Analysing Bureau-Shaping Models: Comments on Marsh, Smith and Richards

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In a recent article in this Journal Marsh, Smith and Richards (MSR) note the massive recent changes in the organization of British government and the attention the bureau-shaping model has received both at a theoretical level and as an explanation of changes. They suggest that the model has breathed new life into debates about the behaviour of officials and is important in the context of the 'Next Steps' agency reform. They state two aims of their article: 'First, it is a critical contribution to the literature on the bureau-shaping model', and secondly it examines 'the model's utility as an explanation of the changes that have occurred in British central government in the past decade'. They also use their arguments as part of an assault upon rational choice and empirical political science more generally in favour of interpretative sociology. However, in this Note, we respond to their work on the bureau-shaping model and rational choice.

First, we specify the bureau-shaping model a little more clearly than do MSR. From Dunleavy's original version a number of important variants have been developed. To the detriment of their 'test', MSR do not distinguish between the original and the later models. Indeed, most of their evidence is actually directed at the James variant. Few of their criticisms are original and the later bureau-shaping models have taken many of the points on board. Secondly, we examine MSR's critique of the bureau-shaping model as an explanation of the Next Steps reform process. We point out that whilst they provide some interesting interview evidence their findings are more ambiguous than they suggest. Thirdly, we examine the methods underlying their test that rely exclusively on elite interviews and statements by those involved in the reform. We suggest that an examination of the bureau-shaping model requires a broader set of evidence. Finally, we suggest that whilst the bureau-shaping model does not provide the final word on the Next Steps changes in Britain, it does provide some valuable insights that, in lieu of any other theorized rival, should not be dismissed lightly.

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2 MSR, pp. 461-2.


4 James, 'Explaining Next Steps'.

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The original bureau-shaping model developed by Dunleavy was designed to broaden the claims of budget maximizing by widening the utility function of senior civil servants to include factors other than the pecuniary rewards that may (or may not!) come with larger budgets. He argued that only elements of the total departmental budget were unambiguously related to bureaucrat welfare. Indeed, he argued some elements of a larger departmental budget may be inversely related to bureaucrat welfare. Dunleavy's bureau-shaping model is a transactions costs model, where bureaucrats reduce the costs to themselves by changing the institutional structure of their department in response to a changing environment. The relationship between the four types of budget he identifies specifies the incentives for change for senior civil servants within each department. This, together with his categorization of agencies, leads to his predictions about the new shape different types of agency will take. He does not take much account of the activities of politicians in civil service change. These constitute exogenous changes in the nature of the constraints upon the bureaucrat's maximand. He has been criticized from within the rational choice paradigm for ignoring the role of politicians. Other scholars using the bureau-shaping model, notably James's work on 'Next Steps' and Hoopes's on oil privatization, have not ignored the role of politicians, and more precisely tried to examine the intentions and behaviour of top officials.

THE NEXT STEPS PROCESS

The second aim of MSR's article is to 'examine the model's utility as an explanation of the changes that have occurred in British central government in the past decade', in particular the Next Steps reform. They criticize the discussion of the model in Dunleavy's 1991 account. However, the main aim of the 1991 book was to develop models as alternatives to Niskanen's budget-maximizing account and suggest possible applications rather than to embark on a full empirical investigation. In this context, MSR's investigation is timely. Their analysis drew on seventy-seven interviews with retired and serving senior civil servants. They make several empirical claims based on this evidence, which we consider in turn.

They claim politicians were important in the reform. We agree with this point but suggest that the evidence they use in support of this statement is sparse. They claim to have found evidence that politicians had a 'crucial' role in the 'evolution and development of Next Steps', stating 'More broadly [than just Next Steps], it is widely accepted that the reforms which the public service underwent during the last Conservative administration were driven by politicians and not bureaucrats. The most senior ex-Conservative ministers' memoirs do indeed pay clear testimony to this fact'. They cite three former senior politicians' autobiographies. The first, by Michael Heseltine, was published before the reform began. Whilst Heseltine argued that ministers were key in initiating many policy initiatives and suggested government needed to be more business-like, he did not present any blueprint for 'Next Steps.' The second book is Margaret Thatcher's autobiography but that mentions 'Next Steps' only as a short footnote in a book of 862 pages of text. The third, by Nigel Lawson, is scarcely more forthcoming: the only substantial reference to Next Steps is on two pages out of 1,036. If politicians saw their role as significant, they certainly do not seem to advertise the fact in the evidential manner MSR see as meaningful.

6 Hoopes, *Oil Privatization*; James, 'Explaining Next Steps'.
7 MSR, p. 472.
8 MSR, p. 464
9 MSR, p. 470.
The real question here is to what extent the reform proposals and their implementation configured departments in the way the bureau-shaping models suggest. Since the claim of the Dunleavy model is a comparative one - the organizational form of the department in terms of its functional and budgetary structure will determine the precise form in which each department (or more precisely bureau) will be shaped - only a comparison of different types of departments as defined by Dunleavy can test this claim. MSR instead largely discuss the James model as it is applied to a specific department - the Department of Social Security.

In James's model, officials prefer higher budget levels to lower ones and higher levels of policy work time in total work time (and by implication lower levels of routine management work) to lower levels of policy work time. Bureaucrats are constrained in their activities by the directives of politicians. (In other words the activities of the politicians are built into the model.) Politicians' concern with 'management' in the 1980s changed the constraint by increasing the amount of management attention they demanded for executive activities. This shift 'triggered' bureau-shaping strategies by officials attempting to achieve their most preferred organizational form by hiving off routine executive activities to agencies and concentrating on policy work instead. The proportion of time officials ended up spending on management is less than it would have been had the agency process not been introduced and had integrated departments instead remained under their direct management supervision. MSR comment, 'The weight of evidence does not support any suggestion that the reform process was bureaucratically driven. Rather it suggests that even if they wanted to, senior officials were not in a position to forward their own preferences at the expense of those of their political masters'. If this statement means that bureaucrats were constrained in what they could do, then that is part of the James model. If it means that Next Steps was directed at every stage by politicians and civil servants were simply neutral cogs in a machine carrying out their masters' wishes, then we do not feel the weight of evidence demonstrates this at all.

MSR argue that much of what senior officials were involved in was 'management' rather than 'policy' work. James's model makes a distinction between policy work and routine management work. Following Dunleavy, policy work is valued because it 'involves innovation and often entails working in small staff units in close proximity to political power sources', by contrast management work often entails working in a large extended hierarchy rather than in small staff units and tends to consist of work at the point of delivery, remote from political power sources'. At one point, MSR seem to suggest that this aspect of the models cannot be evaluated in a meaningful sense. Their criticism centres on the difficulty of separating 'policy' work from 'management' work. Of course, not all work tasks can be neatly categorized and both the Dunleavy and James models only suggest that a substantial portion can. Yet MSR implicitly recognize that such a distinction can be made, stating: 'To the extent that a simple dichotomy between the policy advice and the management function is possible, some civil servants certainly appear to prefer policy work, others management work and others a balance between the two.'

For this empirical claim to have much meaning they must accept the possibility of some form of distinction for a substantial part of officials' work. MSR split the tasks of permanent secretaries into managing the policy process, administering the department, and devising and implementing specific policies. In the conclusion they suggest that, 'In our view, borne out by our interviews, PSs [permanent secretaries] manage in two senses. They administer the department and they manage the policy-making process.'

13 James, 'Explaining Next Steps', pp. 626-7.
14 MSR, p. 471; Dowding, Civil Service, chap. 5; James, 'Explaining Next Steps'.
16 MSR, p. 468. In the James model these different preferences require drawing distinct indifference curves for each type of civil servant.
17 MSR, p. 466.
18 MSR, p. 480.
The three-fold split in permanent secretaries' work does not assist the evaluation of the model. This would have been more straightforwardly achieved by directly evaluating the categories defined in the model and considering the work of all senior officials. However, several of the tasks that MSR define as management work have the characteristics of policy work by the definition in both the 1991 and 1995 models. MSR state that the administration of the department involves 'managing senior staff and resources in the department, being the department's representative/spokesperson inside and outside the Westminster/Whitehall community and acting as department accounting officer'.20 These activities involve proximity to political power sources in the 'Whitehall village' and beyond and seem to exclude routine management of non-senior staff and resources in the department. The second feature suggested by MSR is managing the policy process, ensuring 'long-term policy strategy is being effectively managed', choosing officials to deal with policy issues, ensuring progress on policy issues and 'attempting to prevent political problems resulting from “failures” in the policy process'.21 These tasks appear to involve innovation, working in small staff units or dealing with political power sources. Finally, MSR identify direct involvement in policy work as a task. They acknowledge that this work is consistent with 'policy' work in the bureau-shaping model.

MSR anticipate these objections by commenting: 'Of course, Dunleavy might respond by saying that all these tasks are of high status involving innovative work and close contact with the centres of power.' An alternative approach to that followed by MSR would be to test the models as they were originally set out rather than setting up a different categorization.22 Several 'management' activities they identify fit the definition of 'policy' work offered in the bureau-shaping models. Furthermore, MSR do not find evidence of officials claiming to like working in a large extended hierarchy rather than in small staff units, and working at the point of delivery, remote from political power sources. That would constitute more of a puzzle for the models. Far from contradicting the behavioural assumptions of the bureau-shaping models, much of MSR's evidence provides empirical support.

Even to the limited extent that statements by officials preferring management to policy work refer to management as defined by the bureau-shaping model, there appears to be much conflicting evidence. MSR quotes an Efficiency Unit official who stated that some civil servants were interested 'in all aspects of management'.23 But there is plenty of conflicting interview-based evidence. For example, Hennessy quotes the former cabinet secretary who, in the latter half of the 1980s, commented on civil servants' reluctance to get involved in management.24 In a study of Next Steps, Zifcak noted the comments of a deputy secretary, who said: 'Management is a tiresome business, nobody goes into it unless they have to.'25 We suggest that, on balance, elite interview-based evidence would seem to lend more support to the bureau-shaping model than MSR suggest. However, we further suggest, in the next section, that interview material is by itself not sufficient to draw clear conclusions about the model and MSR's reliance on interview material presents the danger of academic debate by exchange of anecdote.

METHODS: STATED AND REVEALED PREFERENCES

The major thrust of the Dunleavy bureau-shaping model is the relationship between four types of budgets and the shaping processes he predicts. Talking to civil servants cannot produce evidence for or against this model one way or another. If the relationships Dunleavy predicts are to be found

20 MSR, p. 466. 21
MSR, p. 466. 22
MSR, p. 467. 23
MSR, p. 468.
the model is corroborated, if they are not then it is falsified.26 However, interviewing can produce evidence for the behavioural assumptions or micro foundations of the model;27 and provide evidence for or against the James variant of bureau shaping. The sort of exercise MSR conducted is thus useful, but the relationship between different sorts of behavioural evidence is not straightforward. Seeking the arguments in individuals' utility functions is problematic and controversial.

There are many ways in which individuals' preferences may be revealed. We may broadly divide them into two categories: stated preferences and 'revealed' preferences. The former are the statements made by people and come in many forms: anonymous answers to questionnaires, face-to-face interviews, public statements, and so on. Some of these are more public than others. And individuals do not always state the same views in private as they do in public. Most interviewers know that some information unavailable in a formal interview may be gathered once the tape recorder is switched off, and even more 'off the record' information may be gathered if one is lucky enough to buy the interviewee a few drinks later.28 The conventional objections to relying on interview material come not just from rational choice but also from sociological perspectives.29 Interviews are not always valid indicators of underlying motivations. An interview response may be self-serving, or reflect what an individual thought he or she was supposed to say in an interview, rather than revealing important factors for explaining what was going on. Similarly, respondents do not always give the same answers in face-to-face surveys as they do when the questionnaire is completed privately and returned anonymously. We also know that individuals are not always completely consistent when stating their preferences. This does not occur simply because people change their minds, or forget incidents and reconstruct them, nor through lack of honesty. Individuals may be contemporaneously inconsistent as shown in the well-known framing problems demonstrated by social-psychologists.30 Furthermore, those conducting surveys have found that the order in which questions are asked can have important effects upon the answers given.31 The same questions may elicit different sets of answers when asked in a different order. MSR seem to think that those who point out these problems with the stated-preference approach think we should not run surveys or conduct elite-level interviews.32 Most do not, rather they believe we need to be very careful in the ways in which we interpret the results. Interviews are a good source of information about the processes that bring about an outcome provided that the material is triangulated with evidence from other sources. In particular, rational choice approaches suggest that actions involving costs to actors in terms of forgone alternatives should be given particular attention. Stated-preference evidence is low cost for the actors involved and is vulnerable to strategic misrepresentation or inaccuracy because the actors do not have much of a stake in trying to recollect what happened in

26 It is worth repeating that corroboration and falsifiability mean increasing and lowering the odds that a model is true in relationship to a rival model (in the example here the null model). According to Popper no model is ever corroborated or falsified with certainty.


28 Of course, only the recorded or transcribed formal interview material is 'hard' data in the sense that it can be examined later by other researchers. The softer 'gossip' may be used by the researcher to search further or to confirm evidence collected by other means.


31 See, for example, the discussion in B. Fischhoff, Value Elicitation: Is There Anything in There? American Psychologist, 46 (1991), 835-47.

32 MSR, p. 465.
a situation. For these reasons, interview material may not be sufficient fully to reveal all the processes at work.

Economists, in particular, have tended to be sceptical about the stated-preference approach. For them, talk is cheap, and preferences revealed through action are all that can be trusted. The 'revealed preference' approach has received many criticisms over the years, though most of these involve the claim that the revealed preference approach means we can do away with 'intentions' altogether and just study behaviour, raising the question of whether or not we may examine revealed preferences with just the 'internal consistency' conditions of rational choice theory. 33 However, for the purposes of evaluating the bureau-shaping model, the conventions of much empirical political science and the approach followed by Dunleavy and James suggest that stated-preference should not be relied on exclusively and should be cross-checked with revealed-preference to check for conflict and possible misrepresentation. After all, how many people would continue to trust someone who constantly stated undying friendship but seemed to continually undermine one through their actions? Such a situation would require further investigation to see why he or she was behaving in such a manner, rather than simply taking the individual's statements as the end of the story.

It is important that MSR should have followed this approach because they claim to be using the bureau-shaping model and this methodological approach is intrinsic to the model. But even if they do not claim to be adhering to the methods associated with the model this point still raises a problem for their whole evaluation because it does seem that politicians and officials' accounts cannot simply be taken at face value. You do not need to be a rational choice theorist to think that the quote from an official in the Efficiency Unit about civil servants becoming more interested in management needs to be viewed in the context of this unit's mission to introduce such practices.34 Officials in the unit were under pressure to present their activities as a success.35 MSR's use of such a narrow form of evidence is disappointing because other data are available.

MSR characterize the evidence preferred by rational choice theorists as aggregate budget data.36 However, the validity of budget information could be compromised by strategic misrepresentation by actors, for example to inflate the cost of delivering a programme to get more resources in future budget rounds. But, in the context of evaluating the bureau-shaping model, the data form an unobtrusive indicator in 'bureaumetric' terms.37 Researchers do not have to interact with officials in order to have data collected specifically for the purpose, reducing the possibility of strategic misrepresentation. MSR acknowledge that 'such [aggregate] data are relevant' and appear to have no methodological or theoretical objections to using such material.38 But they do not use this form of evidence. In contrast, a study that used a mix of interview and alternative forms of evidence found considerable support for the models.39 There is evidence after the reform that substantial budgets and routine work tasks were passed on to agencies, that most senior officials (of Grade 5 and above in the old grading system) were located in departments rather than in agencies, and that the Efficiency Unit was sensitive to the opinions of departmental officials in drawing up plans for a reform that would meet with broad approval from senior officials.40

In their conclusion, MSR advance a general critique of the applicability of rational choice in this area, the problems of which the model is taken to reflect. However, this critique appears only indirectly related to the bulk of the article, which is an attempt to engage with the bureau-shaping model rather than castigate the fundamental assumptions of rational choice. They comment,

33 See Keith Dowding, 'Revealed Preference and External Reference', Rationality and Society, 14 (2002), 257-82, for a defence of revealed preference and rational choice in this regard.
34 MSR, p. 468.
35 James, Executive Agency Revolution in Whitehall.
36 MSR, p. 465.
37 Christopher Hood and Andrew Dunsire, Bureaumetrics (Farnborough, Hants.: Gower, 1983).
38 MSR, p. 465, though this seems to contradict their 'social construction' of reality position.
39 James, Executive Agency Revolution in Whitehall.
40 James, Executive Agency Revolution in Whitehall.
The emphasis is on intentional explanation and preferences are assumed not explained. No role is given to structure or culture in explaining outcomes. Indeed, what is assumed, or ignored, is much of the legitimate subject matter of political science and sociology. In essence, the key problem is that rational choice theory cannot explain the dynamics of change.4!

One of us has commented elsewhere on this and will not repeat that response here.42 But we may note that they support this with a selective quotation from Hugh Ward, who in the same piece referred to by MSR, comments: 'I do not believe that practising rational choice theorists typically exhibit much desire to squeeze out structure; rather, they often seek to illuminate how choices are made within structures, the agenda sometimes stretching to the consideration of how rational choices reproduce or transform structures.'43

Their conclusions lead us to question why MSR bothered to engage with the bureau-shaping model. They very briefly sketch an alternative perspective to overcome the problems they identify, arguing: 'To do so requires a dialectical approach to the relationship between structure and agency and a recognition that the meaning individuals ascribe to structure, cultures and actions affects their behaviour.'44 But the reader should note that asserting the greater usefulness of such an approach does not demonstrate its usefulness in answering research questions. Their preferred 'dialectical approach' can only be superior if it generates some predictions at variance with the bureau-shaping model which their empirical evidence then corroborates, or is able to explain everything the bureau-shaping model does and some more.45 Those predictions are seriously lacking. We may suggest that even if the bureau-shaping model does not correctly explain the entire Next Steps reforms at least it offers a way of pursuing key issues of interest to academics and practitioners. MSR appear to accept at least some of these arguments in their reasons for looking at the model, which are in large part based on how influential it has been,46 and we suggest that the model is worthy of further exploration as a way of understanding administrative reform.

41 MSR, p. 481.
42 Keith Dowding, 'There Must be End to Confusion: Policy Networks, Intellectual Fatigue and the Need for Political Science Methods Courses in British Universities', Political Studies, 49 (2001), 89-105.
44 MSR, p. 465.
45 We may also note that Hugh Ward has criticized the 'British Institutionalist Rational Choice' approach for being too informal and not producing enough hard predictions and empirical corroboration in 'The Fetishisation of Falsification: The Debate on Rational Choice', New Political Economy, 1 (1996), 283-96, pp. 292--4.
46 MSR, p. 461.

**Understanding and Explaining Civil Service Reform: A Reply to Dowding and James**

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Dowding and James's response to our critique of the bureau-shaping model makes some important criticisms that we welcome.1 However, we suggest that they ignore the empirical evidence we

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presented in our original article (because of their narrow definition of acceptable data) and we believe that they misunderstand our arguments because of the positivist paradigm within which they operate. Our response covers three main issues - epistemology, methods and evidence.

**EPISTEMOLOGY**

Dowding and James criticize or praise us for being 'interpretative sociologists'. If labels matter, then we regard ourselves as critical realists. As such, we are interested in explanation, as are positivists like Dowding and James. However, we have a different understanding of explanation than they have, and, in particular, we have a different view of the role of theory in explanation. To a positivist, deductive theory is used to generate hypotheses that are then tested. If a hypothesis is falsified, then the theory needs to be revised to account for that observation. Our position differs in three key respects. First, in our view, not all relationships between social phenomena are observable; so, hypotheses cannot just be tested against direct observation. Secondly, to us, theory is not something that is used to generate hypotheses, rather, it is something that is used to interpret what is observable, and indeed what cannot be observed (because it is a deep structure). Thirdly, we would argue that the way in which structures (deep or otherwise) affect outcomes is mediated by the agent's understanding and interpretation of his or her structured environment. What this means is that our view of social science, and thus of doing research, differs from that of Dowding and James. Our research focused on two approaches that are usually absent in rational choice research: the use of interview data that deal with the agent's understanding of both his/her situation and the actions of others; and a historical analysis.

**ON METHODOLOGY**

Dowding and James are critical about the use of interview material, because it can often be 'unreliable' or 'soft' data; here, the usual criticisms are that respondents may lie, may selectively recall or may tell the interviewer what they think she should know. We recognize the problems of this type of data.2 Equally, such biases can be countered or reduced by triangulation - comparing the views of respondents, interviewing a variety of politicians and civil servants, comparing with existing primary and secondary literature. At no point is our evidence based solely on memoirs or on interviews.

There are three points important here. First, Whitehall is a predominantly closed world and, as such, it is relatively difficult to generate other forms of data (indeed, it is the reliance on crude aggregate data that leads to the problems of the bureau-shaping model). Secondly, Dowding and James presume that there are some 'good', unflawed, data somewhere, when in fact all data have flaws. Thirdly, and most importantly in our view, most politicians and civil servants stressed the role of politicians in the reforms of the civil service. This is what they understood had happened and that understanding must surely play an important part in any fuller explanation of the changes that took place in the 1980s. It seems astounding that Dowding and James believe that actions are a better indicator of preferences than interview responses. This is a voluntarist, ahistorical and astructural approach. People often do things that they do not want to do.

Elsewhere, we emphasized that Next Steps cannot be explained independently of the historical context in which it occurred. So, we argue first that the Next Steps reforms have to be viewed against the background of the Rayner Scrutinies3 and the Financial Management Initiative and not as an isolated change. In terms that a historical institutionalist would use, there is a considerable degree of path dependency involved here. This is something that rational choice theorists often neglect, in their desire to attain rigorous and, hence, parsimonious explanation. So, in our original article, we suggested that the political context was important. The Thatcher government's reform strategy

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3 The Rayner Scrutinies were a set of reviews of the efficiency of government which took place in the 1980s.
was driven by a belief that Whitehall was an institution committed to consensus politics, big government and defending the status quo. In resisting this 'conservative' force, the government was also emphasizing its image of governing competence, what Bulpitt calls its Conservative statecraft.4 The point here is that rational choice approaches tend to downplay such historical contextual factors because they assume preferences; certainly, Dunleavy's approach appears ahistorical. The rational choice response is of course that these are external factors and it was senior civil servants' reactions to these factors that led to bureau-shaping. However, our point is that these changes occurred despite, not because of, the civil service, and in most measures of official preferences this is not the type of world that civil servants want. Dunleavy may have been right in predicting the form of some of the changes that occurred, but his explanation that it was a consequence of utility maximization by officials is wrong.

ON EXPLAINING CHANGE IN THE BRITISH CIVIL SERVICE

Our article refuted the core hypothesis of the bureau-shaping model in four ways:

(1) Our interviews suggest, whatever the acknowledged problems of elite interviewing, that it is difficult to categorize the sole preference of civil servants, in terms of the pursuit of policy work. Whilst some clearly prefer this type of work, others prefer management (indeed this must be an empirical question and not an assumption of the model). There is not one simple, single, preference.

(2) A clear hypothesis of the bureau-shaping model is that core budgets will be protected and programme budgets cut. The opposite in fact had occurred by the mid-1990s with the Fundamental Expenditure Review and Comprehensive Spending Review under Labour producing cuts in core budgets.

(3) Using a range of policies, government tried to make senior officials more managerial- even though James clearly states that the aim of the agency programme was to stop this occurring. In particular, the Senior Management Review reduced the number of senior civil servants (something the bureau-shaping model would not have predicted) and clearly demarcated Grade 5s upwards as managerial positions. Consequently, those involved in making policy are increasingly Grades 7 and Higher Executive Officers. Under the Labour government, it also appears that the policy-making role is shifting to consultants, political advisers and special advisers. As a result officials are losing their monopoly of policy advice. The clearly stated bureau-shaping hypothesis - that the pattern of reform is a consequence of the desire of officials to retain control of policy - has been strongly undermined by the reforms that have occurred since 1997.

(4) Despite their claims to be 'empirical political scientists', Dowding and James's argument seems to be based on a counterfactual - that had the reforms not been undertaken, officials would be undertaking more management than they are now. This is non-falsifiable.

There is no doubt that rational choice has offered new ways of thinking about the motivation of agents and, more generally, the processes of reform in Whitehall. However, we believe that alternative methodologies can underline some of the simplifications that occur as a consequence of rational choice assumptions. We believe that, even in its own terms, rational choice fails to demonstrate what the preferences of officials are (it just assumes them) or to accept that its hypotheses are refuted. Moreover, its ahistoricism leads to the false assumption that reform is a consequence of the preferences of particular agents. Whatever the elegance of the bureau-shaping model, the lack of empirical support suggests that it cannot explain public sector reform.

Dowding and James claim that the 'dialectical approach' we advocate can only be 'superior' (sic), presumably to their own public choice accounts, 'if it generates some predictions at variance with the bureau-shaping model which their empirical evidence then corroborates'. They do not

4 J. Bulpitt, Territory and Power in the United Kingdom (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983). S Here, we use the pre-1995 Senior Management Review grading system in order to assist in understanding.
acknowledge that, unlike their rather lofty view of what is achievable by political scientists, we never set out in our article to create a 'better' predictive model. Instead, our aim was to provide a critique of Dunleavy, as our own research indicated his analysis was wrong, and to provide what we saw as a more convincing explanatory account of the process of Next Steps reform. As critical realists, we see our goal as trying to provide as full an explanation as possible of political phenomena. We are sceptical of positivist approaches to political science that aspire to generate predictive models. Our epistemological position leads us to conclude that this is more often than not a futile task, strewn with methodological problems. Our interest in critiquing the bureau-shaping model was never to generate a 'better' predictive model, particularly as the original model did not work in the first place!