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CHAPTER

16   Federal Administration 🔓

Frédéric Varone, David Giauque

Abstract

This chapter focuses on the Swiss federal administration and its role in agenda-setting, decision-making, policy implementation, and providing an interface between elected politicians, interest groups, and citizens; it begins with an outline of the federal administration and its evolution over time and notes the ministerial structures of the federal administration. The history of administrative reforms is retraced through a discussion regarding 'New Public Management'. Then, the Swiss administration is placed in an international perspective. Finally, the chapter presents the human resource management issues that the federal administration has faced since the ending of the permanent status of civil servants. The concluding section highlights four upcoming challenges related to the organization and management of the Swiss federal administration.

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1 Introduction

public administration has a powerful role in policy-making. It contributes to framing collective problems and designing policy solutions in the drafting of legal and regulatory documents. Civil servants benefit from discretionary power in the implementation of public policies and the adaptation of administrative outputs to particular situations in the field. Finally, it has a key intermediary role between interest groups, citizens, and elected politicians. The administration's power and legitimacy are grounded in its ability to provide technical expertise as well as neutrality and commitment to the public interest. It maintains privileged relationships with different policy stakeholders. Furthermore, it often enjoys an advantage in access to specialized information. Thus, the administration enjoys a certain degree of autonomy, enabling its political role while transgressing the classical dichotomy between political responsibility and the technical execution of policies, which normally places it in a subordinate position to that of elected politicians.

Five peculiarities of the Swiss political system must be considered, when assessing the resources and effective power of the federal administration. First, the Federal Assembly (i.e. Swiss parliament) exercises oversight over the federal administration (see art. 160 of the federal constitution) and ensures that federal policies are evaluated regarding their effectiveness (art. 170 of the federal constitution). However, the Federal Assembly is still a *militia* parliament: most elected members of parliament (MPs) are not full-time politicians and have a professional occupation beyond their parliamentary mandate. Therefore, MPs have a limited capacity to control an administration's activities (Pilotti et al. 2019).

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Second, even the Federal Council (i.e. Swiss government) portrays weaknesses in steering the federal administration, which has been organized as seven departments since 1848, each of which is headed by a federal councillor (arts 175 and 178 of the federal constitution). This fixed organizational structure has led *de facto* to an overload of ↳ the Federal Council as each federal councillor is a member of the government and is concurrently in charge of managing a department. Inter-ministerial coordination is also hindered because federal councillors tend to focus on their department business and furthermore are not bound by a coalition agreement regarding policy priorities.

Third, Switzerland belongs to the liberal version of neo-corporatist states, with weak unions and strong business associations (Katzenstein 1985, 104–105 and 129). Economic peak-level associations have traditionally been considered influential political actors in the context of an underdeveloped central state (due to strong federalism), weak national political parties, and a weakly professionalized parliament. Major economic interest groups have thus exerted a key policy role due to their resources in finances, membership, expertise, and institutional recognition (Eichenberger and Mach 2011). Their advocacy activities, at each stage of the policy-making process, are thus an important counterpower to the federal administration.

Fourth, the internationalization and, specifically, the Europeanization of public policies (Gava and Varone 2014) has moved some decision-making power from the national to the international level. In Europeanized policies, pre-parliamentary negotiations between national neo-corporatist actors are weakened while the policy-making power of the federal administration is strengthened (Mach et al. 2003; Sciarini 2014).

Finally, Switzerland is characterized by 'executive federalism'—the implementation of federal laws by subnational government entities (i.e. cantons or communes). This model of implementation by federal delegation leads not only to divergences across cantons, which have significant manoeuvring space when producing policy outputs and delivering public services, but also to reductions in the expansion of the federal administration. Furthermore, the federal administration has no coercive instruments at its disposal to reduce diversity among cantons. Conversely, it must either tolerate differences in implementation and thus in the effectiveness of federal policies or foster learning processes that enable the diffusion of appropriate implementation practices across cantons.

These five peculiarities raise complex questions about the manner in which the federal bureaucracy both performs its role in policy agenda-setting, decision-making, and implementation and fulfils its purpose as an interface between politicians, interest groups, and citizens. Additionally, one dominant theme of the political discourse concerns the internal functioning of the federal administration per se. For at least the past two decades, the federal government has assumed that the provision of high-quality public services presupposes a greater degree of both managerial and organizational flexibility. In this light, it is not surprising that several reforms of the Swiss federal administration have drawn on the New Public Management (NPM) movement (Schedler 1995; Mastronardi and Schedler 1998; Ritz 2003), such as the use of performance indicators in the management of several offices, the liberalization of public network services (e.g. telecommunications, electricity and gas, railways, or postal services), the levelling of administrative hierarchies, and the loss of civil servants' permanent status.

To detail these changes, the chapter begins with an outline of the federal administration and its evolution over time. Then, attention is drawn to the fundamental aspects of its ministerial structure. Finally, the effects of NPM and the challenges relating to human resource management are identified and discussed.

2 Evolution of the federal administration

From a legal standpoint, the 'central' administration consists of the Federal Chancellery and seven federal departments: Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), Federal Department of Home Affairs (FDHA), Federal Department of Justice and Police (FDJP), Federal Department of Defence, Civil Protection, and Sport (DDPS), Federal Department of Finance (FDF), Department of Economic Affairs, Education, and Research (EAER), and the Federal Department of the Environment, Transport, Energy, and Communications (DETEC). These federal departments comprise general secretariats, federal offices, and their respective subsidiary units.

The 'decentralized' administration comprises committees with decision-making powers, certain independent authorities, such as the Federal Data Protection Commissioner, Presence Switzerland, the Swiss Agency for Therapeutic Products, and the Office of the Prosecutor General of the Swiss Confederation as well as autonomous firms and organizations.[1] As a result of executive federalism—delegation of the implementation of federal legislation to cantons, which is characteristic of the Swiss political system—the framework of the decentralized administration also includes cantonal administrations and the decentralization of federal agencies such as customs management and border control.

Beyond this formal distinction, the federal administration can be represented by concentric circles with politics dominating the central core. As one moves away from the centre, one observes an increase in the influence of private market forces on the administration. The 'central administration', which performs the roles of leadership, such as formulating and coordinating policies and providing internal management services, comprises the essential core. The general secretariats of the departments, the Federal Office of Justice, and the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs are prime examples of core elements. Within the widest circle, one finds private or special-agreement companies in which the federation is the sole or majority owner. This category includes former monopolistic public companies, including Swiss Federal Railways,[2] Swisscom,[3] and Swiss Post.[4] These public service sectors have gradually been opened to competition (through the liberalization process) and have in some cases been subject to a transformation in their legal and ownership status (through the privatization process). ↳

Table 16.1: Evolution of the workforce (full-time, permanent employees)

Unit/Year	1975	1995	2000	2019
General federal administration	32 355	34 883	31 269	37 000
Post, telephone, and telegraph (PTT)	50 578	58 975	Swiss Post: 42 884 Swisscom SA: 18 155	Swiss Post: 39 700 Swisscom SA: 19 300
Swiss Federal railways (SBB)	40 487	32 661	SBB: 28 272	SBB: 32 500

Data source: Varone (2006, 292) from 1975 to 2000 and Federal Finance Administration (2020, 14) for 2019.

To illustrate the evolution of the frontiers of the federal administration, Table 16.1 presents an inventory of the number of full-time permanent employees in various administrative units from 1975 to the present. The general federal administration employs approximately 37,000 civil servants, whereas network industries (i.e. railways, post offices, and telecommunication companies) employ approximately 91,000 persons. If all decentralized units are included, such as the Federal Institutes of Technology (with approximately 18,900 full-time permanent employees), then the federal administration offers approximately 160,000 full-time positions.

3 The departments as ministerial structures

The structure of the seven ministries of the federal administration appears to be as permanent as the *Churfirsten* string of seven mountain peaks in the canton of Saint Gallen (Germann 1996, 34). Since the adoption of the 1848 federal constitution, the number of federal councillors has been seven (see art. 175 of the current federal constitution). Each federal councillor is a member of the government and concurrently the head of a ministry (art.178 of the federal constitution). Switzerland has thus not experienced the kind of restructuring, division, or creation of governmental ministries that has been typical with the arrival of new governments in other Western democracies. Nevertheless, the immutability of the seven departments has been subject to ultimately unsuccessful challenges on several occasions, including the question appearing on ballots in 1900 and 1942. Political opposition to institutional change is not absolute, however, as several reorganizations have been conducted in the distribution of offices across the departments.

The federal offices that are directly under the control of a department represent the real 'spinal cord of the federal administration' (Grisel 1984, 213). Considering the steadfastness of the departments, the evolution of state activities has occurred at this level, ↳ following the emergence of the welfare state and according to the respective weights of various public policies.

Thus, distributing offices across departments is no small undertaking. Should the balance of responsibilities be distributed equally across the seven departments and the federal councillors responsible for each department? Alternatively, should the responsibilities be grouped along functional lines, combining complimentary policy fields? From a management perspective, should the primary concern be department governability? These three approaches seem to form the basis of the organization and management of the administration by the Federal Council, which conducts the distribution of 'offices between the departments according to the demands of management, the closeness of the links between administrative tasks, and the political and financial equilibrium'.[5]

Nevertheless, the departments remain unbalanced in the number of employees they occupy and the public expenditures they administer. Table 16.2 illustrates that the DDPS accounts for one-third of the staff

resources, while the FDF consumes 25 per cent, the FDFA accounts for 15 per cent, and the other departments account for 7 per cent or less. However, a smaller size does not necessarily translate into less prestige or political weight, especially when one considers the growing importance of the FDJP and the FDFA. Conversely, the DDPS is often a training ground for the most recently elected federal councillor (Germann 1996, 45).

Table 16.2: Distribution of employees and expenditure (in billions of Swiss francs) by department, 2018

Department	Workforce (absolute)	Workforce (in per cent)	Expenditure (absolute)	Expenditure (in per cent)
Chancellery	204	0.6	0.079	0.1
Foreign Affairs (FDFA)	5499	15.6	2.95	4.2
Home Affairs (FDHA)	2448	6.9	17.84	25.1
Justice and Police (FDJP)	2529	7.2	2.88	4.1
Defence, Civil Protection and Sport (DDPS)	11596	32.8	7.06	9.9
Finance (FDF)	8701	24.6	15.45	21.7
Economic Affairs, Education and Research (EAER)	2081	5.9	12.24	17.2
Environment, Transport, Energy and Com. (DETEC)	2242	6.4	12.58	17.7
Total	35300	100	71.079	100

Data source: Federal Chancellery (2022, 44–75).

Furthermore, there is not necessarily a linear relationship between the number of employees in a

department and the public expenditure it administers. For example, the ↳ FDHA has only 6.9 per cent of total administrative employees but administers 25.1 per cent of federal expenditures. The DDPS has the opposite situation, with one-third of federal employees managing only one tenth of the expenditures.

Additionally, comparing the historical evolution of federal spending by task group is useful. The primary changes in sectoral spending are related to national defence (from 34.7 per cent in 1960 to 8 per cent in 2018) and food and agriculture (from 12.3 to 5 per cent). Those related to social security (from 13.4 to 32 per cent), traffic (from 5.9 to 15 per cent), and education and training (from 3.6 to 11 per cent) have increased, although at different levels.

In addition to the structural inequalities between the departments and areas regulated by the federal state, the governability of the ministries must be critically examined. Limiting the extent of supervisory capacity (in the number of subordinate offices answering to one department head), would seem to be a *sine qua non* condition for efficient management (Gulick and Urwick 1937). In fact, the range of offices that answer to the departments remains high at times. The majority of departments had a large range of responsibilities, which grew primarily in the 1980s (see Table 16.3). The DDPS has been subject to the reverse tendency, despite its significant size, because of office regrouping. In the 1980s, the FDFA, which was by definition a diverse department, was also subject to reforms aimed to improve its governability such as regrouping offices responsible for science and research (which were moved to the EAER).

Table 16.3: Services that have answered directly to department heads, 1928–2018

Year/Department	FDFA	FDHA	FDJP	DDPS	FDF	EAER	DETEC	Total
1928	1	7	6	15	7	6	3	45
1959	4	12	6	11	8	6	6	53
1980	5	14	8	7	13	7	7	61
1991	6	11	11	7	11	8	7	61
2001	5	11	11	7	10	8	9	61
2005	6	11	9	7	11	8	9	61
2011	7	13	11	7	12	11	9	70
2018	8	12	12	8	12	12	9	73

Data source: Germann (1996) from 1928 to 1991 and Federal Chancellery (2022)—'The Swiss Confederation—a brief guide' from 2001 to 2018.

Note: From 2004, the services directly under a department consisted only of the units within the central federal administration (not including general secretariats). The services from the decentralized federal administration, such as decision-making committees and the various autonomous corporations and (regulatory) agencies, were no longer included in the calculations.

4 The New Public Management in Switzerland

Since the 1960s and a political scandal linked to the public procurement of fighter jets (Urio 1972), administrative and governmental reforms have been recurrent issues on the Swiss political agenda. The scope and success of various modernizations of the administrative apparatus differ.

4.1 Strengthening staff

The first phase of these reforms resulted in the adoption of the Federal Act of 19 September 1978 on the Organization and Management of the Federal Council and Federal Administration (LOA). This legislation was based on the work of two expert commissions, which were chaired by the Director of the Central Organization Office, O. Hongler, in 1967, and the Chancellor of the Confederation, K. Huber, in 1971. Four innovations were legally anchored in the law (Germann 1996, 35).

First, the Federal Chancellery was upgraded in 1968 as a consequence of Hongler's report, formally becoming the general staff of the Federal Council. The chancellor is elected by parliament, enjoys the same legitimacy as federal councillors, and has a ministerial rank.

Second, the LOA established two secretaries of state to head the Political Affairs and Foreign Economic Affairs Directorates. Their number was increased to three in 1991 by parliament, with a new secretary of state for education and research being appointed in March 1992. This number increased to four in 2010, with the creation of a secretary of state specifically dedicated to international financial matters, and to five in 2015, with the transformation of the former Federal Office for Migration into a secretary of state position.

Third, each department has a general secretariat. Since 1991, department heads have been free to choose the secretary–general as their closest collaborator, although this person does not enjoy tenure security.

Fourth, a minister may have two personal assistants. Accordingly, a trend is underway in Switzerland: the growing importance of political entourages and their increasing involvement in the decision-making process. These entourages are not comparable to the ministerial cabinets in France or Belgium. However, these personal advisers and political communication specialists are acquiring a status that increasingly places them in the spotlight. It is reasonable to assume that they will occupy a central place in the future as support for members of the government, when they face political, economic, environmental, or health crises.

4.2 Interdepartmental savings measures

The second stage of the reform process involved managerial reform. Faced with deteriorating public finances, parliament passed the Federal Act of 4 October 1974, instituting measures to improve federal finances and prohibiting an increase in federal personnel for three years. The temporary freeze was transformed into a permanent cap in June 1983. This approach proved insufficient, and in autumn 1984, a first reform project (1984–1987) was established with the principal aim of increasing federal administration efficiency. The proposed measures sought to save 3 per cent in permanent positions, 5 per cent in working hours, and 5 per cent in operating expenses. Although these objectives were achieved overall, with 514 jobs cut by the end of 1987, it remained imperative to improve the allocation of tasks between departments and furthermore to determine political priorities.

A second change initiative (1986–1996) focused on interdepartmental measures. Such an exercise appeared ambitious in a collegial system wherein each minister enjoyed significant autonomy and no real head of government could arbitrate interdepartmental conflicts. Ultimately, the premature withdrawal of several measures, which would have involved the transfer of important competencies between departments, demonstrated the inability of the Federal Council to find a consensus on a true transformation of the administration, calling into question the management of federal government businesses.

4.3 Reforms in government and administration

In June 1992, the Federal Council opted for a two-stage reform of the federal state. The Reform of Government and Administration (RGA) consisted of a complete revision of 1978's LOA. However, the government postponed the Reform of the State Management, which was only reactivated in April 1997 within the framework of the revision of the federal constitution and was finally abandoned in autumn 2004. All subsequent attempts to reform the Federal Council also failed. Finally, the RGA could only be based on the new Law on the Organization of Government and Administration (LOGA), which was enacted on 1 October 1997. The two foremost innovations of the LOGA concern the following: first, attribution to the Federal Council regarding its competence to organize the administration (previously a parliamentary prerogative); and second, the potential to manage some groups and offices through performance mandates and the budgetary envelope.

The reforms of the LOA (1964–1978, see section 4.1 in this chapter) and LOGA (1990–1997, current section) were characterized by two common elements (Germann 1996, 257ff). On the one hand, they adopted a technocratic and apolitical approach to governmental problems, emphasizing the Federal Council overload.

On the other hand, they enabled a recurrent debate between the Federal Council ↳ and parliament about the distribution of competencies related to the power to organize the administration. The compromise reached in 1978 stipulated that only the parliament had the power to create an office, while the Federal Council could assign an office to a department. In 1997, the power to organize the administration was transferred to the executive branch.

Additionally, the Federal Council introduced NPM tools to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of Swiss public administration. In line with NPM principles, the government aimed to clarify the division of tasks between strategic steering by politicians and operational management by public servants. Since 1997, twelve voluntary offices have experimented with NPM tools in a pilot project called 'Management by Performance Mandate and Budget Envelope' (GMEB). In this NPM framework, the Federal Council controls the GMEB offices with a four-year performance mandate by which it defines the tasks and services to be provided by the administrative units according to administrative product groups. These performance mandates are submitted to the relevant parliamentary committees for their opinions. The department concerned provides a concrete form to each mandate in an annual agreement with the GMEB office. In return, the GMEB office has more flexibility in its use of resources, which are allocated as a global budget. The scope of the GMEB pilot project remains limited, as the participating agencies account for only 5 per cent of operating expenses, 1 per cent of revenues, and 7 per cent of jobs.

According to the RGA evaluation report (Federal Chancellery 2000), these objectives were largely achieved: fifteen offices were transferred, merged, dissolved, or created without any redundancies. In accordance with the provisions of the LOGA, the Federal Council presented a report on the GMEB project in December 2001, which was based on an external evaluation (Balthasar et al. 2001). Consequently, the federal government extended the GMEB project to other administrative units: in April 2003, it renewed nine performance mandates from 2004 to 2007, which were standardized and simplified to guarantee further transparency and improved understanding, especially within the *militia* parliament. The government's goal was to expand the scope of the GMEB and allocate a budget for the entire office rather than for separate product groups, thus waiving the savings measures that were initially set at 10 per cent over four years and simplifying the system, whereby GMEB offices submitted reports to political authorities. Another aim was to avoid involving parliament in defining performance mandate goals—the offices' strategic objectives—as recommended by external evaluators and as requested by management and finance committees from both chambers of the parliament.

In May 2011, the Federal Council announced its intention to strengthen the GMEB and coordinated it with financial planning. Accordingly, it mandated the Federal Finance Administration to develop a new management model (NMG) for the federal administration. Implemented on 1 January 2017, the NMG aims to strengthen administrative management and efficiency in all federal administrative units. To ensure the

implementation of the 'debt brake', which was enshrined in the Constitution in 2001 and ↳ introduced in 2003, and to curb structural budget deficits and debt growth, the NMG has several objectives:

- to improve the Confederation's budget planning by establishing connections between the tasks to be performed and finances as well as between services and resources at all levels (the parliament, the Federal Council, and the administration),

- to promote administrative management and a culture based on management by objectives and results as well as administrative units' accountability and each unit's room for manoeuvres, and

- to achieve greater administrative efficiency and effectiveness.

Management tools and principles through which objectives are to be achieved were also defined as follows:

- a budget with an integrated task and financial plan (PITF) structured by administrative and service groups,

- budgetary envelopes for the domains of all administrative units, with performance groups and objectives included in the budget with the PITF, and

- performance agreements that each department negotiates annually with its offices to coordinate

political and operational objectives and define the means necessary to achieve these objectives.

It should be noted that the Finance Administration will evaluate the application and effects of the NMG, and the Federal Council will present the results and possible improvement proposals to parliament by 2022 at the latest. However, the conclusions of this evaluation remain unknown.

4.4 Switzerland: a good student of managerial reforms

In an international comparison, the Swiss federal administration can be considered a good student in defining and implementing NPM reforms. This may be unexpected, as federalist and decentralized countries are generally reluctant to introduce major managerial reforms, which seem to be the prerogative of countries with Anglo-Saxon or Napoleonic traditions (Giauque 2013). To some extent, the Swiss bureaucratic apparatus mirrors Swiss political institutions. Specifically, it is marked by the *militia* character of the Swiss political system. Even if Swiss MPs tend to become authentic, political professionals (Pilotti et al. 2019), the federal bureaucracy remains a major actor in policy-making processes. Its expertise is frequently solicited in the agenda-setting, decision-making, and implementation stages. Those in political

and administrative spheres work closely together, as many politicians admit their dependence on those in the administration when developing and managing public policies. Moreover, the Swiss federal administration occasionally assumes a political role because of the overload of the federal executive branch (federal councillors).

This observation is reinforced by the internationalization of politics and public policies, which contributes to strengthening the role of the executive branch and federal administration to the detriment of parliamentary actors in decision-making processes (Kriesi and Trechsel 2008; Sciarini et al. 2015). The paradox is that characteristics of the Swiss political system—which is based on a search for balance and consensus—contribute to institutional inertia, although the bureaucratic apparatus is open to change, adopting NPM management principles and tools from the private sector. Administrative reforms are often described as technically oriented and apolitical, emphasizing the importance of modernizing management principles within the administration. In an international comparison, the Swiss federal administration can be considered to belong to the so-called reformist countries, even if the transformations are more incremental than revolutionary.

5 Human resources management

While the Confederation had thus far refrained from introducing lifelong mandates for the federal civil servants, it relied in practice on a system that neared career regulation. According to the federal law of 30 June 1927 regarding the status of civil servants, recruitment was based on a competitive process, with the appointing authority having discretionary power and promotion abilities (thus replacing the concept of career). Civil servants were appointed for an 'administrative period' of four years to assume a function. Although it was opposed to the classical career, the Swiss system of functions (*Aemtersystem* in German) was, nevertheless, close to it in practice (Germann 1996, 114). On the one hand, employment contracts that were theoretically limited to an administrative period were renewed almost automatically. On the other hand, several sets of functions corresponded to true career paths, which is the same as in the diplomatic sector.

The Federal Personnel Law (LPers) of 24 March 2000 abolished the permanent civil service status, granting public employers more latitude to encourage goal-oriented work and reward individual and collective performances. The LPers refers to the abandonment of the public service system, salary scale, and automatic salary progression. By lifting the ban on strikes, this framework law, which replaced a detailed

law, simultaneously sought to revitalize the 'social partnership' between unions and managers. Fearing a loss of job security and protection against dismissal as well as the new salary system, the union that represented federal public employees' interests launched a referendum against the LPers, but the law was accepted by 67 per cent of voters on 26 November 2000.

5.1 The end of the civil service

In September 2010, the Federal Council adopted a new personnel strategy to accompany the implementation of the LPers. The Swiss federal civil service has undergone significant reforms in recent decades: the status of civil servants was abrogated with the entry into force of the LPers on 1 January 2002, which maintained public law status but removed lifetime appointments. Accordingly, fixed-term and ad hoc contracts are multiplying within the federal public administration, thus opening the way to the individualization of working conditions. Increasingly, selection is made on the basis of professional competencies according to job specifications rather than on the basis of both general and universal criteria specific to public service. Furthermore, the skills sought are changing. Legal training and associated skills are losing their importance in favour of managerial and project management skills. Career development is no longer based solely on seniority and experience but on an assessment of individual skills and results, therefore becoming less vertical and increasingly horizontal via promotions in other administrative departments or responsibility for specific projects. Financial remuneration is becoming more diversified and individualized, as it also depends on individual performance, albeit still minimally. Finally, the identity of public servants also seems to be evolving, as they increasingly seem to identify with their field of activity (i.e. the public policy sector within which they work) or with their profession and less with a specific body of civil servants (Emery and Giauque 2012).

5.2 The representativeness of the administration

It is also important to know the extent to which the different socio-economic and political groups in Swiss society are represented in the federal administration. Few studies have been devoted to this question in Switzerland. Although such studies exist, they have focused on the senior civil service, which is admittedly at the intersection of administration and politics, and they are dated (Klöti 1972; Urio et al. 1989). A more recent study highlights senior civil servants' characteristics prevailing in 1910, 1937, 1957, 1980, 2000, and 2010. This prosopographical study provides interesting information regarding the composition of the Swiss senior civil service and related changes across time (Emery et al. 2014).

The first finding relates to education. Approximately 97 per cent of Swiss senior officials have a university degree, whereas only 63 per cent had degrees in 1910. Graduates from law and the hard sciences (technical, natural, medical, and mathematical sciences) were the most numerous until the 1980s; however, the number of graduates from economics and humanities has increased significantly in the more recent period. In 1980, 61 per cent of senior civil servants were officers in the Swiss army; they are now a minority (falling to 42 per cent in 2010). Finally, while the majority of senior officials (67 per cent) came from internal administrative positions in 1957, only 45 per cent did so in 2010. These figures underscore the increase in
the number of senior officials coming from ↳ outside public administration and notably from the private sector (a few come from associative sectors or non-governmental organizations).

Despite these trends, the current top public managers remain primarily academics, who have a background in law and have significant seniority; they have typically made their careers primarily within public administration. Thus, they have benefited from internal promotions, with the majority (with the exception of the 2010 cohort) declaring an officer's rank within the militia. However, this situation is evolving, notably through a progressive 'managerialization' of senior civil servants, a trend that is revealed in the increased number of persons with a university education in the social sciences (particularly in economics) or

continuing education courses in economics or business and public management. Additionally, this trend is evidenced by the increase in the number of senior civil servants coming from the business world and private sector.

Since 1 January 2018, the linguistic distribution of federal employees (72 per cent German-speaking, 20 per cent French-speaking, 7 per cent Italian-speaking, and less than 1 per cent Romansh-speaking) has corresponded roughly to that of the Swiss population, which has undergone notable changes over time. Between 1970 and 2018, the proportion of federal employees indicating German (or Swiss German) as their main language was slightly lower (from 66 per cent in 1970 to 62 per cent in 2018). The proportion of employees reporting Italian as their main language decreased from 11 to 8 per cent, and the proportion of employees claiming Romansh as their main language fell from 0.8 to 0.5 per cent. Finally, the proportion of employees who indicated French as their primary language increased from 18 to 23 per cent.

A recent publication (Kübler et al. 2020) demonstrates that linguistic representation differs significantly from one department to another. Yet, some common trends are at work: a downward trend for the German-speaking community, an upward trend for the French-speaking community, a representation of the Italian-speaking community that corresponds to the target of proportional representation, and a slight increase for the Romansh-speaking community. Kübler et al. (2020) conclude overall that 'the representation of the different language communities in the federal administration has come close to the target in recent years' (Kübler et al. 2020, 53). However, the Italian-speaking community is particularly underrepresented in senior positions. Moreover, the study notes that the most common languages spoken in the federal administration are German (or even Swiss German) and English (also used in the recruitment process). The ideal of representativeness is, therefore, confronted with the test of practice, which indicates the use of German within the administration.

Women comprise 44 per cent of the Confederation staff. According to figures from 2020, in the middle range of salaries, women accounted for just over one-third of the employees. The situation was worse in the higher salary grades, in which women accounted for only 23 per cent. The FDFA was the best performer, with 35 per cent of the senior managers being women. This rate dropped to 7 per cent in the DDPS. Another recent finding is that the health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the substantial underrepresentation of female specialists in management. The glass ceiling that has hindered women's

p. 312 careers (Engeli 2011) remains, as does salary ↳ inequality between male and female federal employees. Finally, both multilingualism and equal opportunities for everyone have been reaffirmed as political priorities by the Federal Council (Office Fédéral du Personnel 2004a, 2004b).

6 Challenges

In conclusion, four political issues are related to administrative actions and reforms. These represent challenges for both political-administrative authorities and political scientists, as the uncertainties that characterize them remain numerous.

6.1 Reforming the political institutions versus the administration*?*

Federal authorities frequently distinguish between reforming political institutions and reforming the administration. Moreover, the Federal Council is abandoning the former while increasing the latter, as if these two approaches are either independent or substitutable. Multiplying administrative reforms instead of truly transforming government is telling in this respect. Furthermore, several instruments of the interface between political power and the senior civil service prove to be problematic, as in the controversy surrounding the increase in the number of secretaries of state or even the growing importance and influence of political advisers. The question that arises is whether and how the political–administrative relationship will be changed by the various reforms underway, and more importantly, who will ultimately benefit from the administrative reforms? Several international studies attest to the fact that new 'public service bargains' (Hood 2001) are negotiated between political authorities and senior civil servants. These bargains extend beyond the dichotomy naively postulated by the NPM between, on the one hand, strategic management, for which the political authorities alone are responsible, and on the other hand, operational management, which is the responsibility of administrative services. One can conclude that the over-accountability of administrative services' achievement of policy output indicators, as defined in their performance mandates, cannot replace improvements in governmental capacities for conducting state affairs or the effectiveness of public policies (measured at the level of the effects on citizens and policy outcomes).

6.2 Competencies of the Federal Council versus competencies of the parliament?

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The division of powers between the legislative and executive branches of government has been a nagging problem for almost five decades of administrative reform in ↳ Switzerland. Throughout these decades, citizens have witnessed a steady loss of parliamentary power, primarily in organizational matters. However, the recent interventions of the supervisory and legislative commissions of the parliament, particularly regarding NPM, suggest a renewed legislative interest in the concrete steering of administrative actions. Here again, a fundamental question remains as to the effective role that legislative leaders assume in high-level supervision of the executive branch, whether it be the federal government, ministerial administration (departments), or bodies to which public service missions are delegated (e.g. independent regulatory agencies in liberalized network industries). Eventually, this could enhance the value of the Federal Assembly in its functions of aggregating preferences, making decisions, and controlling public action—at the risk, however, of interfering excessively in the operational management of administrative actions.

6.3 Public finance as a single reference point?

Since the mid-1970s, the evolution of public finances and curbing public debt have become priority reference points, if not the sole framework for reforms. Moreover, this concern is dominant following the financial crisis of 2007–2008 and the increasing debt resulting from management of the COVID-19 pandemic. In Switzerland, the FDF is leading the predominant modernization projects, such as NPM, and several reforms are connected to the strategy of consolidating federal finances. Thus, will administrative reforms be aimed solely at reducing public deficits, or will other objectives (such as the timeliness and effectiveness of policies or transparency and proximity to citizens) also be included in the government's agenda? This question is important for the roles assigned to federal departments and offices as well as for future strategies in the face of the state's subordination to private market rules, both internally (e.g. through the introduction of market instruments in the functioning of the administration) and externally (e.g. as a result of the liberalization of monopolistic sectors and privatization of public enterprises).

6.4 Motivation of the Confederation's employees?

The abandonment of the civil servant status and application of new management tools and guidelines encourage administrative units to align themselves with the management modes, principles, and practices used in private companies, which are oriented towards performance and individual results. Concurrently, considerations for the human, cultural, and motivational dimensions of these changes may seem insufficient (Giauque and Emery 2016). Some observers believe that these transformations have detrimentally impacted the values of federal employees and may have reduced the professionalization of the administration (Suleiman 2003). Will successive reforms produce a crisis of professional identity, organizational detachment, and even lower productivity? Conversely, ↳ will they lead to the desired effects in increasing federal employees' motivation by financial incentives, as NPM postulates? This is an open question, as research on public servants' motivation in Switzerland (Anderfuhren-Biget et al. 2014) demonstrates that various values, such as civic sense and compassion for the most disadvantaged citizens, are powerful motivating factors. Moreover, introducing financial incentives and performance-related pay (which remains modest in Switzerland) is a risky mechanism. Scholars have established that these practices can have a perverse effect; that is, they can focus employees' expectations primarily on working conditions to the detriment of work content (Frey and Jegen 2001), which is a dangerous gamble from the perspective of human resource management (Ritz 2009; Emery and Giauque 2012).

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Eventually, could the current reforms lead to value conflicts (i.e. between serving the public interest and maximizing one's performance and bonuses) among federal employees that result in resignations (Giauque et al. 2012)? Public employees are fatigued from facing, for at least the past thirty years, constant transformations and reforms of the public organizations in which they perform their work. These perpetual transformations have contributed to the development of a feeling of weariness among public employees (Emery and Giauque 2019). Human resource management in the public sector does not perpetually emerge victoriously from reforms that aim to align public management tools and practices with those employed in private sector organizations. However, in view of public administrations' reactions to the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, most public administrations have demonstrated remarkable organizational flexibility, agility, and resilience. What is certain is that the administrative culture and organizational regulations are being reconfigured, although the contours and effects of this reshaping are difficult to predictively determine.

Notes

1. See arts 6, 7, and 8 as well as the appendix of the Ordinance of 25 November 1998 on the organization of the government and administration (OLOGA, SR 172.010.1).

2. The federal law of 20 March 1998 on the Swiss Federal Railways (LCFF, SR 742.31) transformed the former public corporation into a private company in which the Federation is the sole shareholder.

3. The Swisscom SA corporation was created by the federal law of 30 April 1997 on the structure of the federal telecommunications corporation (LET, SR 784.11).

4. The federal law of 30 April 1997 on the structure of the federal postal corporation (LOP, SR 783.1) created Swiss Post as a legally independent institution with its own legal identity.

5. Art. 43 para. 2 LOGA.

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