, 2011; ABERBACH; PUTNAM; ROCKMAN, 1981).

An examination of the discretionary element present in the activity of this actor leads to an understanding that, in spite of being molded by institutional rules and procedures, he or she still has sufficient autonomy to interpret them and apply them in the implementation process. This analytical line is based on the presupposition that there is an enormous distance separating the policy as designed and formulated from the policy as it is implemented (ARRETICHE, 2001). In the Brazilian context that distance is the result, among other factors, of policies’ being implemented in a complex federative reality in which a variety of actors inside and outside the federal bureaucracy participate, each with their own interests, some of which are often antagonistic. Thus the implementation stage of a policy reveals itself to be a stage in the political construction of the public policy definitions present in the formulation stage, imparting new interpretations and (re)definitions to the directives set out in the laws, decrees and other normative instruments.

That being so, it must be assumed that the bureaucrats in analysis are also endowed with political powers that are an important resource, enabling them to influence the implementation of a public policy. To some

extent, this last hypothesis establishes a dialogue with the comparative studies undertaken by Aberbach, Putnan and Rockman (1981), in which, after analyzing the relations between politicians and bureaucracies in seven countries, they came to the conclusion that it is wrong to state that the politicians just govern and the bureaucrats simply administer. In reality, what is happening in the modern day bureaucracies is a “bureaucratizing of politics and politicizing of bureaucracies” (ABERBACH; PUTNAN; ROCKMAN, 1981, p. 19), and that process is leading the actors in those groups to employ hybrid action strategies. Thus the actors of the group in question actually become policymakers, and with a double set of concerns: political responsibility for their actions and technical responsibility for the affairs of the State. Thus when politicians take office in public posts they need to respond technically to address the respective problems. When bureaucrats occupy high positions, on the other hand, they need to take political criteria into account in their activities whether it be in relation to the extant political system or in relation to the opinion of society at large (COSTA, 1993; SCHNEIDER, 1994).

The amount of attention paid to middle-level bureaucrats in the specialized literature varies according to the different historical contexts of public and private administrations. Currie and Procter (2005) highlight two different phases of the middle echelon bureaucracy: the first dating from the beginning of the 20th century to the 1970s decade was supposedly the “age of gold” for these actors as there was a growing demand for professionals in their category; the second phase began in the 1980s when deregulation, increased competition and downsizing led to a reduction in the importance of these actors in the administration of companies and government agencies.

In spite of that decline of middle level bureaucrats in the 1980s in the context of Brazilian public administration there has been an observable re-emergence of this segment over the last 12 years. As Federal government data show, the numbers of advisory and directors posts at DAS 4 and 5 level have increased in number by 107% and 91% respectively since 1997 (BRASIL, 2013). Most of such posts are occupied by coordinators and directors of teams responsible for the interlocution between the upper echelons and

the street-level bureaucracy of the federal government. It must also be underscored that Brazilian middle-level bureaucracy is not restricted to managerial staff occupying DAS 4 or 5 posts but includes others that are heading teams of subordinates (ENAP, 2014).

Given the important political role of middle-level bureaucrats and their additional importance in public policy implementation, this chapter seeks to investigate the explicative factors and, in that way, determine the extent to which these actors influence the upper levels of Brazilian government administration. While it is true that part of the respective literature stresses the influence the upper echelons have on policies implemented by street-level bureaucrats (MAY; WINTER, 2009; MEYERS; VORSANGER, 2003; SCHOLZ *et al.*, 1991), little is known about the performance of middle-level managers in the policymaking processes. In other words, many of the published studies on public policies and bureaucracies adopt a strictly top-down approach in their bid to identify the factors that lead to a convergence of the directives issued by the upper levels and the policies as they are actually put into effect by the lower managerial levels and the street-level echelons.

Here we adopt an opposite bottom-up approach in investigating the factors that explain the middle echelon bureaucracy's influence on the directives formulated by the top administrative strata. As Lotta *et al.* have underscored, this latter approach implies that public policy implementation is "a continuous and integral part of any policy process involving negotiation between those wishing to put the policy into practice and those on whom the actions depend".

To gain a proper understanding of the policymaking process, it is essential to analyze the influence of the middle-level bureaucrats insofar as their actions are predominantly relational and are capable of having an impact on the way in which public policies are implemented. The findings of Ham and Hill (1984) regarding the difference that exists between public policies as they are planned and as they are actually implemented, that is, the nature of the public policy implementation process, is clear evidence of how important these intermediating actors really are even though those authors' analysis did not investigate them specifically. Similarly, the degree

of autonomy attributed to middle-echelon bureaucrats is a central factor in public policy production because it determines the way in which these actors can pass on the directives and objectives established by the upper echelons to the implementing bureaucracy at the end of the line.

Given the fact that middle-level bureaucrats are responsible for the intermediation between the top and bottom administrative echelons, then it is only to be expected that they should be capable of exerting some form of influence on decisions that are made in policymaking processes insofar as they bring to the notice of their hierarchical superiors the problems that public employees dedicated to implementing policies on the ground have to face. In that regard, the middle-level managers play an important role in interpersonal relations insofar as they are able to exert their influence both upwards and downwards (FLOYD; WOOLDRIDGE, 1992; LOTTA *et al.*, 2014).

These actors synthesize information and identify the best alternatives to support the decision-making undertaken by their heads of their organizations (KURATKO *et al.*, 2005; CURRIE; PROCTER, 2005) thereby exerting an important degree of influence on decision-making. In their portrayal of the actions of middle-level managers in private enterprise, Kuratko *et al.* (2005) delineate very well, the protagonist role played by these actors:

By interacting with first- and top-level managers, those operating in the middle influence and shape entrepreneurial actions as they parcel and integrate knowledge to proactively pursue some form of newness. (KURATKO *et al.*, 2005, p. 702).

## Hypotheses and empirical model

To explain the determinants of middle-level bureaucrats' influence, we will underscore the most important variables associated to the phenomenon and our hypotheses regarding their effects on our empirical model. As the literature makes clear, the middle-level bureaucrats are responsible for the interlocutions between the top echelons and the street-level bureaucrats and perform technical-managerial and political functions (PIRES, 2014; LOTTA *et al.* 2014, OLIVIERI; ABRUCIO, 2011). In that respect they influence the process of transmitting the decisions and directives

of the upper echelons to the front line bureaucracy and orientating the decisions of the top echelon on the basis of their experience with the front line bureaucracy

As stated in the introduction, the database compiled for the analyses was drawn from the survey<sup>2</sup> carried out from April to June 2014 by the Enap with the collaboration of the Ipea and the UFABC (ENAP, 2014). The sample for that survey consisted of 4,463 individuals occupying DAS posts or the equivalent, heading teams of subordinates such as coordinators directors of teams<sup>3</sup>, among others. That cross-section was due to the fact that our aim was to analyze the effects of variables that have an effect on the degree of influence that middle-level bureaucrats actually exert on their upper echelon hierarchical superiors. It must be stressed that only those that declared that they were heads of teams of subordinates went on to answer the questionnaire items investigating influence and autonomy (ENAP, 2014).

The dependent variable in this case was investigated by two items designed to measure the degree of influence of those respondents that coordinate or direct teams of subordinates. The first was directed at their participation in meetings with members of the highest strata of their organizations. Obviously the mere fact of taking part in meetings does not mean that a given bureaucrat can be considered as being influential but we

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<sup>2</sup> The survey made use of the LimeSurvey platform to conduct a self-administered survey embracing anon randomized sample of 7,223 persons occupying posts as directors or special advisors by nomination (DAS levels 1 to 5 or equivalent) in the Federal Government out of a total group of 25,344 people in such positions. The exclusion of level 6 posts was due to the fact that they are precisely the level that composes the highest echelon of Federal Government administration alongside Ministers of State and Posts of a Special Nature (LOPEZ et al., 2014).

<sup>3</sup> The questionnaire had a filter question about managing teams and after answering it, coordinators and team directors were required to answer questions about their managerial autonomy. Out of the initial total of 5,481 coordinators and directors those that were outliers in regard to the variables of the model employed were excluded in accordance with the method recommended by Hoaglin and Iglewicz (1987) resulting in a cleaned sample group of 4,463. On the basis of the variance frequency distribution we took the difference between the first and third quartiles and multiplied it by 2.2. The product of that operation was then subtracted from the first quartile and added to the third quartile to obtain the lower and upper limits of the distributions, respectively. To be more specific, the variables 'general experience' and managerial experience' include working experiences that may have been simultaneous, that is to say, not cumulative, and that made it necessary to exclude those values that were highly discrepant.

can certainly consider that such participation is a necessary requirement for that. In order to effectively exert an influence on the decision-making process, the bureaucrat in question needs to be in contact with members of the administrative elite and that shows the importance of the fact of participation or non participation in meetings.

The second question that investigates a dependent variable concerns the ideas that are taken into account at the moment decisions are made in the body or organization the bureaucrat is working for because the response indicates the extent to which a member of the top levels of an organization are disposed to take into account the suggestions coming to them from below. Both survey questions made use of a frequency scale that varied from 1 (never) to 5 (always) and the correlation between those two is 0.57 (significant to the level of 0.01) and the Cronbach's Alpha value is 0.72<sup>4</sup>. The dependant variable consists of the average of the values obtained for the two questions (or items) and it is based on a 1 to 5 point scale (no influence to total influence).

In regard to the explanatory variables of the proposed model, we can point to three main ones that determine the level of influence:

Post Level which means the category of DAS or of its equivalent posts occupied by the questionnaire respondent and it has attributed values of 1 to 5. The premise was that the higher the DAS level of the post occupied by the respondent, the greater his or her influence would be. In other words it was expected that its effect in regard to influence would be positive.

The variable 'Managerial Autonomy' in this research is represented by the average of the response scores for three questions that go from 1 (never) to 5 (always) and measure the frequency with which the respondent: a) decides on and establishes goals and objectives, b) decides on the

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<sup>4</sup> These numbers indicate an association between the two questions showing that participation in meetings and having ideas considered in decision-making correspond to a phenomenon in common. Pearson's correlation shows that the association between the two questions is positive which means that the more frequent the participation in meetings, the more frequently the bureaucrat's ideas are taken into account in decision making (and vice versa). The Cronbach's Alpha value means that 72% of the influence variable variance is reliable. In other words, the two questions that compose the variable correspond to the same construct which in this case is called 'influence'.

organization of his or her team's work without the need for the approval of superiors and c) defines the technical instruments that he or she considers to be most appropriate for carrying out the unit's work. The correlation between the first two variables is 0.29, between the first and the third, is 0.42 and between the second and the third, 0.37. All of those values are significant to the level of 0.01. The Cronbach's Alpha for the composition of the variable is 0.62. The underlying hypothesis here is that the greater the degree of autonomy the respondents have in their working units, the greater will be their influence which means that the dependent variable should be positive.

The third variable is 'Managerial Experience' and it was based on responses to questions that included the number of years worked in managerial posts in the following spheres: public (federal, state, or municipal) administration, private enterprise and the third sector. This variable is also expected to have a positive effect on the respondent's degree of influence.

We also added to the model a variable of interaction between the level of the post occupied and the state (or federal district) in which the respondents performed their duties to see if there was any effect on the degree of influence of those occupying DAS positions when they were functioning in decentralized contexts. The state or federal district in which the respondent worked may be relevant in determining the degree of influence due to the duties and responsibilities attributed to occupants of DAS posts in the decentralized units of the federal government administration. Apart from the Federal District, there is a set of agencies whose public policies are implemented directly by the Federal Government such as the Federal Revenue Service and the Social Security system. Furthermore, it is in the states that the political agents have their constituencies so that DAS post holders may be more liable to make political nominations to posts in the lower echelons. Our expectation is that the degree of influence of those with DAS 1 to 3 will be greater when they are operating in decentralized contexts.

Our central hypothesis is that the level of the post occupied is a crucial variable for gaining an understanding of the degree of influence of middle-level bureaucracy in Brazil. Even though it may be possible for holders of

posts at the level of DAS 1 to 3 to exert their influence on public policy decision-making processes, it is widely recognized that posts at the levels of DAS 4 and 5 are essentially managerial and therefore their occupants have better chances of being influential. Indeed, when we compared the dependent variable and the level of the post, substantial differences between the levels DAS 1to 3 and DAS4 and 5 were apparent.

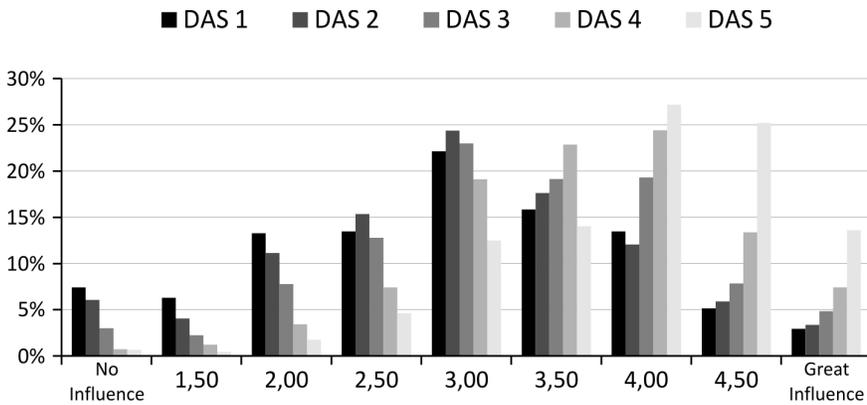
Figure 1 displays the frequency distributions of the influence variable according to the level of the post occupied by the respondent. There is a clear preponderance of those in DAS 4 and 5 positions to have a greater degree of influence. 45.2% and 66% respectively, of the those with DAS 4 and 5 had scores of 4 or above for this variable whereas for those with DAS 1,2 or 3 the percentages of such high scores were 21.6%, 21.4% and 32%, respectively.

Figure 2 relates the influence variable cross-referenced with the respondents' managerial experience. It can be seen that those with 16 years of experience or more have higher influence scores which suggests that the trajectory of the person occupying the DAS post may have a positive influence on the upper echelons. This finding is in harmony with that of Praça and his collaborators (2012) about the value attributed to employees expertise in determining DAS nominations. Among those respondents with 15 years of managerial experience, the maximum percentage with a score of 4 or over is 36.2% while among those with 16 years of experience, the maximum is 48.8%. General experience was included as a reference for comparison of the relative importances of managerial and general experience

We also considered the effect of managerial autonomy on the degree of influence exerted by middle-level bureaucrats in the light of the differences that exist among the public policies implemented by the State. Even though the causal relation between these variables may be a two-way street, it is essential to take into account the degree of autonomy middle-level bureaucrats enjoy from the perspective of their influence on the higher echelons. That is because their autonomy may provide them with the means to achieve more precise evaluations of the directives handed down by their superiors. In other words, when middle-level bureaucrats

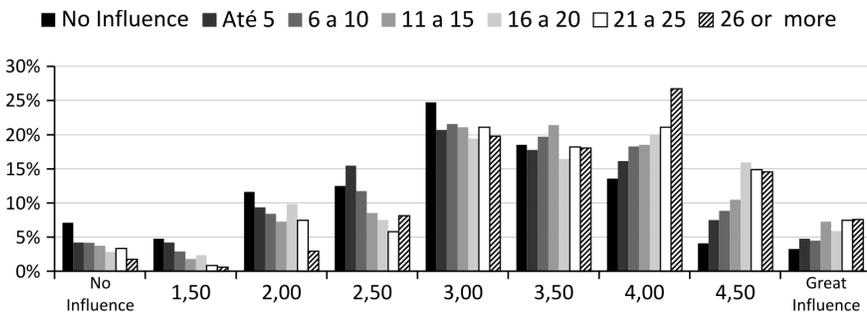
have greater freedom to experiment with different ways of implementing public policies they acquire a greater capacity for identifying problems and that in turn increases their chances of influencing the decisions made by the upper strata.

**Figure 1: Degree of Influence, by level of posts**



Source: Federal Government middle-level bureaucrats survey – Enap/Ipea

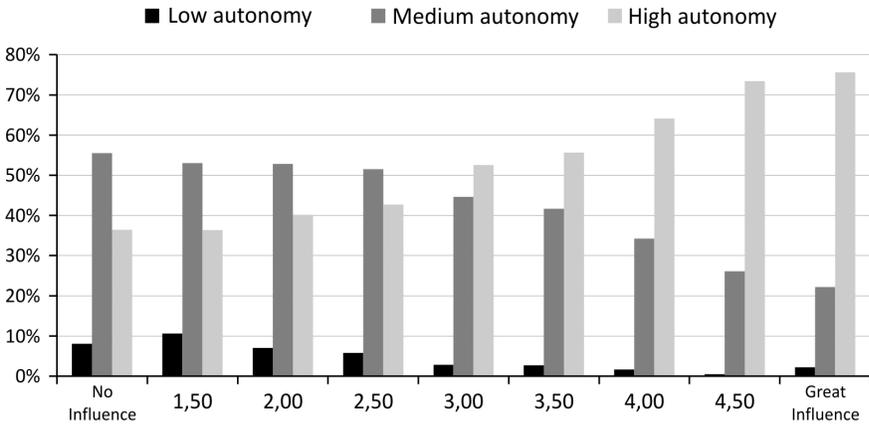
**Figure 2: Degree of Influence by managerial experience (in years)**



Source: Federal Government Middle-level Bureaucrats Survey – Enap/Ipea (2014).

Figure 3 cross references the Influence variable with the Managerial Autonomy variable. As can be seen the two variables have a positive relationship because the respondents that have a high degree of autonomy are the ones with the most influence.

**Figure 3: Degree of influence, by degree of managerial autonomy**



Source: Federal Government Middle-level Bureaucrats Survey – Enap/Ipea (2014).

The model's control variables include socio-demographic factors (age sex, race/color and schooling), the year of appointment to the post, general experience and the government sector in which the respondent operates (social, economic, infrastructure or central government bodies)<sup>5</sup>. The bureaucrats' socio-demographic characteristic may affect their degree of influence especially if we consider aspects like the disparities between the genders in the occupation of managerial posts that is so typical of the federal public administration (ABREU; MEIRELLES, 2009). The year of appointment to the post may be a determinant of influence. Those in their posts longer than others may have conquered a more impressive reputation for the work they have done and for that reason are liable to influence their hierarchical superiors. The model also includes the variable 'General Experience', similar to the 'Managerial Experience' variable except that it considers any kind of experience in the spheres of operation of the respondent whether managerial or not. The premise is that the greater the volume of experience, the greater the person's propensity to influence the decision-making process. In turn, the government sector they work in may

<sup>5</sup> For further details regarding the bodies that make up each sector see Federal Government Middle-level Bureaucrats Research: survey results (Pesquisa sobre Burocratas de Médio Escalão do Governo Federal: resultados do Survey)(Enap, 2014).

be a factor that affects the influence of middle-level managers given that government sectors each have their own distinct hierarchies and their public policies have trajectories and characteristics that are sector-specific as has been commented on in Chapter 2 of this book and by Barberia *et al.* (2014).

Thus we can describe the model in the following way:

$$\text{Influence} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{ DAS level} + \beta_2 \text{ state or federal district} + \beta_3 \text{ DAS level} * \text{State of Federal District} + \beta_4 \text{ general experience} + \beta_5 \text{ experience} + \beta_6 \text{ managerial experience} + \beta_7 \text{ managerial autonomy} + \beta_8 \text{ year of appointment} + \beta_9 \text{ sexo} + \beta_{10} \text{ race} + \beta_{11} \text{ age} + \beta_{12} \text{ schooling} + \beta_{13} \text{ infrastructure sector} + \beta_{14} \text{ economic sector} + \beta_{15} \text{ central bodies sector} + \epsilon$$

## Results

Table 1 sets out the results of the ordinary least squares regression for the continuous dependent variable ‘Influence’. It shows that in accordance with our expectations, the level of the post held has a positive and statistically significant effect on managerial influence. This result suggests that managerial posts in the Brazilian federal public administration are structured in a logical and coherent manner whereby the level of the post occupied by the bureaucrat is directly proportional to his or her influence on the decision makers.

Nevertheless, it is important to remember that one of the initial hypotheses foresees that the effect of the variable ‘DAS level’ is affected by the state or federal district in which the bureaucrat operates. The negative sign attached to the variable “Federative Unit” (state or Federal District) seems to suggest that when the activities of middle-level management are carried out in the Federal District the respective bureaucrats have less influence. It is not possible, however, to draw that inference from the coefficients of the regression table because as Brambor and his colleagues (2006) warned the possibilities of interpreting the coefficients of the variables involved in interactions are quite limited.

The statistically significant coefficient for the interaction between the DAS levels and the Federative Unit shows that the effect of the level of the DAS does indeed differ according to the state or federal district. However, the evaluation of the differences among the effects of the level of DAS of the

post among the various federative contexts cannot be restricted to the table of regression coefficients alone. That is because, as the more recent literature on interactive models has underscored (BRAMBOR *et al.*, 2006; BRAUMOELLER, 2005; KAM; FRANZESE, 2005), the coefficient of a given variable X (in this case the level of the post) corresponds to its effect when the other variable involved in the interaction (federative unit) is equal to zero.

(...) the coefficient on X only captures the effect of X on Y when Z is zero. Similarly, it should be obvious that the coefficient on Z only captures the effect of Z on Y when X is zero. It is, therefore, incorrect to say that a positive and significant coefficient on X (or Z) indicates that an increase in X (or Z) is expected to lead to an increase in Y. (BRAMBOR *et al.*, 2006, p.72)

In other words the coefficient of the variable 'DAS level' in Table 1 indicates the effect of this variable on the influence a bureaucrat operating outside the federal district (the 'Federative Unit' variable was codified as 0 for those respondents working outside the federal district and as 1 for those working in it).

The coefficient of the DAS level is altered when the context is the Federal District (0.237)<sup>6</sup>. That means the inclination of the straight line of the regression between the degree of influence and the level of the post occupied is steeper when those occupying the DAS posts are in the Federal District, which suggests that the relation between those two variables is stronger when the DAS occupants are in the Federal District. On the other

<sup>6</sup> We can arrive at this conclusion by distributing the values in the equation for the regression model. Considering only the coefficients for those variables involved in the interaction ( $\hat{\beta}_1$  DAS level,  $\hat{\beta}_2$  Federative Unit and  $\hat{\beta}_3$  DAS level x Federative Unit), we have:

$$\begin{aligned} \hat{Y} &= \hat{\beta}_0 + \hat{\beta}_1 X_i + \hat{\beta}_2 Z_i + \hat{\beta}_3 X_i Z_i + \dots + \mu_i; \\ \hat{Y}_{(Z=0)} &= \hat{\beta}_0 + \hat{\beta}_1 X_i + \hat{\beta}_2(0)_i + \hat{\beta}_3 X_i(0)_i + \dots + \mu_i; \\ \hat{Y}_{(Z=0)} &= \hat{\beta}_0 + \hat{\beta}_1 X_i + \dots + \mu_i; \\ \hat{Y}_{(Z=0)} &= 1,453 + 0,125 X_i + \dots + \mu_i; \\ \hat{Y}_{(Z=1)} &= \hat{\beta}_0 + \hat{\beta}_1 X_i + \hat{\beta}_2(1)_i + \hat{\beta}_3 X_i(1)_i + \dots + \mu_i; \\ \hat{Y}_{(Z=1)} &= (\hat{\beta}_0 + \hat{\beta}_2) + (\hat{\beta}_1 + \hat{\beta}_3) X_i + \dots + \mu_i; \\ \hat{Y}_{(Z=1)} &= [(1,453 + (-0,344))] + (0,125 + 0,112) X_i + \dots + \mu_i; \\ \hat{Y}_{(Z=1)} &= 1,109 + 0,237 X_i + \dots + \mu_i. \end{aligned}$$

**Table 1: Explanatory factors for managerial influence**

<b>Independent Variables</b>	<b>Coefficient</b>	<b>Standard Error</b>
(Constant)***	1,453	0,131
DAS 1 a 5***	0,125	0,018
Federative Unit***	-0,344	0,065
DAS*Federative Unit***	0,112	0,023
General Experience	-0,018	0,012
Managerial Experience***	0,079	0,012
Managerial Autonomy***	0,254	0,018
Years of Nomination to the Post	0,013	0,014
Sex***	0,066	0,028
Race	0,012	0,029
Age	-0,012	0,009
Schooling Level***	0,094	0,014
Infrastructure Sector	0,049	0,039
Economic Sector***	-0,116	0,038
Central Bodies Sector	0,029	0,036
<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>0,189</b>	
<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>0,186</b>	
<b>Standard Error of Estimate</b>	<b>0,87</b>	

\* Significant to the level of 95%

\*\* Significant to the level of 99%

\*\*\*Significant to the level of 99.9%

Source: elaborated by the authors

hand, the constant is inferior to that displayed in Table 1 (1.109) showing that the minimum level of influence of those occupying DAS posts in the Federal District is lower. Although those results make it possible to infer that the variable 'Federative Unit' is one that moderates the influence of those in DAS posts in the Federal District, it is necessary to construct a

graph displaying those results to enable us to visualize how the influence of different DAS level occupants is affected by the state or the Federal District where they operate.

Figure 4 presents average values for the influence variable as predicted by the model and according to Federative Units and the DAS level of the post. The Bars on the lines represents the confidence interval of 95%. It can be seen that those with DAS 1 to 3 have higher average degrees of influence when they are not allocated in the Federal District but that relation is just the opposite for those in positions at DAS levels 4 and 5 and their average levels of influence are lower when they are not located in the Federal District. This result shows that the relation that exists between the level of the post the middle-level bureaucrat occupies is conditional, that is, it alters in accordance with the federative context in question. It must be underscored that the relationship can only be captured by means of graphic displays and that only goes to confirm the importance of the methodology applied here.

Although most DAS posts at levels 1 to 3 involve technical and assistance activities, it can be seen from Figure 4 that those who occupy such positions in decentralized contexts may influence those in the top echelons more than their peers working in the Federal District, albeit the difference is only very slight in the case of DAS 3 posts for which the averages for the two contexts are very similar. Another interesting aspect is that the greatest disparity of average figures occurs among those at the DAS 5 level where the predicted figure for this item is near to 4 for those holding posts by appointment or indication in the Federal District, while for those in the same posts in decentralized contexts it is closer to 3.6. Some points must be clarified in regard to the effect of the level of the post on influence. First, as Table 1 shows, the most relevant variable in terms of the influence of those in decentralized contexts (i.e. outside the Federal District) is managerial autonomy. In their case the maximum effect of the level of the of the post held (DAS 5) on the influence variable is 0.625 whereas that of the managerial autonomy variable is 1.285. In the context of the federal District, however, the DAS level has practically the same effect on influence as managerial autonomy. In the Federal

District context the DAS level has almost the same effect on the dependent variable as managerial autonomy with a value of 1.27 points. Given the importance of managerial autonomy, its effect on the influence exerted by middle level managers calls for more in-depth investigation in the future in order to obtain a more consolidated explanation for the relationship revealed by the present research.

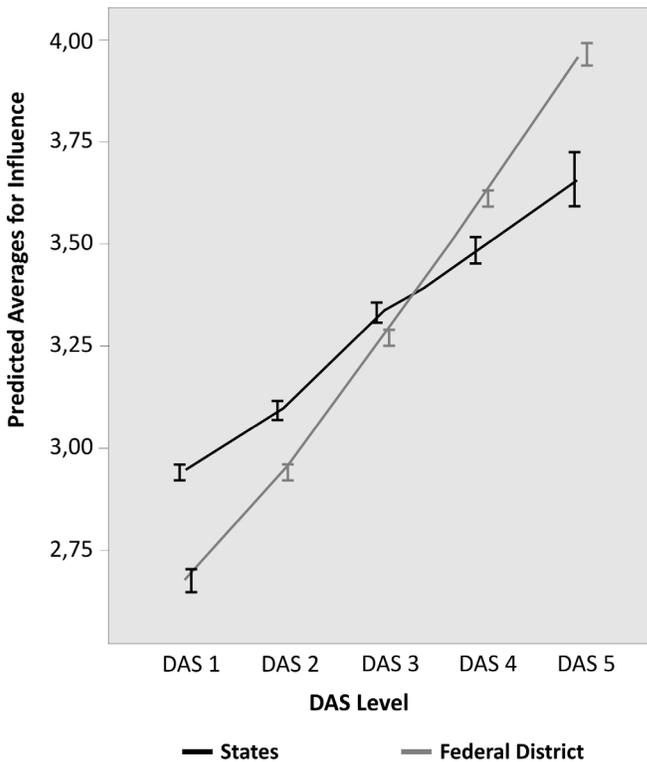
It can be seen that only the constant, the coefficients and the standard errors of the variables involved in the interaction (DAS, FU and DAS\*FU) suffer any alteration according to the value attributed to the FU. In that sense, the interactive model set out here identifies important differences in the attributions of these posts according to the different contexts.

Managerial experience has a statistically significant positive effect on influence levels but of a lesser magnitude than the effect of DAS level. This variable was evaluated using a six-point scale whereby its maximum effect on the dependent variable (influence) is 0.474. According to this result, the trajectory of the professional individual occupying a DAS post is important in determining his or her degree of influence on the upper echelons. It is worth noting the control variable 'general experience' does not have any explanatory importance. Its coefficient is not statistically significant and, contrary to expectations, it has a negative sign. The variable 'year of nomination' which was designed to capture the length of time the individual had been working in the federal public administration also fails to explain bureaucrats' influence even though the sign was as expected.

Among the other control variables, the respondent's sex presented a result contrary to expectations insofar as women seem to have greater influence on the upper echelons than men, even though their overall participation in higher posts is less than men's. That result may be due to a singular feature of our sample group because the percentage of women respondents holding DAS 4 and 5 posts is greater in the sample group than in the total population of DAS post holders. In our sample women represented 36 and 31% respectively of the DAS 4 and 5 positions whereas in the overall population of those in DAS posts (not counting those in equivalent posts with other nomenclatures) they represent 28 and 19% respectively.

Another important control variable is the 'schooling level' of the DAS post occupant. The statistically significant positive effect of this variable shows that those individuals with higher levels of education tend to exert greater influence on the upper strata of administration, which suggests that the capacity building undergone by a DAS post occupants plays an important role in the execution of their duties. Here it must be underscored that there is also a direct relation between schooling level and post level insofar as most of those occupying the top positions have qualifications higher than a university degree (ENAP, 2014).

**Figure 4: Predicted Averages for Influence, by DAS levels and by States and Federal District**



Source: *Federal Government Middle-level Bureaucrats Survey* – Enap/Ipea (2014).

Finally, among the sector variables, the economic sector shows a statistically significant negative effect on the respondents' degree of managerial influence as compared to the social sector (reference category). It may be that this result is due to the profile of the bureaucracy in the economic area in which the organization of their work is typically extremely hierarchic, as demonstrated by the analysis presented in Chapter 7 of this collection, and that fact could reduce the middle-level bureaucrats' margin of influence on their hierarchical superiors in this sector as compared to the social sector.

## **Conclusions**

This chapter has sought to analyze the factors that determine the managerial influence of middle-level bureaucrats on those in the upper echelons and to do so on the basis of a set of original data on the professional profile, trajectory and performance of those who occupy positions by appointment or nomination in the Federal Government.

As we expected, the level of the post ('DAS level') is very important in this phenomenon especially in the context of the federal bureaucracy installed in the Federal District. The hierarchical structure of the posts occupied by nomination or appointment obeys a coherent logic whereby the occupants of the higher levels have a greater influence on the top echelons. This finding is in harmony with the formal perception that exists of the distribution of posts in the federal public administration including its importance in the decision-making process. In the case of posts outside Brasília, however, they seem to be more attractive in the categories DAS 1 to 3. The fact that the location is a determinant for the degree of influence exerted by middle-level bureaucrats raises new questions that the literature needs to address and which could identify the causes of this phenomenon in future studies.

Managerial experience proved to be the most important element in determining greater prestige for bureaucrats in regard to decision-making. In addition to this empirical finding, it is worth noting that experience in the wider sense did not show itself to be reliable as an explanatory factor. However, future studies could analyze the nuances of managers' experience

in heading work teams as a more important element than the mere length of time served.

'Managerial Autonomy' proved to be the variable with the greatest effect on managers' influence and its impact was even greater than that of the variable 'DAS level', albeit the difference has shown itself to be relatively slight in the context of the Federal District. In any event, this result suggests that the middle-level bureaucracy's influence is also determined by factors that are not necessarily linked to the formal structure of Brazilian public administration. Different public policies propitiate different hierarchical relations thereby affecting the importance of the DAS level of middle-level bureaucrats.

It would seem that an understanding of role played by the middle-level bureaucracy also has a contextual component. The evidence points to a negative value for the perceived influence on the decision-making process of those occupying posts by appointment in the economic sector as compared to the role of those in the social sector. A possible explanation is the very nature of the public policies involved whereby better organized bureaucratic routines create more stable and, consequently, more predictable environments, thereby diminishing the spaces in which intermediary bureaucrats could eventually play the role of enablers and innovators. This is a line of research that needs to be unfolded in the form of more in-depth qualitative studies capable of capturing contextual aspects of public organizations such as those presented in Chapters 5 and 7 for example.

The results obtained in this study reveal a promising research agenda that may produce important insights regarding the importance of middle-level bureaucrats in policymaking processes. The explanations delineated in the present work on the basis of the quantitative data gathered, together with the theoretical constructs it has constituted, can serve as a reference that will enable other studies to obtain more detailed explanations for the causal mechanisms observed and to validate the concepts used, thereby furthering a better understanding of how this bureaucracy performs.

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# CHAPTER 4 – IMPLEMENTING AN INNOVATION: THE MIDDLE-LEVEL BUREAUCRACY OF THE *BOLSA FAMÍLIA* PROGRAM\*

*Vanessa Elias de Oliveira  
Gabriela Spanghero Lotta*

This chapter sets out to analyze the performance of middle-level bureaucrats (MLBs) in the implementation of a new public policy that involved the formation of a bureaucratic *corps* and the two distinct stages of its implementation, namely, the initial moment and the maintenance of the program in execution with its ‘incremental’ demands.

In addition to rarely being the object of political science or public policy studies, the particular middle-level bureaucracy that is the focus of this paper has another peculiarity: it is a highly qualified, insulated bureaucratic body, constituted specifically for the implementation of a new policy (the *Bolsa Família* [Family Allowance] program). Most of the constituent bureaucrats are career managers with no (necessarily) previous connection to the social assistance area and consequently free from any inveterate visions associated to prior experience in that sector.

In methodological terms, the chapter draws mainly on qualitative research in the form of semi-structured interviews that were conducted with 10 middle-level bureaucrats associated in some way with the *Bolsa Família* program, as follows: four Directors (DAS 5) of the National Income and Citizenship Department (*Secretaria Nacional de Renda e Cidadania* - Senarc), three Senarc coordinators (DAS 4), one Senarc advisor (DAS 4), one Chief of Staff, and one Ministry of Health coordinator (DAS 4)<sup>1</sup>. In this

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\* We wish to thank the CNPQ for the support it provided for the development of this research.

paper the interviewees have been identified by numbers to preserve the anonymity that was agreed to at the time the interviews were conducted.

The basis for the analysis of the interviews was the theoretical discussion targeting the middle-level bureaucracy, its role in the production of public policies and in the public institutions' bureaucratic hierarchies, as well as their internal and external relations with that structure, their backgrounds and their acquired relational and managerial abilities.

Two main arguments are developed here. The first refers to the separation of technical criteria, especially policy expertise<sup>2</sup>, from partisan criteria in the process for selecting the bureaucrats to implement the *Bolsa Família* program. Priority was placed on technical criteria and that was crucial to ensuring a more autonomous performance on the part of this group of bureaucrats and insulating them sufficiently to allow them the freedom they needed to implement a new policy. That implementation required capacity and freedom to carry out innovative managerial actions in the program's so-called 'heroic period'<sup>3</sup>.

However, that autonomy does not mean the absence of political controls of the bureaucrats and their actions. According to the middle-level bureaucrats themselves, there has always been constant interaction and dialogue with control entities. Furthermore, the autonomy conceded to them does not mean that the MLB has a high degree of discretionary powers; quite the opposite. The institutionalization of the policy and the great visibility it has acquired as a successful management model, together with the vast scope of the Unified Registration (*Cadastro Único* or *CadÚnico*) system that has come to be used by other Federal Government programs and policies has actually endowed the *Bolsa Família* program with greater

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<sup>1</sup> We were unable to interview any representative of the Ministry of Education for the purpose of this paper. Even so we decided to maintain the interview with the Ministry of Health administrator as we felt it provided some interesting slants on the role played by Senarc managers in [policy] articulation.

<sup>2</sup> According to Praça *et al.* (2012), quoting Callander (2008), a "policy expert is a person who has greater knowledge than others in regard to how public policies in a given area translate into concrete results for the population" (PRAÇA *et al.*, 2012, p. 103.

<sup>3</sup> This term was used by one of the middle-level bureaucrats interviewed.

rigidity, reducing the possibilities of effecting any innovation on the part of its bureaucrats. They, who had been so intensely involved in the implementation of a policy that was innovative to the point that it provided plenty of room for experimentation, suddenly found themselves bound by (excessively) stable rules for program management actions. At this second moment the political sphere seems to have far greater influence, now that the public policy has been consolidated, than when it was first being implanted. As a consequence, the bureaucracy is subjected to more severe political and institutional constraints actually resulting from the policy's success leading to increasing rigidity and eventually even discouragement.

To develop the arguments above, the chapter is organized as follows: first we present the main directives of the *Bolsa Família* program, its structure and interaction with the Ministries of Health and of Education in addition to the innovation it generated within the sphere of the Brazilian State's social assistance actions. In addition, we present the structure of National Income and Citizenship Department (Senarc), which is the body responsible for implementing the program. Against that background it is essential to understand the process whereby a new bureaucratic and institutional structure is consolidated that is capable of administering, in isolation, one of the Lula and Dilma governments' top priority programs. We then pass on to an analysis of the empirical data gathered from the aforementioned semi-structured interviews mixing them with the theoretical analysis presented by Lotta, Pires and Oliveira (2014). More specifically, we will focus on some aspects of this bureaucracy that are useful in enabling an understanding of it, as well as other middle-level bureaucracies in the public sphere thereby contributing to a more detailed perception of this particular middle-level bureaucracy category. Finally, we will present a consolidated account of the main characteristics of this bureaucracy and of its performance in this particular policy.

## **The *Bolsa Família* program and its bureaucracy**

The *Bolsa Família* is a program that transfers income directly to populations living in extreme poverty (*per capita* income of less than 77

Brazilian reals a month). It was created in 2003, based on a series of existing actions with the intention of boosting the performance of highly focused and distributive social policies (CARNEIRO *et al.*, 2010; NERI, 2008 *apud* SILVA, 2013). The program has three lines of action: transferring income, setting conditions (health, education and social assistance) for income transfer to occur, and complementary actions for family development. In order to receive the allowance, families must be registered by the municipalities with the Unified Registration System (CadÚnico)<sup>4</sup> and the Federal Government has a computerized system that automatically selects those with the profile targeted by the program as beneficiaries.

To ensure that they receive the allowance, the families must satisfy a set of educational, health and social assistance requirements. The program is jointly administered by the federal, state and municipal governments and the *Caixa Econômica Federal* - CEF (Federal Savings Bank).

Federal government bodies involved in the program are: the Ministry of Social Development and Fight Against Hunger (MDS), responsible for coordinating and executing the CadÚnico, managing the program allowances, accompanying and inspecting program execution and supervising the compliance of beneficiaries with the stipulated requirements; the Ministry of Education (MEC), which monitors beneficiaries' compliance with the educational requirements; the Ministry of Health, which monitors beneficiaries' compliance with the health requirements; and the *Caixa Econômica Federal* which develops the IT systems for program operation, provides capacity-building for managers and technical staff of the program's operational system and is responsible for the payment logistics systems.

The role of the state governments is to coordinate the program at state level; develop activities to provide technical and logistics support to the municipalities; provide training in CadÚnico registration processes to the municipalities; and implement strategies to guarantee poor peoples' access to the identification documents they need, among other responsibilities.

It is up to municipal governments to identify the families and register them in the CadÚnico system; keep the registration information updated;

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<sup>4</sup> CadÚnico is a computerized government instrument used to identify and register all low-income families.

administer the program allowances; ensure that families have access to program and to health and education services; accompany compliance of the beneficiary families with the established requirements; accompany the situation of the beneficiary families, especially those in conditions of social vulnerability; establish partnership arrangements with other government bodies to run programs to complement the *Bolsa Família* program; investigate denouncements and ensure they are brought before the respective authorities.

In the sphere of federal government, the National Income and Citizenship Department (*Secretaria Nacional de Renda de Cidadania – Senarc*), which is responsible for the government’s National Income and Citizenship Policy, is responsible for the *Bolsa Família* program. Senarc is one of five departments<sup>5</sup> that make up the Ministry of Social Development and its mission is to administer those federal government initiatives directed at conditional income transfer such as the *Bolsa Família* program and the Unified Registration system. The department also articulates federal government’s income transfer programs with similar state, municipal and Federal District programs.

The Senarc is organized into four directorates in addition to the office of the head of the department:

- Directorate for stipulated conditions: articulates with the Ministries of Health and Education the design and implementation of information flows to obtain information on the families’ compliance/non-compliance with the stipulated conditions and also evaluates the numbers and impacts of their compliance/non-compliance and accompanies the evolution of social participation in the *Bolsa Família* program with a view to proposing mechanisms to improve it.
- Unified Registration Directorate: generates the Unified Register, articulates with administrating bodies of programs that make

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<sup>5</sup> National Department for Citizenship Income, National Department for Social Assistance, National Department for Food and Nutrition Security, National Department for Evaluation and Information Management and the Extraordinary Department for Overcoming Extreme Poverty.

use of the Unified Register database, makes unannounced inspections to check that those receiving the allowance are qualified to benefit from the program and carries out other actions designed to control and prevent frauds, carries out studies and makes forecasts for the program based on the Register, proposes solutions for the registration of specific population groups (indigenous, quilombola and riverside communities, street dwellers, gypsies etc.), and, up until recently, coordinated capacity building processes for personnel in the states and municipalities (local potential beneficiary interviewers and managers), but that has been taken over by the Office of the Head of the Department.

- Benefits Directorate: accompanies the benefit payment routines, distribution of cards and other actions undertaken by the *Caixa Econômica Federal*; analyzes payment processes with a view to proposing improvements, analyzes the pay sheet produced by the *Caixa Econômica Federal*.
- Operations Directorate: execution of budget and financing of the actions carried out by the department, calculation of the IGD [Decentralized Management Index] and accompaniment of states and municipalities in regard to funding to support decentralized management (how much they spend, whether they account to the Municipal Social Assistance Councils – CMAS, etc.); accompaniment and control of the contract with the *Caixa Econômica Federal*; execution of procedures for the repayment of benefits unduly received.

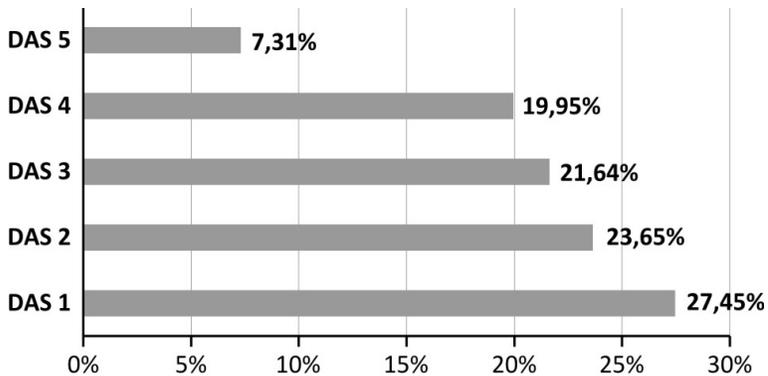
Senarc has a staff of 170 people. There are currently 28 positions of trust (16.5% of the total) in its administrative structure, occupied by appointment or indication and most of the occupants are permanent civil servants of the federal government. 13 of the 28 posts are held by Public Policies and Government Administration Experts, a formally structured career created by the Ministry of Planning. 10 posts are occupied by managers from different careers and 5 are occupied by people with no formal bond with public administration.

It is worth noting that the middle-level bureaucratic *corps* of the

Ministry of Social Development is relatively larger than the average size<sup>6</sup> among the other ministries, as can be seen in Graphs 1 and 2 below.

According to the Enap publication *Caderno Enap 39*, the structure of the middle-level bureaucracy for the purposes of that research was defined as consisting of the occupants of intermediary positions in the federal organizational structure by appointment or indication, that is, those occupying posts at DAS levels 1 to 5.

**Graph 1: General Distribution of Survey Respondents by DAS levels**



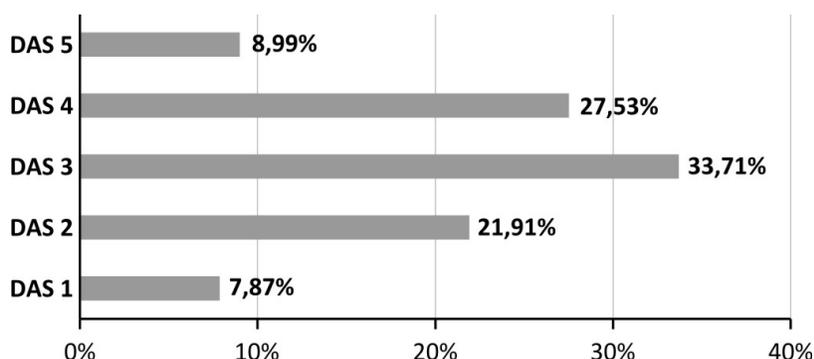
Source: Federal Government Middle-level Bureaucrats Survey - Enap/Ipea (2014).

In addition to the question of the Senarc bureaucracy’s technical qualification there is also a bureaucratic insulation that is seen to be an important element contributing to the success of the *Bolsa Família* program’s implementation process. In this aspect, it is similar to the situation of the *Caixa Econômica Federal* bureaucrats which Helal and Neves (2010) identified as being a key-factor to be considered in any endeavor to understand the policy’s success. In the words of those authors:

<sup>6</sup> That may explain the fact pointed out by Praça *et al.* (2012) that only about 30% of civil servants occupying DAS posts in the Ministry of Social Development in 2010 continued to occupy them in 2011. That rate of permanence in office was even lower for those in DAS positions 4, 5 and 6 (20.7%). In those authors’ opinion, that is because “employees in positions of trust held by appointment and involved in policymaking within the ministerial bodies are more affected by changes at the top of their organizations than the others” (PRAÇA *et al.*, 2012, p.99).

(...) the CEF today is a typical professional bureaucracy. Its staff have all entered government service via competitive public entry examination and are highly qualified and professionalized and that makes it an organization with high degree of insulation. Consequently its bureaucrats are relatively immune to pressures exerted by local vested interest groups. That in turn allows the CEF to keep strict control of the work undertaken by the local municipal departments. This is the first organizational element of relevance in endeavoring to understand the successful implementation of the *Bolsa Família* program, namely, the bureaucratic insulation aspect of the CEF (HELAL; NEVES, 2010, p. 331).

**Graph 2: Distribution of Ministry of Social Development Respondents by DAS levels**



Source: Federal Government Middle-level Bureaucrats Survey - Enap/Ipea (2014).

Concerned, as they were, to gain an understanding of any external factors that might explain the program's success, those authors identified both the CEF's bureaucratic insulation and the capillary insertion of the municipal authorities and their efficiency in selecting beneficiaries, as being such factors. We can extend this analysis of the *Caixa Econômica Federal* bureaucracy to that of the Ministry of Social Development's internal bureaucracy and understand the latter to be a case of insulation too and, therefore, as being one of the explanatory factors for the program's success. We will now show that this aspect was mentioned by the bureaucrats themselves as being an important variable in enabling an understanding of their performance in the implementation process of a new public policy with all the typical resistances and challenges.

The insulation of the Senarc bureaucracy can readily be construed as being a process that creates ‘cluster of efficiency’ of the kind Evans (1993) referred to. In an analysis of the Brazilian bureaucracy, that author stated that:

Finding themselves incapable of transforming the Brazilian State as a whole, Brazilian leadership endeavored to create ‘cluster of efficiency’ inside the bureaucracy, modernizing the Brazilian state by adding on rather than by means of a more embracing transformation (EVANS, 1993, p. 140).

Without any pretension of analyzing or attempting to understand the broader process of forming a new State bureaucracy molded by the new challenges confronting the Brazilian State and committed to achieving social progress in the period after currency stabilization, we can, nevertheless, interpret the creation and development of a highly qualified bureaucracy, technically committed to the proposal for the implementation of a new policy that Evans describes as an attempt to create a “cluster of efficiency” within the ambit of the Ministry of Social Development bureaucracy; one that was not impregnated with the corporate vices that typified the bureaucracies involved with a considerable portion of the Federal Government’s former social assistance programs, on the one hand, and that was open to the challenge of implementing an entirely new government flagship policy, on the other.

Nevertheless, this novel bureaucracy, insulated, insofar as it was mainly constituted on the basis of its members’ technical characteristics<sup>7</sup> and not on the basis of their partisan networks, was not immune to political control. That is because, and here we would open a parenthesis, there is an important distinction between the insulation of a bureaucracy in the aspect of its selection processes and in the aspect of its performance. According to Xavier:

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<sup>7</sup> As Praça *et al.* (2012) have shown, “there are around 21 thousand civil servants in DAS positions in an overall population of 538,143 employees of the Federal Executive – almost 4%. But unlike what we have been led to believe, only 13.6% of such DAS posts are held on the basis of party-political affiliations” (PRAÇA *et al.*, 2012, p. 94).

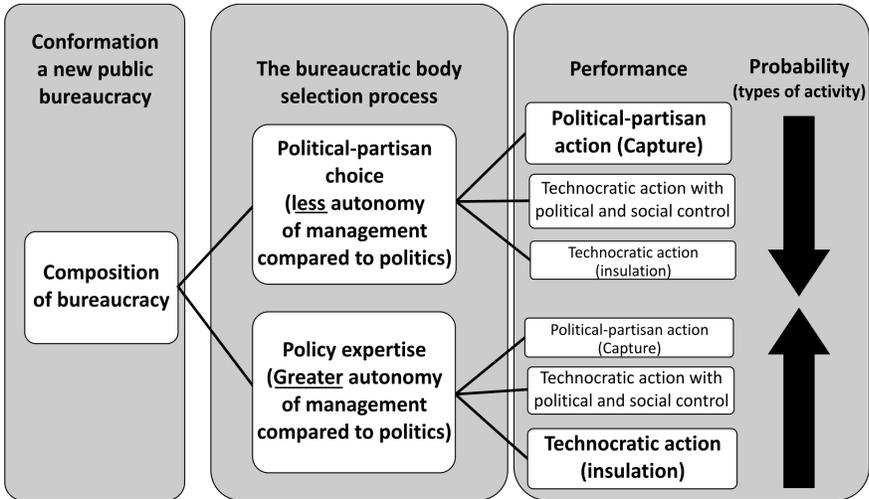
Insulation and technocracy emerge on the basis of a diagnosis that certain areas in which the State operates are essentially technical and that any political interference might jeopardize the possibility of attaining the objectives, whether because of the sluggishness of the public policy negotiation or of the preservation of the rational content of the public policy (XAVIER, 2006, p. 1).

This quotation reveals the interlacing of two distinct moments in the process of constituting a public bureaucracy and consequently the degree of interaction that occurs between politics and administration: the moment of selection and the moment of performance. Thus, the dichotomy between politics and bureaucracy, intensely debated in the field of political science and public administration ever since Weber's time, fails to recognize that the autonomy the bureaucracy enjoys is partly determined by the autonomy that stems from its technical characteristics and, consequently, from the very conformation of that same bureaucracy. In other words, a more technical bureaucracy, that is, one with a greater degree of policy expertise, (CALLANDER, 2008 *apud* PRAÇA *et al.*, 2012) will undoubtedly struggle to achieve greater levels of autonomy in its actions compared to one that is more closely bound to party political bonds and commitments but, even so, subject to political interference in public policy by its very nature. Thus, the more the processes for selecting bureaucrats is subject to party-political criteria, the greater the probability that their performance will be associated to political choices. On the other hand, the more the process for selecting bureaucrats is dominated by technical-bureaucratic criteria, the greater the probability that this bureaucracy will enjoy a greater degree of autonomy in relation to the political sphere and, therefore, will act according more to technocratic criteria than political ones (revealing their greater degree of insulation). In schematic terms we have the following situation illustrated in Figure 1.

For all those reasons we defend the idea that the technocratic selection of the Senarc bureaucracy allowed it to perform with a greater degree of autonomy in regard to the policy throughout the process of creating, implementing and consolidating the *Bolsa Família* program. That does not mean, however, that it is impervious to social and political controls. In that sense it is not in alignment with the concept of insulation presented by Martins (1997), namely, "a situation of excessive bureaucratic autonomy

and low political regulation that is capable of leading to self-orientation or spurious alliances of the ‘bureaucratic ring’ type” (MARTINS, 1997, p. 51).

**Figure 1: Autonomy of the Bureaucratic Corps – selection and performance**



Source: elaborated by the authors.

Indeed, the qualitative research revealed that it is precisely this bureaucracy that dialogues with both the political and the administrative worlds. That being so, the classical separation of politics and bureaucracy seems, in the case of this particular group, to take on a new meaning quite different from the one identified by Svava (2001) as the “traditional paradigm” for an understanding of the relations between these two categories. According to that author, it is necessary to overcome that dichotomy if we wish to understand the roles played by administrators in defining proposals and in determining the outreach of public policies. The analysis employed in this paper highlights the relationship of proximity and interaction between the technocratic world and the political world, especially when we analyze those segments of the bureaucracy that are nearest to the top of the hierarchical organizational structure. In that situation there is clearly a relationship of complementariness, as Svava proposes in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Understanding the interaction between politicians and administrators**

		Politicians: degree of control	
		Low	High
Administrators: degree of independence	Low	Political domination	<i>Laissez-faire</i>
	High	Complementariness <i>Politicians respect administrators' competence and commitment</i>	Bureaucratic autonomy <i>Administrators are committed to accountability and responsiveness</i>

Source: Svava (2001, p. 179).

As Svava (2001) has indicated, in the case of the Senarc bureaucracy, the relationship identified was one of complementariness and not of competition or dichotomy. The facilitated access to politicians and top level administrators that many of the interviewees reported is actually essential for the organization to perform well and to make inter-sector collaboration feasible, as Silva (2013) has stated, and that was confirmed in the interviews.

It should be remembered that in the words of Praça *et al.* (2012), “these [DAS] appointees, particularly those at DAS levels 4 to 6, have privileged access to government information and they have an effect on the hierarchy in the sense of facilitating, controlling, influencing and implementing decisions” (PRAÇA *et al.*, 2012, p. 94).

In short, we can state that the process of selection for this bureaucracy, however technocratic or party-political it may be, has a great influence on the possibilities of its future performance in an insulated environment, in the first case, and in a captive condition in the second. Furthermore, the unusually large size of the group of middle-level bureaucrats with their ability to commute easily between the administrative world and the political one, establishes a relationship of complementariness between the two ‘worlds’.

Thus, insulation is established in the very selection process itself, creating what Evans refers to as a “cluster of efficiency”, but one that nevertheless keeps the bureaucrats in question under the control of the appropriate public administration control bodies (Federal Court of

Accounts, Legislative Branch, internal and external controls of the Executive Branch, etc.) during the process of implementing public policies. They are technically committed to delivering a good performance, chiefly because of their professional qualifications which, in most cases, are associated to public administration.

Silva (2013) described the process as “middle-level bureaucracy empowerment”, that is,

(...) the process by means of which a group of bureaucrats will be recruited to coordinate activities, acting as a link between the top level of the bureaucracy (Offices of the Ministers) and the operational bureaucracy (...). The interviews revealed that the middle-level bureaucracy formed has been empowered because it is a government policy to give them the autonomy and the political and organizational means that enable them to generate inter-sector relations (SILVA, 2013, p. 336).

We will now examine the effects of this ‘empowerment’ based on the analysis of the data gathered in the interviews with middle-level bureaucrats.

## **Public bureaucracy and the implementation of an innovation**

The analysis of the *Bolsa Família* bureaucracy’s profile that now follows focuses on two separate aspects of its performance in the process of implementing a new public policy: first the challenge of creating new rules, institutional structures, and patterns of inter and intra-institutional relations. After that initial stage, the challenge of keeping the policy going, on the one hand through more incremental activities/actions, and, on the other, by generating new possibilities for action/innovation. The latter included searching for political space for new steps forward. Roughly speaking, we can say that the first stage corresponded to the first mandate of the Lula government, when the remaining programs migrated to the *Bolsa Família* program which then attained its expansion goal and finalized its normative (regulatory) design; the second moment, in turn, can be associated to the period of adjustments and improvements that took place in the second Lula mandate, when the program became institutionally and

politically consolidated and consequently there were fewer innovations in that period.

The results shown here were obtained from qualitative research that involved, more than anything else, interviews with 10 middle-level Senarc managers. The following aspects were analyzed:

1. the bureaucracy's profile, performance and functions with special attention to the context of innovation associated to the public policy in question;
2. degree of autonomy and bureaucratic insulation;
3. innovations;
4. networks of personal and professional relations.

### **The profile and performance of the bureaucracy in a context of innovation**

The most notable feature of the middle-level bureaucrats working in the body that administrates the *Bolsa Família* program (Senarc) is their extremely high level of professionalization and broad experience accumulated in various government bodies and agencies, in addition to their formal qualifications in public policy management and, consequently, their considerable knowledge of how the federal public machine works. All that enables the articulations that are essential to problem-solving and gives them the flexibility needed to deal with adversity. That was made very clear in most of the interviews.

That professionalization, however, is not restricted to the specific contents of the government's [social assistance] policy but directed more towards skills and knowledge in the broader field of public administration and management. As Silva (2013) has shown, the MDS staff includes a large number of experts in public policies and the Senarc staff, particularly, combines managers that have been working with the policy for a long time and others that bring with them a vast array of contacts and professional networks with the bureaucracies of other entities, forming what has been termed "a set of articulating bureaucrats" (SILVA, 2013, p. 340).

Another characteristic frequently identified as central to program management was their acquired knowledge of administrative law and

the main regulatory norms that involve public administration. Some of the managers interviewed identified that as knowledge acquired during the course of their trajectory in the public sector and hardly due to their formal qualification at all, especially the undergraduate courses. Many such courses do not even address the subject of administrative law in all its complexity, in spite of the fact that it is essential knowledge for performing in the public sector. It is their professional work in the sector that enables more experienced professionals to accumulate such knowledge, especially vital when a new program is being implanted. At that stage there is a need to construct its normative references and it may be facing resistance in older and more consolidated areas that work with traditional programs and policies. Given the diversity of managers' trajectories, they report that often their lack of knowledge of administrative law and of how the administrative machine really works is often compensated for by the network of relations that they build up in their work, so that very often the more experienced managers support the others, enabling them to gain an understanding of how public administration functions.

A third, repeatedly mentioned aspect is the personnel management skills that a middle-level bureaucrat needs. Apart from technical know-how of the programs and their challenges, one of the most frequently cited characteristics of this bureaucracy is its skill in leading teams and managing interpersonal conflicts. People without such skills may eventually get to hold posts in the lower echelons, but never in the higher ones.

As regards the functions performed by middle-level bureaucrats in the Senarc, there has been a gradual but visible change in the focus of their work. In the program's early days, managers had to dedicate themselves to structuring the processes and the regulatory aspects of program actions so that much of the time they were experimenting with new practices and proposing actions for processes that were still being constructed. In that sense, the middle-level bureaucrats engaged a lot in the technical contents of their work and in 'putting out fires' insofar as not all of the processes had been designed. As one of the managers interviewed put it: "that was the moment we were putting the house in order" (Interview 10).

As time went by, however, the working processes and practices were gradually consolidated. With the recent ingress of new career civil servants to replace outsourced employees as Social Policy officers, the division has become more professionalized so that managers now focus more on personnel and process management in addition to their regular work of articulating with the various program partner entities. The abovementioned features are those that appear in the literature as being most characteristic of a middle-level bureaucrat and it underscores the fact that the process of program maturation leads to the organization and differentiation of the functions of its various bureaucracies.

At this second stage, the program makes a clearer distinction between two types of middle-level bureaucrats: the coordinators and the directors (DAS 5 and 6 respectively). The function of the former is associated to managing teams and processes insofar as they are responsible for groups of 20 to 30 people working directly with the technical execution of the processes. The directors are responsible for the management of macro-processes and, in that sense, they perform somewhat like the “conductor of an orchestra” (Interview 5) insofar as they have a vision of everything that is going on in the various parts of their department or division. Another function that is clearly the responsibility of directors is the articulation and translation between the political demands and the technical operation of the policy. Although the coordinators may often be involved in meetings with the upper echelons, especially when the discussion is eminently technical, in the daily round, it is the directors that are more usually connected to the political discussions and that do the work of translating them into technical and operational terms.

It is also up to the directors to negotiate relevant issues affecting the program with other ministries. Because the *Bolsa Família* has become a showcase program, requests come in from various ministries and organizations to establish partnership arrangements or undertake joint actions (such as using the Unified Register CadÚnico, altering some of the questions in the Registration questionnaire, proposals for joint programs alongside the *Bolsa Família* etc.). While part of the content of such negotiations is basically political (and therefore should be decided by the Minister or Head of Department), the technical aspect is passed

on to the directors to indicate what is possible and what is not in the light of “preserving the program” and not “diverting it from its objectives” (Interview 7). Thus, it can be seen that the directors also exercise the role of “guardians of the program’s objectives” (Interviews 5 and 6) and that has a lot to do with the question of bureaucratic insulation as we will see later on.

### **Bureaucratic autonomy and insulation**

The question of autonomy is a central element in any endeavor to gain an understanding of, or to categorize the work of the middle-level bureaucrat. The term is quite separate from what the literature refers to as “bureaucratic insulation” and that distinction needs to be made clear here. All bureaucracies in democratic contexts are endowed with some degree of autonomy of action and are to a greater or lesser extent free from political pressures. However, the greater the clientelism<sup>8</sup> that exists, the lesser the degree of autonomy because the nominated bureaucrats need to account to the politicians who got them appointed to their posts in the public administration machine.

Bureaucratic insulation, on the other hand, is typically associated to the bureaucratic agencies’ high degree of independence from political or social watchdog control. In his preface to Edson Nunes’ book *A Gramática Política do Brasil* (The Political Grammar of Brazil), Bresser-Pereira declares that “bureaucratic insulation is the strategy *par excellence* used by the elites to circumvent the area controlled by the political parties” (NUNES, 1997, p. 26). Thus, it works as an instrument for “shielding” a techno-bureaucratic elite in order to foster economic development or a given public policy.

It is worth remembering that Nunes underscores the contingency-related nature of insulation, that is to say, the bureaucratic agencies can be divested of their insulation the moment they achieve their objectives and at any moment (NUNES, 1997; XAVIER, 2006).

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<sup>8</sup> The idea of clientelism refers to Nunes’ (1997) concept of it as a practice based on personal exchanges, promises and expectations and future benefits based on an asymmetrical relationship.

In the case of the insulation observed in the Senarc bureaucracy, we have already stated that the insulation in the selection process did not mean that they were insulated and immune to any political or social control – that is, that they were endowed with complete autonomy. It is in fact a bureaucracy constituted in the light of its members' technical profiles and acting in a technical capacity, but, nevertheless, subject to control mechanisms, especially those exercised by the Federal Court of Accounts and the Office of the Comptroller General.

Furthermore, there have been visible changes in managers' autonomy at different moments of the *Bolsa Família* program. At the beginning, when they were still constructing it, they had a lot of autonomy which the president himself conceded to the team managing the program. That period was marked by the political decision made by President Lula to construct a high priority, highly visible social program with strong problem-solving powers.

A highly qualified and highly experienced team was selected, drawn from various areas of the federal government with the intention that it should have sufficient autonomy to propose innovative solutions to support the construction of the new program. Described as the program's "heroic era" (Interview 10), it was a moment when the selected program managers had plenty of space in which to construct the program's regulatory structure and its processes. That decision meant that, right from the beginning, the program could count on highly qualified professionals with considerable experience (in management and not necessarily in social policies) and that gave the team a more technical profile.

That can be justified insofar as there was so much to be done on the one hand, and, on the other, that the PT government was giving top priority to structuring the program, for it was to be the flagship of that government's social policy. Support came even from the government control bodies who acted like partners, proposing innovations for the *Bolsa Família* program. Thus, the context was open to proposals and that called for a bureaucracy with sufficient autonomy to allow for experimentation. In that aspect we can safely affirm that in the early stages of the program its bureaucracy was indeed politically insulated and shielded by the priority afforded to it by the Lula Government and again by the insulation that characterized the

*Caixa Econômica Federal*, which was a key actor in the program, as Helal and Neves (2010) have pointed out.

As time went by, however, and as the program became more structured and its processes and regulatory measures were designed and defined, the space for any new propositions gradually became more restricted. Autonomy became limited to that foreseen within the scope, regulations and directives of the program.

Another consequence of the program's being top priority and a government showcase meant that it was under constant observation and thus autonomy had to be exercised without detracting from the basic principles of the program's mode of functioning. Thus, it can be stated that the current measure of autonomy is more closely associated with operational and technical affairs (such as changes in processes) and they in turn are conditioned by the program directives and guidelines. In other words, middle-level bureaucrats have autonomy to act on technical issues within the sphere of the functions formally attributed to them, or as one interviewee (Interview 1) has stated, "in matters that are directly related to my work, I have a lot of autonomy". However, for issues that involve alterations to rules, regulations or program directives or that have political impacts, that autonomy has been diminished. At the moment, the sphere of Federal Executive policy is far more present in this particular public policy than it was at the beginning. Thus, the program bureaucracy is less insulated now, although it is still shielded from demands of the legislative branch and from state and municipal executives.

This last characteristic can be explained by the program's maturation. Insofar as it has now been completely designed and its routines have been set, there is less room left for freedom. There are other contextual reasons too, such as the program's high visibility, the recent electoral situation and a crisis that occurred in 2013 that left the middle-level bureaucrats apprehensive<sup>9</sup>. Furthermore, the very axis of the program gave managers

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<sup>9</sup> In 2013, a false message was circulated in cell phone networks all over Brazil announcing that the *Bolsa Família* program was going to be scrapped. Program beneficiaries flocked to the banks to withdraw their money, generating a serious financial problem for the program and damaging its credibility. The MDS had to take emergency measures to handle the crisis.

the feeling that “even micro decisions have many effects”<sup>10</sup> (Interview 6) so all decisions need to be made with great caution and in careful alignment with policy and directives.

Currently, most of the posts by appointment are occupied by federal career bureaucrats. The choice of those to occupy DAS level positions is, as the interviewees pointed out, always based on technical criteria and usually considers people with an administrative profile and experience in other government bodies. Thus, there is “no partisan interference in the choice of program management staff” (Interview 6). The professional managers network plays a highly important role in this process insofar as almost 50% of the DAS posts are occupied by career civil servant managers (*Especialista em Políticas Públicas e Gestão Governamental* – EPPGG), including the head of the Senarc, and they tend to call on other career managers they know to take posts in the program<sup>11</sup>.

As the literature indicates, that professional profile has generated a process of bureaucratic insulation constructed and reinforced in the course of time.

The managers have the feeling that they are politically shielded, both from the Congress and from other ministries. They report that their role is precisely “to shield the program and protect it from those that wish to deviate it from its objectives” (Interview 5), or “to preserve the program objectives and its technical functioning” (Interview 4). Two interviewees with a great experience in other federal government bodies reported that the Department was the most technical and the most insulated that they had ever worked in. In their opinion that is a positive feature insofar as the program could be liable to a lot of political interference given the nature of its contents, its priority and its impact.

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<sup>10</sup> For example, they say that any slight alteration to the CadÚnico spreadsheets can make enormous differences to the amounts that are passed over to the municipalities and slight changes in the regulations can greatly affect the beneficiaries etc.

<sup>11</sup> Silva (2013) underscores the importance of the EPPGG career in regard to the consolidation of the *Bolsa Família* program.

## Innovations

The perspective of innovation is another point of fundamental importance for understanding how middle-level bureaucrats act. Part of the literature attributes the role of entrepreneurs to them in the light of their capacity to produce innovation, their strategic placement and their networks of relationships (KELLY; GENNARD, 2007; KURATKO *et al.*, 2005).

As mentioned, the issue of innovation in the *Bolsa Família* program has varied at different moments of the program. While at the beginning there was plenty of room and a lot of encouragement for innovation, as time went by the consolidation of program directives and regulations reduced the space for experimentation and innovation.

Currently, innovation is associated more to process changes insofar as “within the legal limits of the program, almost everything has been tried already. Any changes nowadays are just in processes” (Interview 10). The creation of the Brazil Free from Extreme Poverty plan (*Brasil Sem Miséria* – BSM) in 2011 shifted the locus of any possible *Bolsa Família* innovations. That was because the BSM plan ended up concentrating, in its own sphere, all the actions formerly associated to Axis 3 of the *Bolsa Família* (complementary actions for family development). Those actions are still more open to experimentation. In regard to the Unified Register, the issue is also a sensitive one. Considering that the CadÚnico has expanded beyond the sphere of the *Bolsa Família* and is being used by other programs and ministries, any innovation can only be introduced after involving all the institutions that make use of it to promote public policies and obtaining their consent. In view of that situation, managers underscore the aspect of incremental process-related innovations and the impossibility of obtaining any further structural changes or at least the great difficulty involved, even when they are considered internally important to the Senarc.

A second aspect that deserves attention in regard to the issue of innovation is the need that many of the interviewed managers identified to improve the IT made available to them without which the chances for any innovation are remote.

Furthermore, as mentioned in the analysis of autonomy, the program's consolidation and the consequent perception that it is unlikely to undergo significant alterations is an overwhelming limitation to any possibility of innovation as it is to the autonomy of managers in regard to this item. Many of them cited the fact that the program has been "politically shielded" (Interview 10) and that too implies that it will be maintained just as it is, strongly reducing the possibility of any alteration to its direction, whether because of its association to the CadÚnico and the other institutions that use it, or in the light of the fear that any significant changes might do more harm than good, especially in political terms. Because of that, some of those interviewed expressed their desire to seek for new challenges in other areas of public service given the fact that although the program has achieved success, that had led to stagnation as far as innovation was concerned. Their wish was to move to a different ministry or public policy area.

Thus, today, in terms of innovation, the role of Senarc managers is more of an incremental one and focused more on actions to improve processes and less on any more profound changes to the program.

### **Networks of professional and personal relations**

An important point for understanding the middle-level bureaucracy in the *Bolsa Família* program is the way it operates its relations and articulations. Part of the literature on this echelon identifies their importance as articulators, stating that their central role is to:

interact with the implementing bureaucrats and other agencies to regulate interactions among them and guide the way implementation is carried out, constructing a consensus in regard to shared values (LOTTA; PIRES; OLIVEIRA, 2014).

Authors like Huising and Silbey (2011), Vakkuri (2010), Alexander *et al.* (2011), and Keiser (2010) show how the intermediate position the middle echelon bureaucrats occupy enables them to "create and regulate the relations among the various parallel agencies or between the higher and lower levels of the organizational hierarchy" (LOTTA; PIRES; OLIVEIRA, 2014).

Given the importance of the managers' role in regulating relations among different agencies, it is worth noting that the *Bolsa Família* bureaucrats operate in networks of internal and external relations as part of their daily round. In the case of this specific program, understanding such relations networks is even more relevant given that one of the programs fundamental characteristics is the inter-sector nature of its operations and that in itself points to the need for active articulation among the various organizations; it is the middle-level bureaucracy of the various ministries that produces that articulation.

In the same vein, one of the characteristics common to all the program managers is their constant involvement with other ministries, especially the ministries of education and of health with whom their relations are more constant and institutionalized. In such cases their relations are with people in those ministries at the same hierarchic level as themselves, according to the functions designated to each one. In the case of ministries without any prior relations, they are usually established according to the organizations' hierarchic schemes. Some of them report, however, that sometimes it is the network of personal relations that facilitates the construction of joint actions without the need to bow to hierarchic considerations – for actions that are in alignment with the directives.

Given that the *Bolsa Família* program functions in obedience to a federative logic, there is also a constant involvement with states and municipalities and it is a basic part of middle-level bureaucrats' activities. Such relations, however, have already been formally regulated and transformed into processes within the program<sup>12</sup>.

The program MLBs have another permanent relationship with the *Caixa Econômica Federal*. Here, however, relations are governed by different principles because the Bank is contracted to execute part of the program and it is therefore viewed as an entity that must follow the rules of the organization that contracted it (Senarc). It was reported that at times the

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<sup>12</sup> It is worth mentioning that in his work Fenwic (2009) declared that the fact that the *Bolsa Família* was free from pressure from state governors was key to its success.

relationship with the Bank has been conflictive and although it is improving, there is still a constant need to propose changes to the actions so that the Bank can follow the program directives. In any event, it is clear that there are two things that *Bolsa Família* MLBs need to do in their relations with other actors: they need to manage to “ride the surf between different syntaxes” (Interview 5) in order to be able to negotiate, make themselves understood and so on, and secondly there is a constant need to “preserve and watch over the maintenance of the program’s principles and directives” (Interview 5).

As regards its internal actors, the managers interviewed said that the Senarc is very united and close-knit so that they also relate a lot to their internal peers (coordinators to coordinators, directors to directors). Those constant relations among the different actors are what make constructive interaction possible.

They also report, however, that their relations with other departments of the Ministry of Social Development are not always easy or direct and that sometimes they have to appeal to hierarchy. In the case of their relations with the superior hierarchic spheres they usually obey hierarchical logic that is to say the directors are direct interlocutors of the head of the department and the minister. Coordinators interact with the head of the department when there are technical issues to be addressed or when the directors ask them to participate. Thus, the higher the bureaucrat’s hierarchic position, the greater his or her contact with the political world. On the other side, the closer he or she is to the street-level bureaucracy, the lesser contact with politics and the greater the obedience to the rules consolidated by and for the bureaucracy.

## **Final remarks**

The case of the middle-level bureaucracy that has been analyzed in this chapter raises a series of questions that are important for obtaining an understanding of this group, which has characteristics common to all the other levels of the bureaucratic hierarchy, but also has some specific ones of its own. Given that the study aims to enhance understanding of the

specific ones and is part of a collective effort in that direction, the case of the Senarc bureaucracy gives us some clues as to what they are.

First of all, this bureaucracy is not only influenced by the field of activity it is allocated to, that is, by the logic of the public policy that it deals with, but it is especially influenced by its selection process which is responsible for determining the degree of autonomy it will enjoy later on in the routine performance of activities. As it has been stated above, the fact that a good part of the managers are experts in public administration makes them highly qualified interlocutors with legitimacy to implant innovations and to dialogue with the upper echelons without any hierarchical obstruction and so they consider themselves perfectly capable of proposing alterations, thereby interfering in the design of the public policy. The Senarc middle-level bureaucrats' insulation in the selection process and their facilitated commuting between the world of politics and that of administration leads to the formation of a bureaucratic *corps* with a considerable degree of autonomy in its activities, but also, and at the same time, with an interaction based on complementariness (in regard to the world of politics) that has been extremely profitable for the development of the *Bolsa Família* program.

Although this aspect has been positive from the standpoint of the progress of the policy, in the long run it has become deleterious since the policy entered a period of inertia that followed the overcoming of the initial challenges to implementation so that the bureaucracy has now become the hostage of its own success. As explained previously, because the program has been successful and has achieved inter-sector involvement, it tends to avoid any drastic changes, thereby generating a waning interest on the part of the bureaucracy, which is highly committed and avid for constant challenges and improvements. In regard to this aspect, it is feared that the degree of the bureaucracy's autonomy is also influenced by the moment in which the public policy finds itself. In the case of the *Bolsa Família*, we found that the autonomy to innovate was considerable at the beginning when the policy was being created and instituted but that it gradually diminished over time, becoming curtailed by the policy itself which now seeks to maintain what it has achieved and fears to generate any significant innovation that

might upset the *status quo*. Furthermore, given the interlacing of one of the policy's central elements (the CadÚnico) with other public policies and government bodies, its success has determined its relative rigidity.

In our view, these are the main conclusions that can be drawn from the qualitative research undertaken and they will certainly contribute towards a more elaborated definition of what this middle-level bureaucracy really is and how it acts. That is not to say, however, that it always performs in exactly the same way in all institutional contexts. The cases analyzed here make up part of the federal public bureaucracy. Future analysis of the state and municipal bureaucracies, as well as studies in other areas of public policies, will certainly push the progress obtained here further ahead, the more so because this is the first (collective) effort endeavoring to gain an understanding of different federal government public bureaucracies, all of them situated in the same hierarchic locus, between the street-level bureaucracy and the upper echelon of administration, and making dialogue between the two extremes feasible. For that very reason, comprehending how they perform is indispensable for any attempt to understand the complex implementation processes of public policies.

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# CHAPTER 5 – ACTIVISM IN THE BUREAUCRACY? THE MIDDLE-LEVEL BUREAUCRACY OF THE *BOLSA VERDE* PROGRAM

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At the beginning of her mandate as President of the Republic in 2011, Dilma Rousseff announced the creation of the *Plano Brasil Sem Miséria* (Brazil Free from Extreme Poverty Plan), a concentrated effort to eliminate acute poverty in the country. The plan added several innovations to the existing *Bolsa Família* program administered by the Ministry of Social Development and Fight Against Hunger (“MDS” is the acronym in Portuguese), designed to increase inclusion and care for families living in extreme poverty. It also incorporated other new or existing programs run by other ministries. The aim was to go beyond just solely guaranteeing income transfer, by strengthening various public policies that contribute to the effort of eliminating extreme poverty altogether.

One of the new policies created in this context was the Program to Support Environmental Conservation, or the Green Grants (*Bolsa Verde*) program. The program aims to unite the fight against poverty with environmental objectives by providing *Bolsa Família’s* income transfer for rural families living in extreme poverty, who undertake environmentally sustainable economic activities. The program is targeted at “extractivists,”<sup>1</sup> riverside communities, and people living in “environmentally differentiated agrarian reform settlements”, especially, but not exclusively, in the Amazon

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<sup>1</sup> The term, “extractivist,” refers to rural populations whose main source of income comes from the sustainable extraction of forest products, such as rubber or Brazil nuts.

region. Apart from its income transfer aspect, the program is seen as a precursor to paying for environmental services in the future. It is hoped that by supporting communities whose economic activities are compatible with the aim of forest conservation, this will contribute towards reducing deforestation rates in Brazil.

The Ministry of the Environment (MMA) coordinates the *Bolsa Verde* with the support of the MDS. Three different agencies are responsible for the areas where communities and individuals who are targeted by the program live, namely, extractivist and sustainable development reserves and national forests administered by the Chico Mendes Institute for Biodiversity Conservation (ICMbio); settlements administered by the National Institute for Land Settlement and Agrarian Reform (INCRA) and other lands held by riverside dwellers with tenure titles issued by the Federal Patrimony Department (SPU) at the Ministry of Planning, Budgeting and Management. Each of these agencies has organizational infrastructure in the field that makes it possible to reach out to populations in extremely remote regions.

The creation and implementation of the *Bolsa Verde* program largely depend on the performance of an inter-ministerial team in Brasília that coordinates actions amongst these agencies and ensures the maintenance of complex information and funding flows between Brasília and program units in the field. The main task facing the team was to adapt the technology developed by the *Bolsa Família* program to a new reality. This involved two new challenges. First, the *Bolsa Verde* required the identification of a target community, which was all but invisible because they were located in extremely remote regions. Second, the program sought to combine income transfer with a new type of constraint – protecting the nature. When the program was created in 2011, it was not yet clear how those challenges would be addressed. The solutions would have to be invented as the program unfolded.

This chapter proposes that, given the complexity of implementation, middle-level bureaucrats played a fundamental role in the program construction. It also argues that the behavior and actions of many of these participants were guided by ideas very similar to those that motivate civil society activists. It will show how, by and large, that middle-level

bureaucrats involved were committed to collective projects, particularly to environmentalism. Furthermore, most of them declared that they had some kind of influence over the program's development.

These bureaucrats' activism, however, had a dual aspect: they engaged in activities that sought to transform and maintain the program at the same time. In this chapter, I identify three ways in which the participants interviewed sought to influence the program. First, they helped to find solutions to the difficult operational problems involved in the inclusion of targeted beneficiaries. To do so, they had to be very creative in order to carry out the orders received from their superiors. Second, they invented and promoted initiatives and supporting activities that endeavored to influence the program's design to an extent that they went beyond a strict reading of their orders, especially in their attempts to strengthen the project's environmental goals. Thirdly, some of them tried to consolidate lessons learnt from the program by producing minutes, studies and proposals as a way to deal with political instability. Thus, not only did they try to transform the program, they also tried to ensure its continued survival in the long term. While some tended to favor older or more general causes, others actually became activists of the *Bolsa Verde* program itself.

To influence the policy, middle-level bureaucrats needed to navigate a context in which they found themselves caught between strong pressure "from above" to include more and more beneficiaries and a certain resistance "from below" on the part of the overburdened bureaucrats on the front line of the implementation. In the small spaces available within their exhausting routines, these bureaucrats did their best to influence the program in accordance with their own personal values and professional projects. They were not always successful.

The analysis that follows draws on three sources: a) the secondary literature on the policy areas in which the program is implemented, b) existing data and documents about the *Bolsa Verde*, and c) 16 interviews conducted with 15 people (one person was interviewed in an exploratory manner at the beginning and then re-interviewed in depth later on). From March to October, 2014, interviews were conducted with six MMA civil servants, three from MDS, three from ICMBio, one from INCRA and one

from SPU. The small number of interviewees from the latter entities is due to the fact that they did not have a specific technical team dedicated to the program. Another interview was carried out in relation to a different research project in 2013 with a person who was involved in the creation of the program. The selection process of those to be interviewed was done using the “snowball” technique, whereby interviewees themselves made suggestions of others to be interviewed. In Brasília, I endeavored to contact all middle-level bureaucrats directly involved with the *Bolsa Verde*, not just political appointees but also technical staff (such as environmental analysts in the MMA) whenever they were part of the program team. 13 of the 15 people interviewed were permanent career civil servants, one was on a temporary contract and one was a political appointee with no permanent post. Of the 10 who held nominated positions, nine were permanent federal civil servants. None of the administrative assistants supporting the program were interviewed.<sup>2</sup>

To protect the anonymity of those being interviewed, they are referred to only by a code number and in some cases, to make identification even more difficult, even the reference number was excluded (especially when specific mention is made to particular offices). The idea is to keep faith with the commitment made at the outset of each interview to maintain confidentiality, in order to create an environment in which the interviewee would feel free to express critical opinions.

The research sought the answers to the following questions: do the bureaucrats identify ideologically with the ideas of social movements? Do they try to influence public policies to the benefit of those ideas? If so, what strategies do they use? In the next section we will present some theoretical concepts on which to base the proposal that bureaucrats could be seen as activists. I then go on to contextualize the program and describe how it works and the general features of its middle-echelon bureaucrats. The rest of the

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<sup>2</sup> As it is natural in a research project of this kind, it was not possible to interview 100% of the individuals indicated. Two of the people that were contacted were not available during the period allotted for interviews and four others were only identified towards the end of the period so it was too late to interview them.

chapter is devoted to examining the middle-level bureaucrats' influence on program design and implementation from 2011 to 2014. A first step is to show how the objectives established by the upper echelons were only achieved because of the creative interventions of middle-level managers. The second is to show that in spite of diligently carrying out their superiors' orders, most of the bureaucrats adopted a critical stance which was partly derived from their environmentalist convictions. The third step is to identify the various initiatives of the middle-level bureaucracy in their bid to promote environmentalist agenda in the program's design. The final step is to discuss another kind of intervention that raises intriguing questions such as how the bureaucrats' commitments influence their actions. The conclusion sets out some reflection on the relationship between the creative initiative of the staff and the hypothesis that the bureaucrats could be activists.

### **Activism in the bureaucracy?**

The literature on public policy implementation registers a considerable debate as to who has an influence on decision making. Since the 1970s, academics have been observing how participants formally at the top of the decision-making process do not necessarily have a monopoly on the design of public policies. The literature has mainly focused on the discretionary role of those at the end of the implementation line, who Lipsky (2010[1980]) called "street-level bureaucrats". They end up transforming policy designs during the implementation process (SABATIER, 1986; HILL, 2009; COSLOVSKY; PIRES; SILBEY, 2012; PIRES, 2009).

Although it has undoubtedly been fruitful, the top-down versus bottom-up debate left little room for analyzing what happens in-between, in the middle layers of the bureaucracy. The present research is part of a recent effort to gain a better understanding of those located between decision-makers and street-level bureaucrats (OLIVEIRA; ABRÚCIO, 2011; PIRES, 2012; LOTTA; PIRES; OLIVEIRA, 2014; GUTIERREZ, 2010). In their exhaustive review of international literature, Lotta, Pires and Oliveira (2014, p. 11-13) identify research showing that these participants can indeed have an influence on public policies. For some of these authors, the influence derives from the

interpersonal skills that these bureaucrats have (VIE, 2010 *apud* LOTTA; PIRES; OLIVEIRA, 2014, p. 9). Others underscore how their mastery of specialized knowledge becomes a means to influence public policies (KELLY; GENNARD, 2007; CURRIE; PROCTOR, 2005 *apud* LOTTA; PIRES; OLIVEIRA, p. 10). Gutiérrez (2010, p. 60) states that experts can influence public policies or even head reform processes as long as they act as brokers between their knowledge and the policy. Thus the idea that emerges in common is that:

[...] the intermediate position the middle echelon bureaucrats occupy enables them to create and regulate the relations among the various parallel agencies or between the higher and lower levels of the organizational hierarchy (LOTTA; PIRES; OLIVEIRA, p. 19).

In this chapter, I seek to contribute to the debate on the ability of middle-level bureaucrats to influence public policies from a perspective influenced by the notion of activism. That focus marks the continuation of a research trajectory in which I have tried to examine the possibility that bureaucracy might actually be a site for militancy. In previous works (ABERS; VON BÜLOW, 2011; ABERS; SERAFIM; TATAGIBA, 2014; ABERS; TATAGIBA, in press) I have explored the role of social movement activists who came to occupy governmental posts.<sup>3</sup> In those works, I assumed that an activist must necessarily belong to a social movement network. Here, I propose to broaden the understanding of activism. I understand it to be a kind of action that promotes social or political projects that the person views to be of a public or collective nature. That definition of militancy makes it independent of any direct participation in social movements and may be the result of what Lichterman (1995) referred to as “individualized commitments”.

What could be the explanation for a bureaucrat’s commitment to causes that we usually associate with social movements? Here the literature on social movements is helpful. Ann Mische (1997, 2009), for example, explores the way in which activists’ identities are constructed on the basis of specific life trajectories. The experience of family life, or living in communities, work places, schools, social movements and other spaces

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<sup>3</sup> See also Rich (2013).

all contribute to determining the way in which a person conceives his or her project for the future while at the same time they establish the social networks in which they live.<sup>4</sup> Authors like Hirsh (1990) and Gamson (1991) add that participation in social movement activities – protests, marches, occupations etc. – helps to build commitment to the respective movements, stimulating them to continue or even to radicalize their participation. In other words, the literature suggests that the commitment to a cause arises, on the one hand from the person's life experience (and the involvement with the social, political and professional networks resulting from their life experience) and on the other hand, from their participation in social movements. Would it be possible to provide an analogous explanation for bureaucrats' commitment to causes, when it exists?

Situated at the crossroads of three areas of powerful social movements – social policy, environment and agrarian reform – the *Bolsa Verde* seems to offer an interesting opportunity to study activism within the bureaucracy. However, considering that this particular program was not the result of pressure from social movements, its creation has no relation to major civil society mobilization. Unlike other public policies, civil society organizations have not attempted to occupy key posts in order to influence the program (ABERS; OLIVEIRA, 2014; ABERS; TATAGIBA, in press). Even so, this research shows that even the bureaucrats involved in building the program promoted activist agendas, especially those related to environmentalism.

## Precursors

The *Bolsa Família* program became a major force in the Lula government and led to the creation of an organizational structure never seen before in Brazilian social policy. The MDS invested in the creation of a complex technology for identifying families living in severe poverty, guaranteeing that the income transfer would effectively reach them

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<sup>4</sup> See also the French literature on "militant engagement" for more recent discussion of the relation between "life careers" and militancy as, for example, Fillieuele (2010) and Sawicki and Siméant (2011).

and monitoring their compliance with the conditions stipulated by the program. One of the most important components of this endeavor was the creation of the Unified Registry for Social Programs (*Cadastro Único para Programas Sociais* - CadÚnico), which is fed with information by municipal governments. MDS-trained managers in each municipality ensure the maintenance and update of the Registry (BICHIR, 2012; PAIVA *et al.*, 2013). Building technical capacity on such a large scale in a ministry responsible for social policies is something very rare in Brazilian politics. Historically, the 'islands of excellence' appeared in the economic area and in the state-run corporations, while social policy has typically been staffed by a poorly qualified bureaucracy and marked by clientelist practices (MARTINS, 1997).

By the end of the Lula government, the *Bolsa Família* program had become the largest income transfer program in the world, reaching 13 million families (PAIVA *et al.*, 2013). There can be no doubt that the program's success helped explain President Lula's great popularity at the end of his second term. So it came to no surprise that when President Dilma Rousseff took office, she immediately decided that combating poverty would be a central policy in her government.

The *Brasil Sem Miséria* plan set out to build on the success of the *Bolsa Família* with a concentrated effort to rid Brazil of extreme poverty. It involved two kinds of changes within *Bolsa Família*. First, the government increased the amount of allowance given to families living in extreme poverty to ensure that the allowance was sufficient to lift them out of the poverty bracket. Second, the government set in motion a policy of "active seeking." The MDS made a concentrated effort to identify all those families, who for one reason or another, had been left out of the program.

Another operational front of the *Brasil Sem Miséria* plan was to support the actions of other ministries that contributed towards eliminating extreme poverty. In the first year of the Dilma Rousseff administration, the Civil Office of the President organized meetings with various ministries to identify policies that contributed in some way to achieving that goal. They led to the creation or strengthening of programs run by various ministries such as the professional training courses (Pronatec), technical assistance, water

supply and loans for family agriculture and the expansion of a series of public services such as electricity supply, housing, day-care and full-time schools.

At its meetings with the Ministry of the Environment, the Civil Office requested that ministry authorities identify a social group that suffered from extreme poverty which it was already working with. The answer seemed obvious: indigenous people and communities (Interview 11). This referred to a social group that the MMA had been targeting for a long time, namely rural communities with their roots in specific territories and whose economic activities contribute towards environmental sustainability. As in with other countries, the first environmental movements that appeared in Brazil were conservationist, with a focus on creating protected areas to preserve habitats and biodiversity. Those defending that position tended to presume that the presence of humans was detrimental to nature. In the 1980s, however, the concept of “sustainable development” emerged and became prominent in the international environmental scene. This perspective proposed that economic activity is not necessarily the antithesis of environmental protection. In Brazil, the struggle of the rubber tappers in the Amazon region seemed to embody that ideal. The rubber tappers, whose economic sustenance depend on protecting the native forest, struggle against the land grabbers, who not only wanted to chase them out of the rubber tapping areas, but also to clear the forest to implement cattle farming. The international movement that sprang up to support the rubber tappers intensified considerably after their leader, Chico Mendes, was assassinated in 1988 (HOCHSTETLER; KECK, 2007; KECK, 1995; ALLEGRETTI, 2002).

After Chico Mendes’ death, a growing network of Brazilian and international environmental organizations were mobilized to create “extractivist reserves,” a new category of protected area that would not just protect fauna and flora but also communities, whose survival depend on the surrounding forests. During the 1990s, the Federal Government started creating extractivist reserves in those places where the local population engaged in the sustainable extraction of natural rubber, Brazil nuts, wild fruits and other forest products (HOCHSTETLER; KECK, 2007). The MMA’s leading environmental program, the Pilot Program to Protect Brazilian Rainforests, emphasized efforts to address the needs of traditional communities. These

were experimental policies, never implemented on a large scale (ABERS *et al.*, 2000). During the Lula government, some became larger scale policies, but never high priorities for the MMA (Interviews 1 and 5).

Another important change that took place in environmental policy during the Lula government was the creation of the Chico Mendes Institute for Biodiversity Conservation (*Instituto Chico Mendes de Biodiversidade - ICMBio*), now responsible for the administration of Brazil's federal protected areas. In 2014, the agency managed 312 protected areas in Brazil, including 59 extractivist reserves with a total area of 12 million hectares, almost all in the Amazon (ICMBio, 2014). The Traditional Populations Coordinating Office, in the Division for Socio-environmental Actions and Territorial Consolidation in Protected Areas, is one of the agencies responsible for implementing the *Bolsa Verde* program, especially in extractivist reserves.

Environmental agencies are not the only ones involved in identifying beneficiaries for the *Bolsa Verde* program. Indeed, by 2014, only 33% of those receiving the allowance lived in areas administered by ICMBio (APOLONI *et al.*, 2014, p. 16). Most lived in agrarian reform settlements administered by INCRA. This was largely because INCRA's previous policies facilitated the rapid identification of potential beneficiaries.

Within INCRA, the *Bolsa Verde* is implemented by the General Coordinating Office for the Environment and Natural Resources, a subdivision of the Division for Obtaining Land and Implanting Settlement Projects. That office implemented a program called "Green Settlements" (*Assentamentos Verdes*), which fosters sustainable practices and curbs deforestation in agrarian reform settlements. In the 1990s, INCRA created new types of settlements such as Extractivist Settlement Projects, Forest Settlement Projects, and Sustainable Development Projects. In 2008, such settlements accounted for about a quarter of the total (TOURNEAU; BURSTYN, 2008, p. 118). While originally it was envisaged that the *Bolsa Verde* would only contemplate this kind of "environmentally differentiated settlement," in practice other kinds of settlement that fulfilled the program's environmental criteria were also included. The identification of the latter settlements was facilitated by the activities of the General Coordinating Office for the Environment, which in the years prior to launching the *Bolsa*

*Verde* had mapped out 74 settlements with high levels of poverty and low deforestation rates (Interview). By mid-2014, about 60% of the *Bolsa Verde* beneficiaries resided in such agrarian reform settlements (APOLONI *et al.*, 2014, p. 16).

A third collaborator in the program implementation has a smaller role than ICMBio and INCRA. The Federal Patrimony Department (SPU) of the Ministry of Planning, Budget and Management is responsible for federal lands throughout Brazil. In the Amazon region, it manages public lands adjacent to rivers and in the flood plains inhabited by fishing communities. Since 2005, the Legal Amazon General Coordinating Office of the SPU implemented a policy to regulate land tenure in these areas. The program involves geo-referencing the dwellings of riverside inhabitants, who has signed a sustainable use authority document that gives them the right to use an area within 500 meters of their home (Interview). The fact that this program existed prior to the creation of the *Bolsa Verde* program, where river dwelling families signed a term of commitment to use natural resources sustainably, greatly facilitated the initial program implementation. Even so, in 2014 residents in areas under the SPU accounted for only 8% of the total number of program beneficiaries (APOLONI *et al.*, 2014, p. 16)

## **How the program works**

Despite the fact that they could count on existing programs to work with its target population, the *Bolsa Verde* program managers soon discovered that registering beneficiaries would be a difficult task. The President issued a provisional measure creating the program (MP 535) on June 2, 2011, approved by the Congress, with some amendments in October the same year. Act nº 12.512/2011 authorizes the government to transfer 300 Brazilian reais a month to families living in extreme poverty, who are registered in the CadÚnico and whose economic activities promote forest conservation. In 2011, the government set the target of including 73 thousand families by mid-2012, when the United Nations Sustainable Development Conference “Rio Plus 20” took place. That event was expected to call international attention to Brazil’s environmental policies.

In order to be eligible to receive the *Bolsa Verde* allowance, families must comply with a series of requirements. First, they must live in the right place, that is, a settlement or a protected area prioritized by the agency that coordinates the program. For an area to be included in the program, a diagnostic study had to be conducted using satellite images to identify if forest vegetation coverage was adequate (which has been interpreted as the equivalent of being in compliance with the Brazilian Forest law). Until 2014, that kind of diagnostic work was carried out through a partnership between the Amazon Protection System Management Center (*Centro Gestor do Sistema de Proteção da Amazônia* - Censipam) and IBAMA, Brazil's Environmental Protection Agency. In 2014, the function was transferred to Lavras Federal University, which was also responsible for the remote sensing system of the Rural Environmental Register, another MMA priority program. According to some of those interviewed, the university was capable of working with much higher resolution imagery, enhancing the possibility of regular monitoring of those areas and identifying even very small areas of deforestation. At the time of this research, however, monitoring consists of an initial diagnosis and an annual examination of images with relatively poor resolution.

Second, the family had to be officially acknowledged as a resident of the area in question, which would require their registration in one of the registries maintained by the implementing agencies. The problem here is that the local offices of these agencies usually had a very small staff and low levels of funding, which made it difficult to keep the registrations up to date. New families moving into an area or that were formed by marriage or separation could take years to be registered. Others remained on the lists even though they had left the area.

Third, the family had to be in CadÚnico. The municipal governments responsible for recording families in this registry could be located hundreds of kilometers away from the extractivist reserves and settlements targeted by the program. Often they were understaffed and lacked technical capacity. Unstable internet connections made it difficult to upload registration information. In some cases, the number of families registered had reached the federal established limits for the municipality, so the addition of new families had to be negotiated with Brasília.

Fourth, the family had to be classified as living in extreme poverty. That only required a self-declaration.

Finally, a family member needed to sign a ‘term of participation’. This archaic document written in bureaucratic language, described the environmental commitments made by the family and the program’s rules and objectives. To obtain the signature, a government employee needed to visit the family, explain the policy and get the document signed. That could involve days of travelling by boat to the most remote corners of the Amazon. In the interviews I conducted, all the participants from the agencies involved in program implementation commented on the tremendous operational difficulties they faced.

All of this takes place within a complex intergovernmental coordination process. What one of the interviewees referred to as the program’s “normal flow” occurred in the following way: the agencies involved would send geo-referenced maps of the areas they considered apt for the program and lists of families registered as residents in those areas to the MMA. The MMA would forward the family data to the MDS at the same time when it would conduct a study of the forest coverage in the areas (until recently this occurred in collaboration with CENISPA and IBAMA). The MDS would cross-reference the names of the beneficiaries registered in the CadÚnico and send them back to the MMA, which would print out the terms of participation for eligible families living in the selected areas and whose names are included in both registry systems – of the areas and in the CadÚnico. The terms would then be forwarded to the implementing agencies, who would pass them on to the regional offices. They would send personnel to the field to collect signatures. Once the signatures are obtained, they would send the signed documents back to the implementing agencies, whose personnel would check the data and send the documents back to the MMA. The ministry would then process the terms of participation and forward the data to the Federal Savings Bank (*Caixa Econômica Federal*), which would then make the payment.

At each stage of the process, something could go wrong: the satellite diagnosis could be negative, the family registered by the local agency might not be registered in the CadÚnico, the data cross-referencing could raise

doubts about the identification of the family, and so forth. Furthermore, the practical difficulties in the field were enormous and sometimes led to resistance on the part of field employees, who resent the extra work piled on to them.

“Civil servants receive the expense allowance, go into the field but when we receive the terms, here in Brasília, they say things like this ‘It was not possible to collect the signature because of the dry season; we could not reach the homes’. Then in the rainy season comes a different excuse; floods” (Interview 15).

### **Middle-level bureaucrats of the *Bolsa Verde***

Of the fifteen people interviewed for this research, three held posts as director or advisers at DAS 5 level, six held posts at the DAS 4 level, one was at DAS 3, four were career civil servants not occupying DAS posts and one was a civil servant with a temporary contract, also not occupying a DAS position. All of them were well qualified: six had Masters Degrees and two had doctorates. All of them had university education. The group included graduates of Agronomy, Geology, Public Policy, Economics, Political Science, Law, Oceanography, Environmental Science, Biology and Ecology. Five of them had prior experience of working with civil society organizations ranging from environmental NGOs to agrarian reform movements. Most were relatively young (under 40) and even the older ones were relatively new to Brasília, having formerly worked in regional offices of federal agencies or other entities.

The responsibilities of the *Bolsa Verde* middle-level bureaucrats varied considerably according to their positions in the hierarchy, the governmental agency they worked for and the post they occupied. The directors in DAS 5 positions coordinated several programs and not just the *Bolsa Verde*. They concentrated on the latter program at specific times to sort out a problem or negotiate some important aspect of program design or to identify funding for some particular project they considered a priority.

Most of the civil servants with DAS 4 positions that I interviewed were also responsible for other programs. The only exception was the

person responsible for the program at the Ministry of the Environment. When the program began, a Public Policies and Government Administration Expert (EPPPG – a federal government position) who was working as an advisor to the Director for Extractivist Affairs at the ministry was charged with coordinating the program. Some months later she was nominated to the DAS 4 post of Socio-environmental Administration Manager, running two other programs as well as the *Bolsa Verde*. One of the programs was soon transferred to another sector. For several years, her office took responsibility for the *Bolsa Verde* and another program targeting traditional communities. Given the pressure on the *Bolsa Verde* to increase beneficiary numbers, however, this second program received far less attention from the management team and in 2014 it too was transferred to a different division so that the Socio-environmental Administration Office worked exclusively with the *Bolsa Verde* program (Interview).

The Socio-environmental Administration Division included five environmental analysts, all regular civil servants and four of whom were interviewed, as well as two interns. Three of the analysts interviewed stated that they engaged in internal debates on program design. They also said that they participated in the discussion of proposals in the program's Situation Room or at meetings of its Administration Committee. Two of them participated in debates with other agencies and in the elaboration and collaboration of external agreements and partnerships. Another was specifically responsible for the construction and maintenance of the program's information system which meant constantly interacting with MDS personnel specialized in data management and with companies contracted to design the database. The fourth environmental analyst interviewed did not participate so much in the policy debates but rather focused on administrative activities, especially on defining the program's internal procedures. All declared that in the early days of the program, they spent a lot of time digitalizing information extracted from the terms of participation, since this work was more than the interns could handle.

In the MDS, three bureaucrats were directly involved in the program. The Director for Administration and Accompaniment in the Extraordinary Division for Overcoming Extreme Poverty (*Secretaria Extraordinária para*

*Superação da Extrema Pobreza*) was an EPPG who had previously worked at the Civil Office, where she had taken part in the creation of the program. In the early months of the Rousseff government, she coordinated meetings with the ministries to discuss what each one could contribute to the *Brasil Sem Miséria* program. Today, as the main person responsible for the BSM programs in rural areas, she noted that she spent more time on the *Bolsa Verde* than on any of the other, more consolidated programs. In that same division another EPPG held a DAS 4 position. His main activities were related to the construction of the program's database and to cross referencing information with the CadÚnico. He also carried out a variety of other activities such as coordinating Situation Room meetings, coordinating a task force in the state of Pará and taking part in the definition of resolutions and procedures in the Administrative Committee. The MDS also had the support of a recent graduate who was temporarily employed to assist in various activities including working with the database and even taking part in preparatory discussions for the Administrative Committee's meetings.

The three implementing entities all had offices in Brasília coordinating the work of regional offices located closer to the beneficiaries. At the ICMBio, one of its staff members, with a DAS 5 nomination, headed the Directorate for Socio-environmental Actions and Territorial Consolidation in Protected Areas, which included a large number of programs. At key moments, he took part in decisions concerning the *Bolsa Verde*, especially as an effort to get funding for a complementary activity which he considered of fundamental importance to the program's success: a socio-economic study of the families living in extractivist reserves.

Subordinated to him was a DAS level 4 appointee heading the General Coordinating Office for Traditional Populations. That office had two subdivisions, one of which was entirely dedicated to the *Bolsa Verde* and headed by an ICMBio staff member with a DAS 3 appointment. She described her work as being almost exclusively focused on organizing information flows between the ICMBio's central offices and the managers of the protected area involved in the program. That often meant having to handle problems faced by field personnel. The vast size of the Amazonian protected areas, the lack of resources in the regions and the low budget

allocations to these areas meant that personnel often had to appeal for help with simple things like river transportation to the places where potential program beneficiaries lived. In many cases the Coordinator had to ask for support from the General Coordinator to solve such problems. Both emphasized how the daily operations of the program were constrained by lack of funding and personnel, both in the field and in Brasília.

The situation was no better in INCRA. The *Bolsa Verde* was just one of a number of programs under the General Coordinating Office for the Environment and Natural Resources (*Coordenação-Geral de Meio Ambiente e Recursos Naturais*). The General Coordinator was an INCRA employee with a DAS level 4 appointment. Two administrative employees below him worked with various other programs apart from the *Bolsa Verde*. One of them had a DAS 2 appointment. Until recently there were more people in the team, but several of them left (one retired, the other took a leave) and they had not been replaced. Thus, most of the technical work was performed by the General Coordinator directly with the personnel at INCRA's regional offices (*Superintendências*) and also with the program's coordinating agency. He also coordinated other programs, some of which were very large, like the Green Settlements program (*Assentamentos Verdes*).

In the Federal Patrimony Division, *Bolsa Verde* activities were coordinated by a permanent civil servant provided by the National Electric Energy Agency (*Agência Nacional de Energia Elétrica*) to the Ministry of Planning, occupying the DAS level 4 post of General Coordinator for the Legal Amazon. He was also responsible for several other activities and programs and had a team of five people, all in administrative posts. According to the interviewee, a considerable number of the office's activities were related to the creation and maintenance of a land tenure regulation registry in the areas for which the SPU was responsible in the Amazon. They included an effort to create a geo-referenced database, something the current coordinator, an expert in that field, paid special attention to. Such activities not only contributed to the progress of the *Bolsa Verde* but also to other actions that came under the supervision of the General Coordinating Office.

To sum up, the middle-level bureaucrats of the *Bolsa Verde* are all professionals and almost all of them are technically qualified full-

time civil servants. At the same time, they revealed their strong political commitments, not to political parties, but to ideas. Almost all of the bureaucrats interviewed (except those in the MDS) were deeply committed to environmentalism. That commitment showed itself, not only in their discourse, but also in their life experiences before they entered public service. Some had been activists in the environmental movement prior to taking on government posts. Others had studied environmental issues at university. Those experiences had a strong influence on their decision to sit civil service entrance exams for the environmental area. Most of those interviewed (again except for the MDS bureaucrats) had prior experience of working in governmental environmental programs and had become experts in some aspect of the topics. These people expressed serious concern that the program was not making progress towards achieving its environmental objectives, although they generally praised the program for bringing social policy reform to communities that were not visible historically.

## **Creativity in achieving goals**

An official document, probably written in April or May 2012 (Interview 16), states that the program had by then registered 17 thousand families in 32 protected areas and 140 settlements, all of them in the Amazon (BRASIL, 2012, p. 26). That was a far cry from the target of 373 thousand, established the year before, to be achieved by the time the next UN conference was to take place in June 2012. The bureaucrats interviewed described that moment as one of tremendous pressure to increase the number of participants registered.

The Act that created the *Bolsa Verde* program established that it would be run by an Administrative Committee whose composition would be decided by the MMA. The Committee only began to meet regularly in 2013. During the program's early years, key decisions were made in the *Brasil Sem Miséria* Situation Room in Brasília. Such rooms were first used when Dilma Rousseff was the head of the Civil Office, designed to ensure the progress of Brazil's Growth Acceleration Program (PAC). Subsequently, Situation Rooms proliferated amongst the federal government's priority

policies. Some MDS staff members were experts in coordinating Situation Room meetings, helping partner agencies find solutions for implementing problems. In the case of the *Bolsa Verde* program, the MMA technical team worked intensively to prepare for the meetings. Middle-level bureaucrats such as the program coordinator negotiated directly with the MDS to defend their proposals. Technical staff from both ministries commonly attended the meetings, even those without DAS status and even though they did not formally participate in them. It was mainly in the Situation Rooms and by means of innumerable informal conversations between technical staff and managers that the participants involved found the solutions for the challenge set by the numbers.

There is evidence that various important ideas for overcoming program bottlenecks had their origins in middle-level bureaucracy. As an example, according to the interviewees, a first proposal for quickly increasing the number of beneficiaries was conceived in the Ministry of the Environment. This was the decision to expand the program beyond the Amazon. With the inclusion of agrarian reform settlements that had already been identified as environmentally adequate, there was a surge in the number of registrations up to almost 30 thousand by August 2012 (Interviews 15 and 16). Even so, the target was a long way off. After the UN convention was over, the government decided to extend the period for achieving the goal to the end of 2014.

According to the interviewees, another idea for improving program outreach emerged within the MDS, whose “active search” for new beneficiaries of the *Bolsa Família* had already developed the technique of implementing task forces (*mutirões*) in the field. In 2013, the program initiated a *mutirão* in the state of Pará, identified as the region with the greatest concentration of potential beneficiaries. The MMA and the MDS recruited a group of 40 employees in Brasília to travel to Pará to help in the search (Interviews 3 and 12). It was a highly complex action involving various different government entities. As one of the task force coordinators explained:

The ICMBio, the Incra and the SPU were with us. We divided up by municipalities, those areas where there is the greatest deficiency in

registrations in the CadÚnico. ... And so with the knowledge they had, they began to survey the area. In the area of Santarém, we are going to do the Tapajos National Forests, and we will need 2 boats and so many people to do the registrations. There was a big process of identifying all the logistical needs, infrastructure, such as boats, or vehicles or whatever was needed. Pará was divided into seven areas, seven task force areas and for each region, an estimate was made of the number of people from the municipal authority that should participate... because it is the municipality that does the registering for the CadÚnico, there had to be an approach to the municipalities, to invite them, find out if they have enough people, whether they have people available to support us and if they do, whether they want to and whether the area in question really does have problems, all of that .....and with the help of the Pará state government's social assistance department, they managed to get in touch with those municipalities ... "we are going to do a task force to register *Bolsa Verde* program, you can carry out any other action you want, take health, take advantage of this effort to tie in with some other action". We also worked alongside the PNDTE, the INCRA and the MDA, and the Documents for Rural Workers Program which offers documentation such as CPF (Tax Registration Number), RG (ID Card), Birth Certificate (Interview 12).

The task force led to the identification of 40 thousand new families (Interview 3). However, a considerable group could not be included in the program because they declared an income that was not below the extreme poverty line. Others ran afoul of the CadÚnico bureaucracy, since as several interviewees mentioned, some municipalities found it difficult to process the documentation of new *Bolsa Família* beneficiaries. By the end of 2014, many of the families identified in the 2013 effort were still in the process of being included on the program payroll (Interviews 3,12 and 16).

Efforts of this kind ensured that, over the years of implementation, beneficiary numbers grew steadily. One interviewee declared that she expected that the goal would be achieved by the end of 2014 (Interview 16).

## **Going beyond the quantitative targets: bureaucrats' concerns**

Situated in various positions and based on their personal experience, the bureaucrats interviewed expressed various perceptions of how the

program worked and how it should work. Those at the MMA and MDS commented on a relatively horizontal decision-making environment. Several of them expressed their satisfaction at having their work duly recognized by their superiors. Technical staff, even those not in DAS posts participated in debates on program design and in the Administrative Committee meetings. Some of them regularly held conversations with highly placed ministry authorities, even the ministers themselves, who closely accompanied their actions and often asked their opinions on how to proceed. Several of the interviewees commented the fact that the program was part of the *Brasil Sem Miséria* meant they had better access to their superiors and to financial resources. One even went so far as to say “*A priori*, in the *Brasil Sem Miséria* we have no budget problems” (Interview 11).

Those that worked in the implementation agencies, however, were not so happy. In their interviews, all of them complained about the lack of funds and staff. “It is a government priority program, but that is not reflected in its structure” said one (Interview 8). Those occupying posts at levels 4 or 5 participated in the Situation Room meetings and in those of the Administrative Committee but they also observed that they were frequently excluded from key decisions. Several stated openly that they had no influence on important aspects of program design and even though they were always careful to mention that there was plenty of room for dialogue with the ministries, they also felt the need to resist strong pressure from above to increase the numbers. “The MMA mainly takes on the role of formulating and demanding [results] and we try to put on the brakes” (Interview 15). Typically, those who felt they had little influence on program design were in lower level positions of the hierarchy or working for the implementing entities. One of the latter expressed great frustration with the workflow:

“There is not even time to think! ... Because, just imagine, we have to stop everything to answer them (field personnel). They come in saying things like ‘Please, Coordinator, there are two people here who have not been paid’. Then we have to contact the MMA and say ‘MMA, sort this out for us’. Another says ‘Ah, I sent in a list of 300 people and some of them have received (the allowance) but others have not’. We have to investigate and find out who got it and who did not and we do not have

an answer to give them ... So we end up being an information desk, like a sort of customer call line” (Interview 9).

Another person from an implementing agency identified a very different problem. It was not so much a question of not being able to influence decisions, but rather a more basic structural limitation:

“We do have a lot of liberty within the program to say what we think and how things should be and so on. I think that is because this is a program of the Ministry of the Environment... It is very open in that respect. The government, however, and here I mean the Ministry of the Environment, INCRA, the ICMBio and the SPU, does not have the technical and operational staff to run this kind of program ... The Government does not have the operational capacity to undertake this program” (Interview 14).

In addition to the differences in the opinions of those in the coordinating agencies and those in the implementing agencies, there were differences amongst the areas. Employees attached to the MDS tended to emphasize how the program clearly contributed towards achieving the overriding goal of the *Brasil Sem Miséria* program, namely, to actively seek out those Brazilian families, who for one reason or another have been left out of the *Bolsa Família* system. The same employees commented that the main challenge still facing the program was to achieve the environmental goals, but employees in other agencies were even more critical of that aspect, probably because most of them were personally dedicated to the environmental cause. The main content of their criticism was that the pressure applied from above to achieve the beneficiary inclusion target figure jeopardized the program’s environmental component. They observed that top level authorities formally recognized that the program had environmental objectives but in practice what they demanded was actually focused only on the quantitative target.

“Whenever anyone from the *Brasil Sem Miséria* is talking about the *Bolsa Verde*, it is only to mention the number of beneficiaries registered, never to comment on the program’s other actions” (Interview 2).

Those interviewed felt that excessive attention to that goal had various consequences. Some emphasized the lack of time and funding to

ensure that the beneficiaries would actually fulfill their role in environmental protection. They called for heavier investments in capacity building and technical assistance. Another criticism was that simply giving money would not in itself ensure that the beneficiaries would conform to other social and environmental public policies; the benefit needed to be connected with other policies. A third criticism referred to the environmental monitoring system, which some considered to be precarious in the light of the program's real needs. An annual analysis of satellite images of large areas with poor resolution was not enough to identify families that might be responsible for deforestation. What was even more difficult was to find out why some families persisted in cutting down forest. This information could be used to address the problem. Others expressed their concern on how the program focused only on combating extreme poverty, which could undermine environmental objectives. Benefitting only some of the families created a sense of inequality in the communities, which went against the creation of collective responsibility for the areas. One of those interviewed even declared that favoring those living in extreme poverty contradicted the sustainable development goal, since it would discriminate families more successful at sustainable activities, who would not have access to the program.

## **Environmental interventions**

Situated between the decision makers and the field workers, the middle-level bureaucrats needed to discover how to distribute the weight of the demands coming down from above amongst the lower entities in the hierarchy, a process that sometimes involved selective resistance to pressure in order to achieve the objectives. It would be a mistake, however, to understand the work of middle-level bureaucrats merely in terms of filtering or translating the decisions of their superiors into the actions of their subordinates. These bureaucrats also attempted to influence decisions themselves. Most of the people I interviewed said that they had been at least partially successful at doing so and that their influence had almost always emphasized strengthening and broadening the environmental protection and traditional community agendas.

Interviewees from both the coordinating and implementing agencies stated that they used certain strategies to influence their bosses. Some of them stressed their strategic access to information on how this new and highly complex program works. They said that decision makers higher up in the hierarchy often asked for their opinion or for explanations. When this occurred, they had a chance to present their own proposals.

“Obviously we have to present these discoveries that we make to the higher levels, but the way we present them and the ability to argue in favor of one side or the other ... I was practically taught to always present two scenarios, advantages and disadvantages. So then, if we go this way this is what we get and if we go the other way we will get this other result. Obviously if you are the person that has the most knowledge about the problem, you are in a position to present a more vehement presentation of a given scenario, to defend it much more than another” (Interview 3).

Sometimes middle-level bureaucrats remarked that personal contacts with their superiors helped them to put forward an idea of their own. One mentioned that the fact that he had worked before with a top authority in his agency facilitated his success. Most of those interviewed, however, did not have such contacts but agreed that the Situation Rooms and the meetings of the Administrative Committee were important forums to discuss their proposals.

When asked about their personal influence on program design, most of the interviewees declared that they had left their mark. In some cases these were small changes: a strategic decision in an Administrative Committee meeting, the redefinition of a certain concept that would improve flows or safeguard beneficiaries’ interests. Others mentioned bigger projects that called for significant negotiations amongst participants and the creative mobilization of resources. Most of those initiatives attempted to enhance the program’s positive impact on environmental protection. A good example was a capacity-building program for beneficiaries that resulted from a conversation between MMA employees and the British Embassy. The ministry officers negotiated a partnership between the embassy and an NGO, the International Education Institute of Brazil (*Instituto Internacional de Educação do Brasil* – IEB) to develop a methodology to train beneficiaries

in the workings of the *Bolsa Verde* and other public policies and also in forest management techniques (production, processing and commercialization). The program trained 120 managers (mainly protected area and municipal government personnel) to implement the methodology.

One such initiative involved a partnership arrangement with another *Brasil Sem Miséria* program – the Rural Technical Assistance Program. *Bolsa Verde* bureaucrats managed to negotiate the launching of a special competition for technical assistance projects designed for forest-based extractivist production. They were applied primarily to *Bolsa Verde* beneficiary families.

Another step forward was the implementation of a socio-economic diagnosis of beneficiary families, spearheaded by the ICMBio personnel. The ICMBio director responsible for the program managed to convince the *Brasil Sem Miséria* managers in the MDS to finance an agreement with the Federal University of Viçosa to conduct a socio-economic study of the families living in extractivist reserves. According to ICMBio staff interviewed, the study allowed the identification of priority policies that should be promoted to improve local conditions and the sustainable production capacity of the beneficiary families.

Another example of change brought about by participants in various agencies concerns monitoring. In 2014 a University group (Lavras Federal University) was contracted to perform regular analysis of satellite images, which had far better resolution than those which the government had been using. It was hoped that such analysis would enhance government's capacity to check whether families were fulfilling their environmental commitments. The question was controversial. Whilst some of those interviewed emphasized how important it was to have a technically advanced monitoring system, others argued that the system should be integrated with increasing the government's capacity to reach out to families and provide technical assistance that would make their sustainable behavior possible.

These initiatives have three aspects in common. Firstly, all of them sought to go beyond the merely quantitative inclusion in the program. Capacity building, technical assistance, socio-economic diagnosis and improved monitoring would enable the program to access more fully into

the lives of the beneficiaries. They would enable the transfer not only of income to the families but also of capabilities, thus expanding their access to other public policies. Second, each of these initiatives was made possible through the provision of financial resources among different government agencies. The *Brasil Sem Miséria* financed the diagnostic study. Its Technical Assistance Program created a specific project for extractivist activities. Even non-governmental organizations formed a partnership that would benefit the program. Third, and perhaps the most interesting, those activities not only sought to promote the *Bolsa Verde* program itself, but also to contribute to other programs implemented by the agencies involved. As one of the bureaucrats interviewed has said:

“We are starting to see the *Bolsa Verde* as something that induces policy. It is the first to arrive but it is bringing other things along with it” (Interview 15).

In that sense, several of the interviewees spoke about how their activities in the context of the *Bolsa Verde* ended up mobilizing resources for environmental programs. Financing for technical assistance would not only help the *Bolsa Verde* to achieve the environmental results but would also support the INCRA'S Green Settlements program. The study of extractivist families would not only facilitate the identification and monitoring of *Bolsa Verde* beneficiaries but would also support all other policies being implemented in the extractivist reserves. The efforts to improve monitoring by satellite would be important not just for the program alone, but also because it would enhance the government's ability to monitor deforestation. In short, several of the interviewees viewed the *Bolsa Verde* as an opportunity to leverage financial resources toward other programs, which they often felt to be more important.

## **Another kind of intervention**

At the end of the field work period, I heard about a different kind of initiative by mid-level bureaucrats. In October 2014, just before the second round of presidential elections, a cloud of uncertainty hung over

federal bureaucrats with respect to the continuity of the programs in which they worked. In that context, an MMA interviewee told me that the *Bolsa Verde* technical team was working to guarantee that it “left its mark”. If the program were to continue in the new government, it would probably be with a new team and a new administrator would probably want to make changes in the program. What was important therefore was to leave a legacy of evaluation materials and proposals for change, so that any modifications would be made intelligently.

To that end, the team was working on a draft bill proposal that would change some of the policy’s central aspects. One proposal was to scrap the Term of Participation, which the staff thought was an ineffective document, crouched in legal language that made it difficult for the families to understand what exactly they were committing themselves to. The group hoped that eliminating the need to collect signatures would free financial resources that could otherwise be used to strengthen capacity-building and technical assistance programs. Another proposal was to expand the program’s target public to include the “poor” population and not just the “extremely poor.” In that way, entire communities could be included, greatly facilitating the implementation with land use management. The group intended to write up documents and drafts and have them approved by their superiors before the government in power left office. In that way, they would leave a documentation trail of the lessons learnt, increasing the chances of those lessons being considered by the incoming new government.

## **Considerations and reflections**

Certain features peculiar to the *Bolsa Verde* program helped its middle-level bureaucrats exert a considerable influence on program design and implementation. The complexity and unprecedented nature of the work created fertile ground for interaction, debate, argumentation and creative thinking, in which the main protagonists were middle-level bureaucrats who held crucial information regarding that complex context. In this chapter, I have shown the various ways in which those participants acted creatively,

often in an effort to foster a certain social movement agenda. At the same time they attempted to transform the program, however, the middle echelon also acted creatively to ensure policy implementation in the way it was proposed by the upper echelon. The bureaucrats described here made creative efforts to both “follow instructions” and to change the policy.

On the one hand, they performed creatively to achieve the objectives established by their hierarchical superiors. Although the higher echelons defined goals and objectives and approved the programs’ basic statutes, their decisions were merely the point of departure of a rich decision-making process in which certain fundamental questions had to be answered by the technical team: Which territories should we prioritize? How can we encourage the field workers to make visits? Which other resources do we need to mobilize in order to get to the beneficiary population? At the end of their period in office, some of the bureaucrats showed that they were highly committed to the policy to which they had dedicated themselves for years, so much so that they sought to foster the program’s continuity in the face of the imminent possibility of a change in command.

On the other hand, the bureaucrats interviewed in this study did not show themselves to be satisfied with the conception of the program as it was defined by their hierarchical superiors. Notably, almost all of them questioned their superiors’ tendency to overvalue the numerical targets for the inclusion of families to the detriment of the environmental objectives. In the narrow spaces of a hectic working routine marked by the processing of thousands of beneficiaries, bureaucrats committed to environmentalism tried to find enough time to seek support and resources for projects that would strengthen sustainable development. In their intermediate position between different areas of public policy they managed to create various innovative partnerships. In the case of the capacity-building training program, bureaucrats of the Ministry of the Environment even acted as mediators between two non-governmental organizations.

The fact that the program was a top priority for the government had an ambiguous effect on the middle-level bureaucracy’s ability to influence its direction. On the one hand, various interviewees observed that the inclusion of the program amongst the government’s top priorities meant that the

team's activities were constantly monitored. The pressure to achieve the numerical target led to a high pressure working environment, in which the focus was beneficiary inclusion. On the other hand, the inclusion of the *Bolsa Verde* in the *Brasil Sem Miséria* program created a source of funding for the bureaucrats' initiatives. It became feasible to mobilize funds that would not normally have been made available, especially in those fields that traditionally are low priority for public policies, such as environmental and agrarian reform policy. Thus, *Brasil Sem Miséria* supported some of the bureaucrats' environmental initiatives, financing the ICMBio's socio-economic registration and negotiating a partnership with the Rural Technical Assistance Program.

If bureaucrats did nothing more than obey orders from above, as the Weberian vision of the bureaucracy predicts (which Lotta, Pires and Oliveira refer to as the "structural perspective"), then they would not be promoting initiatives of this kind. Yet the attitudes of the bureaucrats interviewed did not align with the expectations of the "public choice" literature either, where civil servants are presumed to have some personal initiative, but only to further their own interests (NISKANEN, 1971). Most of the interviewees spoke about their political commitment to ideas that went far beyond such individual interests, especially environmental ideas. To some, their work in government was a way to continue their previous activism in civil society. The commitment of others was either personal or professional, sometimes stemming from their academic qualification in biological sciences or in environmental management. Irrespective of whether they have had any connections with social movements, all these participants seemed to have something in common with "activists", even though their actions may be more constrained. One of the bureaucrats was quite explicit on this point:

"It is because here we do not have as much flexibility [as in civil society]. For example, I may have an opinion that I cannot express here, not only because it is not a priority but also because we need to understand the situation of the moment; some things we cannot manage to pass at all... [but] I have never gone beyond the limits of my ethics, because that is also a goal of mine in continuing here. If something offends me, then I will not accept it. Every day, I make that evaluation, whether what I am doing is useful. Because the moment it no longer is, the moment I feel that we are not building a policy that will address the needs of those

populations that we work with, then I will move to another area. So in that sense I do believe it is a kind of activism. Because there is something in it that I believe to be just” (Interview 4).

In addition to the constraints of being an activist in the bureaucracy, the interview cited above suggests that activism does not necessarily mean trying to impose changes. Sometimes the activist chooses his work situation precisely to support the *continuity* of a specific government program.

The interviews show that most of the bureaucrats had developed commitments to environmentalism before they came to work in the government on the basis of their experiences in civil society, in school and in other work situations. However, the commitment continued even after joining the government. The bureaucrats developed a sense of commitment towards government actions to which they dedicated themselves for years on end. In the interviews, this latter kind of commitment appears to be more typical for those working in program coordination (in the MMA). These participants revealed their commitment even to the objectives prioritized by the higher echelons, considering, for example, that achieving them was a question of honor. Faced with political instability in an electoral period and the probable change of ministers that would ensue, they went beyond what is normally expected. They sought to consolidate their lessons learnt and to leave their mark on the program in the form of documents, studies and draft legislation and resolutions, in an effort not only to incorporate the changes made, but also to ensure that the program would continue. In short, the very experience of being a *Bolsa Verde* bureaucrat helped foster their commitment to the program.

In that sense these participants seem to engage in something analogous to what Lawrence, Suddaby and Leca (2010) call “institutional work”: in their daily routine of minor tasks and activities, they seek to use their creativity not only to change institutions, but also to maintain them. After all, most middle-level bureaucrats interviewed were permanent civil servants and would continue working with the program even under a leadership change. In addition to them being situated between upper echelon and street-level bureaucrats, middle-level bureaucrats can also play another, very important intermediary role: acting as intermediaries

between the past and the future, as guardians of the policies, in which they themselves have constructed. In short, it would seem that many of the bureaucrats interviewed acted just like environmentalists committed to an agenda of transformation and as bureaucrats committed to the continuity and strengthening of the state. The line separating bureaucratic honor and activism seems to be a very thin one.

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# CHAPTER 6 – INSIDE THE PAC: FROM FORMAL ARRANGEMENTS TO THE INTERACTIONS AND PRACTICES OF ITS OPERATORS\*

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In the last decade the Brazilian Federal Government has taken up its investment capacity once more and set priority on conducting logistics, energy, water, urban and social infrastructure projects throughout the country. The Growth Acceleration Program (*Programa de Aceleração do Crescimento - PAC*), launched in January 2007, plays a considerable role in that effort. PAC-1 (2007 – 2020) doubled public investments from 1.62% of GDP in 2006 to 3.27% of GDP in 2010 with a total amount of 619 billion Brazilian reais. In turn, PAC-2 (2011 – 2014) passed the mark of 1 trillion reais in December 2014, increasing the volume of investments made under PAC-1 by 72% and achieving considerable impact on employment levels and workers' incomes<sup>2</sup>. This chapter sets out an understanding of how the PAC works and how it is operated, its objectives, its formal and informal institutional arrangements for carrying out infrastructure investments in Brazil.

Executing large-scale infrastructure projects has always been a complex task for all governments across the world because they need to mobilize resources to address various conflicts of interests and challenges

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<sup>2</sup> Data available in the 11th complete balance of PAC 2 at: <http://www.pac.gov.br/sobre-o-pac/divulgacao-do-balanco/balanco-completo>.

of a technical-operational nature. They also require large amounts of public funds and address resulting considerable social, environmental, economic and territorial impacts. Due to all those factors and other challenges, it is common for such projects to suffer delays and incur costs beyond those foreseeable at the start of the venture<sup>3</sup>. Those tendencies are exacerbated by the Brazilian political-institutional environment which, especially in the field of infrastructure, presents challenges to the management of public policies related to the construction and maintenance of governance, inter and intra-governmental discussions, the performance of the control and oversight bodies, accountability, guaranteeing individual, collective and diffuse rights and last of all, the growing demand for civil society participation in public policy formulation and control.

In the light of the complexity in executing infrastructure investments, it must be recognized that PAC has made expressive progress, increasing the amounts invested in infrastructure and gradually increasing the level of project execution. Since the program began, the investment execution rate on the part of the Brazilian Federal Government has gone up from 47% in 2007 to 65% in 2010, ranging above 50% in the subsequent years<sup>4</sup>. Thus, the intention here is to explain how and why the PAC manages to make progress in the face of the challenges that must be met by governmental actions in the area of infrastructure investment in Brazil.

The argument developed draws attention to the fact that the progress made cannot be fully understood only by analyzing the formal structures and arrangements established for PAC. It is necessary to consider how operators perceive it and act on realizing the outcomes. In other words, the argument is that the effectiveness of PAC stems from the meanings and roles attributed to it by the bureaucrats who are involved in the execution and from the practices and interactions they establish with each other and with external actors.

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<sup>3</sup> Reviews of the international literature on infrastructure policy execution show that delays and additional costs are common problems in all regions of the world irrespective of whether the countries are developed or developing countries and variations are more associated to the type of venture and its respective degree of complexity (ANSAR *et al.*, 2013; HERTOUGH *et al.*, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> Calculations made by the Ipea based on data displayed in the *Siga Brasil*.

To that end, this study has adopted an analytical perspective of middle-level bureaucrats (MLBs) to get an insider's understanding of the constitution and operation of management and implementation arrangements of public policies (LOTTA; PIRES; OLIVEIRA, 2014). The MLB concept embraces a varied set of actors performing intermediate management roles as directors, managers, coordinators or supervisors. They are situated hierarchically between the operational level, responsible for policy execution, and the upper echelon bureaucrats, responsible for the formulation and strategic decision-making (PIRES, 2012). The MLBs are a fundamental link between the top and the base, between rules and decisions and their practical application among the different actors and the understandings arrived at to make joint actions feasible for the implementation of government actions. Thus, given the strategic structural position of those actors, they are always interacting with others around them, synthesizing and disseminating information that is often the means to conditioning the direction and results of the policies. MLBs are a set of actors that has received little attention in the literature on public policy implementation<sup>5</sup>. But one whose analysis would make it possible to understand how state organizations function beyond the sphere of their formal institutions and structures, setting greater value on the interactions and relations that are established amongst the various state and non-state participants involved in policy production.

This approach requires that we populate the usual institutional analysis with human agents and the social interactions that construct the meaning and significance of the formal institutions through their daily practices. After all, institutions (or laws, organizations, government programs) are not mere inert containers of meanings (or reified

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<sup>5</sup> According to Lotta, Pires and Oliveira (2014), the literature on public policies has been dedicated far more to the analysis of street-level bureaucrats and the policy formulators in the upper echelons based on bottom-up and top-down approaches, than on any attempt to understand the varied sets of participants that are situated in between the top and the base of governmental hierarchies. Those authors have constructed an extensive revision of the literature in an endeavour to understand the definitions that exist within the role, functions and 'positions' of middle-level bureaucrats in public and private bureaucracies, as well as systematizing three analytical perspectives (structural, individual and relational) of how they are viewed.

abstractions). They are ‘inhabited’ by people and by the activities they perform daily. It is through the interactions of these agents that institutions are interpreted, modified and disseminated (HALLETT; VENTRESCA, 2006).

Thus, in any worthwhile analysis of an institution, state or government program, it is of fundamental importance to obtain an understanding of how bureaucrats interpret and act in the name of their respective institution. That is, neither the legal-formal regulation nor its implementation can exist independently of the social relations (transactions and subjectivities) that they help to compose and in which they are a part of (COSLOVSKY; PIRES; SILBEY, 2011).

To address that requirement, the research process involved interviews<sup>6</sup>, documental analysis and direct observation of some of the regular activities and working routines (such as meetings, situation rooms) of middle-level bureaucrats involved in the PAC. The set of information and interactions collected enabled researchers to get a closer idea of the view, narratives and interpretations that these actors construct on the basis of their personal experience of working as PAC operators. Thus, the material and the analysis carried out offer an insider interpretation of the PAC, including its meanings and practices that make it operational based on accounts and behavior of its participants.

From here on the text has been organized into five sections. In section 1, there is a description of the context in which PAC emerged and operates. The idea is to highlight the challenges, problems and dilemmas associated with implementing infrastructure investments in Brazil. They stem from the political-institutional climate that emerged after the promulgation of the

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<sup>6</sup> 16 interviews were conducted altogether lasting, on average, one hour. Eight of them were with staff from the Growth Acceleration Program Department (*Secretaria do Programa de Aceleração do Crescimento - Sepac*) and with representatives of each of the four thematic directorates, the general coordinating bodies and the special advisory bodies that compose it. In addition, there were three interviews with former Sepac staff members and five with directors, coordinators and advisors attached to the Ministry of National Integration, the Ministry of Mines and Energy and the Ministry of the Cities and Urban Development (in the latter, a group of four persons was interviewed). To ensure the anonymity of the interviewees, they have not been named. I would like to take this opportunity of thanking them for their generosity and their willingness to contribute to this research.

1988 Constitution. The sections that follow offer an understanding of how PAC progresses, organizes itself and functions in the face of the complexity of its institutional environment. Section 2 describes the Program's objectives and formal arrangements. From then onwards, the analysis is conducted from the standpoint of the program's operators. Section 3 sets out the results obtained from the PAC operators' narratives, how they perceive the Program's motivations, the reasons for its existence, purpose and meanings. Section 4 offers an interpretation based on PAC operators' statements and direct observation of their routine activities. It proposes that, apart from its formal structures and procedures, PAC is based on a whole set of interpersonal relations involving horizontal and vertical interactions directed at transacting the information to be used in monitoring the execution of infrastructure projects and at building the capacity of the Program execution bodies. The last section presents the study's conclusions and some final remarks.

## **The institutional politics' context and the challenges presented by the implementation of infrastructural policies in Brazil**

The Constitution of 1988 marked a point of inflection in the democratization of politics and of the state in Brazil. The Charter consolidated the democratic processes that had emerged in the previous decade and established new bases to guarantee individual, collective and diffuse rights while at the same time promoting a greater degree of political inclusion and structural reforms in a state that was previously arbitrary and centralized. On the one hand, the inflection represents one of the most important socio-political steps forward in the country's recent history. On the other, it introduced considerable complexity and challenges in the making of public policy, especially in the field of infrastructure. In the text that follows, we will examine the four main areas in the constitution of the Brazilian political-institutional environment and their dynamic and often unforeseeable intertwining.

The first area concerns the construction of a governance framework in a multi-party presidential regime. The 1988 Constitution restored the

formal independence of the Executive, Legislative and Judicial branches and instituted electoral processes for the first two in the federal, state and municipal spheres of government. By the early 1990s, the combination of a presidential regime with multiple political parties and a federal structure had already revealed that it was potentially explosive, insofar as it led to fragmentation and made it very difficult to form stable government coalitions between the Federal Executive, on the one hand, and the Legislative branch and sub-national governments, on the other. Nevertheless, over the last 25 years, the construction and sustained existence of coalition governments have proved to be possible in Brazil (FIGUEIREDO; SALLES; VIEIRA, 2009; LIMONGI, 2006). Making those governments politically viable, however, has demanded ever increasing volumes of financial resources and goods to be used in exchanges for political support in the Congress and in the sub-national governments. They take the form of parliamentary amendments and appointment to posts in the ministries, autarchies and state corporations, attracting political actors to the Executive administration who are not always in alignment with the priorities and style of government of the elected presidents (MELO; PEREIRA, 2013). The dynamics involved have serious implications for public policy management and implementation in Brazil because essential administrative resources have to pass through a process of “filtration” associated with the logic of maintaining political support that is not always compatible with long-term program goals. It also complicates intra-governmental coordination and transversal actions with government bodies headed by diverse political leaders.

The second area that influences government activity in Brazil concerns political-administrative decentralization. The 1988 Constitution transferred many of the responsibilities and competences from the federal government to states and municipalities, making them active and indispensable participants in public policy management to various extents, according to the sector involved. The same Constitution, however, was parsimonious in the institution of mechanisms for discussion amongst the different entities to ensure government action and provision of government services. Even though in recent decades the federal government has found institutional ways to obtain the cooperation of sub-national governments

in the implementation of policies in areas in which they share a common interest (ARRETCHE, 2012), in many others there has been an abundance of problems associated with the organization of the relations between the federal government, states and municipalities.

A third area concerns various actors formally empowered to control state activity, the accountability of public administration, and that individual, collective and diffuse rights are guaranteed. These are bodies whose mission and objectives involve the inspection, auditing, or influencing government actions. Many of them existed before 1988, but the Constitution was renewed and even expanded their objectives and mandates. Such was the case of the Office of the Public Prosecutor (*Ministério Público – MP*), the Federal Court of Accounts (*Tribunal de Contas da União – TCU*), the National Historic and Artistic Heritage Institute (*Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional – Iphan*) and the National Indian Foundation (*Fundação Nacional do Índio – FUNAI*). Others were created afterwards to put into effect the provisions and protective mechanisms instituted by the new democratic regime. Examples of the latter are the Brazilian Environment Institute – Ibama, the Palmares Cultural Foundation (*Fundação Cultural Palmares – FCP*), the Chico Mendes Institute (*Instituto Chico Mendes – ICMBio*) and the Office of the Comptroller General (*Controladoria-Geral da União – CGU*). Such bodies exist to curb abuses of power on the part of the state and prevent corruption and distortions by scrutinizing the actions of its administrative agents. That may be done by bodies under the aegis of the Executive Branch itself, such as the CGU, the Office of the Federal Attorney and the Federal Police, or by entities of the Legislative Branch (like the National Congress or the TCU), of the Judicial Branch or by the Office of the Public Prosecutor.

Other agencies are charged with the responsibility of promoting and guaranteeing individual, collective and diffuse rights determined and defined by the Constitution and other subsequent legislation. They are intended to influence the actions of the public and private sector and to mitigate their impacts. The most notorious of such processes is the socio-environmental licensing one, which analyzes the impacts of enterprises and verifies whether the norms and regulations concerning environmental

protection and the rights of the populations involved are being complied with. The Brazilian environmental licensing process is very complex and is considered by many to be one of the most rigorous in the world, at least from the formal point of view (FONSECA, 2013). In the federal sphere, Ibama is responsible for issuing such licenses and there are three versions of it – prior licensing, license to install and license to operate. They are issued after Environmental Impact Studies and Environmental Impact Reports conducted by those entities proposing the venture (usually private sector entities) have been duly analyzed. The process involves holding public hearings with the participation of local civil society. It also requires other state bodies charged with protecting and guaranteeing rights such as the Iphan, the FCP, the National Settlement and Agrarian Reform Institute (*Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária – Incra*), the ICMBio, the National Health Foundation (*Fundação Nacional da Saúde – Funasa*), the Ministry of Health and the Office of the Public Prosecutor to express their opinions. The statements issued by those bodies are supposed to identify the existence of obstacles that impede further progress in the licensing process or that indicate measures to be taken or conditions to be met for overcoming the problems identified. All of those aspects mean that the process is highly contentious and involves the formation of coalitions of actors that are for or against the project, resulting in the incorporation of social and environmental considerations that often have strong repercussions on the project's costs and schedules (HOCHSTETLER, 2011).

Finally, the fourth area of our political-institutional environment highlights the increasing incorporation of institutional forms of social participation in the formulation of processes and control of public policies since 1988. In recent decades, these mechanisms have become intensely used in the municipal, state and federal spheres of government, in a wide variety of public policy areas and taking a variety of formats such as councils, conferences, audiences, public consultancies, ombudsman offices, and others (AVRITZER, 2010; PIRES 2011). Alongside government transparency initiatives and the Law of Access to Information, these channels for participation create opportunities for consultations and discussion regarding the direction of government actions, thereby expanding the

foundations of its legitimacy as well as providing information and forming partnerships for monitoring and controlling public policies. In spite of all these constructive inputs, the emergence of these social participation opportunities introduces new elements and participants that need to be articulated in order that government actions achieve success. While it is true that there is occasionally synergies between the decisions made by participative forums, government's priorities and commitments and the discussions at the National Congress, on various other occasions there have been visible divergences, tensions and conflicts among those different areas of democratic authority.

Taken as a set, those four factors represent important historical steps forward in the construction of a democratic state in Brazil but, at the same time, there are also sources of complexities and difficulties that challenge the management and implementation of public policies. Taking the specific case of an infrastructure policy as an example, the project for the Integration of the São Francisco River to the Basins of the Northern Northeast, the result of these areas produce: a) a set of initial efforts to ensure the political prioritization of the project, which required negotiations between the Presidency of the Republic and the political parties forming the government's support base that, accordingly, came to occupy the structures of the Ministry of National Integration and the relevant state corporations, and to control the allocation of funds and organizational resources to the project; b) coordination between the said Ministry and its subordinate bodies and all other federal bodies and agencies involved, many of which were represented by political parties with different objectives and interests; c) discussions amongst the federal government, states and municipalities, which were split between those that thought the project jeopardized their interests (the "water donors"), and those that would benefit from the transposition (the "water beneficiaries"), all of which have direct implications for the dynamics of government support in the Congress; d) local-level debates and discussions against the development of the project (São Francisco River Basin Committee), which has been reformed in the light of discussions and positions taken at the national level of social participation (National Water Resource Board) in addition to the environmental licensing

process, other questions raised by the Office of the Public Prosecutor and the unrelenting scrutiny and audit of oversight bodies such as the TCU and the CGU (ABERS; KECK, 2013; LOUREIRO; TEIXEIRA; FERREIRA, 2013).

Considering that the single occurrence of any one of those areas on its own would be enough to seriously challenge government action, the simultaneous occurrence of all of them creates a propitious situation for further raising the level of complexity. On the one hand, the perception of those areas underscores Brazilian State's political and administrative fragmentation. On the other hand, the way they are intertwined increases the possibility of divergence, tension and stalemates. In such an entangled institutional environment, the materialization of public policies can only take place through the intervention and interlacing of multiple arenas (ABERS; KECK, 2013). Thus, the endeavor to achieve at least a minimum level of communication, discussion and coordination amongst the various actors involved and the production of coherence and connectivity amongst their actions become major challenges to the workings of government and to the concretization of investments in infrastructure.

Considering that it was implemented in such a politically and institutionally complex context, PAC has managed to obtain some expressive results in terms of volumes of investments, level of investment execution and national outreach. At one point, PAC 2 involved more than 40 thousand works in all regions of Brazil. By October 2014, 91.3% of all the investments planned for the period of 2011 to 2014 had been achieved and that figure was expected to increase to 96.5% by the end of the year. This represents a global volume of investments amounting to 1.066 trillion Brazilian reais spent in projects in the areas of transport, energy and social and urban development<sup>7</sup>.

Those figures indicate the relevance and degree of success achieved by the Program, which involved an extensive set of actions, projects and public works, whose implementation constantly runs up against the conditioning factors described above. Thus, it is worthwhile gaining an understanding of how the results were actually achieved, especially in the arrangements,

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<sup>7</sup> Data available in the 11th complete PAC Balance (*11º Balanço completo do PAC 2*) at <http://www.pac.gov.br/sobre-o-pac/divulgacao-do-balanco/balanco-completo>.

dynamics and formal and informal mechanisms that PAC introduced, which enabled it to address and overcome the existing challenges.

What follows below is an attempt to understand how the PAC has emerged and inserted itself in the Brazilian political-institutional context. The oncoming sections present, first of all, the PAC's objectives and formal arrangements (Section 2). That is followed by an analysis of perceptions as to its purpose and functions (Section 3) and the regular practices of its operators in their daily round (Section 4).

## **The Growth Acceleration Program (PAC): objectives and formal arrangements**

PAC was formally created in January 2007 by Decree nº 6.025, to which a series of regulatory norms<sup>8</sup> was subsequently added. The decree and the regulations established the Program's objectives and its institutional design. With regard to the objectives, the Decree itself does not define them explicitly but rather it institutes the Program. Its first Article states that it is:

“constituted of measures designed to stimulate private investment, expand public investment in infrastructure, improve the quality of public expenditure and control the expansion of current expenses in the sphere of Federal Public Administration”.

Many other documents like decrees, reports and presentations are equally parsimonious in defining the objectives, purpose, and reason for the existence of PAC. They usually articulate ideas such as: strategic planning, the renewal of planning and investment in structuring sectors and large-scale projects, overcoming infrastructure bottlenecks, acceleration of the economic growth rate, expansion of employment and income levels, and the reduction of social and regional inequalities. From 2009 onwards, two years after it was launched, PAC formal communications also started to refer to the Program as an anti-cyclic instrument that face up to the impacts of the international financial crisis.

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<sup>8</sup> The decree and the various other normative instruments concerning the PAC can be accessed at: <http://www.pac.gov.br/sobre-o-pac/leis-pac>.

In addition to instituting PAC and its purpose, Decree nº 6.025 established its basic organizational structure consisting of two formal management spheres and a monitoring and information management system. Figure 1 shows the structures, processes and arrangements that characterize PAC.

In compliance with the provisions of the Decree, PAC is monitored and supervised by a PAC Administrative Committee (*Comitê Gestor do Programa de Aceleração do Crescimento* - CGPAC) subordinated to the Presidency of the Republic and its aim is to coordinate whatever actions are needed to achieve Program implementation and execution. The CGPAC is composed of the head of the Civil Office of the Presidency, the Minister of Planning, Budget and Management, and the Minister of Finance. When PAC was created in 2007, the Civil Office was in charge of coordinating the Administrative Committee, but in 2011 this responsibility was transferred to the Ministry of Planning, Budget and Management<sup>9</sup>. In addition to the participation of the government's main coordinating bodies, subject to the agenda of the meeting, other ministers may take part in the CGPAC's meetings. The Committee's mission is the overall management of the process based on the analysis of monitoring reports. It is also responsible for alerting the Presidency of the Republic of the need to make decisions, whenever necessary.

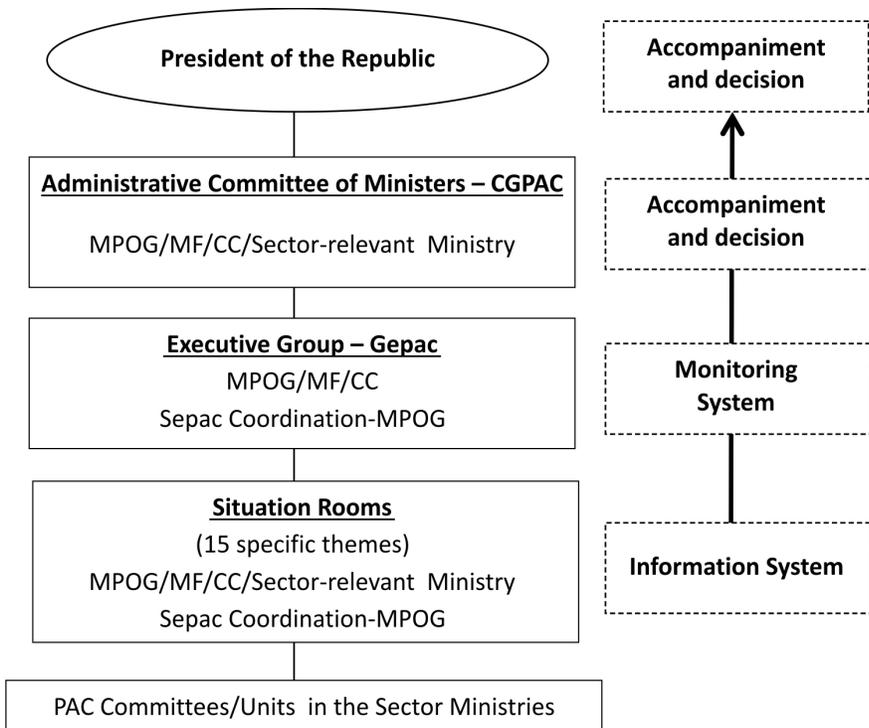
The PAC Executive Group (*Grupo Executivo do Programa de Aceleração do Crescimento* – Gepac) is subordinated to the Administrative Committee and its purpose is to consolidate Program actions, establish specific objectives and monitor the results of Program implementation and execution. The Gepac is made up of the heads of the following departments and government bodies: a) Growth Acceleration Program Department (Sepac), Federal Budget Department (SOF) and Department for Strategic Planning and Investment (SPI), part of the Ministry of Planning, Budget and Management; b) the deputy head of the Articulation and Monitoring (SAM) at the Civil Office of the Presidency of the Republic, and c) National

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<sup>9</sup> At the beginning of the PAC-2, Decree nº 6.025 was revised and given the new reading determined by Decree nº 7.470 of 2011, which transferred the coordination of the PAC from the Civil Office to the Ministry of Planning, Budget and Management (MPOG) with the creation of the Growth Acceleration Program Department within that ministry (*Secretaria do Programa de Aceleração do Crescimento* - Sepac).

Treasury Department (STN), Economic Policy Department (SPE), and Economic Accompaniment Department (Seae), at the Ministry of Finance. The Sepac/MPOG takes on the role of Gepac Executive Secretariat.

**Figure 1: Institutional Design of the PAC**



Source: Elaborated by the author based on public presentations of the Sepac team

The Decree also instituted the PAC monitoring system which was originally run by the SAM in the Civil Office. From 2011 onwards, it was transferred to the Ministry of Planning, Budget and Management and the Sepac was endowed with the statutory powers to: a) support the process for defining the objectives of the projects integrated to the Program; b) monitor and evaluate the results, and c) produce PAC management information.

PAC monitoring is based mainly on what is referred to as “situation rooms”. They consist of meetings (usually monthly) convened by the Sepac operators responsible for the corresponding thematic areas.

Participants are usually representatives of the ministries responsible for the projects of the specific area in question and of other federal bodies that influence their execution in some way (such as those involved in socio-environmental licensing processes or financial intermediation, state corporations, regulatory boards and so on), in addition to representatives of central government bodies such as the Civil Office, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Planning, Budget and Management. The situation rooms are dedicated to discussing the execution of PAC projects, that is, the physical and financial progress of the public works, monitoring of schedules, the evolution of processes (normative processes, legal, technical and organizational reference frameworks), mitigation actions, and any restrictions to execution. Thus, the mechanism basically operates in the identification of unresolved issues and the measures that need to be taken to resolve them. In many cases, the dialogue among the various bodies and agencies in the situation rooms, mediated by the Sepac, is enough to produce the agreements and solutions that are supportive to the progress of a venture. In some occasions, however, no consensus is achieved so the search for a solution needs to be forwarded to higher echelons, firstly to the Gepac and, if necessary, to the ministers themselves (CGPAC).

Having periodic Situation Room meetings and monitoring PAC works support the compilation of balance sheets every four months. Every four months, those that work with PAC within the sphere of the Sepac and the relevant ministries are mobilized to obtain information from a variety of sources, analyze their consistency and synthesize them for broad dissemination to the public. Thus, the publication of PAC balance sheets enables global systematization and analysis of investments and it also supports accountability.

Finally, the monitoring that is undertaken also meets the demand for information. These are requests for information on the financial evolution of the projects, the impacts of the works and the progress of specific works/projects. Many of such requests come from the Presidency of the Republic, from the Congress, from government bodies dedicated to control and inspection and from the press. The information to be supplied is either

available in Sepac's systems<sup>10</sup> or stems from situation rooms or involves specific demands made to the executing agents.

In addition to the structures and routines that the Sepac mobilizes, the way PAC functions includes a set of administrative units, processes and routines based on other government sectors responsible for conducting and supervising the work. Thus, in addition to meeting the Sepac's demands for information, contributing to the compilation of PAC balance sheets and taking an active part in the Situation Rooms, the sector-based bodies also perform tasks related to the work execution.

In that regard, the performance of sector-based bodies in project management will be strongly conditioned to whether project execution is direct or indirect<sup>11</sup>. Works that are directly executed are those where federal government bodies conduct the main processes to ensure their materialization. In other words, federal government bodies themselves are responsible for the planning, study, authorizations and concessions, competitive bidding processes, contract management and management of relations with the private sector, socio-environmental licensing and other regulations associated with social protection, monitoring, in addition to dealing with the control and inspection of projects conducted by the state's control bodies (CGU, TCU, MPU etc.). On the other hand, when a project is indirectly executed, these activities are the responsibility of a variety of bodies in the state and municipal governments and the role of the federal government is then to stimulate, finance and monitor the actions of sub-national governments. Those differences affect not only the kinds of actors that interact with sector-based bodies, but also the focus of their

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<sup>10</sup> The Sepac uses three main systems: the Sispac, the SGI and the SAM. Various sector-based bodies have their own monitoring systems.

<sup>11</sup> For the purposes of this article it was decided to use the terminology "direct or indirect execution" just as the PAC operators do. However, it must be noted that according to the Brazilian Law governing competitive bidding processes (*Lei de Licitações* Nº 8.666/1993), the correct terminology is "execução própria" that is, executed by the body itself, or "execução por terceiros", that is, executed by third parties. In fact, under the first heading falls not just direct execution carried out by the government body itself (as if the employees of the Roads and Highways Department actually built the road), but also those that are indirectly involved in contracted works (the Department contracts a company to build a road). Thus, execution by third parties is referred to the state and municipal governments or to other entities.

monitoring management actions. For example, in the case of construction of huge hydroelectric plants, the execution of the work is done directly by the federal government, and so it is the Ministry of Mines and Energy that will be directly involved in conducting the execution of the venture, managing contracts with the private sector, interacting with all the other federal government bodies involved and monitoring the progress of the works. Within the sphere of the Ministry of the Cities, in contrast, there are many examples of indirect execution of ventures, so in those cases it is up to the federal government to establish partnership and collaboration arrangements with sub-national governments, make financing feasible, and monitor the execution, which is often done by the Federal Savings Bank (*Caixa Econômica Federal*). Nevertheless, planning, contracting and managing such works (for example, the BRT system) are the responsibility of state or municipal government bodies<sup>12</sup>.

In both cases it is the responsibility of the sector-relevant bodies to take basic measures necessary for the venture to develop and to conduct the primary execution. As an example, according to the staff from the Ministry of Mines and Energy, they are entirely responsible for managing the relationship with contracted entities (mostly from the private sector or the Eletrobras Group), from the competitive bidding process to the daily management of contracts. Contacts with entrepreneurs are usually made on a monthly basis, and they generate information regarding the status of work (physical and financial progress), forecasts of when the work will be concluded and when the project will go operational. In the case of the Ministry of the Cities, the management and monitoring of projects that are under the aegis of states and municipalities are the responsibility of the Federal Savings Bank, which gathers information *in loco* (percentage of physical and financial execution, measurements and the situation of the work in question). Should any problems be identified in the projects, an

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<sup>12</sup> The difference between direct execution and indirect execution ventures also affects the articulation, coordination and monitoring done by the Sepac. While in the former the Sepac has direct access to all the bodies and entities involved in executing the works, in the latter it has to mobilize intermediary operators to gain access and manage actions with states and municipalities. In the area of urban policy that role has been performed by the Federal Savings Bank.

Integrated Management Group is set up in the form of a videoconference amongst Ministry of the Cities staff members, personnel of the Federal Savings Bank in Brasilia and in locations where works are being carried out, proponents (sub-national governments) and the contracted companies.

Thus, in addition to accompanying and monitoring works, PAC operators situated in the sector-related government bodies have to directly handle technical, bureaucratic and legal aspects. According to one civil servant from the Ministry of National Integration, their daily rounds involve activities that are related to engineering, supervision and evaluation of works being undertaken. It also involves instructing processes – in other words, carrying out the protocol required by legislation, the formal and process-related requirements of public resource management. “Because we are subject to oversight bodies who are going to check whether these procedures are being followed, and this takes up a lot of our time”. (Interview 13)

In various cases such as those of the Ministry of Mines and Energy, the Ministry of National Integration and the Ministry of the Cities, internal executive or management committees have been set up in order to aggregate and systematize the information produced by ministries responsible for specific processes (competitive bidding processes, contract management, transfers, agreements, in addition to technical areas) for direct communication with Sepac.

A superficial examination of the PAC’s institutional arrangements such as the synthesis in Figure 1 suggests that it is based on a formal structure and organization for government articulation and coordination that is both simple and familiar, involving top-level collegiate entities combined with technical thematic groups in interfaces with sector-based entities. Several other experiences in Brazil’s recent past, which mobilized similar arrangements, were notably unsuccessful or only partially successful. In some cases, those arrangements were transformed into mere bureaucratic routines and the participants viewed themselves as mere executor of formal duties. In other cases, they imploded in the light of conflicts, divergences and tensions amongst government entities. Other arrangements never even became concrete practices, remaining as mere intentions set out in official documents.

So the question that arises is: what is the explanation for the apparent success and smooth functioning of PAC? How did PAC build its “practical authority”<sup>13</sup> to deal with the centrifugal vectors of the Brazilian political-institutional environment? In other words, which elements mediate the transposition of this formal structure into concrete practices and daily rounds recognized and respected by the agents that make up its complex institutional environment?

Obviously one important element that cannot fail to be considered is the political support for the Program and its centrality in the last two governments (2007 to 2014) – an aspect that was underscored in the narratives of those that were interviewed and one that is widely acknowledged. The Federal Government’s prioritization of PAC has most certainly contributed towards channeling funds and attention to it in a different way from that afforded to other programs<sup>14</sup>. The classic literature on implementation (*e.g.* PRESSMAN; WILDAVSKY, 1972), however, has shown that prioritizing a program is not sufficient on its own to guarantee that it will be executed satisfactorily or that the desired results will be obtained. In addition to that kind of formal signaling by government leaders, it has been observed that the prioritized nature of the PAC is present in the more operational sphere in the way that the Program’s operators perceive and understand the Program and habitually act in its name. It is argued that this dimension of analysis is essential to gaining an understanding of PACs effectiveness. This will be the focus of the next two sections.

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<sup>13</sup> In the case of institutions like the PAC, the construction of effectiveness or the capacity to influence requires both a combination of status and formal capacities, which are defined by law and by the entity’s institutional insertion – and its acknowledgement on the part of the actors and organizations with which it interacts directly or indirectly. That combination of formal capacities and institutional recognition constitutes what Abers and Keck (2013) refer to as “practical authority”. That is to say, the power to influence others, which is constituted in practice by means of interactions, communication strategies and inter-institutional penetration.

<sup>14</sup> A simple comparison of infrastructure projects that are similar but differ in regard to their inclusion or non inclusion in the PAC reveals the important effect of PAC prioritization in terms of political attention, financial resources etc.

## **The PAC in action 1: the operators' perceptions of its purposes and functions**

One essential step towards gaining an understanding of how formal institutions are translated into concrete actions and their impacts on the interactions amongst actors that are subject to them is to identify the ways those actors perceive and understand the aforementioned institutions, the reason for their existence, their purpose and their functions. Therefore, the first stage of our attempt to understand PAC is an analysis of the way Program operators perceive it.

Some of the report of PAC operators drew attention to the economic aspect of its objectives<sup>15</sup> – the idea of a strategic plan to accelerate economic growth rate by means of investments and the elimination of infrastructure bottlenecks in consonance with legal and regulatory acts that guarantee its formal existence. However, a systematic examination of the material gathered during interviews showed that those expressions only reveal part of the objectives and functions attributed to the Program by those directly involved in its construction and operation.

PAC operators underscored with great emphasis the political-institutional aspects that justified its creation and maintenance, the most outstanding being the articulation and coordination of government actions attributed to PAC, which leads to the ideas of monitoring, establishing priorities and dynamism.

According to the narratives analyzed, articulation and monitoring of government action were central objectives of PAC right from the start.

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<sup>15</sup> The analysis of the narratives of people that had taken part in the creation of the PAC made it clear that by the end of President Lula's first mandate, government circles considered that the previous years have been successful in terms of the progress achieved by various social policies but the sustainability of the development model called for a second boost involving the expansion of infrastructure investments, which have been waning steadily since the 1980s. Present day PAC operators in the Sepac and in the sector-based bodies reinforce the perception that "the overriding goal of the program is to strengthen national infrastructure" (Interview 2) by recuperating "a series of infrastructure works that had been thought about or planned at some moment in the history of the country, but many of which had never been executed; they had been put off or shelved" (Interview 14); and providing guaranteed investment to overcome the lack of continuity in such projects – the investment hiccups – that prevailed in the preceding decades (Interview 15)

According to a former PAC 1 staff member who took part in its creation at the beginning of President Lula's second term:

"The Civil Office has concentrated on the role of coordinating the government's internal actions<sup>16</sup>. In that sense, the SAM was created to oversee strategic projects (...) to monitor it (...) to be a facilitator in the articulation of those programs. Because, more often than not, a strategic program, since it is so big, is not a monothematic or mono-ministerial program, if I can put it that way. It ends up involving more than one government body, directly or indirectly, doesn't it? So our role was to facilitate that articulation" (Interview 10)<sup>17</sup>.

That overall orientation has been maintained right through to the present day. According to one Sepac operator, "our job is to monitor and coordinate. That is the main reason for the PAC Department's existence" (Interview 5). Thus it is clear the PAC, in addition to its economic purposes, is also an attempt to react to challenges posed by the Brazilian political-institutional environment, which impede infrastructure policy implementation. It proposes to build mechanisms for communication, articulation and coordination amongst the various actors involved, produce complementariness and reduce existing contradictions among the state's various segments.

The narratives show that one of PAC's central objectives is to foster the articulation and coordination of actions amongst the different ministries associated with the area of infrastructure. Since Lula's second administration, the ministries of Transport, Mines and Energy, Cities and National Integration have no longer been occupied by people indicated by the Brazilian Labor Party (*Partido dos Trabalhadores* – PT) but rather by parties that agreed to be part of the Lula and Dilma governments, which

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<sup>16</sup> Whereas the Institutional Relations Department (*Secretaria de Relações Institucionais* - SRI) took over the political coordination part, the relations with political parties, parliamentarians governors and mayors.

<sup>17</sup> The team that eventually came to make up the SAM had already been working with intensive monitoring experiments such as the so-called "presidential goals" during the first mandate (2003 to 2006) and later (2005) with the Investments Pilot Project (*Projeto Piloto de Investimentos*-PPI), in addition to other experiences towards the end of the FHC administration (such as the Brazil in Action and Forward Brazil Plans), all directed at getting better results and involving computerized monitoring systems.

are not necessarily closely aligned with the directives of the Presidency of the Republic. Thus, one of PAC's functions, as stated by a Sepac operator, is:

“to ensure that whatever is being decided in the ministries, whatever is going to be implemented, is in alignment with the directives issued by the Presidency and the council of ministers concerning investments... (...)... and to promote that alignment amongst public policies while at the same time collecting the most reliable and updated information that comes in from those ministries' investments and even from the proponents, isn't it?... from the states, from the municipalities.... to go back to the decision-making, so that they can smooth out the wrinkles, right? ... up there at the highest level, directly with the presidency and with the ministers”. (Interview 6)

Thus, the PAC provides the government's central decision-making nucleus with some degree of control over the actions of its political partners, at least in regard to the contents and intensive monitoring of projects, because the decision as to whether or not a project will be part of the PAC is made by the council of ministers. The ministers are still able to run their own projects and present their own proposals but, as another Sepac operator has declared, “[the PAC] blocks decisions that we might consider, shall we say, not very republican, right? (...) you can make the government move towards a specific public policy project, at least at the infrastructure area, endow this kind of vision of the country with coherence”. (Interview 5)

In a similar way, in regard to the problem of federative articulations, the PAC fosters greater convergence of those actions in consonance with the government's directives.

“So, on the one hand, you have this coordination structure and, on the other, you have the ministry with its public policy, but then you also have the states and municipalities ...they turn to the ministry for support, or calling for investments and they also have access to the other ministers and even to the Presidency... so, on one side, we work with the coordination structure, which tells us what needs to be done, the government's directive that needs to be followed, how to do it, what to analyze...” (Interview 6).

Finally, in regard to the area representing the tensions in the relations between those bodies charged with executing the policies, on the one hand,

and those bodies responsible for auditing, controlling and guaranteeing rights, on the other, PAC seems to respond to the challenge by acting as a counterweight to the tendency to fragmentation and stalemates. A Sepac operator has revealed that:

“we have innumerable internal interactions among government bodies, don’t we? And we also interact with other bodies outside the sphere of government administration such as the Federal Court of Accounts ...we have innumerable interactions here on the inside, the relations with Funai ... and that interlocution process, it works a little as if it were oiling the mechanism, making it all work in a more integrated manner... so in that way, PAC ends up helping the government as a whole to function in a more integrated way, insofar as the administration is becoming an increasingly complex and more systemic structure. PAC works as a part of the mechanism that ensures that the system does not become a mere collection of various isolated micro-systems. Instead, it creates a process of internal integration”. (Interview 7)

Given that, in the eyes of its operators, PAC seems to be a strategy for articulating and coordinating government actions in the political and administrative spheres, it manages to represent and work on behalf of the government’s vision and priorities. One of those interviewed from the Ministry of Mines and Energy stated that “the moment our chief, our president says ‘look, we understand this to be a priority’ then all those that are part of that government treat it as if it were a priority” (Interview 2).

In a similar way, PAC operators in the relevant sectors underscored that the entire internal coordination and articulation process contributes to the creation and communication of priority actions for the government as a whole. An interviewee from the Ministry of National Integration has declared that:

“It introduces credibility so that those works that have been selected, the priority works, are seen as being the government’s main works contributing to the country’s development, and that arouses interest in ensuring that they are in fact carried out. (...) Formerly, there was no such certainty as to the interest in seeing a work executed... so, there was always a doubt; there could be unforeseen restrictions, budget difficulties, financial difficulties and so on... but PAC has managed to overcome all of that”. (Interview 13)

An interviewee from the Ministry of Cities has stated that:

“in all government bodies and agencies, there is great respect for PAC (...) so such a close attention on the part of a Minister of the Civil Office and then a Minister of Planning, it really does attribute importance to the policy in question, it shows all civil servants the importance that is being attributed to that policy, right?”. (Interview 15)

The perception of those agents placed in sector-based bodies adds to the understanding of operators of Sepac itself, for whom PAC is:

“a program that represents the government’s vision... a vision held by the government as a whole ... the PAC breaks the logic of “ah, the project... the Ministry of Mines and Energy’s priorities... the Ministry of Cities ‘ priorities... the priorities of this, that or the other ministry... what we have are the government’s priorities ... that makes the Esplanade [of Ministries] and government bodies and so on understand that the execution of their projects is better when the projects are integrated to that vision”. (Interview 7)

Finally there is another meaning attributed to PAC by its operators and it is directly linked to those ideas of articulation, coordination and prioritization. It has to do with the dynamism, streamlining and fast tracking of government processes. Most of the informants mentioned this aspect, but it appeared more strongly and intensely defined in the narratives of the staff of those sector ministries that interact simultaneously with projects inserted in the PAC and others that do not have access to its ‘benefits’.

“Any project that is included in the PAC gains some advantages, right? What happens? All the interactions we need to have with other government bodies in regard to projects that are not in the PAC, we have to conduct them directly with each one of them... it’s a direct negotiation with each entity involved. When you have a project that is included in the PAC, you have the Ministry of Planning as an additional intermediary; but not to get in the way or interfere, but instead to mediate, to help (...) the great advantage introduced by PAC has been this issue of dynamism. Because I sit down at a table together with all the agents involved, with the other autarchies, other government agencies, for us to sit down and try to find the next step forwards; to sit down together and discuss (...) in the case of the electricity sector, as I said, we already had our own planning, our own monitoring system, so what did PAC have to offer us? The PAC brought us agility, celerity”. (Interview 2)

Even though the normative acts and official documents are markedly dedicated to the economic objectives of investments in infrastructure, the narratives of PAC's operators reveal that the Program has other functions that are just as important, namely that of articulation and coordination in the highly complex political-institutional context in which infrastructure project management currently takes place in Brazil. Thus, the PAC can be understood as a program not only dedicated to accelerating growth, but above all to accelerating government actions, or, to be more specific, accelerating the multi-sector implementation of priority infrastructure projects.

## **The PAC in action 2: everyday interactions in an information network for monitoring and capacity building**

The analysis of the perceptions, meanings and ideas that PAC operators associate with the Program made it possible for us to broaden our current interpretations of the Program's purpose and objectives. Furthermore, we are getting closer to better understanding the practices of these actors who materialize the Program on an everyday basis. The presupposition is that the ways in which actors perceive an institution influences their practices with regard to it and that, reciprocally, their practices constitute the meanings and understandings attributed to the institutions (BEVIR; RHODES, 2010).

For that reason, the analysis of PAC operators' practical performance could potentially offer elements that would allow for an understanding as to how the Program works that goes beyond what can be extracted from an analysis of its formal arrangements. To that end, however, it is necessary to penetrate the arrangement described in section 2 and search for the human resources and the inter-relations that are established inside of it.

The Sepac structure is organized in the following way. At the top level there is the head of the Department, subordinated to the Minister of Planning, Budget and Management, and his or hers closest advisors. There are then five directors (four dedicated to thematic areas of infrastructure

and one dedicated to information and system management). On average, there are two general coordinators in each directorate, each with two technical assistants. The vast majority (around 90%) of those occupying such posts at Sepac are career civil servants, most of them coming from careers in federal public administration such as Planning and Budget Officers, Public Policies and Government Administration Experts, and Infrastructure Officers. However, there are also permanent government employees drawn from state-owned enterprises and from state and municipal governments. Recruitment is continuous and highly selective insofar as Sepac has priority in selecting those it intends to keep for itself. The selection process involves curriculum analysis and interviews, on the basis of which an attempt is made to identify civil servants that are “capable and available (time)” to handle the pressures of the daily round<sup>18</sup> and setting highest value on the candidates’ relational skills. According to an interviewee attached to Sepac, “the selection process focuses on the ability to stitch [people and agreements] together because specific technical knowledge is readily available in the sector based entities” (Interview 6).

Inside the sector ministries, the units specifically dedicated to PAC project management have a variety of different recruitment processes according to the nature of the government body involved. There is however a visible tendency to the occupation of director and coordinator positions by federal civil servants, especially those in the career of Infrastructure Officer or originating from state corporations or other entities associated to them.

However, apart from the basic characteristics of those human resources populating PAC’s institutional structures, what do those operators do and how do they construct and effectuate the Program in their everyday round of implementation?

From the systematic analysis of the interview material and the notes taken during *in loco* observations, an interpretation of PAC operators’

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<sup>18</sup> According to the narratives, the information disseminated for Sepac selection process emphasizes that “the work will be hard and the candidate needs to be prepared to respond to the crack of the whip” (Entrevista 6), as a way of screening for candidates disposed to perform under pressure, for long hours and with great dedication. That same aspect was mentioned by many of the interviewees as responsible for the high turnover rate among the Sepac personnel.

performance in their daily round has emerged<sup>19</sup>. It suggests that those agents perform like nodes of an information network for monitoring and capacity building purposes. This last descriptive term represents three elements that are central to any attempt to understand the PAC's everyday operation:

(a) the idea of a network evokes the importance of personal interactions, which actually transcend the organizational frontiers inside the government structure and do not necessarily respect hierarchic structures and protocols so typical of the federal bureaucracy;

(b) the presence of the term 'information' represents the primordial objective of the interactions among the horizontal agents (government bodies) and upwards on the vertical axis even as high as the Committee of Ministers and the Presidency of the Republic;

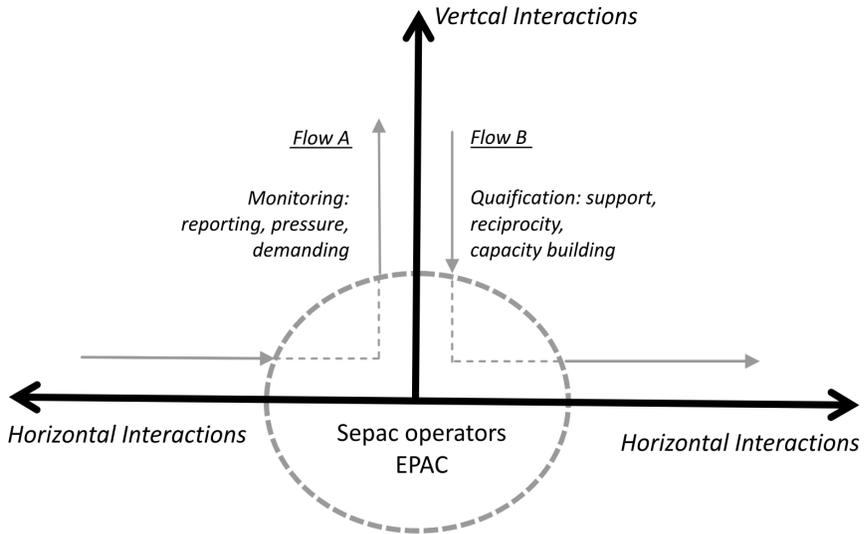
(c) lastly, the ideas of 'monitoring' and 'capacity building' refer to the purpose and utility of the information exchanged in the network in its vertical and horizontal axes.

Figure 2 illustrates those interactions and information flows and situates PAC operators at the intersection of a whole set of lateral and vertical interactions. As shown below, they function as links that intermediate the information flows between those perpendicular axes of government concerning their sector dynamics and the central decision-making nucleus. Indeed, the operators refer to themselves as "monitors" and "articulators" and to their mission as "making the wheels turn". To that end, they spend most of their time in meetings and communicating by e-mail and telephone, identifying problems and obstacles that hinder project execution and contributing towards finding solutions and measures to be taken to make implementation feasible.

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<sup>19</sup> Given the absence of any formal conduct code or protocol defining the expected or desired forms of action and behavior, it was surprising to note how much convergence the analysis of the empirical material revealed in the PAC operators' discourses and narratives about the way they performed their jobs.

**Figure 2: PAC operators at the center of horizontal and vertical information flows and interactions**



Source: elaborated by the author

As explained by two Sepac operators, a man and a woman respectively:

“we use that ability a lot... that need to coordinate, set up situation rooms, identify the main problems, demand an accounting for progress... when there is no progress, what are the problems that we can help with in some way.... when there is a need to involve various bodies we call on them, acting as a kind of filter to try to get ahead”. (Interview 8)

“The Sepac, in the Ministry of Planning, does not execute anything ... we do not execute any public work... we do not contract anybody or anything. What we do is monitoring and accompanying, articulating the projects that are being executed by other ministries or by state corporations or private companies ... our role is to ensure that the work is executed in the best way possible, with due respect for all the procedures (such as socio-environmental licensing) and with the participation of all the government entities involved ... our role is mainly that of an articulator, of examining the conflicts that arise between the interests of the project executor and the various government bodies involved, or any other kind of problem” (Interview 14).

As can be seen in Figure 2, laterally (on the horizontal axis), Sepac operators are in constant interaction with all the other PAC operators located in the various ministries and in those bodies that regulate, control and condition state's actions. They usually interact with people holding the posts of director or general coordinator who are responsible for aggregating and systematizing information on PAC projects they are executing. In regard to other government bodies, the Sepac operators perform a kind of meta-monitoring insofar as it is the responsibility of the sector ministries themselves to execute the projects (bidding processes, contract management, works supervision, etc.) and to produce basic information for monitoring them and the responsibility of the other bodies to conduct the authorization and control procedures (concessions, licensing, auditing, etc.).

Those lateral interactions amongst PAC operators (situated in Sepac and in all the other bodies involved in PAC projects) take place on a daily basis and are part of a daily routine of meetings and contacts via telephone and e-mail. Two Sepac operators commented on those interactions:

“we talk to each other every day, sometimes 3 or 4 times a day. Some days are calmer than others with not much going on, but even then I call my contacts at least once in the morning and once in the afternoon ‘So how is it? Everything alright? Any problem? Is there any particular project that needs attention?’ (Interview 3)

“we have this constant routine ... for example in the case of the [government entity], it is weekly. We established a regular exchange of information every Friday. They send in a presentation showing the status of all the works, the situation of all the [type of work] ... and any changes for the week in the projects” (Interview 8)

At the apex of the lateral interactions are the so-called ‘situation room’ meetings. These are a set of meetings, usually on a monthly basis, coordinated by Sepac operators and involving only the PAC operators from other ministries and from the entities responsible for regulating and controlling State actions and ensuring respect for human rights. They are held by thematic areas, that is, for each thematic area of PAC activity (energy, petroleum and natural gas; urban mobility; water resources; ports and airports, for example) there is a routine of specific meetings involving

those government bodies directly involved with the projects being unfolded in each area. The result of the thematic specialization is that each Situation Room has its own peculiarities according to the nature of the entities involved and the nature of project execution (direct or indirect).

Generally speaking, however, such meetings are very much like a meeting of executives come together to discuss, one by one, each project of their particular thematic area. The discussions involve updating and checking information on the situation of the respective works, identifying problems and obstacles in their execution and identifying measures to be taken and solutions to make implementation feasible. The meeting takes place on the initiative of the Sepac operators who conduct and act as mediators. When it begins, all participants take up their spreadsheets, reports, text markers and computers containing the information on each project that their respective organizations are responsible for. From then on, PAC operators from the various ministries discuss the progress of each project while displaying on screen systematized information gathered as part of the corresponding situations and pointing out what they consider to be obstacles to project execution. The latter are often procedures (e.g. authorizations and concessions granted by the regulatory boards, socio-environmental licensing, liberation of funding and financial and accounting flows, interference with or from other projects or areas of the government, and others) that are the responsibility of government bodies with representatives present at the meeting, in addition to questions concerning the private enterprise involved (such as changes of scope or schedules, contract management). After that, Sepac operators ask the bodies involved to clarify the issues identified and the latter present the situation from their perspective, describing the situation of processes and explaining the possible reasons for delays and difficulties which generally involve document flows, manifestations, proofs and studies, but which may also include scarcity of human or financial resources, legal problems etc. From then on, agreements are established between the parties involved with regard to document processing, response time, and processes and solutions are defined to overcome the difficulties

identified. The meeting then turns into a discussion of the next project and so on until all the agenda items have been addressed, which may take three or four hours or even a whole day. In most cases, solutions and steps forward are found that make it possible to 'unblock' the process of project execution. Given that all those present in the Room hold positions as directors and general coordinators of their respective organizations, they are all empowered to make decisions or take other issues directly to their superiors (something that often happens in the course of the meeting itself). So, the interactions of these middle-level bureaucrats make it possible to quickly and flexibly arrive at agreements and decide on measures to be taken by the professionals present at the meeting who also show a propensity for taking part in the discussions on the more technical aspects of project management<sup>20</sup>.

Thus, the Situation Rooms have the aspect of a cordial environment for lateral interaction among middle-level agents of various organizations, but, nevertheless, involving visible latent tensions amongst the bodies defending their jurisdictions and prerogatives, but with the potential for defining practical steps in the form of collaborative actions directed at making project execution flow properly. One operator located in the Ministry of Mines and Energy has declared that:

When we sit down with the Sepac people, there are round-table discussions, the people are those in positions of command, they are directors of their institutions and their institutions are in alignment with the government's objective, that is the prioritization of these projects. Tensions continue to exist, right? They do not suddenly stop existing. At no time can you overlook the technical work, the technical work is fundamental... it has its own characteristics... and the technical professional has his or her own vision too, but he/she, knowing, as he/she does, what the directors of each institution are thinking and understanding it to be a priority, he/she must address the subject, he/she is going to try and show them 'no, this cannot be done as it is, but it could be done in another way.'" (Interview 2)

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<sup>20</sup> In the situation room meetings the intense dialogues have a strong technical content mobilizing very specific engineering concepts and procedures and using acronyms and citing legislation, processes and reports that are not readily accessible to anyone without specific qualifications in that area.

To that end, the role of mediation and articulation performed by the Sepac operators is essential<sup>21</sup>. As one of them said:

“it’s very much like this, having the skill to really understand the position of each entity, how each one has its own legal attributions, its own area of competence, and trying to respect the position of each one of them... but also trying to arrive at some point of convergence, which in the end is the progress of project execution. So, sometimes the entrepreneur carries out an environmental impact study and the study is poorly done or it is incomplete, or something like that, and he hands it in to the environmental authority and that authority says ‘look, with this study I cannot issue an official position’. So, we definitely cannot force that body to issue a complete technical opinion that it would not feel comfortable about issuing. So we call the entrepreneur and say ‘look, do you really want to get this contract? Because if you do, then you had better conduct a proper study’”. (Interview 14)

In the course of time, this routine of continuous (virtual and live) lateral interactions leads to the establishment of a network of personal relations that are very different from the impersonal character that usually typifies institutional relations. Because they involve reiterated exchanges of information that are essential for monitoring and decision-making, those relations gradually become transformed into bonds of trust. The operators come to know whom they can count on and depend on to find solutions for urgent demands. This was narrated by one Sepac operator as follows:

“Sometimes we have an urgent demand, sometimes the minister or the president needs information fast. We can’t manage to talk to them [administrators in the sector-related ministries] so I make a call directly to the area, I call [the autarchy associated to the sector orientated ministry] directly. Because of the Situation Room meetings we end up getting to know the technical team, so I am already much closer to them and so I know precisely whom I need to call.” (Interview 3)

In addition to speeding up access to information, this network of personal contacts cuts across political relations, overcoming possible

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<sup>21</sup> In a study analyzing highway construction in Sweden, Johansson (2012) identified a situation similar to the one observed in the PAC. The middle-level bureaucrats performed as promoters of dialogue and negotiation involving other central government bodies, municipal authorities and local society, in an endeavor to forge agreements that would avoid aggravating tensions and make project implementation feasible.

divergences and the instability that stems from changes in the political superiors in sector-based government bodies. Several of the Sepac staff interviewed spoke about having recourse to their network of contacts, often involving technical teams and civil servants in the ministries in their efforts to avoid tensions, stalemates or delays imposed by top level administrators and managers occupying their posts through political nomination<sup>22</sup>. One example cited by a Sepac operator was when he needed to deal with a Head of Department of a sector-based ministry who made it very clear that all he was worried about was to maintain himself in the post he had been appointed to and with the progress of projects in his own area of political influence. After a while, however, the operator managed to establish close relations of trust with the technical team of that department (career civil servants) and obtain exchanges of information that were invaluable for monitoring PAC projects without having recourse to the minister or the head of the department.

That kind of situation underscores how important personal relations are for the smooth running of the Program. Again, in regard to changes in the upper echelons of the sector-based ministries, a Sepac operator has declared:

“for example, recently there was a change of minister at the [name of the ministry] and all the heads of departments were changed, but in that case you know whom to turn to if you want more reliable information. The person that is very strong politically is only there to play the role set out for him by the party... so when we need more technical information, we seek out some other person, someone we already know to be more trustworthy”. (Interview 8)

Thus, this network of personal relations is all the more relevant because it overrides the formal protocols and structures of the usual relationship amongst bureaucracies. While it is reasonable to suppose that repeated interactions among bureaucrats in any sector, area or policy fosters personal relations that facilitate cooperation, in the case of PAC operations

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<sup>22</sup> Examples of such tensions, stalemates and delays are refusal to supply information requested by Sepac operators, or supplying incomplete or wrong information or supplying information after the expiry of the period allotted for its supply, all of which jeopardize Sepac’s monitoring activities.

that aspect plays a role of fundamental importance and becomes an asset that can be mobilized to promote agility in the information flows and for the assessment of credibility and trust amongst the interlocutors.

Finally, in addition to their instrumental utility, these networks of personal contacts reveal the aspect of socialization and humanization of the institutional environment where normally one would expect relations to be very impersonal. At the beginning of each situation room meeting, there is an atmosphere of fraternization as the participants take up conversations that began in the previous meeting, or chat about personal matters (family, trips, private property etc.). When I was introduced as a researcher-observer at one of the meetings, one of the ministry representative exclaimed “Welcome to the PAC family!”

Figure 2 shows that in addition to their lateral interactions, Sepac operators’ routines include vertical interactions as well. Vertically, they are in contact with the top authorities of the Ministry of Planning, Budget and Management (Head of the Sepac and the Minister) who coordinate the PAC Executive Group made up of Executive Secretaries and the Administrative Committee of the PAC, which in turn is made up of the ministers and also mobilizes the central decision-making nucleus of the Presidency of the Republic.

Those interactions ensure that information produced and transacted in the lateral interactions “goes up” to the higher echelon. When there is a problem or obstacle to the execution of projects, the ministry responsible for the project will be the first to try and solve it. If he or she is unsuccessful, the problem will be placed on the Situation Room agenda. If the Situation Room meetings are not sufficient to produce the necessary agreements or referrals, then it is up to the Sepac operators to take the problem to the Gepac a or even to the Administrative Committee (CGPAC). One of the Sepac operators underscored that aspect of seeing that the information “goes up” as being part of his everyday activities:

“my job is to monitor the referrals and routing and keep the minister and the Head of the Sepac fully informed about the situation of the projects and their problems. If we detect a very severe restriction, then we mark that project with a red stamp or a yellow one, as being

a source of concern and deserving immediate attention. Those are the works that we will be bringing up at the meeting with the ministers and heads of departments. There are some problems that our own monitoring cannot solve and so we take them up and put them in the hands of the ministers". (Interview 3)

Parallel to the channels among the Situation Rooms, the Gepac and the CGPAC established by the formal arrangement of the PAC, the vertical interactions are all the more intense because of an apparent relaxation of hierarchy in the relations between Sepac operators and their superiors, that is, the Head of the Sepac and the Minister of Planning, Budget and Management. The narratives of those interviewed for this research suggest that Sepac operators see themselves as very close to those at the very top of their organization whom they have direct access to via e-mail, phone calls or meetings. For many of them, this fact distinguishes their work from all their previous experience in other ministries, state corporations or other spheres of government. Here is how one Sepac operator sees it:

"In theory the usual flow would be the minister dispatches with the secretary, the secretary with the director, the director with the coordinator and so on... but here the situation is far more fluid and furthermore the secretary is heavily overburdened. So, it is quite common for the minister to contact the coordinator directly depending on the issue of interest or the specificity and availability of the information required. It often happens like this... a coordinator gets a call from the minister or takes part in a meeting with the minister and so on and we end up participating, taking part in the strategic discussions with ministers and secretaries right from the start [of the projects] and so we get a good overall vision of the decision-making process." (Interview 6)

Some of the interviewees attributed that fluidity in the hierarchical relations to the priority that PAC has received in the government and the fact that it is the center of attention of the ministers heading the central bodies of the Presidency of the Republic. Accordingly, great importance is attached to the agility of information flows in regard to project execution and that often calls for direct contact between ministers and their executive secretaries on the one hand and middle-level bureaucrats and their technical teams on the other. As a result, the intensity of the vertical interactions and their continuous access to the top echelons ends up empowering the

Sepac operators to conduct their functions of lateral articulations because they, the Sepac operators are, in effect, links with the government's central decision-making nucleus<sup>23</sup>.

Thus, being situated at the intersection of lateral and vertical interactions the Sepac operators dedicate themselves to fostering continuous information flows between the agents at the end-points of the two axes. The analysis of the interview narratives led us to perceive that the flows in question were in two directions each with different contents (See Figure 2): one has to do with monitoring and giving account (Flow A) and the other is one of capacity building and access to resources (Flow B). In the former case, the network of interactions that Sepac operators have with their articulators in the central bodies of government contributes to the intensive monitoring of government actions and mainly takes place in the form of demanding information on the situation of project execution from the lateral axis and reporting the problems and obstacles encountered to the superior echelons. In the second case, the flow is in the other direction whereby Sepac operators based on their access to the higher echelons contribute to building capacity and making support feasible to obtain a better performance of their activities on the part of their lateral interlocutors.

In the case of the monitoring flow (A), Sepac operators transmit the demands for information passed down by their superiors to their lateral interlocutors, which may take place in the Situation Room meetings or in the preparation of the four-monthly balance document or it may be in the form of extraordinary demands from the president or the minister for an update or specific information. One way or another, most of these operators' activities consist of demanding information and the demands are usually urgent. One PAC operator attached to a sector ministry has informed:

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<sup>23</sup> Another facet of this question of a more fluid hierarchy in the PAC administration is the pressure that is applied to the Sepac operators. While on the one hand the absence of rigidity in the hierarchical structure broadens access to the upper administrative levels, on the other it broadens the accountability of these bureaucrats for the information reported. That aspect was also mentioned in several of the narratives addressing negative aspects or difficulties faced by the Sepac operators.

“we have a good relationship with those people but it is actually very difficult. We often have to drop everything we are doing because the demand is always highly urgent, it can never wait for a week. So sometimes we have an internal demand from our own department, but then there is a demand from Sepac and we have to stop what we are doing and give priority to the Sepac information... and that can happen at any moment. Because they also receive a demand at any moment from the president or the minister or whoever... so it really messes up our daily work routine”. (Interview 9)

As the above report shows, these activities of demanding an account are naturally very uncomfortable for the person at the end of the accountability line, not only from the point of view of the disruption in the normal activities of the respective body, but also because the supplier of the information knows that the purpose of the Sepac demand and the information supply is to work up a report to be passed on to their superiors whenever there are problems, delays or deviations. One Sepac operator commented on the passing on of monitoring information to his superiors:

“so it is not easy, right? Because sometimes we have to play the nasty role of calling to account, of carrying information, of pointing a finger, take it to the Secretary ‘Look, this and that are not happening’; take it to the minister and then the minister calls up the sector minister to complain about whatever it was”. (Interview 8)

Given the fact that the monitoring information has consequences in the form of pressure and complaints from the central nucleus of the government, it is not surprising that Sepac operators encounter a certain degree of resistance to their demands on the part of their lateral interlocutors in other bodies involved in executing projects under the aegis of the PAC. The Sepac operators say that in order to handle it, at such moments:

“you need to know just when to be hard because while there are some people that know you are serious and whom you do not need to pressure too much, they make it work; but there are others with a tendency to conceal information, that find it difficult to respond when you make a demand”. (Interview 8)

However, intensifying the demands as a means of overcoming resistance runs up against another challenge for Sepac operators which

is that of maintaining those bonds of trust and good relations which they establish with their interlocutors in the sector ministries. As the informant whose following comments suggests, in various situations they need to find a way to soften their mandate as “government empowered information collectors” in the name of the sustainability of their lateral relations.

“we learn as we go along. There are times when you need to use a little emotional intelligence. You go to a meeting and browbeat everyone very hard then the time will come when you will destroy the relationship, and the others will stop passing on information, they will start to withhold information. So all in all, it’s a process of construction and it takes time.” (Interview 8)

The construction process referred to is not restricted to the vertical and lateral interactions that operate the monitoring flows. Parallel to them, there is another form of intermediation carried out by the Sepac operators and it too links the lateral and vertical axes with flows of capacity building (Flow B). This flow complements and combines directly with the monitoring activity. This was made very clear in the following declaration of a Sepac operator:

“When they realize that we actually want to help as well, and not just demand information for demanding’s sake, then things become easier. So, we demand a lot in Situation Room meetings, but then after a few days we call and ask ‘how is that project we spoke about doing? Why didn’t it take place? What is the problem? Do you need any help from us?’ So, then we use the capacity available in the Ministry of Planning to help out other areas ... we have to intervene, call up another department... we have to play a contributing role as well”. (Interview 8)

Those capacity building flows take place when Sepac operators take advantage of their access to the upper echelons (authorities in the Ministry of Planning, Budget and Management and in the Presidency of the Republic) to enable the realization of actions directed at strengthening the sector organizations’ response capacity. One Sepac operator put it this way:

“I think of it as an exchange. Just as we make demands on them, so we are also used by them as a channel for their demands to get through to the higher levels of authority, to the ministers”. (Interview 6)

Given the current political-institutional context marked by the existence of 39 ministries plus all the government agencies attached to

them and their distribution among different sectors, all of them at the same time demanding priority from the central nucleus of the government, interactions with actors capable of carrying their pleas to the highest spheres of government enabling decisions and communication becomes a very precious asset. Thus, the use of the words “exchange” and “channel” represent the way the (lateral) interlocutors in the sector bodies see the Sepac opportunities and elements capable of enabling their demands and appeals for support to be heard.

These demands and requests for support can be expressed in a) the administrative sphere, b) the normative production sphere or c) the form of advice on how to deal with the oversight and auditing bodies (especially the Federal Court of Accounts).

With regard to the first kind of support, in line with building management capacity, situations are identified in which the Sepac operators channel questions related to budgeting and financial resources, human resources and inter-agency communication. For example, the interviewees narrated situations in which they were mobilized by their lateral interlocutors to intermeditate on their behalf with the National Treasury for the liberation of pledges and payments of the installments due for some specific public works that required that kind of adjustment. In other cases, they took action in the sphere of the SOF and SPI to enable an increase in budget allocations in the light of changes that have been made in the scope of a project in question. Also, they narrated how they have merely been requested to open a line of communication with specific government bodies and agencies and to that end they convened meetings to enable those contacts to be established.

In the sphere of human resource management there are several examples. Whenever a lack of qualified personnel is identified as a factor jeopardizing the performance of sector bodies in the execution of a given infrastructure project (or in the conduction of regulatory and supervisory processes associated to it), Sepac operators take action to contribute towards obtaining the reallocation of staff or the holding of the appropriate public competitive civil service examinations, or the restructuring of the respective units. Several of the interviewees mentioned reallocations of

infrastructure officers carried out among different ministries and bodies to address demands for qualified personnel. Such technical professionals play an essential role in the execution of public works (contracting companies, contract management, inspection of the works etc.). Another frequently cited example concerned the Ibama, Iphan, ICMBio, and Funai, all of which recently ran civil service admission processes on a considerable scale. The approval of those processes was at least partly due to the demands transmitted by the performance of the PAC professionals. Finally, in other cases the intermediation of Sepac operators with the General Secretaries at the Ministry of Planning, Budget and Management was very obvious in the creation of units taking responsibility for accompanying processes and demands in regard to socio-environmental licensing involving the allocation of posts and technical staff to those bodies where they were lacking.

A second kind of support in regard to normative production was mentioned by some PAC operators (in the Sepac and in sector entities). In this case, Sepac operators took steps to ensure the production and alteration of regulatory norms of the Executive Branch (decrees, normative instructions, etc.). The idea is to remove normative obstacles to the execution of works, provide normative guidelines for administrative processes or for endowing the bodies involved with the necessary competencies to conduct enterprises in the sphere of the PAC. This kind of capacity building activity has proved to be highly relevant in some areas of the PAC that work with indirect project execution whereby the federal government finances and supervises the execution of the works in question, which are carried out by the states or municipalities. In these cases the normative acts regulate the procedures for contracting, fund transfers, schedules and inspection among the entities involved. Thus, constructing or altering the normative instructions can increase the capacity of the sector bodies to handle such enterprises/projects. For it to happen, however, Sepac operators need to intermediate the decisions which have to be made at the top level of government.

Finally, the third kind of support for capacity building that was identified concerns the advisory service Sepac offers to the control entities. Sepac has a specialized advisory group dedicated to accompanying

processes being addressed by the Federal Court of Accounts and the Office of the Comptroller General. Their purpose is to monitor the risks that the processes may be paralyzed or suspended thereby jeopardizing the ongoing execution of the projects. When requested, they also advise sector-based bodies on how to prevent and avoid such situations. In that way, Sepac is a bridge that links the TCU to the various enterprises being coordinated by the various departments and agencies of the Federal Executive Branch. Thus, Sepac can act as a partner to sector entities in specific cases, while at the same time transmitting preventive orientation in a more diffuse manner to the government as a whole. Furthermore, the advisory action contributes towards imparting a more general and integrated vision of government programs under the aegis of the PAC to the TCU itself.

As illustrated in Figure 2, apart from the formal arrangements and competencies, PAC should be seen as a set of interpersonal relations involving lateral and vertical interactions for transacting information that is used in monitoring the execution of public works and for incrementing the capacity of project executors.

It is in fact a “social-informational fabric or mesh” that is maintained for two main reasons. First, because of its ability to generate gains, advantages and benefits for the set of actors that engage in its dynamics. The cohesion of the mesh requires a high degree of cooperation amongst the lateral interlocutors (sector based bodies), who feed the mesh with a continuous, accelerated supply of information. In turn, their cooperation is often rewarded by facilitated access to political, financial, human and legal resources. In addition to those rewards, cooperation is considered an important element in achieving concrete results. After all, when a public works project is concluded on time and with the desired quality standard and can then be made available to the public, then there are gains all round, not only for the President and the Minister of Planning, but also for the ministers responsible for the respective sector who can capitalize their political image, for the technical staff who see their efforts bear fruit for society and their professional experience enriched and for the governors and mayors who have attracted capital investments to their territories.

When asked about what distinguished working for the PAC from previous professional experiences with articulation and intensive monitoring in government circles, one former PAC staff member who took part in the initial construction of the Program and whose prior experiences had not been so successful declared:

“I would say that those [former] initiatives were interesting from the portfolio selection point of view but from the point of view of their being put into effect in practice, they ended up very inferior to what we came to experience later in the PAC... first of all, I think, in the aspect of sponsorship, right? You need to have an administrator, a political leader who embraces the idea, tucks it under his arm and transforms it into something that is of central importance in the public policy sphere. Secondly they [those former experiences] fully intended to set up intensive monitoring mechanisms but they lacked, shall we say, the famous stick and carrot. There was no carrot, was there? There was the stick alright but there was no mechanism to reward in some way a successful execution with an offer of additional financing or an assurance of eventual institutional support or some other kind of support or reward. So I think their mistake was not having the two aspects.”  
(Interview 10)

The second reason why the network has been maintained has to do with the fact that there is a whole set of government agents specifically dedicated to its upkeep. The Sepac operators in their condition as typical middle-level bureaucrats occupy the intersections of the sector-based dynamics and the centralized decision making spheres and maintain flows of monitoring information in one direction and capacity building in the other. They build or produce their positions by managing those information flows. They can intensify or relax their demands for information, decide what will be passed on upwards and what will not, decide to what extent they will make an effort to provide support or seek solutions in response to requests (demands) from partners in other government bodies, decide how best to handle the tensions amongst the various actors with whom they interact and administer whatever measures or referrals they think are necessary. In their own words, they “make the wheels go round” oiling the cogs of the lateral and vertical axes of a complex political-administrative machine.

## **Final Remarks**

This study has endeavored to understand how PAC is operated, its objectives, instruments and management processes from the standpoint of the program operators. Two interpretations have emerged from this effort and they contribute to a more in-depth understanding of the Program as well as some theoretical and analytical implications that call for a reflection on public policies and government actions.

First of all, one of the study results concerns an understanding of the PAC beyond the sphere of its formal objectives. While formal official discourse defines the PAC as a strategic plan designed to recuperate investments in infrastructure and to accelerate economic growth, a close examination of the narratives offered by PAC's middle-level bureaucrats made it possible to perceive the Program as a response to the challenges that hamper public policy implementation in the current political-institutional environment. In a scenario marked by a whole set of centrifugal forces acting on public policy management such as instability in the management of the political coalitions, excessive administrative fragmentation, disorganized federative decentralization, and a profusion of actors endowed with the power of veto, PAC emerges as the possible solution for the problems of inter and intra-governmental political-administrative articulation and coordination. In that light, it would be possible and perhaps even more appropriate to understand the PAC as a program designed to accelerate government action.

Secondly, in regard to its formal arrangement, official sources lead us to understand the PAC as a governance model notable for its operation by groups of inter-ministerial committees. In spite of that, immersion in the daily reality of the Program's operations leads us to envision PAC as more of an information network. As demonstrated, the network involves a whole set of interpersonal relations that connect lateral and vertical interactions, making it possible for information to flow, that is, information associated with the monitoring of PAC venture execution and information to support capacity building for the Program executing entities. Thus, the operation of the network benefits all of its various participants and that is the explanation for its cohesion and sustainability in the course of time.

Thus, while the present study does not offer an assessment of PAC in terms of its success in achieving its objectives and in producing the impacts intended by its formal acts (that is, eliminating bottlenecks, and accelerating economic growth), on the other hand, the study does reveal that there are important points of correspondence between the way PAC is perceived by its own bureaucrats and the practices and ways in which they act and interact in the routines of their daily work.

These interpretations based on the specific case of PAC also have two important analytical implications. The first concerns the relevance of taking into account the performance and influence of middle-level bureaucrats (MLBs) in any analysis of public policy production. As Lotta, Pires and Oliveira have indicated,

the intermediate position that the middle-level bureaucrats occupy enables them to create and regulate the relationship amongst the various parallel agencies or between the higher and lower levels of the organizational hierarchy. That role means that the managers adopt strategic stances not just because they regulate relationships established, but also because they are centralizers of information (LOTTA; PIRES; OLIVEIRA, 2014, p. 481).

The second implication of the study findings concerns the ways in which the constitution and operation of the state itself are observed and analyzed. The interpretations of the PAC that have emerged were constructed in the light of the perceptions of its own operators thereby going beyond merely having recourse to official documentation and sources. In other words, it reflects the narratives and accounts of the experiences of the people whose daily work is to realize the Program. On the one hand, because the analysis are the fruit of the perceptions of the actors directly involved in the Program, we need to be cautious given the absence of external perspectives or critical visions. On the other hand, however, by favoring the perspective of the actors directly involved with the daily production of the PAC, this analysis connects and nourishes interpretations of the contemporary state. The ‘relational’ approach adopted here is founded on the recognition that government action (and public policies) can never be properly understood merely on the basis of an analysis of structure (laws, organizations and formal institutions) or of isolated individual actions

(interests and rewards). We need to reflect on the notion of bureaucrats' "situated agency"<sup>24</sup>. We need to make a contextualized analysis of the practices of the actors involved (what they do) and the associated beliefs, meanings and significances (what they think about). Those are mutually constitutive elements constructed and transformed by means of everyday social interactions because there are no practices that are not based on ideas, beliefs and meanings that people attribute to facts and things and, in turn, beliefs and meanings would not make sense were they to be disconnected from the practices to which they refer.

Therefore, the state can be understood as "a series of contingent and unstable cultural practices, which, in turn, consists of the political activity of specific human agents" (BEVIR; RHODES, 2010). Agents of the state (bureaucrats, civil servants, administrators, etc.) in their everyday activities interpret the laws and decisions of their superiors, develop understandings of the institutional mission and the role of their organizations and are endowed (to varied extents) with the power of discretion in the decision-making as to the course of action to be followed in their daily bid to materialize public policy. Thus, far from being mere followers of orders who mechanically execute the decisions of their hierarchical superiors and the formal normative dictates, these agents of the state must be understood as being co-creators of the state itself and of its public policies. In their everyday routine, such agents are constantly resisting, supporting or altering the institutions and the institutional environment they operate within. The relational approach makes it possible to capture such cultural practices by observing the complex web of relationships between the bureaucrats and a varied set of actors that surround them and involving other bureaucrats as well as political social and economic actors. In other words, it makes it possible to approach the state on the basis of the human resources and the personal relations that materialize its existence in everyday life.

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<sup>24</sup> To Bevir and Rhodes (2010), the idea of "situated agency" implies, on the one hand, rejection of the idea of individual autonomy because individual experiences and elaboration are based on a web of pre-established beliefs and meanings but, on the other hand, it implies valuing the idea of agency (in counterpoint to structuralist approaches) insofar as people are capable of mobilizing those beliefs and acting to transform the social contexts in which they find themselves.

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# CHAPTER 7 – THE MIDDLE-LEVEL BUREAUCRACY IN THE BRAZILIAN FEDERAL REVENUE DEPARTMENT: SELECTIVE INSULATION AND CONSTRUCTION OF BUREAUCRATIC CAPABILITIES

*Lucas Ambrózio Lopes da Silva*

Even though the fiscal area is one of the oldest and most essential areas of public administration, the Federal Revenue Department, as an organization that is part of the state *apparatus*, has been the object of few studies in the literature on bureaucracy and policy. The fact that this is a government department not very receptive to party-political appointments (LOUREIRO *et al.*, 1999) and that it is a good example of a ‘pocket of excellence’ (MARTINS, 1997) are the most commented aspects in the scarce literature. Nevertheless, there is a latent need to obtain a broader understanding of the internal workings and articulations of this bureaucratic organization. While it distinguishes itself from the rest of the Federal Government, at the same time it is similar to other government departments with a more insulated orientation.

The aim of this paper is to expand our comprehension of how an entity associated to the economic area, relatively insulated and competent and with a long institutional history, actually functions and especially how its middle-level bureaucracy performs. The latter is understood to be a bureaucratic *corps* situated in an intermediate position between the (more political) top level bureaucracy and the (more technical) policy-implementing bureaucracy. As the literature has underscored, especially the international one (LOTTA; PIRES; OLIVEIRA, 2014), middle-level bureaucrats’ performances are decisive in determining the extent of institutional autonomy and the different degrees of success and innovation of public policies.

Based on a common theoretical reference framework (LOTTA; PIRES; OLIVEIRA, 2014), the data gathered by the Federal Government Middle-Level Bureaucrats Survey (*Pesquisa sobre Burocratas de Médio Escalão do Governo Federal: Resultados do Survey*) (Enap, 2014) was used to construct empirical analysis based on the evidences presented. Some themes have received more attention than others because the literature identifies them as important describers (LOTTA; PIRES; OLIVEIRA, 2014), such as decision-making autonomy, operational autonomy (to organize work), organizational insulation, relation between bureaucracy and politics, bureaucrats' relational skills and the degrees of innovation and maturity of the implemented policies. Thus, analyzing the performance of these bureaucrats may well be the key to understanding the process of building state capacities, which are understood here to be the technical potential for implementation and the political potential for articulation and governance (GOMIDE; PIRES, 2014).

In Brazil there is a lack of analysis of these particular bureaucrats' performance inside the Federal Government, both in the national academic literature and in the studies conducted by the bureaucrats themselves and their understanding of the theme. Generally speaking, the literature concentrates on studies produced during authoritarian periods, especially those focusing on the federal bureaucracy's performance (LOUREIRO *et al.*, 2010). Many of today's bureaucratic careers, however, have only recently been created or have undergone profound restructuring processes, all of which underscores the pertinence of the present study. In addition, the literature has concentrated on studies targeting bureaucrats in the upper echelons of public administration (Executive Department and Ministerial offices) or on street-level bureaucrats (studies on public policy implementation). In other words, very little is known about the bureaucrats in the intermediate levels.

This paper sets out to examine the role and analyze the performance of middle-level bureaucrats in the Brazilian Federal Revenue Department (*Secretaria da Receita Federal do Brasil - SRFB*) on the premise that there is no such a thing as a typical middle-level bureaucracy but instead there are multiple bureaucratic configurations inside the Brazilian state. The

idea is to delineate lines of analysis that will help towards understanding the patterns of performance and practices inside a federal department associated with the economic area, relatively insulated and competent and with a long institutional history.

The research employed multiple data gathering and data analysis techniques. The arguments presented and the data analysis were based on an initial process of gathering general data on the middle-level bureaucracy in the SRFB and the federal public administration (direct administration) as a whole based on a survey research. That data was complemented by information obtained from documental and organizational analysis of the Department, which in turn were used to orientate semi-structured interviews held with middle-level bureaucrats located both in the department's central unit and in other decentralized units. The questions established in the basic script for the interviews were designed to complement the data obtained by the survey and test perceptions and hypotheses that had been formulated on the basis of that survey and of the abovementioned documental and organizational analysis. This stage of the fieldwork consisted of 13 interviews with civil servants, all of whom held positions of trust by appointment in the category of Directors and Senior Advisors (*Direção e Assessoramento Superior* – DAS). Among them were representatives of all five national sub-departments and of two decentralized units.

Altogether the survey was responded by 7,226 out of a total 25,000 people occupying DAS posts or others with a similar nomenclature in the Federal Government. Thus, the sample represented 28.9% of the population. In spite of that apparently high degree of representativeness, probably the biggest database ever produced in Brazil on this kind of bureaucrat, our analysis was not based on it alone. The data provided general indications that were used for further fieldwork. In other words, the data were complemented and analyzed using other qualitative techniques. The table below shows the number of survey respondents in the SRBF disaggregated by DAS categories. Of the 1,313 people occupying such posts in the SRFB, 464 collaborated with the research, representing a response rate of 35.3%.

**Table 1: Number of survey respondents in the SRBF by DAS categories**

DAS (levels)	Total	Respondents	Percentage
101.1 e 102.1	617	242	39,2%
101.2 e 102.2	516	138	26,7%
101.3 e 102.3	139	55	39,6%
101.4 e 102.4	35	23	65,7%
101.5 e 102.5	6	6	100%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1313</b>	<b>464</b>	<b>35,3%</b>

Source: Elaborated by the author based on Decree nº 8.148, dated December 5, 2013.

## The organization of the Brazilian Federal Revenue Department

### Background

The SRBF is the result of an institutional strengthening process and the unification of tax gathering attributions in the Federal Executive apparatus. In the past, the area of fiscal administration was fragmented and conducted by various government departments with different tax collecting functions such as national tax collection, customs and excise administration, social insurance contributions etc. In the course of time, those separate areas gradually underwent a process of fusion and integration (RECEITA FEDERAL, 2014). The last such expansion of the present-day Department's responsibilities took place in 2007 with the incorporation of the Department of Social Insurance Revenue (*Secretaria da Receita Previdenciária* - SRP). The way the SRBF is structured today represents the most far-reaching and unified institutional configuration of tax and revenue gathering activities ever seen in Brazil. The organization of its workforce underwent a similar process. Today the career of Federal Revenue Tax Auditor (*Auditor Fiscal da Receita Federal do Brasil* - AFRFB) in Brazil is a broad category that incorporates functions that were formerly carried out as a series of separate careers so that the workforce has increased in numbers and

that has accentuated the heterogeneity of functions and practices. One of the biggest incorporations of what was formerly the separate career of Federal Tax Fiscal Agent (*Agente Fiscal de Tributos Federais*) was enacted during the Military Government by Decree nº 1024/69. Another important contemporary career category in the SRFB is that of Federal Revenue Tax Analyst (*Analista Tributário da Receita Federal do Brasil - ATRFB*), formally subordinate to the career of AFRFB. Thus, with the exception of some outsourced support functions and of the career of Technical Administrative Assistant, which is an administrative support career in the sphere of the Ministry of Finance, the Federal Revenue bureaucracy consists of just two horizontal careers: that of AFRFB with broad functional prerogatives and that of ATRFB with a more limited range of activities.

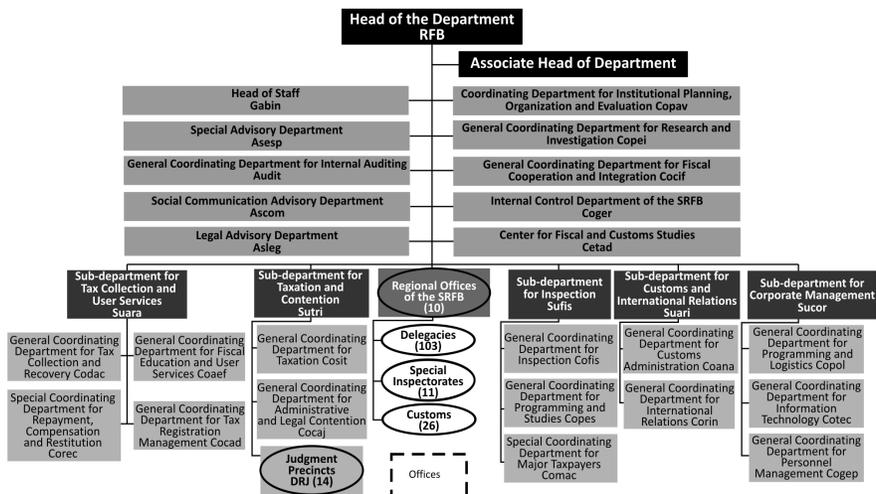
From the very beginning of the history of public administration in Brazil, the fiscal administration bureaucracy enjoyed considerable prestige and recognition as a class. They already belonged to the concept of the bureaucratic establishment (FAORO, 1958) or to the category that Oliveira Vianna called “*homens de mil*” [most worthy individuals] (VIANNA, 1987). Over the years the Federal Revenue Department managed to keep itself fairly independent of the major changes that took place in the structure of the Brazilian state, even when a series of state departments were captured by the private sector during the Military Regime (MARTINS, 1997; SCHNEIDER, 1991). Thus, we should not lose sight of the role of the traditional institutional trajectory of the Federal Revenue Department, which has become increasingly stronger in the context of a state apparatus that has undergone great alternations of strengthening and weakening, of insulation and politicization. We should also note that its bureaucracy is endowed with a powerful professional ethos in the setting of a well-consolidated organizational culture.

### **Organizational Structure**

The SRFB is present throughout Brazil and consists of a central unit (basically the set of departments centered in Brasilia, Federal District) and 569 decentralized units (with circles around them in the organization

chart below) namely, regional offices, inspectorates, customs offices and agencies (RECEITA FEDERAL, 2014). Generally speaking, it is strongly vertically structured with a large number of hierarchical positions. Those occupying posts of directors or posts of a special nature are far more numerous than in the conventional Federal Government DAS structure and the posts extend to include people with additional functions that are rewarded in a similar way. In synthesis, the bureaucratic functions in the higher echelon are carried out by people holding posts classified as ‘of a special nature’ (Heads of Departments and Executive Secretaries), those pertaining to the middle echelon (the connection between the strategic and the operational levels) are DAS posts categories 1 to 5, while those bureaucrats exercising functions as team leaders, coordinators and the functions more directly associated to policy implementation (lower echelon) either receive a gratification for their additional function or are civil servants with no gratification other than their normal salary.

**Figure 1: Organization Chart of the Brazilian Federal Revenue Department**



Source: Receita Federal (2014).

This simplified organizational chart of the SRFB does not give details of the levels and divisions that are subordinated to the General Coordinating

departments and that include directorates and team leaderships. Neither does it present the hierarchic details of the decentralized units, which may be varied. However, it does serve to locate and analyze the performance of middle-level bureaucrats who are responsible for the organizational units set out above and for their immediate subordinates.

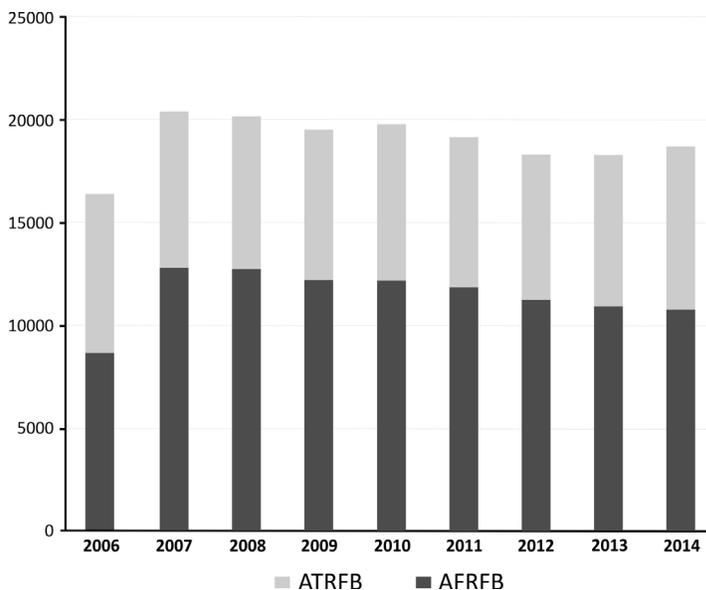
### **Bureaucratic careers and the profile of the workforce**

The Federal Revenue Department bureaucracy consists mainly of two careers, Tax Analysts and Tax Auditors, both of which require university qualifications and are well paid, although there is a big salary difference between them. The number of staff dropped slightly, 10.39% from 2007 to 2013 (see Graph 1). The average age of the workforce is 48, relatively high. It is also very experienced and the average time working for the department is 18 years. The vacancy rate (employees leaving the department) is low, on average 0.69%, which is far lower than the annual retirement rate, which is 2.42% (MPOG, 2014). However, while the rate of organizational turnover is indeed low, on the other hand the rate of rotation among the units of the Revenue Department (internal turnover) is high, because the Department's allocation policy determines that most of its civil servants begin their careers in less coveted units and functional positions (such as frontier units) and then gradually progress towards the more desired work posts and units. As a result, most of the staff has already carried out a variety of activities mainly when working with direct implementation. In addition to being a well-known feature of the Department's human resources policy, this is an important feature of all those who were interviewed. They all had performed a variety of different activities in different areas of the Department at some time.

The survey targeting personnel holding DAS posts in the SRFB delineated the profile of the middle-level bureaucrats and showed that 95.5% are full-time career civil servants in the career of Tax Analysts, the average time spent in federal public service is 19.35 years, 91% of them are heads of teams, 64.2% have at some time worked in private enterprise and 20.9% have had previous experience of working with state governments. Altogether, 77.3% are men and 77.4% are white. Their average age is 47.9.

In regard to schooling, more than half of them only have a simple university degree, 38.1% have a *lato sensu* post-graduate qualification and 11.2% have a Masters degree or a Doctorate.

**Graph 1: Evolution of SRFB staff numbers: analysts and auditors**



Source: Federal Revenue Department (2014).

## The middle-level bureaucracy at the SRFB

### Occupation of the middle-level posts

The vast majority of DAS posts in the SRFB is occupied by Tax Auditors, either because some areas of activities are the exclusive attribution of auditors or because of an informal logic whereby the career of analyst is hierarchically subordinate to the career of auditor so in that light, the posts of directors should be occupied by members of this latter career. Given that the Tax Analysts generally have salaries much more significant than any additional amount due to the occupation of a DAS post, it can be said that there is very little monetary stimulus for such staff members to occupy positions as directors or coordinators. In the

interviews conducted with middle-level bureaucrats, it was apparent that it was not an important incentive because it is accompanied by a huge increase in responsibilities. On the other hand, many of them expressed their satisfaction at the possibility of exercising such functions insofar as it opened up the possibility of getting away from their usual operational work and taking on a managerial role. The low level of competition for DAS posts leads to a situation whereby those that occupy middle-level management posts are precisely those who experience satisfaction in performing management roles because in the field of aspirations to be nominated to such posts, the management motivation is much stronger than the monetary one. The qualitative interviews revealed that the motivation for performing management activities, coordinating their own teams and intensifying the impacts of the work they performed were far stronger. These were the major determinants of their aspiration to or acceptance of nomination [to such posts].

In spite of the totally endogenous nature of the middle-level occupation processes (internal recruitment), there is a high percentage of bureaucrats with prior experience outside the public sector and that helps to ‘ventilate’ and expand the networks of bureaucratic articulation. On the other hand, in the course of the interviews, it was also found that the great mobility in the allocation of these civil servants in the course of their careers in the Federal Revenue Department has enabled them to have contact with experiences in various areas and with various actions carried out by their respective governmental departments, in addition to endowing them with considerable knowledge of the work conducted by the implementation teams located in the decentralized units, considering that almost all of them had already exercised such functions, especially during the first years that they worked for the Department. There is also the question of making use of a selection system to determine who will occupy DAS positions that can be activated and thereby enhance the meritocratic tendency in the choice. Although there is little access to the data in this latter system, it does not seem to have been identified as a relevant mechanism by the interviewees when they were queried regarding the process for selecting those who will occupy DAS posts.

According to the survey data, when interviewees were asked to identify factors they thought might have been influential in their own selection, 9% cited technical competence, 78.9% confidence, and 78.7% experience. All those figures were higher than the average obtained by the survey of the Federal Government as a whole. 43.7% of them considered building informal networks to be important (lower than the average for the federal government respondents as a whole) and only 2.8% attributed any importance to party political affinity (far lower than the average). This confirms the opinions expressed in the narratives, that there was little political interference in the nominations.

On the other hand, the interviewees revealed important characteristics identified by their superiors for the nomination of subordinates, namely, loyalty, cohesion, reliability, motivation, commitment and experience in the decentralized units. The preponderance of citation of those characteristics as the main factors influencing nominations is strongly connected to the low motivation for occupying middle-level posts. Thus, given the heavy responsibilities associated with the functions, the superiors prefer civil servants that are highly committed and whom they can trust as a way of compensating for the relatively high risk of loss of motivation and relinquishing the post, associated with the poor financial stimulus.

According to Oliveira (2011), levels of motivation and engagement continue to be high even though the variable career remuneration mechanisms that existed for nine years up until the mid-2000s have been removed. There has been little change to motivation levels because of this removal. On the other hand, Bianco (2010) states that the strongly horizontal nature of the Tax Auditor career, which allows an auditor to occupy a variety of posts in different areas and different units of the SRFB, tends to dilute the identity of the career given the lack of any strong bond between the civil servant and the area or unit in which he or she is working. While it is common for people in horizontal careers to have a weaker sense of identity, in the SRFB that is counterweighted by the ethos of the bureaucracy in this area and by the great stability of the organizational culture inside the department, as we have seen above. Thus, while there

are, indeed, elements present that weaken identity, there are other organizational elements that strengthen it.

### **Power structure and work routines**

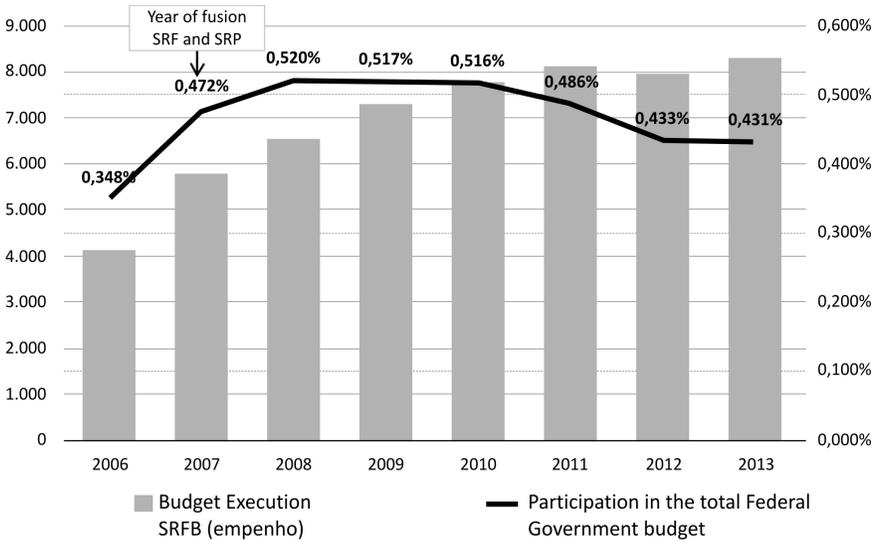
In their narratives, the middle-level bureaucrats reveal that they have a high work load and a long working day, often going beyond the stipulated 8 hours into the evening and, sometimes, the weekends and holidays as well. Communication among team members is dynamic and takes various forms: phone calls, personal contact, e-mails and instant message exchange services on the department's intranet or via cell phone applications.

The management style in the central unit is the "open-door" type. Any member of the team has access to his or her immediate superior at any time. In the decentralized units, however, we found that kind of communication to be less common. The interviewees underscored the fact that, generally speaking, the teams enjoyed a high degree of operational autonomy. Once the goals, objectives and budgets have been defined, they are free to organize the work and create tools and processes on their own volition. One outstanding example of that was the teleworking program that started being tested in October 2014 in the Judgment Precinct of São Paulo whereby civil servants are allowed to do most of their work from their own homes using a corporate PC.

Even though the bureaucrats have a considerable degree of operational autonomy, for the middle-level bureaucrats there is very little autonomy in regard to the budget. They hardly ever manage to obtain additional budget allocations and they take almost no part in budget definition. We could see, too, that among them there was great respect for organizational strategic planning and the hierarchies. In that regard, the middle-level bureaucrats understand their technical-political roles and their subordination to political orientations and decisions (like the budget decisions) very well. The middle-level bureaucrats strongly complained about the budget limitations. There were two basic perceptions involved: (1) that the department in question should receive bigger allocations even though its allocation had been increased, or (2) that the department was

receiving less funding than it used to and that the person did not approve of that. As we can see from Graph 2, the Department’s participation in the total general budget has dropped considerably in recent years.

**Graph 2: Evolution of the SRFB budget and its participation in the total federal government budget**



Source: Elaborated by the author based on the Federal Budget (SOF/MPOG).

### Intra-organizational Coordination

Intra-organizational coordination is understood here to be the relations among bureaucrats within the sphere of the Federal Revenue Department itself, in the same unit or between different units/areas. Usually this government department does not have many institutionalized *loci* for broader collective discussions such as collegiate departments (structures much used in the public sector for inter-organizational coordination) for the purpose of bringing together representatives of different areas of the organization. That makes sense insofar as it is typically a department with clear divisions and specializations of its activities (sectors are clearly demarcated). In almost all areas there is a regular weekly meeting between the heads and their immediate subordinates so that the middle-level bureaucrats need to hold at

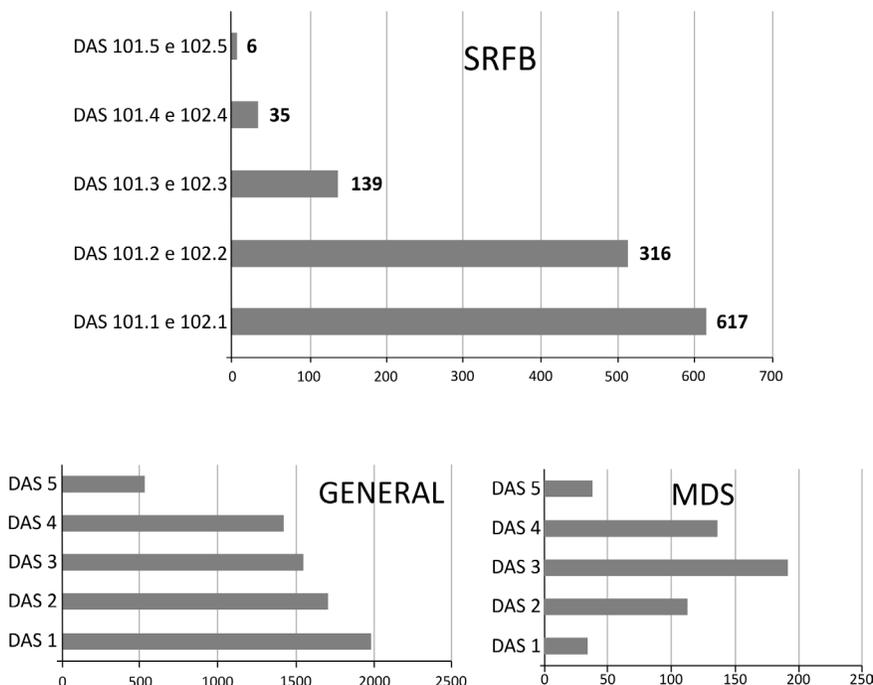
least one meeting a week with their subordinates and one with their superior and peers in the same hierarchic level.

The areas of the Department are well defined and it is clear what each one is supposed to do so that there is very little overlapping or duplication of tasks. Generally speaking, the activities of articulating and coordinating with other units are conducted by the heads of units at least in the beginning of such processes, and only afterwards may go down to the tactical and operational levels. The processes tend to favor contacts between civil servants in the same hierarchic level so that coordinators talk to coordinators, directors to directors, and so on. Communication between teams is reasonably fast and agile despite the context of solid formal hierarchies and carefully marked off work divisions.

In spite of the increasing diversity and expansion of the field of action of the SRFB, the bureaucrats have a clear vision of their attributes, responsibilities and limits. That is associated to the nature of this particular department with its institutional stability and broad trajectory of action and work organization. Contacts of the middle-level bureaucrats with those in the upper echelon are relatively rare, especially compared to the situation portrayed by the data of the general survey. In the SRFB, more than 40% of respondents declared that they very seldom or never meet with their superiors. That piece of information is associated to the high degree of hierarchy with the respective levels clearly defined and demarcated, unlike many other departments of the Federal Public Administration (see the comparative graphs in Figure 2). Thus, behind this department's organizational structure, there is strong internalization of the classic bureaucratic principles, namely, specialization and rationalization of the work, pervasive hierarchy and well-defined rules.

In Figure 2 we can identify greater verticality in the structuring of DAS posts within the SRFB as compared to the general pattern for the Federal Executive branch and unlike the pattern in other departments as the Ministry of Social Development and Fight Against Hunger, where the structure is flatter. That characteristic of the SRFB corresponds to a more formal institutional configuration, specialized and hierarchic, conforming more closely to the classical Weberian model of institutional engineering.

**Figure 2: Comparison of DAS distributions: Federal Revenue Department (SRFB), general survey (Geral) and the Ministry of Social Development (MDS)<sup>1</sup>**



Source: Elaborated by the author based on survey data.

### Intra-governmental Coordination

The coordination of the Federal Revenue Department with other Federal Government departments is mostly passive insofar as the Department is more the target of demands for actions from other federal executive departments than the originator of demands. Among those Federal Government departments that most interact with SRFB is the Ministry of Finance, to which it is in fact subordinated, followed by some of the ministries and, to a lesser extent, the Presidency of the Republic. As

<sup>1</sup> For the Ministry of Social Development (MDS) and the SRFB we have used the data referring to the total population. In the case of the "General" graph the data used was based on the survey sample.

the survey has showed, the intensity of articulations with other Federal Government departments is less than that observed in the sphere of the federal public administration as a whole.

There are two possible explanations, namely, the nature of the Department itself and the way it is treated. As regards its nature, because the SRFB dominates almost all the stages involved in implementing its actions, it rarely needs to interact with other sectors. On the other hand, being relatively shielded from the institutional-political environment creates a scenario that fosters isolation from the rest of the government. This aspect underscores the idea of “technocratic islands of excellence” because, as we shall see, there are other forms and elements of articulation beyond the institutional political system (Presidency of the Republic, ministries, the Parliament, parties and sub-national governments).

In regard to cooperation with the control agencies, it is in general a harmonious relationship with very little tension. According to the SRFB bureaucrats, in recent years the control departments have shown greater understanding of the Department’s performance and paved the way for a respectful relationship. Relations with the control department and various other forms of relationship outside the organization are conducted by specific units such as the General Coordinating Department for Internal Auditing, which conducts the relations with the control and demand departments and handles demands from other areas of the Department itself.

### **Selective insulation: bridges leading from the island**

The same logic of specific points for external dialogues organized by topics is maintained in the relations with actors outside the sphere of the Federal Government. The Legislative Advisory Department looks after relations with the Legislative Department, the Legal Advisory Department with the organizations of the judiciary system (such as Public Prosecutor Offices and the Courts) and they do so much more to meet demands made than to make demands on others. The Communication Advisory Department intermediates most of the interactions with the non-governmental world such as the press and researchers.

The middle-level bureaucracy has little contact with elected politicians. Such contact is almost entirely in the hands of the upper echelon. There is also cooperation with international fiscal administration departments such as the Inter-American Fiscal Administration Center (*Centro Interamericano de Administração Tributária* – CIAT) and specific forums associated to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and relationships with foreign delegations from the fiscal area, all of which generates a highly active organizational environment open to the global fiscal affairs community.

The premise encountered in the literature that bureaucratic insulation could be part of the explanation for the structuring of the SRFB was confirmed by this research, not only by the data gathered from the survey, but also by the narratives collected in the interviews. However, while it is true that there is a relative isolation from the rest of the Federal Executive departments and from the political institutions, there is a significant insertion and contact with actors that are strategic for implementation of the Department's actions. Table 1 below sets out some of the survey data regarding the frequency with which middle-level bureaucrats interact with actors that are external to their organization. The data for the SRFB group have been compared with the general survey data.

The scheme that follows below was based on the information in Table 1. It represents the dynamics of the SRFB middle-level bureaucrats' contacts/relations. The shading of the fields containing the names of the social actors expresses the comparison between the data on the SRFB bureaucrats in DAS posts and the data obtained by the general survey. The darker the shading, the lesser the frequency of SRFB bureaucrats' relationships, compared to the frequency for the totality of administrative departments of the Federal District. The fields in lighter shades of grey are those actors that have a higher frequency of contacts of relationships with the middle-level bureaucrats in the SRFB than those of public administration departments in general.

To sum up, in comparison with their colleagues in the Federal Government, the bureaucrats in the SRFB have less contact with: politicians, other Federal Government departments (including the Civil

Office), international departments, control departments, and sub-national governments. However, their contact with departments of the judicial system, media, private companies and citizens is greater than that of their colleagues in the other Federal Government administrative departments. Thus, in broad terms they have greater autonomy in the political dimension and greater contact/insertion in the functional dimension of their activities.

**Table 2: Frequency of MLBs interactions with external actors: comparison of SRFB data with those of public administration in general**

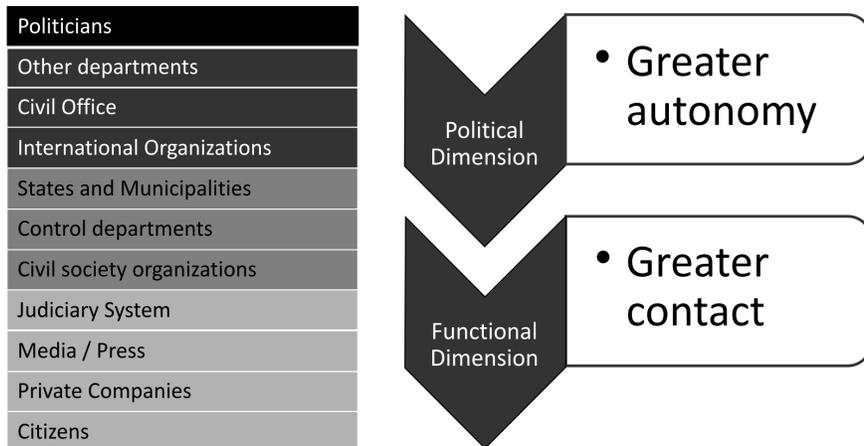
	General			Federal Revenue Department		
	Always or Frequently	Seldom or Never	Never	Always or Frequently	Seldom or Never	Never
<b>Other departments</b>	32,2%	33,7%	11,2%	17,9%	48,9%	15,8%
<b>Civil Office</b>	6,6%	82,3%	61,3%	2,0%	94,6%	85,5%
<b>Politicians</b>	7,4%	78,3%	56,0%	3,4%	88,7%	72,3%
<b>Control departments</b>	19,2%	53,5%	27,0%	11,1%	68,7%	40,6%
<b>Judiciary System</b>	16,8%	63,4%	37,7%	24,9%	45,6%	20,9%
<b>International Organizations</b>	11,8%	73,0%	51,0%	4,0%	87,9%	67,6%
<b>International Organizations</b>	21,7%	58,7%	35,0%	13,9%	62,4%	29,3%
<b>Media</b>	11,0%	72,0%	47,5%	16,6%	67,1%	47,0%
<b>Civil society</b>	21,0%	57,8%	33,6%	15,4%	62,7%	36,2%
<b>Citizens</b>	29,3%	47,9%	22,5%	41,5%	33,7%	17,6%
<b>Private Companies</b>	29,7%	47,6%	24,7%	40,2%	37,3%	18,4%

Source: Elaborated by the author based on survey data.

Thus, those four actors that have the closest relations are key actors for the implementation of Federal Revenue actions, as many of those interviewed pointed out. The relation with departments of the Justice system is a two-way affair because the latter make demands on the Federal Revenue Department for technical opinions and actions, which are channeled through the precincts. The Department, in turn, makes its demands especially in the case of forced collection and litigation. The press also plays a vital role in regard to the achievement of the SRFB objectives,

especially two of them that are set out in the organization’s strategic map, namely, increase the level of spontaneous compliance with tax and customs obligations, and enhance the Department’s image in the eyes of society. It is highly important in the role of addressing taxpayers doubts, passing on information, publicizing coercive actions unfolded by the SRFB, increasing public awareness of the Department’s activities and fostering spontaneous compliance with fiscal obligations. Press entities often demand statements from the SRFB, especially in regard to explanations of changes in the taxation system. In that regard a strong link is forged, coordinated by the Communication advisory group and its equivalents in the decentralized units and guided by their mutual interest in sharing informational and communicational resources.

**Figure 3: Points of greater and lesser insulation as compared to public administration departments in general: political shielding and functional insertion**



Source: Elaborated by the author.

Contact with the press is not restricted to the tax collection aspect. It can also have a strategic side. For example, the development of information technology (IT), or a project involving a company to test new ways of filing tax returns or of collecting taxes. According to the interview narratives, partnerships of this latter kind are quite common at the SRFB and have

been the means to opening spaces for innovation within the department itself, as will be shown below. As mentioned, the Federal Revenue's IT area has expanded and intensified its relations with private enterprise, in the light of the latent difficulty experienced by the federal government main providers of IT services – Serpro and Dataprev – to meet the highly dynamic demand stemming from the SRFB.

The extensive contact with the citizenry at large, especially at the end point of policy implementation, shows two patterns: 1) the strong relationship of middle-level SRFB bureaucrats with the stage of policy implementation, which, if we were to consider SRFB's formally hierarchic structure alone, would be unexpected. However, the considerable experience of the middle-echelon bureaucrats with implementation in their previous positions and the horizontal nature of their career, tend to draw the middle-level bureaucrats nearer to the (implementing) street-level bureaucrats and their implementation activities and consequently, nearer to the ordinary citizens; and 2) the potential openings for feedback to occur and inform the redesigning of projects and actions based on the needs and demands of the teams working at the end of the implementation line and those of the citizens/taxpayers themselves, which are also opportunities for innovating in service provision. In that light, that positioning nearer to the citizenry is a strategic orientation insofar as it helps to synchronize formulation, implementation and the re-designing of activities through continual adjustments.

As we will see further on, that insulation process which is selective and not complete, seen from the formal and normative point of view, is crucial to gaining an understanding of the harmonious combination a stable, hierarchic, institutional engineering with an organizational environment that is propitious for innovation.

The performance of middle-level bureaucrats in the SRFB comes very close to what Evans (1992) termed "embedded autonomy". Furthermore, we can see that the insight provided by the survey and the quantitative research allowed us to qualify the description of the SRFB, not merely as "islands of excellence" but "islands of technocratic excellence". Relations with actors outside of the Federal Government sphere are crucial to the

establishment of new forms of action and to some extent they influence the design and profile of the fiscal administration policy.

Embedded autonomy depends on an apparently contradictory combination of Weberian bureaucratic insulation with intense immersion in the surrounding social structure. How this contradictory combination is achieved depends, of course, on the historically determined character of the state apparatus and the nature of social structure in which it is embedded. (EVANS, 1992:396)

It is an autonomy embedded in a concrete set of social ties which bind the state to society and provide institutionalized channels for the continual negotiation and renegotiation of goals and policies. (EVANS, 1992:403)

That apparent contradiction between bureaucratic isolation and insertion in the social structure identified by Evans (1992) is what makes the insulation only partial. The selective aspect is expressed by the logic behind the relations; in this case it has a strong connection with actors that possess important knowledge and abilities capable of boosting policy implementation in the field of fiscal administration. A dynamic structure inside the organization enables it to relate to and position itself in a complex social fabric in spite its bureaucratic configuration, which endows it with great autonomy and mastery of the entire production cycle of its own public policies. Thus, the existence of a solid bureaucratic structure allied to the prerogatives of autonomy has been mobilized to construct relations of governance strongly directed towards achieving the organization's strategic objectives.

The scenario depicted here closely parallels the strategy of insulation present and experienced throughout the structuring process of the modern Brazilian state apparatus, and most markedly in those public administration departments engaged in promoting economic development policies. Cardoso (1993) in the light of his concept of bureaucratic rings called attention to the construction of organizations with strong bureaucratic prerogatives and insulation during the Getúlio Vargas government. At that time, such departments only articulated with specific sectors of society, notably, the emerging industrial bourgeoisie. The author defined the bureaucratic rings concept as follows:

[...] a mechanism which implicitly determines that the administration is supplementary to private interests and that in their relations with the state these flow through webs of personal complicities. [...] In the case of Brazil, that was precisely during the National-Populist era [...] just when the so-called “islands of rationality” of a planning technocracy were beginning to form (CARDOSO, 1993, p. 99-100).

Later, during the Juscelino Kubitschek administration, there was the construction of a variety of bureaucratic structures endowed with a high degree of political insulation and vigorous articulation outside the state, which came to be called the “parallel administration”. It was a strategy to insulate certain bureaucratic structures that could guarantee the execution of the bold investment plan known as the *Plano de Metas* (Strategic Objectives Plan) by means of bureaucratic articulations and networks of governance and coordination with market-based actors (LAFER, 2002). During the Military Government, the strategy of allying bureaucratic insulation, justified on the basis of technicist arguments, to the strong penetration with external actors was a notable characteristic of the construction and operation of the state apparatus in the economic area, orientated by developmentalist ideas that sought to boost the industrialization process (SCHNEIDER, 1991; MARTINS, 1997).

Some recent studies have endeavored to describe and analyze the performance of Federal Executive departments in the economic area during the democratic period and include the explanation of insulation allied to the mobilization of personal networks of governance and circulation outside the sphere of the state. Thus, Olivieiri (2007) describes the nomination and articulation processes of the upper echelon of the Brazilian Central Bank as nurtured by, but at the same time strengthening the mobilization of impersonal articulation networks between the bureaucratic elites and certain specific sectors of civil society.

Thus, it is quite common for the insulation of Federal Executive departments to be only partial and not constitute the total isolation of the organization so that it is perfectly plausible that the aloofness of the political institutions should exist side by side with a close interaction with certain groups of civil society, especially those groups, in the policies in question, that have strategic resources.

## **Management tools and capacity development**

While on the one hand, from the external and structural point of view, the idea of autonomy is the strongest argument associated with the construction of policy innovation and implementation capacities in the SRFB, on the other, the way the work is organized, with vigorous incorporation of management tools and a close approach to actors that play a key role in policy implementation, also explains a considerable part of the technical and managerial capacity building achieved. In the same vein, if we take the two dimensions of state capacity building as proposed by Gomide and Pires (2013), we see that the relationships that normally typify efforts to construct political capacity (with the political bargaining, negotiating, legitimating and consensus spheres) are relatively unimportant activities in the sphere of the SRFB. That pattern is not repeated, however, in the case of the relationships that typify efforts to construct technical capacity (with spheres directly or indirectly associated to policy implementation). Thus, the institution converts its prerogative of autonomy into little or no need to construct political capacity to justify and sustain its policy designs. On the other hand, the same prerogatives endow the organization with heightened capacity to structure itself competently and rationally internally and externally, and with great potential for enhancing its implementation capacity.

There are important examples of consistent public sector human resource management processes in the SRFB, starting with the recruitment and selection of staff (LONGO, 2007). It is a process based on merit that selects personnel for a career that arouses great interest in the candidates, not only because of the Department's reputation and the functions involved but also because of the good pay. As we have seen, the internal recruitment process for managerial posts generally selects career civil servants with a suitable managerial disposition, solid bonds of legitimacy with the team and loyalty and trust in relation to their bosses. The internal recruitment process and the structure of the careers are important factors that explain the high level of retention (few people ever leave). Furthermore, the generous offer of capacity building opportunities and training plays a crucial role in ensuring the organization's technical capacity as a whole.

Vigorous strategic planning mobilizes and converts the technical capacity mentioned above into managerial capacity. Unlike the general pattern of organizational culture in Brazilian public administration as a whole, which relies very little on crucial strategic planning (DE TONI, 2009), in the SRFB there is a strong organizational commitment to the execution of organizational strategic planning consisting of short, medium and long-term plans. Various planning techniques and methodologies have been incorporated (BLONSKI, 2012) by the Department, strengthening the planning area and imbuing the bureaucrats' activities with greater cohesion and coordination. Middle-level bureaucrats are very much aware of the organization's goals, objectives and programmed actions. According to the interview narratives, making decisions and constructing the means for planning to be put into effect are among the SRFB middle-level bureaucrats' most important, central activities.

### **Innovations inside a stable structure**

Part of the base from which this department seeks to foster innovation and achieve a high level of performance is sustained by the constructions described above. There are also other important actors that complement and boost those achievements. The role of the Superior Fiscal Administration School (*Escola Superior de Administração Fazendária - Esaf*), created in 1973 with the incorporation of the former center for training and development, is crucial in imbuing the performances of fiscal bureaucrats like those in the SRFB, with cohesion, excellence and alignment. The Esaf carries out activities that include the organization of the process of personnel selection by means of public competitive entrance exams, personnel training and development and external actions. It also has an important participation in knowledge management within the department and organizing the technical papers and production in the area. In a complementary manner, the vigorous articulation of the SRFB middle-level bureaucrats with international fiscal administration networks (like the Ciat) and with foreign teams engaged in similar work fosters a strong flow of bureaucratic working experiences. It establishes a network of cooperation and dissemination that constitutes an entry point for innovation and good practices.

We have identified strong mechanisms of incentive, recognition and dissemination of innovation and experimentation in the SRFB. One of the most used of such mechanisms is competitions and awards. There are some internal awards and a strong participation in external award schemes. The Federal Revenue Award for Creativity and Innovation (*Premio de Criatividade e Inovação na Receita Federal do Brasil*), established in 2002 by the SRFB itself, is now in its 13th edition and has played an important role in stimulating, systematizing, disseminating and valuing innovation in the Department. Several of the experiments tried out inside the SRFB have won external awards, as for example, in 2009 with the experience “Digital Administrative Processes”, which competed for an award for “Innovation in Public Federal Administration”, a competition organized by Enap. The innovation in question was the elimination of paper from all processes inside the organization, altering the entire process and providing a greater degree of transparency, efficiency and effectiveness to the organization’s activities. Other innovations have also had wide repercussions both in the press and in the ambit of the international fiscal administration community.

Many of the Department’s innovations are associated with the intense use of information technology, such as its new systems of internal administration processes, the continuous improvements made to the way tax returns are processed, new means of filing tax returns (initially done electronically and via internet, and now with the new possibility of using smartphones and tablets), experiments with different ways of working like the teleworking that is already a possibility for some groups of judging auditors attached to the São Paulo Judgments Precinct (still at the pilot project stage) committed to increasing their productivity.

## **Final Remarks**

In general terms, we can consider the SRFB bureaucracy to be a stable department (in terms of staff permanence) with considerable functional and geographic mobility opportunities and capable of performing a variety of functions within that highly complex organization. In the light

of its complexity and segmentation, those occupying DAS posts, even at the levels 1 and 2, have highly important managerial roles to play. There is clear segmentation of the middle-level bureaucracy of the Department not only into hierarchic levels, but also between different areas, between the central unit and the decentralized ones and between the members of analyst and auditor careers.

Given the characteristics of those careers, especially that of the auditors, there is little incentive for them to occupy middle-level posts and that tends to favor the rise to such posts of regular civil servants with a strong managerial profile, highly committed to the organizational objectives and a strong cohesion with their hierarchical superiors. The organizational structure is marked by a very clear-cut division of the work and functions accompanied by great awareness on the part of the middle-level bureaucrats of the goals and objectives negotiated in the formulation of a broad and reasonably effective strategic plan. That configuration makes it possible to endow the teams with a certain degree of operational autonomy (how to do the work) but with decision-making basically centralized, especially in the new context of loss of budget autonomy and limits on expenditure. Decision-making continues to be essentially centralized.

The analysis that provides the best synthesis of the way the SRFB is structured and of the performance of its middle-level bureaucracy is that of selective insulation, which basically has three crucial aspects:

- I) Political shielding: low levels of interaction with political institutions and their representatives (politicians, the Presidency of the Republic, other federal government departments, sub-national governments and control departments/agencies.
- II) Weberian bureaucratic organization: the work is hierarchic and rationalized to a great extent and that is accompanied by a high degree of operational autonomy ceded to a stable, capable and relatively cohesive bureaucratic *corps*.
- III) Functional insertion: vigorous interaction with those external actors associated to strategic resources, that is, actors capable of endowing their policies with greater implementation capacity. That is the key for establishing a series of partnerships and relationships

intended to mobilize bureaucratic capabilities and clear the way for innovation processes.

To gain a better understanding about the functional insertion aspect has been one of the purposes of this text. Even in highly stable and formal organizations, politically insulated and masters of all the resources and prerogatives necessary for implementing their policies, dynamic configurations are forming and being transformed all the time. Contrary to what might be expected, the fact that within such organizations bureaucratic mechanisms exist that permit them to be self-referencing does not necessarily mean that the organization and its bureaucrats isolate themselves from the greater social fabric that surrounds them, especially when they can identify important actors that can potentially boost the actions that the organization is responsible for carrying out. Thus, it is important to analyze government departments in a relational-interactive perspective (LOTTA; PIRES; OLIVEIRA, 2014), that will enable progress to be made, little by little, moving ahead from the interpretations of the more formal and individual aspects of those actors' performances.

Unlike innovation present in other Brazilian public administration departments, the innovations that occur in the SRFB are more of an incremental nature and are closely associated to a strong openness in regard to the adoption of modern management tools and to which there is strong adherence on the part of the bureaucratic *corps*. It differs strongly from other forms of innovation in the public sphere that are more conceptual and more closely related to policy formulation, a feature that is typical of departments or policies with a low degree of maturation. Accordingly, the construction of State capacity in the context of the present case study is centered far more on technical capacity than on political capacity, whether because of the high normative powers formally delegated to the organization or because of the strong institutional domination of all stages of its public policy cycle. Against that background, the strategic opening for partnerships and relationships that boost the department's managerial and implementing capacities is one of the main institutional performance/action strategies. Furthermore, in a department that is highly committed to its strategic planning, that kind of decision has a much broader outreach.

The description of selective autonomy that has been exploited here to analyze the case of the middle-level bureaucracy at the Brazilian Federal Revenue Department, in addition to offering answers to the main questions raised in the literature, helps us to think through and visualize a series of problems, which raise innumerable other questions. To what extent can that selectivity be regulated or subjected to political accountability? Who (agents or principals) will conduct the apparently unperceived relations with the outside world? How much influence do those external actors have on the transformations that occur in policy implementation (especially in the case of a policy that is highly insulated politically and shielded by the discourse averring its technocratic nature)? Are there any other departments/policies in the economic area that have adopted the concept of selective autonomy? As we can see, it is glaringly apparent that although in practice dilemmas of a political nature may be deemed of secondary importance and left aside, they will, nevertheless, always be eloquent themes.

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# CHAPTER 8 – MIDDLE-LEVEL BUREAUCRACY DILEMMAS IN THE CONTEXT OF A LOOSELY ARTICULATED POLICY: THE CASE OF THE NATIONAL PUBLIC SECURITY DEPARTMENT\*

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*Larissa Peixoto Gomes*

In this study, we investigate an aspect of Brazilian public security policy that has received little attention, namely, the performance of the National Public Security Department (*Secretaria Nacional de Segurança Pública* - Senasp), primarily its middle-level bureaucracy.

While acknowledging the importance of the implementation stage of a public policy and the various elements and factors that influence it, this paper focuses on the work of the middle-level bureaucracy of the government body, investigating its internal routines, its relations with internal and external actors and the dilemmas it has to face, especially in regard to decision-making and innovation processes that are needed to execute the policy in the federal sphere. To that end, it seeks to analyze a new set of studies based on the premise that organizations' performances are considerably influenced by processes and activities that take place in the intermediate levels of the organization, that is, not exactly at the top nor the bottom. In such studies, which are still infrequent, middle-level bureaucrats are addressed as being key strategic actors (CURRIE; PROCTER, 2005, p. 1325).

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Notably absent from the literature (HOWLETT, 2011), middle-level bureaucrats comprise a set of influential stakeholders, apart from the executive administrators that make up the upper echelon and that have traditionally been the main focus of the literature. Literature on middle-level bureaucrats argues that they are effectively capable of participating in strategic discussions and in the process of formulating public policy itself. To that end, they direct their influence upwards at the higher echelon or downwards to the policy frontline, playing a decisive role either in translating the commands issued from the top or in coordinating their organizations' operational activities (LOTTA; OLIVEIRA; PIRES, 2014).

The case study that will be discussed in this paper particularly underscores the varied processes of articulation and negotiation that Senasp's middle-level bureaucrats carry out in their everyday routines. The processes are of fundamental importance to the setting up of the 'National Public Security Policy'<sup>1</sup>, and which are interpreted as being the main activities undertaken by those actors in that context.

The initiative is part of a research agenda that seeks to fill in the gaps in empirical studies of middle-level bureaucracies in the Brazilian context and to bring to light the disputes and specific situations that bureaucracy has to face in the context of a "loose" (federative and inter-sector) articulation exacerbated by a degree of institutionalization that is still low, and the non-linear trajectory of the Federal Government performance in the field of Public Security.

This exploratory study mobilizes ideas and concepts from the realm of Political Science and addresses the object in a relational perspective (LOTTA; OLIVEIRA; PIRES, 2014, p. 17) in an endeavor to understand the working of state organizations. However, the study is not based on the formal structures of the organization that are the immediate determinants of the agents' behavior, nor based on the premise that the individuals involved act on a rational-instrumental basis. Instead it addresses the bureaucrats'

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<sup>1</sup> There is a pertinent debate in the specialized literature that questions the existence of a "national public security policy". For that discussion see the texts cited in this chapter (SÁ; SILVA, 2012 E 2014; AZEVEDO et al., 2014).

behavior based on the premise that they are limited by cultural and symbolic conditioning factors, by their beliefs and the values they embrace, and by their multiple interactions with other agents of the state, the private sector and other social sectors. In that light, governance practices are seen as being cultural practices so that, to understand them, it is necessary to unveil the set of meanings that are associated to the actors' formal aspects or 'objectives' and other dimensions involved (BEVIR; RHODES, 2002, 2008).

The chapter unfolds as follows: supposing that these agents find themselves in specific historical circumstances that function as a "backdrop of inherited traditions" (BEVIR; RHODES, 2002, p. 138; 2008, p. 3), we start the chapter describing the trajectory of the Senasp itself and the task or public policy it has historically been delegated to carry out. Then, comes an analysis of the profile, trajectory and constitution of the Senasp's middle-level bureaucracy, its routines and the beliefs it holds regarding its own work in a bid to understand the prevalence in the midst of a bureaucracy at once "activist" and relatively stable (even though most of them are not permanent civil servants). The section that follows explores their performance in relation to other internal and external actors in vertical and horizontal networks of relations characterized by intensive articulation and negotiation. In spite of the prevalence of the use of the term 'autonomy' in studies on middle-level bureaucracies and actors' performances and behavior, we prefer to borrow Bevir and Rhodes' (2002, 2008) concept of 'situated agency' to construct our interpretation of the spaces for, and forms of performance available to these actors. In the final section, we discuss the case study findings, comparing them to those of other middle-level bureaucracy studies, on the lookout for convergences and possible contributions of this investigation to the future research agenda on this theme.

In-depth interviews were conducted for the purpose of this research with civil servants of the government body in question, all of them occupying DAS positions (Director or Senior Advisors) by nomination, as established by the guidelines of this research<sup>2</sup>. Eight of the interviews

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<sup>2</sup> In this case those occupying posts by nomination at DAS levels 4 and 5, which means they are either directors or general coordinators.

were with persons currently occupying such posts in three of the four sub-divisions that constitute the National Public Security Department. The data consists of a set of descriptions (BEVIR; RHODES, 2008, p. 4) of their work and about themselves narrated by the agents and constituting the primary evidence that this study mobilizes in the course of the text<sup>3</sup>. Some additional nine interviews were done with other civil servants, political actors and former Senasp personnel and these provided important supporting information for the analysis<sup>4</sup>. Their importance lay in the fact that they provide the elements needed to filter the most relevant meanings, based on the self-descriptive narratives, and made it possible to identify and interpret inherited practices that mold the performances of these middle-level bureaucrats. Their actions are perceived as responses to pressures for change, which may not result in important innovations in the Federal Government's security policy.

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<sup>3</sup> Middle-level bureaucracy study pioneers Floyd and Wooldridge (2000) and Currie and Procter (2005, p. 1336) defend the use of qualitative research allied to direct observation of the routines of the actors involved and interviews. In such cases the research should be of a comparative and descriptive nature and rely on the bureaucrats' own narratives. That is in alignment with Bevir and Rhodes' (2002, 2008, p. 13-ss) proposal whereby the self-descriptions obtained from the interviews and the live observations aimed at producing ethnographies (dense descriptions) or historical narratives (critical genealogies of specific - individual - traditions) are the most suitable ways to conduct this kind of investigation. To analyze the data of this particular piece of research, the authors have read and re-read the interview transcriptions, observation notes and all the other evidence gathered. During that process, the themes and categories for the analysis gradually emerged and were refined. Thus, this empirical case actually represents a second order interpretation of the interviewees own perceptions supplemented by other subsidiary evidence.

<sup>4</sup> The subsidiary interviews were carried out with two Senasp staff members occupying posts that lie outside the category targeted by the research, one former director, a former employee, six members of the middle-level bureaucracy from a Brazilian state and three from partner entities in the private sector (engaged in projects run by the Department). Although the narratives of these latter interviewees are not quoted in the chapter, they were, nevertheless, of fundamental importance in understanding the object in question in the sense indicated by the text. Furthermore, several years of investigating the national public security policy have provided the researchers with routine contacts with said bureaucracy that were intensified during the course of this research, providing a privileged perspective with which to observe their work, which was of crucial importance in the construction of the interpretation. Finally, there was also use of documentary evidence.

## The historical constitution of a loosely articulated policy

“The most difficult part is indeed the matter of articulation, not only with other ministries with which we have integrated policies but also with the federated entities; to think together, to listen to them and also regarding their demands and in the evaluation they make of what we try to induce, as well as with our efforts to articulate any different kind of policy.” (Interview 1).

“To me these partnerships, despite of the work they involve, are a bit like a marriage, every day you get home and you have to say how your day has been, you always have to be encouraging, you can’t give up. ‘Come and see, let’s do it together, let’s talk about this’.” (Interview 2).

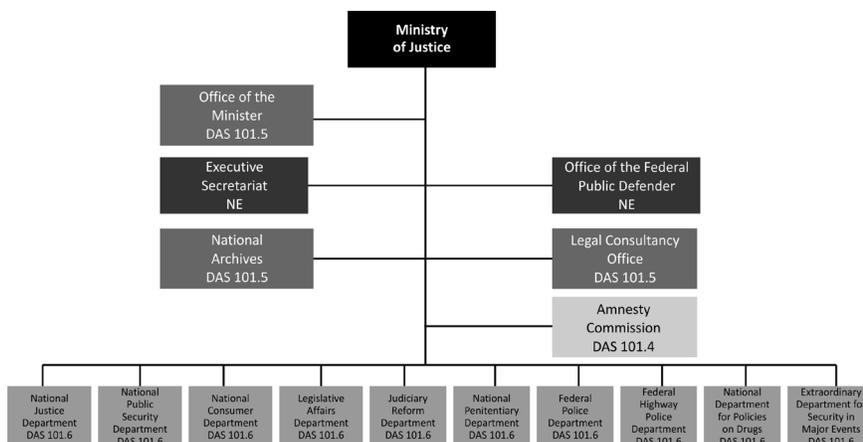
The importance of the task of articulation and building of vertical and horizontal network relations is related with the routine activities of the middle-level bureaucrats in the National Public Security Department that need to be understood in its historical and political contexts<sup>5</sup>.

Senasp is one of the 10 departments that make up the Ministry of Justice (Figure 1) and it is not alone in making operational the various tasks and actions that are usually associated within the public security scope. The others are the National Penitentiary Department (*Departamento Penitenciário Nacional*), the Federal Police Department (*Departamento de Polícia Federal*), the Federal Highway Police Department (*Departamento de Polícia Rodoviária Federal*), the Judiciary Reform Department (*Secretaria de Reforma do Judiciário*), the National Department for Policies on Drugs (*Secretaria Nacional de Políticas sobre Drogas*), and the Extraordinary Department for Security in Major Events (*Secretaria Extraordinária de Segurança para Grandes Eventos*), all of which are also responsible for actions carried out in this area.

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<sup>5</sup> This section seeks to take up some important aspects of the trajectory of the Federal Government’s performance in the area of security, especially from the time when the Senasp was created. This research does not intend, however, to give the complete narrative with detailed descriptions of the entire trajectory. The selected examples are simply intended to make it easier to understand the case being analyzed and presented in the coming sections.

**Figure 1: Organizational Chart of the Ministry of Justice**



Source: Ministry of Justice.

The actions of the Federal Government complement the traditional and historical performance of the states in the field of public security. These last federative entities have the constitutional prerogative to organize and coordinate the state police forces – the uniformed police responsible for ostensive policing activities and the civil police responsible for investigative work, also known as the “judiciary police”. These forces are organized based on a division of tasks. Other organizations involved are the Office of the Public Prosecutor and the Office of the Public Defender. They are associated with the State Executives (but with administrative autonomy) and the Federal sphere. Also in the sphere of the State government executive, there are the state prison systems. The prison system administered by the Federal Government was only structured quite recently. That whole set of organizations is highly dependent on the actions of the Criminal Courts system, which is organized at state and federal levels and involves a complex distribution of duties and authority. Finally, there is also the activity of the Municipal Police Forces (*Guardas Municipais*) and the municipalities are empowered to take part if they wish.

This broad set of organizations, most of which have a historical existence and became organized over time without any awareness of the need to be concatenated with each other, has led to a high degree of

dispersion. The consequences of that institutional architecture in the light of its “loose” organizational concatenation, as Powell and DiMaggio call it, have been studied by Saporì (2006) and his work has become a relevant reference in the Brazilian literature. That author explains that this historical construction, at least in Brazil, reveals a division of work among various different organizations that in no way resembles the usual “typical-ideal” or rational-instrumental pattern that would be expected if the reference framework were the classical Weberian trajectory for bureaucratic organizations construction. On the contrary, distinct and conflicting logics run contrary to the ideal of harmony and complementariness necessary for the proper and effective functioning of the system as a whole (SAPORÌ, 2006).

The current division of federative powers and responsibilities dates back to the decentralized architecture that was (re-) instituted by the 1967 Constitution after the prior period of greater centralization that characterized the Vargas Government. It merely exacerbates the dispersed and fragmented nature of the system, insofar as, when producing the public security policy, it institutes a division of attributions that cut across one another in the federal, state and municipal spheres, in addition to the overlapping of various organizations. On the one hand, the 1988 Constitution attempted to avoid some of the practices associated with the previous idea of ‘national security’ by replacing it with ‘public security’, while on the other hand, it maintained practically all the same institutional and organizational structures in existence at the time for the operation of the security and criminal courts systems<sup>6</sup>.

Bevir and Rhodes (2002) argue that change only occurs in response to dilemmas. These arise when new ideas or events oppose themselves to old ideas or practices that force the solution of that dilemma. In the present case, it is facing up to the tradition that prevails in the area of security that

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<sup>6</sup> In the context of the Constituent Assembly, the actions of an informal organization made up of federal representatives affiliated to center and center-right parties, the so called “Centrão” group (big center), blocked the voting on changes to the institutional architecture of public security by boycotting the respective session (as they did with other areas).

creates the “dilemma” for those actors who found themselves in a context of re-democratization. At that moment, a consensual perception becomes consolidated, not only in the academic world but also in civil society, about the legacy of perverse practices handed by the former tradition of national security and its predecessors. The construction of that perception included, above all, considerations about police violence, the selectiveness and inefficiency of the criminal courts system and of security as a whole. It could be seen that they were worsening the security situation instead of improving it. Another important aspect of the scenario was the restriction of admission to the field of public security, including its bureaucracy, to individuals with a military background from the armed forces or from the police forces. The rupture with the national security tradition would require that the public security policy be opened to a multiplicity of actors that had previously been ignored in the debates and in the construction of that policy.

The response to the dilemma only came in the mid-1990s when the original perception was joined by a serious increase in crime and violence rates that led the Federal Government to take decisive action. The first National Plan as well as the National Public Security Department were created, endowed with powers to implement the plan during the government of Fernando Henrique Cardoso.

Before the 1st National Public Security Plan (*Plano Nacional de Segurança Pública* – PNSP) was launched in 1995, another department was created, The National Security Actions Planning Department (*Secretaria de Planejamento de Ações Nacionais de Segurança Pública* - Seplanseg)<sup>7</sup>. The subsequent creation of the Senasp<sup>8</sup>, which replaced it, and the National Public Security Fund (*Fundo Nacional de Segurança Pública* – FNSP) in 2001

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<sup>7</sup> MP no 813, dated January 1, 1995. Subsequently Act no 9.649, dated May 27, 1998. Nevertheless, the Seplanseg was still to be noted for an administration staffed by personnel originating from the Armed Forces.

<sup>8</sup> Edict no 1.821, dated October 13, 2006. Of the sub-departments that initially made up the Senasp, Narcotics migrated to the National Anti-Drugs Department (Act no 9.649, dated May 27, 1998), becoming the sub-department for Prevention and Recuperation. The National Traffic Department came under the aegis of Executive Secretariat of the Ministry of Justice (Decree no 2.351/1997) and the Federal Highway Police Department as well (Decree no 2.802, dated October 13, 1998).

consolidated the response to the Federal Government's dilemma under pressure to intervene in the field of public security. Up until then, the Federal Government's actions had been restricted to mobilizing the Federal Police and the Federal Highway Police, while the bulk of actions in that field were centered on the state police forces endorsed by the Federal Government's omission (SÁ; SILVA, 2014). With the unleashing of that response, the Federal Government came to play the role of inducing policies directed at:

- overcoming the problem of the absence of articulation among the actions of federative entities, especially the states and their organizations, and among the latter and the legal system;
- modifying the traditional performance patterns of the organizations in the system, adapting them to the democratic context;
- providing openings in the field of public security for the "new" actors.

The Federal Government then would have the power to take action in the area while at the same time respecting the distribution of powers and attributions determined by the 1988 Constitution. If it were efficacious, that role of the Federal Government as an inducer and financer of policies would ensure that those that were in conformity with the desired parameters would be contemplated, thereby having a positive effect on the problem of violence and criminality in the short term, but only locally. It would also foster a form of organizational mimicry of the recommended practices (POLLITT; BOUCKAERT, 2000), and that could bring about global transformations in the practices of the system's organizations, but only in the long term.

In short, the response to the dilemma created a mechanism for the incremental production of complex changes, especially by inducing new operating patterns to strong, longstanding and autonomous actors and organizations, as well as inducing their articulation in a system ruled by commitment and the expectation of it being complementary and transversal. For those very reasons, the scenario immediately afterwards would maintain to a large extent the logic of a performance in the midst of permanent conflict and lack of articulation, obliging the Federal

Government to engage permanently in negotiation and dialogue to move the strategy forward.

This policy trajectory has not been continuous. After the implementation of the 1st National Plan in the second FHC government, the Lula government began by placing a renowned academic at the head of the National Public Security Department, breaking with the longstanding tradition of that post being held by a person from the armed forces or the police. The Plan was administered during the course of the year 2002 with the collaboration of more than one hundred experts, made no progress and one year later the Head of the Department was dismissed. The most solid performance of the Federal Government in this area was to come only in the second Lula government with the creation of the National Program of Security with Citizenship (*Programa Nacional de Segurança com Cidadania - Pronasci*) in 2007. There is a consensus in the literature that this period was when the Federal Government participated in the area most intensely as a protagonist, unfolding the greatest number of actions and making the highest volume of investments ever<sup>9</sup>.

The Dilma government, in turn, seems to be restricting the scope of the Federal Government's performance in the area. According to some balance sheets already drawn up, there is less programmatic unity and actions based on a National Plan of which the main points "have been implemented according to the interest of allied state governments" (AZEVEDO, 2014, p. 15) and there is a clear perception of a new withdrawal in course (SÁ; SILVA, 2012). Even though there have been some important sporadic projects and innovations, such as the reform carried out of the National Public Security Statistics System (*Sistema Nacional de Estatísticas de Segurança Pública - Sinesp*) as well as other innovative protocols in the field of violence prevention and some relevant localized interventions, the

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<sup>9</sup> These investments total 7 billion Brazilian reais in glaring contrast with the 500 million invested at the time of the 1st PNSP. However, the literature states that in spite of that there were various problems in effectuating the results which were fragmented and disperse; the projects opened no spaces for questioning the solutions which were marked by the "mere adherence" of states and municipalities, monitoring difficulties and the abandoning of the structural reform agenda. (SÁ; SILVA, 2012).

current administration seems to be passing through another moment of de-prioritization of the security agenda.

This is the context and scenario in which the middle-level bureaucrats interviewed for this research are located<sup>10</sup>. In this sense, the following lines indicate how they act in the context of a tradition that is still being confronted. In other words, one that has not yet achieved stability, in a context strongly marked by cycles of “prioritization/de-prioritization”.

### **What the Senasp’s middle-level bureaucrats do and think**

A part is very managerial, official calls to tender, selecting proposals, drawing up agreements, monitoring agreements, inspecting them. Then, there is another part in which we are actually ‘getting things done’. (Interview 1)

According to the literature, the middle-level bureaucracy manages the street-level bureaucrats and makes the link between policy executors and policy formulators (LOTTA; OLIVEIRA; PIRES, 2014), normally making operational the strategies formulated by the upper echelon of the bureaucracy (PIRES, 2010). This middle-level group is made of the intermediary categories in the management structure – directors, general coordinators, managers, supervisors, project coordinators, among others. The literature endeavors to understand these civil servants’ profile, trajectory and values insofar as they are important elements that influence their performance.

### **Organizational structure of the Senasp and the profile and routines of its staff**

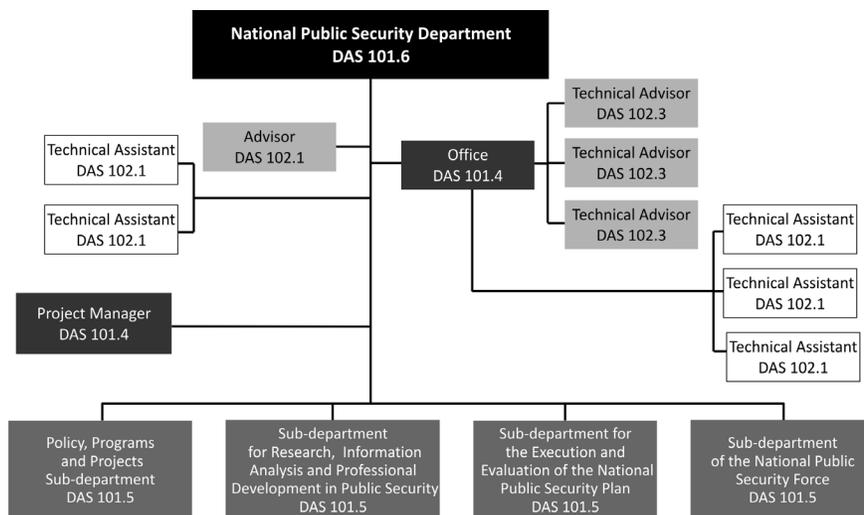
Below here follows a description of the Senasp’s four sub-departments (Figure 2). The current distribution of competencies and responsibilities among them was formalized by Decree nº 6.061, dated March 15, 2007.

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<sup>10</sup> It must be stated that in order not to contaminate the answers regarding their mode of action, none of the questions was specifically about the context and neither was there any request to make comparisons with previous administrations - those comments that were made were entirely spontaneous.

The Sub-department for Research, Information Analysis and Professional Development in Public Security (*Departamento de Pesquisa, Análise de Informação e Desenvolvimento de Pessoal em Segurança Pública* - Depaid) is responsible for research activities (most of which are diagnosis of specific public security problems or assessments of policies or programs) and they are conducted in partnership with universities, research centers and international bodies. Other activities are related to public security information management, which is generally considered to be a serious bottleneck, and also other actions concerning the training and qualification of agents to perform in the area of public security given the great scarcity of such professionals in the sphere of the states and the need to create national guide lines. This body is also charged with responsibility for developing new teaching methodologies and techniques.

**Figure 2: Organizational Chart of the National Public Security Department**



Source: Ministry of Justice.

The Sub-department for the Execution and Evaluation of the National Public Security Plan is responsible for the implementation of all the actions as foreseen by the Plan. It should be noted that, to that end,

the sub-department can count on the National Public Security Fund. This department also bears responsibility for the implementation, in some states, of the Safer Brazil Program (*Brasil Mais Seguro*), as well as elaboration of proposals for standardizing police buildings and equipments and stimulation of use of new technologies.

The Policies, Programs and Projects Sub-department is not only responsible for carrying out actions related to projects and programs that the Senasp participates in, but also actions that may be the responsibility of other departments of the government. Among other incumbencies, it is expected to stimulate crime prevention measures and yield projects related to the development of interactions between security bodies and the population at large, including community actions, police disciplinary actions and registration of private security entities.

The Sub-department of the Public Security National Force is responsible for organizing, training and convening the National Force whenever there is an emergency situation in one of the states. It also takes responsibility for coordinating and supervising the National Force's activities whenever it is called upon. The same Sub-department undertakes intelligence activities and manages the information produced by the public security bodies.

There is a familiar distinction among the interviewees, between the four departments, regarding how they function. The Depaid and the National Force act as "means-to-an-end" according to some, because their attributions are not directly related to the public security policy core activity, but rather to the conditions that allow it to be followed through, such as creating the conditions that allow the existence of public security information; that this information is used for diagnosing problems; so that security professionals in the states get the proper capacity to execute the policy; or, in the National Force's case, gathering their members to act on specific cases when needed. These are actions "that make up the Department's menu" (Interview 8) and, thus, are relatively institutionalized, that is, their offer is somewhat continuous.

On the other hand, the actions of the Sub-Department for Policies, Programs and Projects and the one responsible for the National Public

Security Plan are more directly related to the core activities in the field of security and they are charged with managing projects “that have a beginning, a middle and an end” (Interview 4). Those sub-departments have the task of creating, managing and executing security projects that are usually of a temporary nature. For that very reason, the volume of official calls to tender, agreements, transfers, and donations that they are called on to administer is constantly changing and depends on a series of factors, which will be set out in detail later in the text. Their bureaucrats may also have a certain influence in the delineation of the format of the policies that will be adopted in the states.

“[We carry out] two main kinds of actions. Actions of induction: that is the actions undertaken by the states as they receive funding, there are voluntary transfers based on specific agreements; and also the direct actions associated to research, education in the field of security. So there are two axes that call for different competencies.” (Interview 4).

“(…) *Crack [It can be overcome]*: supposing it is a successful program, at some time or other it will no longer be on the list and something else will be done. Not here. From the point of view of what it’s done, irrespective of what is on the day’s agenda, we here are practically a ‘means’ activity. Even though we do have a lot of finalistic actions to carry out, I like to joke that from the macro point-of-view of the security policy, it is practically a ‘means’ department because we capacitate the officers to carry out the program actions, we seek the information to support program design, so it is really an ongoing thing” (Interview 6).

Senasp directors coordinate various projects at the same time and are responsible for various activities, which make it difficult to describe the role they play within the organization. Also, the idea that they have multiple functions to perform (CURRIE; PROCTER, 2003) prevails – the directors find themselves busy with tasks that might seem trivial compared to activities of designing a policy at the strategic level or executing it at street level. The functions they carry out seem to be highly fragmented among those that are traditionally associated to management – planning, coordination and monitoring, and other activities associated with responses to short-term emergency problems.

A part is very managerial, official calls to tender, selecting proposals, drawing up agreements, monitoring agreements, inspecting them.

Then there is another part in which we are actually ‘getting things done’. (Interview 1)

“There is a general coordinator, a general coordinator for budgeting and finance, a general coordinator for inspection, for accompanying and inspecting the agreements. Within the general coordination, there is technical assessment coordination, within the sphere of the general finance coordination we have budget coordination, the section for programs that handles specifically the whole execution, (...) contracts, drafts, signing, control, accompaniment, execution start-up...” (Interview 3)

“In the *Crack It can be overcome* Program we acquire the equipment and donate it, contract inspectors go there to evaluate the equipment. And we are engaged in a process to evaluate policy implementation. Because one of the things of the policy is that there is a local management committee, in the state and the municipality, to integrate public policies and they have to give us a feedback. Obviously that does not take place in real time, partly because of the personnel we have.” (Interview 2)

The directors find it difficult to systematically identify the activities they are responsible for because there is no specific single task. They are also unable to explain or define the competencies necessary to carry out such functions.

“I think that it is all very confused. If I wanted to write down the competencies needed for my post, I wouldn’t be able to do that, and why? Because there is a whole set of competencies that in practice I would find it very difficult to identify. (...) It is by nature a post that should be occupied by people specialized in the specific field of public security so that in some way we can plan what we want to get done during the term of a given government. That is, what my ongoing actions will be; what is the security policy. (...) Obviously that is a fundamental qualification, that is, it’s as if I were saying that it needs to be someone that understands security, that fully understands the field of public security, etc.” (Interview 1)

“First you need to have a lot of courage. Second a feel for things, leadership, power to articulation, to dialogue, to persuade people.” (Interview 4)

“[Some things] don’t have to go through somebody else, I have to look if they followed through on what I asked. So that’s one thing. I ‘get my hands dirty’ because we have few people and I need to know what the problems are.” (Interview 2).

Sometimes managers' routines get confused with those of frontline managers:

"There are some moments of 'shop floor bureaucracy', at least here in this sub-department, and that is sometimes confused with that middle-level bureaucracy. That's something you do not have any kind of structuring in this ministry, it doesn't seem to me that that exists in other ministries, that allows me to have support sections and that I don't need to worry with bureaucracy in the strict sense. What am I trying to tell you? I sign thousands of things, purchases, agreements, a whole pile of things. I always look at it all and say: luckily I'm a lawyer – and even so, I afraid about the things that I am approving." (Interview 1)

"More than listening, it is necessary to have a perception of what are the difficulties in order to (...) relate to the other states when they call me complaining that some technical staff member is not analyzing their proposal or reformulation the way they wish. Like the way the policy is conducted, the difficulties especially, because we always have many. I believe that I'm different in that because I enter the *Sincov* and I look. (...) I already manage to demystify and I think some other directors don't, so I don't know if I'm a good example." (Interview 2)

Beyond the distinction between "core" and "means-to-an-end" departments, there is another division in the Senasp between departments headed by directors with a police career background and others headed by "civilians", those that are not police. The Depaid and the Depro are both run by civilians and the departments responsible for the National Security Plan and the National Security Force are run by police officers. That distribution would seem to mirror the differences in ideological positions between the two groups insofar as they have repercussions regarding the division of work in the Department. The sub-departments coordinated by people without a police career background are more dedicated to the production of information and crime prevention which are themes dear to academics and/or activists from the security field. The other two sub-departments are headed by directors with a police career background and they are dedicated to the more "traditional" aspects of public security, namely administering the National Security Force and the National Public Security Fund.

That distribution may well diminish the space for internal debate but its effects seem attenuated somewhat by the fact that most of the staff

has held their posts or others in the Senasp for many years. That may have enabled them to adapt to that need for working alongside one another and to “develop their negotiating skills” (Interview 5). Nevertheless, it was observed that there are groups that share beliefs, values and proposals but at the same time establish disputes or at least raise barriers against others inside the organization (BEVIR; RHODES, 2002):

“Because the Senasp directors have been there for many years. Director X, for example, has been in the Senasp since 2006 or 2007. (...)Y has been here since 2003. So there are people with a lot of know-how about Senasp and that enables them to overcome these issues.” (Interview 5)

The turnover rate among middle-level bureaucrats in the Senasp seems to be quite low, at least in the cross-section that was examined by this research. There are very few career civil servants<sup>11</sup>, so most of them have been nominated to their posts and have no permanent employment bond with government. There are also many collaborators, usually police officers on temporary loan from state organizations. “They are the ones who sustain the policy, especially in view of the situation of cutting down on staff like this (*the present one*)” says one of the interviewees. On the other hand that may be a reflection of one of Senasp’s main problems, the lack of a “fixed structure”, which means it has to count on the collaboration of others to carry its policy forward.

A third interviewee considered that the problem with that mechanism is that it generally does not select civil servants “with a vocation” and in that context “vocation” means a more general objective on the part of the person to work for the benefit of public security. Conversely, joining Senasp would be done so by a sporadic need to work on a specific project for a temporary period. Of those, some remain beyond the initial period and that is the situation of many currently occupying nominated coordinators or directors, through invitation. Many of them left the Senasp only when

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<sup>11</sup> According to data supplied by the Senasp, the Department has 139 permanent civil servants. There are 65 posts occupied by nomination, but only 10 of them are occupied by career civil servants (and indeed the Senasp does not have its own structured career defined), and 16 are occupied by people from the police forces. The other 39 are held by people with no permanent employment bond.

the current management introduced large cuts in staff; some are still in the Federal Government, probably in the Ministry of Justice occupying different posts. In any event, all those that were interviewed had a long service trajectory in the federal or state governments<sup>12</sup> and many had been working at the Senasp itself for a long time.

The profiles of the staff that were interviewed were also very specific. Among those that do not have a police career background, it was clear that the department attracts professionals engaged in the area, generally speaking legal professionals or social scientists with a history of previous work in public security and/or in the field of human rights. There is no training required after the professional has been hired, although some individuals had taken management courses on their own volition. While these facts underscore the importance of having specialized staff, they are also a sign of the policy's increasing institutional precariousness given that its execution depends on collaborators and its management depends on staff nominated to their posts and with no permanent employment bond with government, albeit they enjoy relative stability in the organization.

### **What the Senasp MLBs do in their regular working day**

Senasp directors spend most of their time engaged in a variety of tasks, but especially in keeping in contact with local bureaucracies in the states and municipalities and with police corporations, in negotiating agreements and fund transfers, in analyses and inspections of the latter and sometimes carrying out inspections *in loco*. They also report that they take part in meetings with the upper echelons and with other ministries. Some of the interviewees said that they have participated in international representations, but only sporadically. However, these very same bureaucrats may find themselves engaged in tasks like contracting transport services, meals supply and accommodation associated with the holding of events or running capacity building activities, for example.

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<sup>12</sup> That is also valid for those that are not civil servants because the directors and coordinators that were interviewed are nominated precisely because they have already been work in the government for some time (usually in the Senasp itself).

Recently the practice of direct donation (of equipment for example) has become increasingly important and as a result Senasp has to take on the additional tasks of running competitive tendering processes which was formerly an attribution of the respective federated body. There also seems to have been a gradual increase in capacity building conducted directly by the Federal Government in the states and municipalities as well as training in the use of specific management tools for technical staff in the federated entities. An example of that is the training on the Siconv<sup>13</sup> for managing agreements drawn up between them and the Senasp itself and also for the interventions of the National Force. The aim of all those actions is to overcome the limitations imposed by the lack of local capacity so that it is in effect a centralizing part of the actions because of the need to achieve greater effectiveness for the policy, as for example “manage to purchase the right equipment and ensure that it is used in accordance with the demand” (Interview 6). In a similar vein, it may be that the highly detailed regular accompaniment of the agreements and other projects that Senasp carries out is the main explanatory factor for the high percentage of budget execution (around 90%, far higher than most other government bodies).

When describing their own routines, the interviewees also told how a considerable part of their time was spent in activities to address the demands of the control bodies. Their relations with those bodies are accompanied by considerable friction and the prevalence of “postures of control” that lack sensitivity in regard to the Department’s specific functions and attributions.

“With CGU [Office of the Federal Comptroller General] the experience we have here in the sub-department – and I mean the Senasp as a whole – is not a good one. Over there they are not minimally preparing themselves to understand the things here, they are extremely bureaucratic. I joke, I say they are very good at finding little ants, and eventually they run the risk of letting all the elephants go by. I can tell you without a doubt that I spent from 20 to 25% of my time on demands from control bodies and generally for very petty things”. (Interview 4).

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<sup>13</sup> Federal Government Agreements System.

“Sometimes you get the feeling that the person is using a magnifying glass on something very small and letting something big pass by. And the big things are not in the magnifying glass, it’s a different kind of thinking to catch the big things. It’s a much more analytical way of thinking than the magnifying glass, because you can’t kid around with this money laundering story: in money laundering, the processes are beautiful; the invoices are all there... everything is beautiful, it’s all organized. It’s a different kind of intelligence to detect, and it seems to me that CGU is still doing ‘Let me check that invoice...There’s a smudge on it. Make another one’. It’s as if they look at us and think ‘civil servants are all corrupt, so that means I’m here to catch you!’ And I look at them and I am like: ‘What!’ (...) Otherwise, I will carry on making mistakes. If I do not have good technical advice, internal control (...) people do as they know... and this we don’t have normally.” (Interview 1)

“I think control is fundamental, but control cannot be placed over understanding the action itself. (...) And because there are things they don’t know in practice... I saw that the National Force has to discuss with them if this body protector is better than that one. Then they like it, because they bring the protector, the National Force shield to be seen, touched, the weight felt, and that makes a difference. But I think there is a lack of knowledge from the front line, knowledge of how things work. When my colleague was fined, I saw them say: ‘There was no loss to public assets, there was no bad faith, but there was a mistake!’”. (Interview 2)

The relationship is made all the more difficult because the Department does not have its own legal advisory body; it can only use the Ministry of Justice’s own. The latter, however, is not very collaborative and its replies to queries are merely formal: “they don’t answer; they don’t help to solve the problems or decide on the best alternative” (Interview 1). Furthermore, all the staff interviewed protest that the control bodies undertake “activities that are none of their business” such as evaluating policy results and their idea of evaluation is also wrong: “if it can be touched and counted”, then it is considered as an action that has been effectively executed and it is evaluated positively. However, the results of a security policy are far less objective than that, as the interviewees explain:

“I was even explaining to the TCU people once, when they remarked about something saying – ‘Look, at the Ministry of Health...’ I said: – ‘At the Ministry of Health there are vaccines for old people, vaccines for children, there are policies. That will never change’. In the Public

Security area things are changing all the time. (...) Today I have the problem of violent deaths, I need to address that. Tomorrow it will be something else, crime migrates. When I start to work to cut down crime in a given area, it will migrate somewhere else. And I need to be ready for when it migrates, to develop another action to attack it wherever it goes.” (Interview 4)

“It is quite common for it [the action of the control bodies] to eat me alive. Quite often a technical competency is relegated to second place because you need to fight with the TCU (...) but you have no one to defend you and yet you need to go ahead with the purchase... It’s bad. The lack of the most minimal supporting structure means that we lose a lot in terms of our potential to finalize the thing itself.” (Interview 1)

Some of those that were interviewed, however, have developed mechanisms to forestall the control bodies and they reported a reduction in the usual hassle:

“Yes, it is important [CGU control]. (...) But it is important because it is supposed to be a form of support, ourselves included, to work in partnership with them in terms of procedures.” (Interview 7)

“What we are doing in the present administration is: not waiting for the *control* to come along and detect some irregularity, some error, some mistake, something that is liable to happen. We act first and approach the *control* telling them what we think and we align our understandings so that we can do things as correctly as possible. So that we can have fewer bottlenecks for them during inspection and, for us, who are the main actors, during execution.” (Interview 5)

Be that as it may, it is important to observe that recent public administration reform movements have fostered a vision of continual suspicion of civil servants. While on the one hand the control bodies seek to protect the public interests and exercise the necessary control over bureaucratic activities, on the other, the literature shows that as a consequence, governments are experiencing a loss of interest in government employment and especially a loss of trust on the part of civil servants (KELLOUGH; NIGRO, 2002; CONDREY; BATTAGLIO, 2007 *apud* CHEN; BOZEMAN, 2014: 553). When government agencies are subject to strict scrutiny, excessive supervision or regulation (RAINEY; BOZEMAN, 2000), it becomes highly likely that it will contaminate civil servants perception of

the degree of autonomy to be found in public administration. This point will be taken up again later in the text.

### **Perceptions of their work: the 'activist' MLB**

Another aspect repeated in the interviews and associated to the above discussion is the perception that their work does not receive due recognition.

"I think that, first of all, it is not easy to find people that want to work in the Federal Government, the salaries are very poor. That is, in terms of people with more propositional profiles, people who are important in the field of public security. (...) People have an illusion: 'there's status in working in the Federal Government'. But there is nothing glamorous about it." (Interview 2)

What interviewees felt was that however intensely they used their skills, there was no recognition for their efforts. That aspect was also underscored by Chen and Bozeman (2014)<sup>14</sup>. According to the informants' perceptions, there is another aspect insofar as the policy is largely implemented by experts who could not easily be replaced.

"The execution field is highly sensitive, it is a very technical area to work in. You don't get professionals like that anywhere. That is why, in some places, these professionals working with policy execution are not changed, because it is such a technical work." (Interview 8)

Nevertheless, there is a readily detectable feeling of commitment among them, a perception of their "civic duty". It is a recurrent sentiment and associated with the idea that "if I don't do this, nobody else will" (Interview 2), which was also identified and analyzed by Oliver<sup>15</sup> (1984).

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<sup>14</sup> "The discouragement stemming from a negative affective climate can hamper an individual's motivation and attitudes such as satisfaction with his job, involvement in the tasks and organizational commitment (THORESEN *et al.*, 2003). Both theory and practice suggest that embarrassment, pressure pain, envy and resentment are often derived products (...)." (CHEN; BOZEMAN, 2014, p. 553).

<sup>15</sup> Oliver bases his analysis on interviews conducted with participants in neighborhood associations, a voluntary social movement very different from the case under analysis. Nevertheless we are basing ourselves on Abers (2011) understanding that activism can occur inside or outside the State and in that sense the argument would be applicable to the Senasp MLBs.

“I think that when I came to work in the government, not at the Senasp, I noticed right away that if I were to allow it, I would be working constantly to fill demands. So made a list: ‘It makes sense for me to work for government as long as...’. So, even if it is only 15% of my time, I must have time to do what I believe needs to be done. Every once in a while I tick the list, even if it’s something bureaucratic – like when, after two years, we managed to create the inter-ministerial decree regulating the use of force, which was something very dear to my heart. (...) It was not a top priority at the Senasp or even for the Secretariat for Human Rights. But for me and three or four other people who thought it was an important issue and we went ahead and did it. Even though its results have not been valued internally, it was a tick off my list. I am very clear about the things that I want and need to do”. (Interview 1)

“There is no incentive at all [*for professionals to continue in their jobs*]. [*- So why did you stay on?*] It is the desire to work with something one knows about.” (Interview 5).

“I think it is because I like working in this field; because it is a fascinating area... it is challenging... very stressful, but challenging.” (Interview 6)

Civil servants constantly reaffirm their commitment, explain that they carry on because they feel challenged, but also because they do not believe there is anyone else disposed to do the same. Oliver (1984) also identified this belief that the participation of others in the production of a public good is difficult especially when the results are not immediately tangible, as is the case with public security.

Given the pervasive comments on their inefficiency, together with the difficulty to obtain an objective basis on which to institute control plus the policy’s poor degree of institutionalization, glaringly reflected in the absence of an adequate and sufficient technical *corps*, the scenario does not seem to be a very favorable one for Senasp’s middle-level bureaucrats to perform their activities in. Even so, given that their primary activity is articulation and negotiation, the bureaucrats manage to find spaces for an incremental and collaborative kind of innovation (KURATKO *et al.*, 2005), as will be shown below.

## **Negotiation and articulation: the space for situated agency**

Bevir e Rhodes (2008, p. 3) propose that individuals are “situated agents” who reflect on their own beliefs and act for their own reasons but only do so against a backdrop of “inherited traditions”. That means that on the one hand the agents necessarily find themselves in “historical contexts”, but on the other, it also means that we cannot take such contexts to be “natural phenomena” – we must view the traditions or structures as being pragmatic constructs. Traditions can also be considered as being the resultant of unintentional consequences of other agents’ actions, which constitute a social world that presents itself to the individual as “given” (BEVIR; RHODES, 2008, p. 5-8). Accordingly they do influence but do not determine the action - because the subject cannot create his own meaningful experiences, fundamentals, logical thoughts, beliefs and actions outside of a social context.

Thus, in their rejection of autonomy as an idea whereby subjects think and act strictly on the basis of their own reasoning and command, Bevir and Rhodes also move away from a structuralist viewpoint insofar as it would be possible to defend the possibility of agency even without autonomy.

To deny that subjects can escape from all social influences is not to deny that they can act creatively for reasons that make sense to them. On the contrary, we must allow for agency if only because we cannot separate and distinguish beliefs and actions by reference to their social context alone. Different people adopt different beliefs and perform different actions against the background of the same social structure. So, there must be a space in social structures where individual subjects decide what beliefs to hold and what actions to perform for their own reasons. (BEVIR; RHODES, 2002, pp. 139-140).

Thus subjects not only develop, reject or adapt their inherited tradition or context, they also choose their own beliefs and actions creating new repertoires which can transform the social structure. It is in that light that we will address the question of innovation in this chapter.

What stands out in the self-descriptions of the Senasp middle-level bureaucracy’s actions and the narratives of those we interviewed is the importance of the roles of articulation and negotiation they perform. The articulation, so necessary to make the policy effective, often involves finding

solutions for bottlenecks of the most varied kind that can be found in the spheres of the states and municipalities.

Therefore, the Department's intervention is orientated towards the provision of training for public security professionals, which is lacking altogether in many places; gathering and systematizing public security information for the construction of diagnosis; specific and focused interventions on places where difficulties are greater and crime rates are higher; or even directed at training local managers to execute the financial resources provided by the Federal Government, and other matters.

“Because of the autonomy of the states, we cannot implement directly. That is why we have to talk about inducing, fostering, supporting projects. We can't say: – ‘You are going to do this...’ (...). We articulate through research carried out in various regions, states and municipalities, and as part of those researches, we elaborate diagnosis, pass them to our top managers, who go to the states' managers and present the research and the diagnoses to say ‘We have problems, here and there. As part of the Federal Government's public security policy we are concerned about this and we want to support this project which could have greater impacts nationally’. Then we invite them to take part in the project.” (Interview 4)

“We have the same problems with the states as we have with the Federal Executive branch. In the states we do not find an area dedicated to do the planning, purchasing, distribution and exercise control over that [the execution of the policy], the states don't have it. This administrative area works on a rotation basis. They take a military police officer, a civil police officer or a firefighter from the street to do this, but that's not what they applied for. He keeps there because of the own personal expertise he acquired himself and there he is, but he doesn't want to stay there. He works there for a while, then leaves and another one takes his place, and then another. That turnover is a very serious problem.” (Interview 3)

To ensure their performance, the managers have developed negotiating methods that allow them to put the policies into effect. They find themselves in such positions that require bureaucrats to become negotiators among the various stakeholders and it is their capacity to negotiate with the different agencies and interests that enables the policy to achieve results (BEVIR; RHODES, 2008). The mechanisms vary and include telephone and e-mail conversations, and others such as “on line data

systems, meetings, seminars, debates with police academies, presentations of results obtained in the states, etc.” (Interview 2)

In addition to their interaction with state and municipal actors involved in local execution of the public security policy, the Senasp’s MLBs interact with a network of actors inside and outside the sphere of the state, including other ministries. They also interact with research institutes, NGOs and international bodies. The relations with other ministries foster the development of inter-sector policies and may eventually require the intervention of another body, as we shall see later on.

“It is yet another situation that greatly depends on the MLBs’ negotiating and articulation skills. This Department covers ... let us say from A to Z of the alphabet. We can unfold a variety of actions because of all the interlocution with other ministries especially in the field of [crime] prevention. For example, with the Human Rights Department, we have work we are doing with the Inter-ministerial Committee for the Street-dwelling Population; the Inter-ministerial Committee for the LGBT population. [In the area of] children and adolescents you have a whole range: there is the question of the adolescent offender, child and adolescent victims of sexual exploitation and others. We take part in forums, and we try to integrate the information to our actions in the field of prevention.” (Interview 2)

“In regard to other ministries, I think we have some favored partners among them. I think the Department of Policies for Women is a favored partner, the general secretariat, the Special Department for Promoting Racial Equality (Seppir), the Ipea [Institut of Applied Economic Research]. Eventually, it is the Human Right Department that we most deal with and more recently, the Ministry of Health, although it is not a frequent partner. I believe those are the Ministries that we in the Department most have dealings with.” (Interview 1)

“One way or another, the ministries for vulnerable segments of the population will bear part of the costs and that because security also relates to them, whether it is a question of providing protection [to individuals] or even to address the issue of policemen that violate [human rights]. The question of the data or of how to train such policemen to perform better in the front line are also topics that are necessarily present in all dialogues of that kind. So we have these lines of dialogue well established and working well.” (Interview 7)

The interaction with civil society, however, is very slight and so is that with the National Public Security Council (*Conselho Nacional de Segurança*)

*Pública* - Conasp), even though the interviewees felt it to be important. Such omission contrasts strongly with the everyday dialogue established with the council that gathers the departments in the states and with the council of police commanders and heads of police forces, which clearly indicates the key role of the police corporations in the performance of the Department.

“[About the interaction with the civil society organizations] There is the Conasp, which has various representatives, but actually I deal more with the public security institutions.” (Interview 5)

“The articulation within the ambit of the councils themselves is more constrained. For example in the councils of the street-dwelling population [policy] there are people representing civil society. Here in the Senasp we don’t have that. The ministry does not extend that practice to the Senasp. We don’t have them and we are not authorized to form them.” (Interview 2)

“Well, in regard to Senasp’s relations with civil society, I don’t have very good relations. We have the Conasp, which theoretically should be the *locus* for such interaction with civil society, but in fact it does not do it. It is something 100% isolated from the Senasp, from us, the directors. I don’t know whether the others would describe it differently but I have only attended the Conasp meetings once or twice. Sometimes I found out from the Conasp website that it is deliberating on or discussing something that has a lot to do with my department but I was not even called on to report what actions my department is carrying out in regard to the topic. So there is very little interaction. I came here from [another Secretariat] and there the relations with civil society were very intense, it was not a very harmonious relation, there was plenty of conflict and harsh criticism, but it was OK, here that is not so. Here things are still focused on the council of the states’ public security departments, and of the commanders and the chiefs of police.” (Interview 1)

The narratives also refer to interaction, albeit infrequent and only recent, with those civil society organizations that work with vulnerable population groups, especially in the context of unfolding projects specifically directed at the segment.

“In the Pronasci, which handles preventative actions, I go to society, to the most vulnerable points, I have to get and there I really do need organized civil society in order to try to design something like *Mulheres da Paz* (Women for Peace) and *Protejo* (I Protect) projects, which address the question of protection for young people, the needy, the

addicted and so on. We need to go there in order to understand. Who do we need [to contact]? We need [to contact] the people who care for them, who are organizing and working with them so that we can find out how we can help.” (Interview 2)

Finally, there are intense relationships established with universities and research centers due to formal collaboration agreements for the production of diagnosis and policy evaluations. Some interviewees pointed that over time it was built up an informal, but stable network with academics who had served as preferential Senasp informants and consultants. This was highly important for these bureaucrats insofar as they had constituted an epistemic community that contributed to imbuing the Department’s policies and actions with consistency and its performance with legitimacy. Apparently that relationship with the academics became even closer from 2003 onwards, according to one of the interviewees, but currently it is on the wane. Notwithstanding, it is definitely a tendency among the new middle-level bureaucracies, for whom their interpersonal networks have usually been the key means to identifying problems, finding out about new solutions and establishing relations with experts in order to navigate the more formal decision pathways among the governmental agencies they populate”<sup>16</sup> (ALEXANDER *et al.*, 2011, p. 1274).

Other important actors that the middle-level bureaucrats maintain relations with are the international organizations such as the UNDP, the BID and others who are partners in the implementation of projects and actions “that could perfectly well be carried out by the Senasp, but are not for the lack of sufficient staff” (Interview 8). In short, these latter partnerships not only insert the Senasp in another important network, but they also “make it possible for Senasp to do what it is supposed to do” (Interview 6) and constitute another alternative created to overcome the problem of lack of staff.

The middle-level bureaucrats have no direct contact with politicians or the legislative branch. With local politicians like mayors and heads of

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<sup>16</sup> “Para navegar nas vias de decisão mais formais entre os órgãos governamentais em que se situam”.

state government departments, they conduct articulation which is generally carried out by the office of the head of the department in deference to the established hierarchy. That is in alignment with another tendency identified in Alexander's research:

Another unusual pattern concerning key-roles performed in the networks is the peripheral position of politicians in these kinds of networks. (...) Given their role in defining policy and government's general strategic orientation, we expected that politicians would be more apparent, especially in the strategic information networks. Results suggest that in comparison with others internal actors, politicians make their main contribution to governments in the ambit of formal processes and comparatively speaking, they are of no importance in the informal world of resource sharing (ALEXANDER *et al.*, p. 1287-1288, 2011).

Be that as it may, their networks of negotiation have expanded the scope of influence of these intermediate managers and that in turn has been primarily caused by the policy's vertical and horizontal design, that is, by the cross-cutting powers imposed by the federative pact, and also by the need to execute transverse actions and projects in a coordinated manner with other ministries and Departments of the government itself. The intense articulation occurs in spite of the great set of limitations that exists, including possible constraints imposed by the senior bureaucrats. In that sense, it mirrors the space that these middle-level bureaucrats have constructed in which to act against a backdrop of an extremely adverse institutional, organizational and political context. It is essential to bear this aspect in mind in order to thoroughly assess whether the middle-level bureaucracy performs a political role or a merely bureaucratic one and to determine what their effective position is in the organizational hierarchy.

Before drawing any conclusion regarding this aspect, it is worthwhile considering that the literature has generally indicated that a more effective public administration is supported by the construction of information flows and the establishment of interpersonal communication. These allow for the construction of convergences with the central actors in terms of strategic counseling and information or with others actors that are not considered as occupying central positions in the organizations' hierarchies but who are of fundamental importance in ensuring the policy is put into effect.

The excerpts from the interviewees' narratives that follow are examples of the kind of relations that are constructed in the various dimensions of their work:

"We are fostering and inducing a policy that the states already have but they do not have the financial resources to take on some of the actions involved. Within its possibilities, the Senasp does that and works alongside the states to that end. The training is done now by the e-learning network which is currently the biggest network in the world in the area of public security. We have around two hundred thousand civil servants being trained every year in public security, management and all the other processes that are administered in public security institutions." (Interview 6)

"We unfold a policy that attempts to meet the demands of the neediest [federated] entities. We have a new technology to introduce into public security, one that will reduce the demand on human resources for the states. Because we are engaged in actions of the same kind, we try to induce the adoption of this policy. For example, the purchase of equipments we do in the department via agreements or voluntary transfers and passed on to them." (Interview 4)

"Up until a short time ago, we were the only ones working with the municipalities – verifying how the municipality could work in the field of public security, working with prevention of crime, drawing the municipal departments (of sports, culture, health, education and social assistance) closer. (...) We have always worked with the induction of actions, effectively transferring funds to the states and municipalities so that they can work with them locally." (Interview 2)

"And now we are proposing to the minister and other federal bodies that there should be a second part of the security program boosting the aspect of articulation among the federated entities. That is one of the things. We also organize regional meetings every four months. We meet together at least once every three months." (Interview 5)

As it can be observed, MLBs occupy a central position in the information flows both in relation to the upper echelon and to the regional/local bureaucracies and actors. Being so, it would seem that the MLBs and the Senasp are capable of altering or significantly influencing security policy

results. In situations in which spending is being cut down, for example, a decision typically made in the upper echelons of administration, there is plenty of space for the middle-level bureaucrats of this Department to influence the decision – as to exactly *where* the cuts will be made and *what* the priorities will be, for instance.

“Actually our induction for budget planning is within the planning of what we intend to do in the coming year. When I am planning execution for the coming year I have to explain why I am going to undertake so many actions. In the sphere of the ‘Brasil Mais Seguro’ (Safer Brazil) Program, what I am going to do is: to establish agreements with four other states and in those states I will need to coordinate actions with the civil (investigative) police force, the Fire Brigades and the military police. And in the sphere of these institutions involved, what will I need to purchase? I make a list of their needs and draw up a budget. In this intervenes the question of the [budget] limits. So we send it in to the Ministry, which says ‘you are not going to have two hundred million for the *Brasil mais Seguro* Program because the ministry only has so many millions and it has to divide them up among so many Departments, the Federal Police, etc. You are going to get one hundred and fifty million or one hundred and twenty million’. So, you have to redo it all, examine the actions that you set priority on, cut out those with that will have less impact, do it all over again. It is on that basis that we have some influence. Not that we can say what has to be and what has not. But we do have the power to diminish, take away something here and there, leave some policy or other for next year, and see what is more essential right now, for the year in course. This is the kind of thing that we advise the head of the Department on”. (Interview 4)

“[In regard to the inspection of the various agreements] Nowadays we define priorities. Given that we cannot be everywhere at one and the same time, we define priorities. It is within the sphere of those priorities that we are going to conduct the process of accompaniment and inspection.” (Interview 3)

Interviewee’s speeches show that they are partly responsible for the adjustment and redesigning of the projects and the determination of priorities. Thus, they do influence the decision-making process at the strategic level. Another example of that is the inspection and supervision of the agreements that are established, given that the decision as to where the monitoring is to be done, is made by the MLBs. It is also apparent how the middle-level bureaucrats perform an integrating role in the priority

projects insofar as they consolidate the decisions passed down by the upper, strategic echelon and translate them according to the local needs.

The following narrative excerpt refers to one of the priority projects, namely the *Brasil Mais Seguro*, and the next one, to a service that engages directly with the citizens. Both of them mirror the influence that a Senasp MLBs can have given his strategic position in regard to the production and concentration of information. They are the ones who receive and get to know the data, the diagnosis produced by the research and the main connections in the sphere of the municipalities and the states. With that information, they can influence policy design or redesign it, thereby modifying current performance patterns.

“They wanted us to come up with a Plan just like the one the previous government had, a carefully designed public security plan, fleshed out. However, the present management opted to work directly with specific focused points. When we began there was no such thing as ‘Safer Brazil’ (...) The diagnosis showed that violent crime was on the increase and so we needed to create a project, a program. If I had something already designed on hand, I would have to re-design it, keep adjusting it all the time. So we worked with priority programs. We had to create a program to block violent crime. What to do? We brought together technical staff, developed a program, carried out the research, made a diagnosis and developed an entire policy to address that specific point.” (Interview 4)

“... [About the citizen information system]. It is something new and I am the one that handles it. That is mainly because of the years of service. I am now in my fifth mandate as head of the sub-department, so I have a very broad vision of the Senasp itself and of how things are conducted, how it works with the states and municipalities in the question of conducting the policy.” (Interview 2)

As we have seen, the middle-level bureaucracy influences and regulates the end-of-the-line decisions made by the local implementers. The aspect of innovation that the Senasp MLBs take over is only possible because of the interaction of that bureaucracy with a considerable range of actors inside and outside of the government who are important for the policy implementation. From that interaction spaces arise opportunities for decision and innovation – in other words, for situated agency. These are

circumstances in which the MLBs are provoked by necessity or by some kind of constraint to develop a new action, a new protocol or a new directive<sup>17</sup>.

Although the Senasp bureaucrats have managed to create mechanisms to operate their vertical relationships, they experience great difficulty in their intra-governmental relations. Part of the success in coordinating the inter-sector environment is due to the existence of an actor at a higher level who demands results. The role of coordination recently taken on by the Civil Office of the Presidency was positively evaluated by all the interviewees as distinctive and highly relevant. In that regard, they mentioned the coordination of programs that the Presidency of the Republic prioritizes and that are the responsibilities of the Senasp but are carried out via articulations with other ministries. The Civil Office's intervention, which began in 2013 in the form of monthly meetings with the various actors from different ministries, appears to be an effective strategy for establishing the necessary pacts and those meetings have become a reference even for those articulations that are attempted outside the sphere of government.

“So how does it improve the actions? I go to the Civil Office and I show them the need to increase the limit, to increase the margin of credit, to increase the funding in order to unfold a given action within the sphere of a priority program. So then I manage to obtain a permanently open channel for solving those problems over which I had no managerial control whatever. With that open channel, I practically have direct management. The Senasp ends up having a direct induction of a problem that on our own we were unable to administer.” (Interview 1)

“That change of attitude, thinking more about establishing governance, that is a much better idea. Because we must understand the idea of governance that they are propagating so that we can implant it right

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<sup>17</sup> Those spaces emerge mainly because since the Department was created, that bureaucracy has developed into a set of actors favored by and for the reception, discussion and dissemination of valuable information. Academic development in the field of public security in Brazil has been most vigorous at the time the Senasp was at the peak of its development and the former was partly nourished by the knowledge produced in the latter body (LIMA, 2006; GODINHO, 2011). Throughout that period, the middle-level bureaucrats circulated in the spaces of both the state and the academic world. Nevertheless, however contradictory it might seem, that situation is actually facilitated by the policy's low level of institutionalization and the spaces may well become reduced once the Senasp becomes staffed by career civil servants that are not 'activists'.

here and try to foster its implantation in the states. Because, as we are talking about induction, about fostering things, I cannot implant anything in the states directly. If I have an idea, I need the states to have the same concept of governance implanted so that we can carry out that kind of action together.” (Interview 5)

“I think that sometimes the role of the SAM [Sub-Department of the Civil Office for Articulation and Monitoring] is very inconvenient because, in fact, their business is to be inconvenient. So in principle it is a role that I appreciate, that is, the role of articulation. Because when we go to other ministries, in some circumstances it’s very difficult to achieve a formal agreement. (...) Particularly the work we are doing with the Ministry of Health. Now it has finally got underway, but only after a whole year. It was very difficult indeed! That is a Ministry that it is hard to work with in terms of collaboration. (...) The SAM was actually very good at mediating it and so on.” (Interview 7)

“The de-bureaucratization... In the meetings that are held you jump months ahead. Because I go there and explain all my problems, all my difficulties. It is a process of de-burocratization.” (Interview 4)

“The creation of the priority projects has introduced a sense of direction. You stop diluting your resources among various projects. There is a guideline for you and for those responsible for [policy/project] execution.” (Interview 6)

## **Discussion and some conclusions**

Bevir and Rhodes’s (2002, 2008) interpretivist theory endeavors to establish an explanation that lies somewhere between a structuralist and an individualist approach. By establishing this middle term, their view rejects both the consideration of structures as being excessively capable of controlling and determining individual behavior and the view of “excessively subjective individuals”. Those authors call it “situated agency”, in which autonomy is constrained by structure and political action becomes a cultural practice that depends on the meaning of actions embedded in the social contexts. The structure, in turn, is marked by inherited traditions which are modified in the face of dilemmas that confront the structure, like new ideas, for example. In that context, subjects are capable of choosing among different conviction and courses of action and they have the chance to innovate when possible.

The structure can be explained in four major ways: in the form of traditions, networks of beliefs that influence actions; it may consist of a sub-set of dilemmas that confront the traditions; it can also be represented by cultural practices that stem from the actions of individuals and represent themselves as “objective social facts”; or again in the form of unintended consequences of the subjects’ actions in general. The agent, then, navigates among those structures determining his or her actions according to the limits they present, and the degree of limitation or constraint determines whether the space for innovation will be larger or smaller. In any event, all individuals are situated agents and they innovate even without having complete autonomy (BEVIR; RHODES, 2008, p. 6; BEVIR; RHODES, 2002, p. 142-ss).

In that light, both power and autonomy must be understood in a relational way, given that a tradition of specific behavior or even the behavior of other actors restricts the possibility of agency. According to Bevir and Rhodes, the case study employed in this research was guided by the intention to investigate how certain traditions, dilemmas and structures restrict the actions of Senasp’s middle-level bureaucrats. In that regard, we have tried to understand both the capacity for action and the capacity for resistance: how, against such an adverse backdrop, the set of actors manages to transform original functions with their experience; how beliefs and ideas brought in not only by their “activist” baggage but also by the networks of relationships and partnerships they build up have impacts over and oxygenate public policy (BEVIR; RHODES, 2002, 2008).

Obviously, the cross-section examined by this study has neither the intention nor the necessary outreach to establish a complete narrative much less does it set out to cover the entire historical trajectory of the creation (or continual re-creation) of the Senasp or the performance of the Federal Government in the field of public security. Nevertheless, it does try to shed light on a little noticed aspect, the routine of those that actually implement a given public policy, how relevant the factors in the respective dimension are and the positive or negative impacts they have, how they perform and, ultimately, the results they obtain.

The self-descriptions proffered by the middle-level bureaucrats in the Senasp in regard to their everyday routines were the main evidence on

which this study was based. By means of their narratives, the social context they find themselves in is made explicit, as well as their scope and the way they perform. The social context is marked by i) the institutional heritage which installed a context permeated by a whole set of loosely articulated and highly varied systems and organizations, ii) the political response that emerged in the attempt to institute a 'national policy' based on inducing the performances and iii) the trajectory of that policy and of the security agenda, highly intermittent and strongly marked by the alternation of periods of its prioritization and non-prioritization on the part of the Federal Government. Consequently, it was constantly found necessary to renew the operational performance to address the distinct political moments that the body has lived through since the time it was created.

This research has shown that the Senasp's middle-level bureaucrats do indeed occupy a privileged position insofar as they can absorb and synthesize strategic information, interpret it and channel it to the top echelon of their organization. Accordingly, they are capable of affecting the visions of the strategic strata and it is not uncommon for their interpretations to be used as the basis for decision-making. These particular MLBs are also capable of redesigning, facilitating or adapting strategic decisions, constructing alignments, translating broad strategies into short term operational performances and making their execution feasible or even mediating the vision of those at the top with the operational reality. In that sense, they actually end up exercising a strong influence on the end of the line, that is, the bureaucracy executing the policy, usually at the local level in the sphere of the other federative entities (the federated states and municipalities). In other rarer cases, the exercise of that influence takes the form of a deliberate strategy that emerges on the same level as that of the MLBs and which is practically independent of the strategic level.

In short, their actions are of fundamental importance for the effective coordination of the various actors and systems embraced by the public security policy. The difficulties that exist are mainly due to the fact that such coordination is the main purpose of this "National Policy". That is because performing coordination, articulation, and concatenation of functions depend on consistency and institutionalization (something

quite different from excessive control and regulation). Without them, the coordinating role of the middle-level bureaucracies wanes and jeopardizes the policy's efficacy.

This study has drawn attention, on the one hand, to the capacity of influence these intermediate actors have, but also to the fact that it does not only depend on their personal abilities and sensitivity in regard to the strategic context in which the national security policy is implemented. Additionally, it also depends on the level of conflict with the professional staff responsible for the everyday, routine operations,- for example, the local bureaucracy, the police corporations<sup>18</sup> and the criminal justice system -, and on their position in the organizational structure. In this case, it reflects the prioritization of the public security agenda and that of the Senasp itself within the sphere of the Ministry of Justice.

The first aspect, as it has already been pointed out, has to do with the basic intention that the policy has of breaking with the traditional pattern of performance and with the monopoly of the traditional organizations in this area, namely, the police forces and the judicial system. The second has to do with the fact that the room for situated agency that the MLBs have managed to find within the Senasp only exists at the micro level. That means that even the major actors eminently capable of exercising their influence cannot produce any significant alterations- or construct any stronger institutions. Thus, today it seems that the political limitations of their actions, that is, the priorities established by the strategic sphere of the Federal Executive constitute their principle dilemma. That limitation has an impact on the policy's degree of institutionalization and eventually on the structure of the Senasp itself as it implies an insufficient supply of personnel and funding, among other resources.

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<sup>18</sup> "In some areas of public policy, (...) some categories have greater power to oppose the commands of the MLBs than others". Furthermore, "whenever the category of MLBs and the category under their command - given the fact that they are 'powerfully autonomous' - do not coincide, then the implementation of any policies or directives stemming from the upper echelons that the bureaucrats consider to be contrary to their own interests or perceptions of how they should perform becomes even more difficult. See also Currie and Procter (2005, p. 1326-ss).

Thus, in spite of the evidence of exercise of innovation on the part of the Senasp middle-level bureaucrats and its effects and importance, this cannot be considered a “success story”. The Senasp bureaucrat’s case is dissonant with the other cases examined by this research. The ‘high’ degree of discretionary power this bureaucracy exercises has nothing to do with its recent creation as was the case with the *Bolsa Verde*, for example. On the other hand, its relatively long existence has not led to any adequate degree of institutionalization or any shielding of the policy would be provided by establishing a specific career for implementing it, as it was the case with the *Bolsa Família* or the most outstanding example in this research, the bureaucracy associated with fiscal policy. Again, the characteristics of the negotiation and articulation conducted by the Senasp’s middle-level managers are not explained by the same reasons that explain the negotiating and articulating performance of the PAC MLBs; unlike the PAC, the public security policy has not been given priority and neither has it achieved stability.

In this sense, it is just one more case to be included in a relatively extensive set of studies which suggest that the capacity to innovate or even to make the policy effective is opposed by a strong political interference. The resulting scenario, which the interviewed bureaucrats know so well, is not just one of loss of motivation, limitations to their capacity to operate the policy or to do any long term planning, but it is one that cries out for the much needed reforms in the sector – a long standing diagnosis and one that in theory orients and is the objective of the policy itself.

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# **CONCLUSION – PROFILES, TRAJECTORIES AND RELATIONS: IN A PURSUIT OF A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS OF MIDDLE- LEVEL BUREAUCRATS OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT**

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The aim of this book is to contribute to understanding, on the part of academics and the State itself, a category of bureaucrats that occupies central posts in the government, the so-called middle echelon. To that end, in the course of the presentation of this collection of articles on that theme, using various methods, we have endeavored to trace the profile and trajectory and describe the performance of these Federal Government bureaucrats. To achieve that objective, the results of a theoretical study mapping the respective literature and empirical studies using qualitative and quantitative analysis methods have been presented. The administration of a survey made it possible to identify some elements of the profile and trajectories of these actors. In turn, the five case studies provided a more in-depth perception of how they perform and their involvement with various different public policies.

In this closing chapter dedicated to conclusions we set out a cross-cutting synthesis of the seven empirical chapters of this research seeking to identify elements that they have in common and others that distinguish them, to enable us to develop important reflections as to what these mid-level federal bureaucrats are and what they do. The text is also intended to introduce new issues for the future research agenda always within the reference framework of the theoretical discussions developed in Chapter 1.

## Profile and trajectory

An important step towards delineating the characteristics of the MLBs is to analyze their professional profiles and examine whether they differ from those of other members of the state bureaucracy. In that regard, the survey results contributed to enabling the identification of central aspects such as women's participation, bureaucrats' qualifications, their careers and accumulated experience.

Women are under-represented in the middle echelon of the Federal Government bureaucracy: the higher the post, the less they participate, a situation that is frequently identified in the labor market at large. Nevertheless, there is a noticeable heterogeneity in the patterns of occupation of the posts at the level of director or special advisor (DAS) and those filled by nomination and other equivalent posts with different nomenclature in various government sectors. On the one hand the distribution of such posts between men and women is more even in the social area ministries, while on the other, male majority is greatest in the ministries of the economic area.

In regard to middle-level bureaucrats' qualifications, data of the most up-to-date survey available, the Integrated Human Resources Administration System (*Sistema Integrado de Administração de Recursos Humanos - Siape*)<sup>1</sup> shows that, on average, the MLBs are highly qualified insofar as 94% of them have a university education or higher and, of those, 63% have a postgraduate degree. If we consider the situation of the Brazilian population at large where just 11% have a university education or higher, then we can safely say that this segment of the federal bureaucracy is an elite. The educational aspect is all the more relevant when it becomes apparent that the most highly educated among those holding nominated (DAS) posts are those with the greatest influence on the higher echelon, which suggests that capacity building is a central question not only in the

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<sup>1</sup> The Siape data registers the employees' qualifications at the moment of entering government service. It does not, however, register any progress in the bureaucrats' qualification after that moment.

characterization of their profiles but also in the way they carry out their activities (Chapter 3).

The great majority (80%) of all MLBs have a permanent employment bond with public administration and, above all, careers in the Federal Government, which clearly refutes the well-known ‘Brasilia myth’ that DAS posts are predominantly occupied through clientelism practiced by actors external to the Brazilian State (LOUREIRO; ABRÚCIO; PACHECO, 2010). The logic behind the occupation of such posts, however, tends to vary according the sector of government and the presence of career civil servants is highest in the economic and infrastructure sectors. As to the trajectories of these professionals, they have spent most of their careers in federal public administration, although there are noticeable differences among the sectors in other areas of performance (sub-national governments, private enterprise, non-governmental organizations). In short, the bureaucrats have considerable experience in the Federal Government and, more specifically, acting as team managers.

In addition to those factors, the average time they have held their present posts tends to be aligned with the duration of the presidential mandate. The survey results are in agreement with data available on the Transparency Portal<sup>2</sup> on the population of those occupying DAS posts and confirm the well-known aspect of the high internal turnover rate in this particular bureaucracy. In other words, there are always many changes among those occupying mid-level bureaucracy posts, but they always seem to be filled by the same group of actors, that is, career civil servants with managerial experience in Federal Government.

The hypothesis that the turnover of MLBs is internal requires specific investigation because the questionnaire used for the quantitative study does not make it possible to effectively confirm the assertion. However, the qualitative studies seem to indicate the same perception. As an illustration, while in the Federal Revenue Department (Chapter 8) there is a high turnover rate among career civil servants of the institution itself, in

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<sup>2</sup> <http://transparencia.gov.br>.

the Senasp (Chapter 9) there is a much lower rate of change in the middle echelon, which tends to be dominated by bureaucrats with no permanent employment bond with the Ministry of Justice. The analysis of turnover points to another interesting line of investigation: to gain an understanding of how it takes place in the different sectors of government, that is, to see whether bureaucrats holding DAS positions tend to move to other posts within the same sector, the social sector, for example, or if the changes are predominantly from one sector to another.

On the one hand we can conclude that the typical middle-level bureaucrat in Federal Government is a highly educated male with large managerial experience in public administration and has held his post since the current government took office. On the other hand, the survey data, together with the qualitative analyses, introduce elements that suggest greater complexity in the profiles of those actors and that the profile may vary not only from sector to sector, but even among specific government institutions and programs. An example lies in the Senasp where there is a considerable number of such bureaucrats without any permanent employment bond with the Federal Public Administration.

Other crucial factors to be considered when characterizing the MLBs are those that influence their recruitment process and consequently their differentiation in regard to all the other members of the federal bureaucracy. What are the reasons that determine the nomination of a MLB? That question is a tricky one, both in the interviews and in the survey data, insofar as one must admit the possibility of the respondents tending to exaggerate their own attributes. What can be observed from the two methods employed is the prevalence of technical competence and professional experience to the detriment of political or personal relations considerations - a fact which, in theory, converges with the classical Weberian premise in regard to bureaucracy, although important differences have been detected in the degrees of importance of factors determining nomination in different sectors of government (Chapter 2).

The case study analyses show that in all policies investigated the process for recruiting managers placed high value on the technical and knowledge aspects and the person's professional experience to the

detriment of party-political considerations. This was underscored by the fact that 80% of those who were interviewed and occupy DAS posts by nomination are permanent civil servants and highly qualified both in academic terms and professionally. That percentage was confirmed by the survey data. This knowledge level meets the demands of a vision of middle-level bureaucrats that is highly technically orientated whereby a high level of technical qualification is held to be essential for anyone to occupy such posts. As we shall see later, those knowledge levels and professional qualities are made known and disseminated in the bureaucrats' own relationship networks.

At the same time, that esteem for knowledge and technical qualification is boosted not only by the upper echelons when selecting the middle-level bureaucrats but it also appears in the MLBs' own discourse when they narrate the importance of their knowledge for the posts they occupy, valuing a technical aspect in decision-making and in their own selection for the post or the selections they make for their work teams. The valuing of technical knowledge, however, is not limited to the specific contents of the policies. In the case of public security, for example, what is valued most is the manager's previous professional experience with public security (Chapter 9) or, as in the case of the *Bolsa Família* (Chapter 5), it was seen that broader knowledge of the state and public administration were also highly valued.

Alongside the aspects of competence and experience there is another question that stands out, namely the bureaucrat's personal involvement with a specific policy or program. In that regard there are examples of bureaucrats concerned with institutionalizing the programs they were involved in, endeavoring to create rules, norms and routines that would make the policy perennial and safeguard their memory. That was particularly obvious in the case of MLBs involved in the initial stages of *Bolsa Família* implementation and in the current *Bolsa Verde* program, and also visible in the construction of the PAC norms and the (sometimes frustrated) efforts to construct regulations for the Senasp's actions.

In the case of public security policy, the narratives reveal an almost passionate involvement with the policy and how important it is to those

bureaucrats that things be done in the best possible manner. Again, in the *Bolsa Verde* there is evidence of commitment that goes far beyond the merely professional aspect and that is a stance that resembles something very much like middle-level bureaucrat ‘activism’.

Such values are visibly being disseminated and operate in the social networks in which these bureaucrats circulate. Some of the networks are formed by those occupying management positions in the Federal Government. In every case there are declarations as to how important the MLBs’ relational networks are when they need to form teams or aspire to certain posts. At the same time there are statements that involvement in such networks is based on certain shared values. To sum up, it is the combination of the strategy of valuing technical knowledge (of policy content or management) and that of forming relational networks that can best explain, to a large extent, the choice of who will occupy which posts.

## **The MLB as a relational being**

It is precisely the relational aspect that the literature identifies as a factor that distinguishes the performance of the MLBs from that of other segments of the bureaucracy. The mapping of the literature that was done shows that there are three different ways in which the MLBs are analyzed: i) in a structural perspective – which observes the MLB’s performance within the formal hierarchic structure whereby the bureaucracy is seen as merely responsible for executing whatever orders it receives; ii) in an individual perspective – which sees the bureaucracy in light of the logic of an individual rationality; and iii) in a relational perspective – which understands the bureaucracy on the basis of its multiple relations, analyzing it as an actor that establishes the interface between different groups of actors involved in public policies (Chapter 2).

Given that articulation is a prime characteristic of that context, any understanding of the MLBs must necessarily consider those interactions as an essential part of that bureaucracy’s nature. That is why the relational perspective was the one that most influenced the case studies that were conducted and also the quantitative analyses that have been

presented here. The inference is that due to the intermediary position they occupy in the organizational chart of the Federal Government, that is, situated between the great mass of civil servants that do not occupy DAS positions and the upper echelons, it is their inter-relations within their allotted government bodies, as much with their superiors as with their subordinates, that predominate. The survey results reveal the presence of this kind of behavior in the different sectors of government, although there are detectable differences in the patterns of interaction (Chapter 3). In the same way, the five case studies that were undertaken are situated in the same perspective considering that the MLBs are actors that operate the articulations among different agencies, organizations, federative entities and civil society and so, accordingly, any attempt to understand them must be based on the relations they establish and in which they are the primary actors.

One variable that distinguishes the MLBs is their distance from or nearness to the street-level bureaucrats (those that interact directly with the policy's target public). There are also differences between those bureaucrats who are physically located near the place where the service is being provided and those who are far from it. There are some middle-level bureaucrats directly responsible for service delivery and, accordingly, they tend to have a greater influence over allocation and especially decisions affecting the work of what Lipsky (2010) calls the street-level bureaucrats. Bureaucrats situated further away from the implementing bureaucrats are those least present in the literature but, on the other hand, they are most present in the Federal Government because of Brazil's federative structure whereby a considerable part of public policies are elaborated by the Federal Government and executed by the municipalities. The logic of the decision-making structure means that such bureaucrats tend to make much broader decisions far removed from what will actually be delivered to service users. In the interviews conducted for the cases that were studied, only some of the Federal Revenue Department bureaucrats (Chapter 8) actually managed street-level bureaucrats. All the others are in positions far removed from the end of the line where the service is actually delivered directly to the citizens.

As regards horizontal relationships, that is relations among different policies and government bodies, the middle-level bureaucrats need to be capable of understanding the different syntaxes of the organizations and bureaucracies they circulate among and also be able to develop heterogeneous negotiating methods. Furthermore, in the process of circulating among the different government agencies they are required to articulate and negotiate joint actions to preserve and foster the directives and principles of their programs. This tendency was very noticeable in the case of the *Bolsa Família* program (Chapter 5). Furthermore, the analysis of the PAC showed that MLBs are noted for their rapid, agile construction of agreements and referrals (Chapter 7).

In regard to these articulations, however, even though the MLBs are expected to conduct them, their power to make them effective is conditioned by the degree of priority being attributed to the programs or sectors they are operating in, given that all the bodies involved are at the same hierarchic level. In some cases where the programs do not have priority (Senasp), articulation and obtaining the desired results through interaction with other bodies become very difficult. Thus, for MLBs to be able to act as articulators, they need to be empowered to influence other agencies, as they clearly have been in the case of the government's priority programs (PAC and *Bolsa Família*).

On the one hand then, the MLBs' ability to carry out articulations depends on them being empowered to do so or on the priority attributed to the respective policy. On the other, it can be seen that those articulations also depend on the MLBs' personal ability to circulate among the different sectors and areas of government and consequently to handle the syntaxes that govern them. The effectiveness of articulations also depends on the different sectors perceiving that there are mutual gains to be obtained from them.

As for the distance between the MLBs and the top echelon of their organizations, the bureaucrats closest to the top tend to be more exposed to political issues and decisions and accordingly further removed from the operational side of public policies. The case studies presented here show that there is an important difference between those MLBs occupying DAS 5

posts (near the top) and those with DAS 3 or 4, with the latter taking greater responsibility for technical decisions affecting public policy operation. The studies also revealed important differences in access to the upper echelon, depending on each policy's specific context. In certain policies the MLBs are empowered to have direct access to the top echelon, as in the case of the PAC, whereas in others access obeys the logic of the organization's formal hierarchic structure.

Such heterogeneity in this aspect of their performance can also stem from the middle-level bureaucrat's own powers of persuasion and ability to convince his superiors as Currie and Procter (2005) propose. In addition to the chapters dedicated to the case studies, the quantitative chapters also make analyses, in different perspectives, of MLBs' ability to influence their superiors. While the comparative approach analyzing differences among government sectors revealed expressive differences in DAS distributions, in keeping with the case study findings, there were visible differences in the bureaucrats' perceptions of their degree of influence. In short, the nearer they are to the top, the more they are exposed to political considerations and decisions and the further removed they are from the operational aspect of public policy. Even so there are detectable differences according to the location where the bureaucracy is installed. Middle-level Federal Government bureaucrats working in decentralized situations (outside of the Federal District) with lower level DAS posts (DAS 1 to 3) tend to be more influential than their peers located in the capital.

The results contribute substantially not only to gaining an understanding of the relational dynamics of these actors in the sphere of public administration, an essential component of any characterization of the MLB, but also insofar as they introduce interesting new elements to the debate on MLBs' influence on the decisions involved in policymaking. In that sense, both those issues represent fertile ground for further research whether the focus is on a government structure or on separate entities and organizations.

Another distinguishing feature of MLBs is their organizational *locus*. Some bureaucrats are involved in the 'means' areas of their organizations and others in the finalistic (ends) areas. That distinction is reflected in the

fact that 'means' area bureaucrats tend to present predominantly internal relations whereas finalistic area MLBs have more external relations. It also has an effect on the kind of decisions they influence; managerial decisions in the former case and policy content decisions in the latter. Most bureaucrats in the case studies were involved in finalistic areas of the policies. In the survey there was a slight predominance of the means area activities - 55% to 45%.

Depending on how these variables correlate and affect one another, they may have different impacts on the middle-level bureaucrats' profiles and performances especially in aspects such as: whether interaction is more internal or external, the degree of discretionary power they can exercise, the outreach of their decisions, their relative insulation or exposure to political considerations, and so on. A relevant conclusion is that the complexity, characteristics and natures of the policies and organizations generate different forms of action and performance on the part of MLBs and that in order to understand this particular actor, it is essential to analyze the institutional environment in which they operate.

## **The multi-faceted bureaucrat**

The analysis of the MLBs activities and the respective literature (CURRIE; PROCTER, 2003) show that generally speaking their performance is notable for the multiplicity of the functions they perform and also that there is not always a clear-cut separation of typically managerial actions like planning, agreement management and administration from others more operational activities, especially to address emergency issues like operating systems, filling out forms, making decisions on sporadic cases, etc. Separation of management from operation, when it is found, seems to be the fruit of program maturation processes, insofar as when programs are in the construction stage there is not always a clear separation of the two roles, namely managing processes and executing them, as the cases of the Senasp and the *Bolsa Verde* showed and the *Bolsa Família* in its early stages.

The analysis of the survey results underscores the perception that activities are directed towards the organizations' internal routines such as personal contacts, meetings and elaborating internal documents, as Vie

(2010) suggests when he states that activities such as internal conversations (relational activities) in their own government bodies and administrative activities take up a good part of the MLBs' working day.

One function that appeared to be shared by all the MLBs interviewed in the case studies is that of influencing the operations and routines of the policies they coordinate. Although the difference between managing operations and executing them is not always very clear, there is nevertheless a clear perception on the part of the MLBs of their attributes in regard to defining and managing work routines and especially in translating policy definitions into technical operations.

Thus the role of the MLBs is to coordinate their teams in such a way that the decisions made by the upper echelons can be materialized in practice. In that sense, as Chapter 6 on the *Bolsa Verde* program insists, the bureaucrats make creative efforts in their endeavor to achieve policy goals; they use their creativity to translate the political decisions into technical definitions, eliminating bottlenecks when they occur so that their objectives can be achieved. That is a vision similar to the role attributed to MLBs by Huinsing and Silbey (2011) when they state that their role is to govern the gap that exists between the rules and the real possibility of applying them, something they denominate as regulating relations. In the case of the *Bolsa Verde*, what is outstanding is the creative aspect of its bureaucracy, which goes well beyond the mere making of operational decisions; the MLBs performance is a combination of obeying and transforming the orders they receive.

That creative dimension is present in cases like the PAC, *Bolsa Verde*, Senasp and the *Bolsa Familia*<sup>3</sup> (in the first stage of the program's normative construction) but it is not present in the same way in the Federal Revenue Department or in the second stage of the *Bolsa Familia* program. In these

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<sup>3</sup> The authors argue that it is possible to distinguish two distinct stages of the *Bolsa Familia* program, the first, in which the challenge facing the administrators was to create the rules, institutional structures and inter-institutional relationship patterns for the construction of the program; and the second, still ongoing, which is the execution of the program already constructed and now endowed with great visibility and requiring program managers concern themselves with maintaining the policy and keeping it functioning.

last two cases the rules and regulations have become more institutionalized and so the MLBs' performance are more marked by their understanding that their role is a technical-policy one and by their subordination to the policy decisions and orientations that are passed down to them (Chapter 8).

Thus with the exception of the Federal Revenue Department and the second stage of the *Bolsa Família* program, an important function of the MLBs is to create program-related concepts and rules. In most of the cases studied in the research, the bureaucrats do indeed play a relevant role in creating rules, and accordingly, in institutionalizing the programs. That is partly linked to their translating policy decisions into operations. Nevertheless, even this latter activity requires them to constantly exercise their creativity insofar as they have autonomy to create the set of rules that will make it possible to actually operate the policy and, quite often, because of their extensive knowledge of how the administrative machine works, they go beyond what was determined in the original policy decisions.

## Autonomy

One important variable in regard to the question of autonomy is the degree of maturity attained by the policy or the organization. In more mature policies or organizations, that is those that are more institutionalized and regulated, MLBs' autonomy tends to be limited and clearly bound to their formal function. As mentioned above, the Federal Revenue Department and the second stage of the *Bolsa Família* program are good examples of that.

The nature of the policy itself can also have a considerable effect on the extent of MLBs' autonomy as, for example, whether their work is inter-sectorial by nature or not. In both the case studies and the comparative analysis (Chapter 3) important differences among the different sectors of the government can readily be identified. The differences in degrees of autonomy have a lot to do with the structure of the respective organizations. Where there is a very rigid hierarchic structure installed, then autonomy tends to be more restricted or at least more formally specified. An example of this is the Federal Revenue Department. Conversely, in organizations

where the hierarchy is more fluid, autonomy tends to be much greater, as in the PAC for example.

Nevertheless, in all cases it could be seen that the degree of autonomy conceded to MLBs is always subject to the political decisions made by the top echelon of the body in question or by institutional aspects such as norms, budget restrictions, and personnel limitations, etc. It is the responsibility of the top level of administration to decide how much autonomy, if any, it will concede to its mid-level bureaucrats and also to establish the directives to guide the exercise of such autonomy. Bureaucrats' influence on decision-making processes, however, may be conditioned by the autonomy these actors have in relation to the internal management of the team they head. The results of the quantitative analysis indicate that such autonomy over the managerial aspect is a relevant factor in determining the performance of the MLBs in the organizations they work in (Chapter 4).

Even when constraint on autonomy is applied by the upper echelon, the case studies reveal a tendency on the part of MLBs, in the course of time, to exercise whatever degree of autonomy they enjoy to construct rules and regulations to achieve two ends- namely, ensure the institutionalization (and long life) of the program and preserve it from political interference and alterations in the long term. Thus the MLBs engage in a process of institutional construction of the program to preserve it from external interference.

So in the end, while exercising their autonomy to create rules and regulations, the MLBs are actually limiting it in the medium and long term and insulating themselves in order to preserve the original objectives of the actions that they have committed to. Thus it can be seen that understanding the classic dilemma between autonomy and control in studies of the relation between bureaucracy and politics shows itself to be very complex when applied to the middle-level bureaucracy.

## **Future agenda for the middle-level bureaucracy**

First, as all the research has shown, the prerequisite for understanding the performance of middle-level bureaucrats is that the investigation

must be contextualized. That means it is essential to adopt a relational perspective to understand these actors in the specific contexts in which they establish and carry out their actions. The MLBs cannot be viewed as a hermetic category with unique characteristics shared by all those who occupy middle management posts. These bureaucrats must be observed in their specific contexts and in that sense there are actually types of MLBs, typified by their activities, or their organizational locus, or the kind of policy they administer, etc.

The analyses also underscore the importance of values in any attempt to understand MLBs' performances. As has been shown, unlike what public opinion tends to suggest, the occupation of mid-level posts has been done through processes that set a high value on technical knowledge and skills in the field of policy contents and public administration. The MLBs studied in this work are almost all highly qualified professionals and professionally and emotionally committed to the policies they work with and their commitment goes beyond political or professional issues of their everyday work.

We have also shown that one of the central characteristics to be considered in this endeavor to understand how these bureaucrats perform is their capacity for vertical and horizontal articulation. That ability to articulate is directly related to the intermediary position they occupy. However, as we have seen, it is also related to contextual aspects of the policies themselves, so that in the Brazilian reality today, inter-sector and inter-federative entity actions prevail. In that light, these bureaucrats are required to unfold articulation activities so that by means of their interactions they can construct a set of actions/activities that will bring in positive results for the policies that they coordinate. Those articulations, in turn, demand that they be eminently capable of circulating among different fields of knowledge, of establishing networks and of preserving the agencies they represent.

In addition, another function of the MLBs targeted by this research is related to translating political and policy decisions into operational processes. In that case there is a creative dimension involved that can explain how they act, not just as executors, but as creators, translators and inventors of rules that help to materialize and institutionalize public policies.

Finally we have seen that there is another factor that is central to MLBs' activities, which is the way they handle the question of bureaucratic autonomy and insulation. The autonomy is a product of its context, which includes both the political decisions and organizational and temporal aspects of public policies. Beyond that, however, we have identified another outstanding characteristic of the bureaucrats that have been analyzed here, namely the use of their autonomy to construct the memorial of the public policies they coordinate at the same time as they institutionalize practices and regulations that seek to preserve and safeguard programs.

Finally it is worthwhile proposing an agenda for future research considering some of the aspects not addressed or not consolidated by the present research. First of all, it is important to examine other policies with different characteristics from the ones studied here in order to generate broader conclusions with a wider embrace. The study of the Federal Revenue Department, which was noticeably different from most of the others, shows how important it is to consider policies and organizations with very different profiles in order to gain a better understanding of the MLBs. It would be valuable to examine cases of other federative entities with different contextual issues involved and not just those of the Federal Government.

Another important aspect to be pursued would be to extend the temporal embrace of the policy studies, analyzing them at different moments in time and observing the alterations and the impacts of changes on the bureaucrats' performances. Returning to the fields studied here sometime in the future would be highly useful to improve our understanding of the alterations that occur and the practices described here. It would also be interesting if the field studies had more time in which to make their contextual observations (of routines, meetings, etc.) as a means to deepening understanding interactions the way they actually take place and not just the way the actors themselves perceive and narrate them.

The option for the complementariness of the qualitative and quantitative methodologies was very successful not only in regard to the convergence observed among the results, but above all for the divergences they revealed, which served to underscore the complex nature of the profile

and performance of this segment of the bureaucracy and, in so doing, to introduce new problems for future investigations.

In summary, we believe that the set of research compiled in this collection provides important support for characterizing middle-level bureaucrats and their relations with the policymaking process within the original exploratory perspective adopted by the research. From here on we seek to contribute towards the production of new questioning in this promising line of research and consequently to the debate on public administration and towards improving public management in Brazil.

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The book discusses the main results obtained from the research "Middle-level Bureaucracy in the Federal Government," which aimed to describe the profile and the work of the occupants of intermediate positions in different sectors of the Federal Government.

This collection contains important reflections on the Brazilian State, especially with regard to its bureaucracy. Thus, we hope the book will contribute to scholars interested in the functioning of government and its bureaucracy, to society as a whole and especially to public managers working in the field of personnel management.