

The German Vocational Education for Public Administration

Elements of Success and Idea Transfer for Development Cooperation

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Purpose

The point of departure for this study is the growing interest of partner countries of German development cooperation in the public administration education in Germany. The study was commissioned by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and focuses on vocational education. The study addresses two questions:

1. What are successful elements of the vocational education in public administration in Germany?
2. Which of those successful elements are relevant for an idea transfer to other countries?

In pursuit of an answer we describe the German public administration education and training, identify elements of success for the German system and evaluate their relevance for an idea transfer to partner countries.

Success in the Administration Education

The vocational education is a key factor of the public administration's capacity to serve state and society. We define success as "fitness for purpose and transformation"². Fitness for purpose means that the vocational education contributes to fulfilling the objectives and caters to the demands of the public administration. Fitness for transformation is the ability to adapt to an ever-changing environment as well as to changes in the objectives. The vocational education of public servants can be considered of high quality if it retains the ability to adapt and contributes meaningfully to the capacity of the public administrations to meet expectations of the society and of the state. Society expects the administration to adhere to good governance which requires it to be participatory, consensus-oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive and to follow the rule of law³. The state expects its employees to be neutral, loyal, adhere to democratic principles, to the constitution, and to human rights.

Research Design

In order to capture *to what extent* and *how* the required values, knowledge, and skills are being imparted in the vocational education, we draw on the academic literature on vocational education in public administration, analyze 31 curricula of study programs at 20 universities of applied sciences, and conduct guided expert interviews with experts from three types of institutions: (i) universities of

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² Harris-Huermann (2008): Evaluating evaluators. An evaluation of education in Germany. pp. 35-38.

³ UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (2009): What is Good Governance?

applied sciences for the higher intermediate civil service; (ii) vocational schools for public administration and (iii) human resources departments at government institutions. For the interviews, we selected four federal states (Baden-Württemberg, Bremen, Saxony, Thuringia) reflecting the diversity in the federal republic with respect to state size, historical background (east and west) as well as the type of university of applied sciences involved in public administration education. Additionally, we conducted interviews with development cooperation experts to select relevant elements of the administration education.

Limitations

This study has a clear focus on vocational education and leaves aside continuing vocational education for experienced professionals. The transferability can be assessed only broadly in this study because the conditions of public administrations differ considerably between countries with respect to the education system, the labor market, the structure of the administration and the value attributed to practical knowledge and skills. To enhance transferability, we lay out some basic requirements for transfer, in the full study report we will explain the preconditions for individual transferrable elements.

German Education for Public Administration

The German public administration has a continental European federal tradition with a strong legalistic culture and strong rule of law. All administrative action has to be based on or justified by law. Due to the strong federalism the subnational levels are highly important. Of all employees in the public administration, only 12% are employed at the federal level, compared to 53% at the state level, and 35% at the municipal and county level. The German civil service system is relatively lean with a 10% share of all employment, mostly because welfare is traditionally provided by the third sector but financed by the state.⁴

Over the course of the past two centuries, the training of public servants remained remarkably constant. The training requires multiple years of training before entering the job and links theory and practice. Alongside this extensive training, several principles were developed that still persist today: the merit principle which requires applicants to meet high standards in exams before entering public service, appropriate salaries, lifetime employment, and a highly differentiated disciplinary system. The German public service was remarkably effective throughout all this time, but the loyalty to the head of government and the strong hierarchical structure made it possible to use the bureaucracy for whatever purpose in the past. One consequence of the bureaucracy's involvement in atrocities in Nazi Germany was to root democratic and human rights principles as a foundation of values in the vocational education.

The German civil service is divided by qualification levels and by employment status. A person may either be employed regularly with an individual contract as employee (*Angestellte/r*) or as civil servant (*Beamte/r*) which establishes lifetime tenure with special rights and obligations. Both forms of employment exist at every qualification level. When speaking of civil service, we refer to both types of employment. The German civil service is divided into three qualification levels: the intermediate level civil service, the higher intermediate civil service and the higher civil service.⁵

⁴ Kuhlmann/Wollmann (2013): *Verwaltung und Verwaltungsreformen in Europa*. p. 79.

⁵ Due to rising professional requirements the ordinary civil service ranking as the lowest level has become obsolete. Hence, it will not be discussed here.

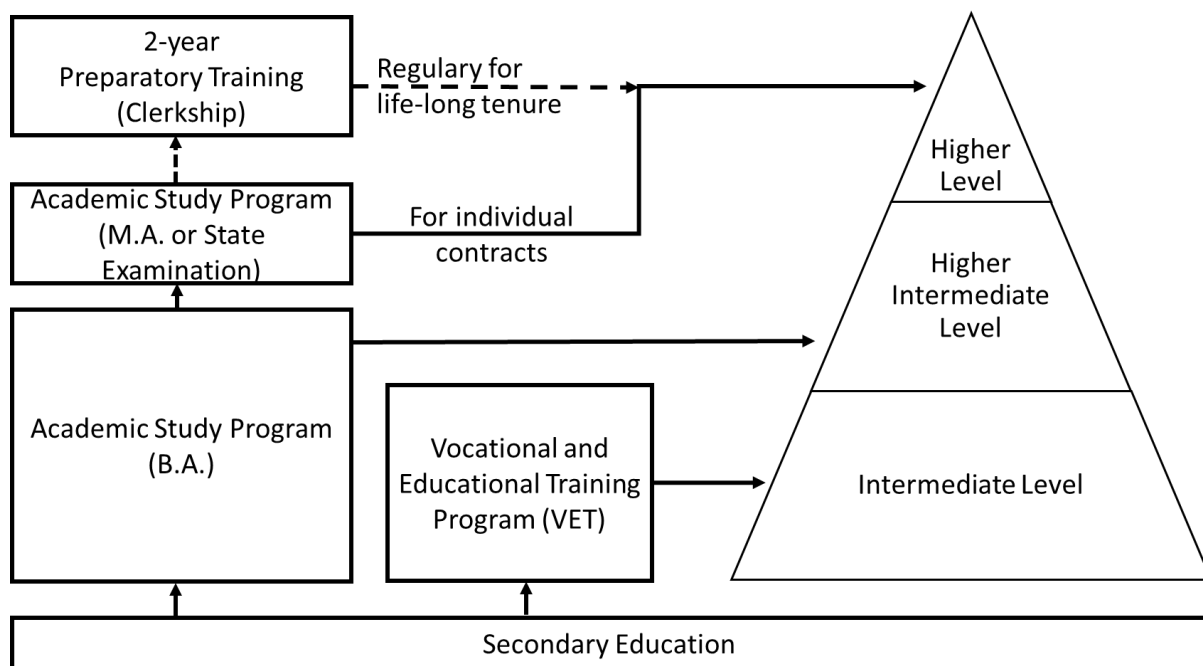


Figure 1: Entering the German Vocational Education for Public Administration. (Figure based on Reichard/Röber (2012): 14⁶)

Germany's dual vocational training system evolved from apprenticeships which are forms of on-the-job training where practitioners pass their knowledge on in exchange for work. The dual vocational training system combines apprenticeships in a company or agency with vocational education at a vocational school. After completing their vocational training the apprentice gets certified and awarded the status of "journeyman". The system enables a highly standardized and comparable education in combination with the more specific on-the-job training, which allows employees fairly high mobility on the labor market.

The goal of the vocational administration education is to form "administration all-rounders". The competences imparted are profound knowledge in the application and implementation of law, accompanied by management and organizational skills as well as high communication skills. The main values imparted are adherence to and conviction of the rule of law, welfare orientation as well as service orientation.

Intermediate level

The vocational education and training program lasts three years and allows for specializations on the federal, state, or municipal and county level.⁷ The education is predominantly practical (70 %) and takes place at the agency, the theoretical part taught at vocational schools amounts to 880 lessons (45 min each) and an additional 420 lessons in the specializations.⁸ Theoretical education is provided by practitioners, vocational teachers, and lawyers. Schooling is organized in blocks of several weeks. The practical part consists of on-the-job training at the agency where the apprentices usually rotate

⁶ Reichard/Röber (2012). Ausbildung der Staatsdiener von morgen. Bestandsaufnahme, Reformtendenzen, Perspektiven. p. 14.

⁷ For the direct entry as a medium-level civil servant, there exists a completely school-based vocational training program which will not be described here as states and municipalities increasingly switch to the dual vocational training program.

⁸ 178. Innenministerkonferenz (1999): Anforderungen für Studiengänge an internen Fachhochschulen. Zur Wahrung der Einheitlichkeit laufbahnrechtlicher Anforderungen nach § 14 Abs. 2 bis 4 BRRG (Anlage 2 zu Nummer 26 der Beschlüsse).

through 8 to 20 different branches of the agency and work supervised by qualified and certified trainers.

Higher Intermediate Level

The higher intermediate civil service constitutes the “backbone of the administration”. Similar to the dual vocational training at the intermediate level, the study program consists of both theory and practice. The shares of subjects (figure 2) show the focus on practice (27%) and law (23%) which is followed by an interdisciplinary mix of business and economics (18%), and administrative and social sciences (11%). Even if not in a prominent position, additional skills and project management courses make up about 8% of the studies which show that complementary skills are taught as well. The shares also reflect broadly the composition of teachers who are usually academic experts in their respective fields with practical experience outside academia.

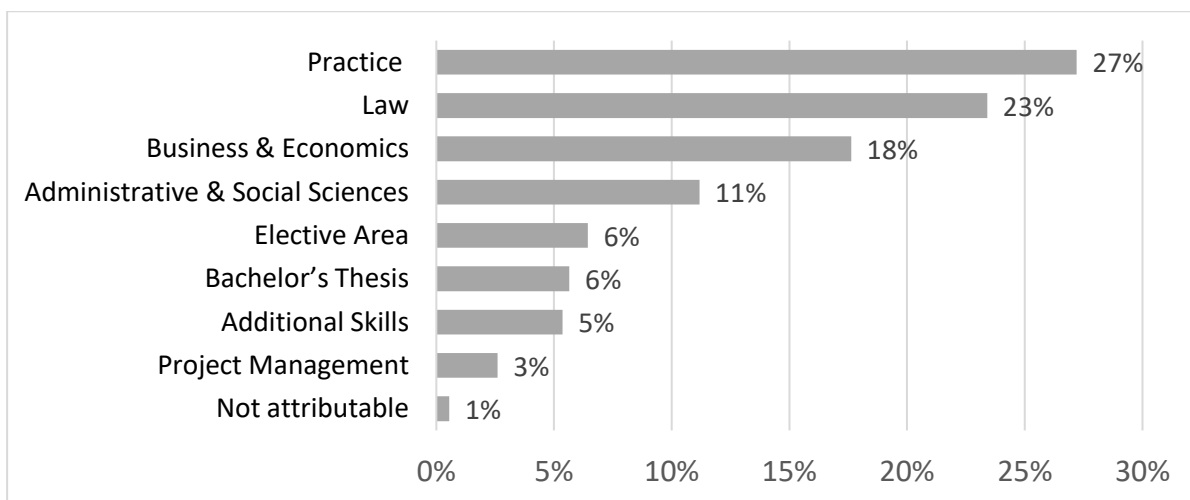


Figure 1: Subject Shares of the Study Program (in %). The table is based on all 31 Public Administration study programs offered in Germany of which 28 culminate in a bachelor's degree and 3 in an equivalent diploma. Study programs such as “Public Management” are included.

Successful Elements of the German Public Administration Education

Recruitment

- The selection criteria are deduced from the job profile and focus on performance in school and on social skills.
- The selection process generally follows three stages: The human resources department preselects the written applications and invites promising candidates to a written test. The test results and school performance are weighted and translated by the Human Resources department to a ranking list. The best candidates are invited to job interviews in which their social skills and aptitude for the job will be assessed.
- The appeal of the dual education programs is strong because of job security and family-friendliness in the administration.

Dual education system

- The dual education system can be considered successful due to its contents, organization, qualified teachers and instructors, and its institutional setting. The goal of training administration all-rounders is pursued through an interdisciplinary program with a focus on law.

- The combination of theory and practice allows students to apply their theoretical knowledge in a practice-oriented way, acquire practical knowledge about the structure and organization of the administration as well as its procedures, improve their social skills in contact with colleagues and citizens, and, finally, to adopt values by way of socialization in the agency.
- The organization of the education programs is characterized by the alternation of theory and practice, several practice stations with qualified instructors and instruction managers that offer guidance.
- The interdisciplinary composition of the teachers' body helps convey different perspectives.
- The institutional setting ensures fitness for transformation by way of a comprehensive quality management system: Evaluations of coursework, teachers and institutions provide the basis for quality management. Institutionalized boards at multiple levels serve as platforms for exchange that together include most stakeholders and have clear procedures and responsibilities for keeping education up-to-date and, if necessary, to reform it.

Jointly, the program enables the graduates to take on multiple perspectives on the actions and consequences of the administration and make adequate decisions in complex situations.

Potential Elements for an Idea transfer

Before describing the elements for an idea transfer, we need to highlight some preconditions that facilitate an idea transfer. The following list is not conclusive, instead it needs to be adapted to the context of a country's public administration and its education system.

- The first step should be conducting a needs assessment in order to know what competences are needed.
- The recruitment for the administration should be based on performance and aptitude and not on political loyalty to provide the administration with the best students.
- Practical knowledge should be valued and appreciated as it is the basis to implement rules and legislation properly and to execute plans effectively and efficiently.
- The public administration should be attractive to employees in the long run in order to avoid brain drain to the private or the third sector which would render a vocational education little effective for the administration.

Idea transfer

1. Recruitment can be improved by defining selection criteria, by introducing a multi-stage selection process as described in the section on recruitment above. In the case of lacking quality or quantity of applicants, target-group oriented advertisement should be considered.
2. The "dualization" of the public administration education is a two-pronged approach which encompasses increasing the practical components where programs are highly theoretical and increasing the theoretical components where vocational education reduces mainly to on-the-job training. The preconditions are financial and human resources for setting up such a system as well as regulations to delineate a clear framework for the cooperation between theory and practice.
 - a. To increase practice shares the practical stations need to be defined together with learning objectives, cooperating agencies need to be found and cooperation agreements between schools and agencies should be adopted. The agencies should appoint instruction managers in the human resources department as well as instructors in the different branches of the agencies. The instructors in the agencies should receive teaching skills training to ensure a practical education of high quality.

- b. To increase the theoretical share of on-the-job training program adequate education institutions need to be found. Potential partners are universities of applied sciences as well as vocational schools and schools of continuing education. Schooling and work needs to be reconciled through concepts like block seminars, weekend seminars or evening classes.
- 3. The fitness for transformation should be rooted in institutions, rules, and procedures forming a quality management system.
 - a. Quality management should encompass the accreditation and re-accreditation of education programs, the appointment of quality managers, the evaluation of both courses and teachers and finally a standing committee that discusses quality management on a regular basis. Additionally, education institutions should discuss with human resources managers on a regular basis to ensure that the vocational education meets the agencies' demand in practice.
 - b. Rules and regulations should allow the education institutions some autonomy to keep the coursework up-to-date, and to experiment with new teaching methods. A commission of several stakeholders should ensure at the federal state or national level that educational contents are up-to-date.
 - c. There should be clear procedures and decision rules for reform that allow to react to major changes and challenges for the public administration education. During a reform process all stakeholders should participate, but nevertheless responsibilities should be assigned clearly in terms of the elaboration, the decision on, and the implementation of the reforms in order to avoid deadlock or lacking compliance in reform implementation.
- 4. Even in contexts where implementing vocational education programs with a duration of three years does not seem realizable due to fiscal or other constraints, introducing at least a basic module of administration education should be considered. The rationale is that it shortens the on-the-job training period and ensures that employees are more versatile and effective which saves money in the long term. Drawing on the basic requirements of working in the public administration, one should devise foundational values, skills, and knowledge that every employee should learn. This should be combined with practical learning periods that enhance the understanding of administration structures, organization, and procedures. This basic module could be integrated into a modularized concept of continuing education with a human resources development concept that allows for different career paths and links the paths to according salaries (which can be modified by performance criteria). To devise such a modularized concept of continuing education there are diverse concepts in the respective states of Germany of which some are promising candidates for future research and potential transfer, but which were not part of this study.

Conclusion

Successful elements of the German vocational administration education lie in the fields of recruitment, contents and organization of the education, quality of teachers, and a somewhat adaptable system. In all those areas the German experiences may inspire an idea transfer to improve the administration education. The main work consists in developing specific measures for changing the administration education based on both the ideas offered in this study and a country's existing system.