EXPLAINING VARIATION IN PERCEPTIONS OF RED TAPE: A PROFESSIONALISM-MARKETIZATION MODEL

GENE A. BREWER AND RICHARD M. WALKER

In the public administration literature, ways in which perceptions of red tape vary between different parts of the public sector remains relatively unexplored. In this article we define organizational red tape as a subject-dependent concept; that is, we expect to see variations in the level and type of red tape between different internal stakeholder groups. We then explain variations with two organizational-based variables, professionalization and marketization. The empirical analysis is undertaken on nearly 800 English local government services. The framework correctly predicts that officials in highly professionalized and marketized services perceive higher levels of red tape, while those in less professionalized and marketized services report lower levels. We then summarize our findings and comment on their theoretical and practical significance.

INTRODUCTION

Rules can be described as norms, regulations, procedures and expectations that regulate individual behaviour in organizations. Rules exist to ensure accountability, equity and ethical behaviour. As a result, they provide some of the basic building blocks of public administration (see Crozier 1964; Weber 1988) and provide us with knowledge about behaviour, organization and decision making. Public administration has undergone a period of focusing on ‘bad rules’ or when rule making goes wrong and rules shift from being actions that increase organizational performance to actions that stifle and inhibit it. This perspective is associated with a presumption in the writing on bureaucracy that rules proliferate and result in maladies of which red tape is the most severe. Bozeman’s (2000, p. 12) widely cited definition of red tape – ‘rules, regulations, and procedures that remain in force and entail a compliance burden but do not advance the legitimate purposes the rules were intended to serve’ – indicates that by-and-large red tape is viewed as bad tape and it is assumed to have uniformly negative consequences (see, for example, Craig and McCutcheon 1955; Kaufman 1977; Bozeman 1993). This is not to say that rules in themselves are problematic – formalization, that is rules working appropriately, is conceptually separate from red tape (Bozeman and Scott 1996).

Bozeman (1993, 2000) launched the first intensive effort to understand the red tape concept both theoretically and empirically. Bozeman contends that some rules are ‘born bad’ while others may have ‘gone bad’. For example, rules can be born bad when rule makers make erroneous predictions about organizational behaviour, when they aim to create frustration or centralize power within particular parts of a public agency, or when they try to micromanage agency operations. Rules may also go bad within an organization because of implementation change. That is, a rule can be executed in different ways; the purpose of a rule may change so it becomes needless or less effective; or rule strain may occur when the number of rules increases leading to a compliance burden on the organization. As Bozeman (2000, p. 124) argues: ‘No organization is red-tape proof’. Red tape is, however, likely to be higher in public than private organizations because of greater...
degrees of external control, the need for accountability, and the shift to inter-organizational governance arrangements for the delivery of public services.

In the UK, the nature and impact of red tape on public agencies has long been debated. The public choice arguments propounded by Conservative governments through the late 1970s and 1980s attacked public services for being highly inefficient, and one driver of this inefficiency was bureaucratic resistance or red tape (Walsh 1995). The Labour administration elected in 1997 has perpetuated the view that red tape is prevalent in English public services, as seen in the Gershon (2004) review on efficiency, and papers by then Prime Minister Blair (2002) and the Office of Public Service Reform (OPSR) (2002). The argument presented is that red tape, demarcations, and restrictive practices are bad rules that have negative consequences and need to be reduced if public services are to be improved (Blair 2002; OPSR 2002, pp. 18–20).

Recommendations to reduce red tape are based on changing structures (decentralization) and management practices (devolving decision making towards the frontline) and seeking to enhance organizational flexibility through innovation. These strategies suggest that central government in England sees red tape as internally generated rather than emanating from the external environment, which in the English case is relatively laden with centralized prescription.

Agencies have nonetheless been established to tackle red tape. For example, the Better Regulation Executive (BRE) works ‘… to understand and minimise unnecessary bureaucracy, or “red-tape” that prevents front-line staff from carrying out their core duties’ (BRE 2005). To resolve the problem of red tape, public service organizations are encouraged to innovate and find new ways to respond to customer demands: ‘Innovation and efficiency are much more likely to be achieved where people are given the incentive to do so at the local level …’ (OPSR 2002, p. 15). Reductions in red tape are seen to have positive consequences. For example, ‘Classroom assistants are allowing teachers to concentrate on education in the classroom. Bursars help heads concentrate on leading their schools. Their introduction enables schools and their pupils to get the best out of staff, allowing a greater focus on teaching and lesson preparation’ (OPSR 2002 p. 19). Such claims are typically made with little systematic evidence to support them.

In terms of English public services, if red tape is assumed to be prevalent and problematic, questions need to be posed about its nature, extent and impact. In this paper we begin to address some of these questions. The paper is focused on exploring the extent to which perceptions of red tape vary between different services in English local government and to develop explanations for this variation. The services of English local authorities have different goals and functions (welfare distribution, regulatory and service delivery), and their power can vary from removing a child from a family to protect the child’s interests to providing library services or public swimming pools. The paper is by necessity preliminary. Research on red tape is in its infancy. Indeed the authors have not been able to track down any systematic research on red tape outside the United States. US studies have typically either examined public-private differences or been limited to one administrative area.

The nature and extent of the red tape literature is reviewed in the section of the paper that follows. We then generate hypotheses on why perceptions of red tape may vary between services. We propose two variables, professionalization and marketization, that may assist in explaining this variation in perceptions. Methods, data and measures are then outlined, and we present the research findings. The results confirm the value of...
the hypotheses presented in this paper for the development of a more comprehensive framework to explain red tape.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON RED TAPE

Internal red tape refers to bureaucratic rules and routines that cause task delays and negatively affect the internal operations of a public agency, for example, lowering employee motivation and making work processes more complex. The result is lowered individual and organizational performance. Thus, red tape is viewed as one of the most damaging of bureaucratic maladies (Kaufman 1977; Wilson 1989).

The red tape concept is closely associated with the public management literature. The majority of research on the topic has been conducted in the US, where scholars have developed measures of red tape and mounted a number of empirical studies investigating the forms and impact of the construct on public employees and organizations, describing it along the lines of formalization and complexity in management subsystems such as personnel, budgeting, and procurement (but see Bozeman and Scott 1996). This tradition began with Kaufman’s (1977) early theoretical exploration of the red tape concept and Buchanan’s (1975) study comparing managers’ perceptions of red tape in the public and private sectors, which stimulated a number of follow-up studies (for example, Rainey 1982; Baldwin 1990; Bretschneider 1990; Bozeman et al. 1992; Rainey et al. 1995; Bozeman and Scott 1996; Pandey and Kingsley 2000). As Pandey and Scott (2002) pointed out, the sheer number of publications on the subject of red tape in the last decade suggests that considerable progress has been made in understanding how to deal with it. However, the authors contend that a closer examination reveals a mixed picture. Until relatively recently few studies have gone beyond exploring public-private differences in red tape.

In recent years, the emphasis has shifted toward improved conceptual development and more intensive research on red tape in public organizations. For example, Pandey (2003) has collected a large and rich data set involving a national sample of state health and human services managers and examined relationships between red tape and communication, and managers’ strategies for coping with red tape and work alienation (DeHart-Davis and Pandey 2005; Pandey and Welch 2005; Pandey and Garnett 2006). One of these studies shows how a developmental culture can mitigate the negative impacts of red tape (Pandey and Moynihan 2006). The growing interest in red tape has led researchers to include the concept in multivariate models of bureaucratic behaviour, policy implementation, organizational performance, and other outcomes of interest (see, for example, various studies by Pandey and colleagues, Brewer and Coleman Selden 2000; Brewer 2006). However, some of these studies only peripherally focus on red tape and utilize different measures of the construct. As a result, the research findings, although growing in number, are difficult to synthesize.

Measurement of red tape is typically based upon managers’ perceptions of the prevalence of the concept in general. However, one stream of work does utilize perceptions of task delays (see, for example, Turaga and Bozeman 2005). Most of these studies do not provide a panoramic view of red tape. Rather, they tend to focus on certain occupations or organizations, and they sometimes investigate topics that are not directly related to red tape.

External red tape is also identified in the literature. It refers to bureaucratic procedures and regulations that make it difficult for citizens and other stakeholders to interact with the agency or comply with legal mandates. Both Kaufman (1977) and Bozeman (1993)
acknowledged the existence of external red tape, and some government reforms have specifically sought to ease the burden on citizens and other stakeholders (US Office of Management and Budget 1979; BRE 2005). Studies examining external red tape are typically found in the cross-country literature and focus on the topics of regulation or corruption (Mauro 1995; Bardhan 1996; Banerjee 1997; La Porta et al. 1998; Kaufman and Wei 1999; Guriev 2004). These studies often define red tape as excessive regulation and focus on the difficulty that businesses, citizens, and other stakeholders experience when interacting with government agencies. A finding that emerges from these studies is that red tape is prevalent across different nations and political systems, but it is more common in highly developed countries – especially Western democracies with their elaborate mechanisms for allowing citizen participation and ensuring justice, fairness and equity. These researchers generally find it hard to develop good measures of red tape that are applicable to the range of countries studied.

In summary, past research seems to agree that red tape is a subject-dependent concept; that is, it can be gauged through the perceptions of various stakeholder groups, and these perceptions are thought to have important impacts in the real world. Yet most previous research has not probed different perceptions of red tape across different stakeholder groups, and it has not investigated internal and external red tape simultaneously (for an exception, see Walker and Brewer 2008). In addition, studies focusing on internal red tape have tended to emphasize public-private comparisons and utilize data sets that are limited in scope – mostly cross-sectional surveys that tap specific groups of employees or organizations providing specialized services. In contrast, research on external red tape has tended to measure red tape more bluntly and focus on cross-country comparisons, which do not tell us much about what is going on at the organizational or service levels.

This study builds on and extends past research in several ways. We adopt the prevailing view that red tape is a subject-dependent concept that can be gauged via the perceptions of various stakeholder groups. Here we study variation across internal stakeholder groups in different service areas. Accordingly, we believe this study provides the first detailed, comprehensive view of the different types and levels of red tape across different services in a governmental body. Another contribution is made by identifying two organizational variables that influence perceptions of red tape: professionalization and marketization. This latter contribution could prove useful to scholars trying to develop a more comprehensive theory of red tape.

HYPOTHESES ON VARIATIONS IN PERCEPTIONS OF RED TAPE

Framework

There are no comprehensive theoretical frameworks explaining why red tape is likely to vary across different service areas – or at least none that the authors have uncovered. It is, however, possible to develop and test hypotheses on this topic. If the empirical results support the hypotheses, these hypotheses may provide the basis for a more comprehensive framework. This paper takes some tentative steps in this direction. Thus, we develop one hypothesis from the red tape literature and three hypotheses from the broader public management literature to examine the red tape taxonomy presented in figure 1.

Professionalization and marketization are selected as variables to explain red tape because they have been the subject of sustained discussion in the academic and policy arenas in recent years (Walsh 1995; Exworthy and Halford 1999; Boyne et al. 2003;
Professionalization

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Marketization

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FIGURE 1 Perceptions of red tape in professional and marketized public services

Kirkpatrick et al. 2005; Walker and Boyne 2006). Professional groups played a prominent role in establishing the welfare state and expanding public services, and they played a central role in devising many current rules, procedures and norms. These groups continue to strongly influence the organizations they are associated with: see, for example, the UK National Health Service. Whereas the relationship between professional groups and public services may be traced back to their origins, marketization in public organizations is a more recent phenomenon. From the early 1980s onwards, marketization has become a popular way to organize and deliver public services in the UK (Walsh 1995). Nonetheless it has had profound effects on public service organizations. Efficiency gains have been achieved in a number of settings and services (Boyne 1998a; Walker and Li 2006) although the effort to separate policy-making from service delivery has not always been a smooth journey (Boyne 1998b, c). In figure 1, we cast the degree of professionalization and marketization as high or low (details of measurement are given below) and contrast that with red tape. We suggest that where both professionalization and marketization are high, the perception of red tape will also be high (cell 4, bottom right) and, conversely, where they are low, the perceived level of red tape will be low (cell 1, top left).

Because we are dealing with services in one organizational type, English local authorities, there is no variation on other measures that we might explore such as legislation, publicness (Bozeman 1987) or regulation, because all English local government services are now regulated. As we will expand on below, this is not to say that we believe our framework is only applicable to our unit of analysis, English local government. Other studies adopting a wider range of settings could examine these variables. The framework is, however, suited to multi-purpose organizations that have mixtures of goals, services and groups of managers. We therefore believe the framework is widely applicable.

English local governments are politically elected bodies with a Westminster style cabinet system of political management. They employ professional career staff and receive between two-thirds and three-quarters of their income and guidance on the implementation of legislation from central government. Local authorities are multi-purpose but not all-purpose; for example, health care is provided by health authorities. There are five types of local authorities. Three types are comprehensive in that one authority provides all designated services to one geographically defined community. These include London boroughs, metropolitan districts and unitary authorities. These comprehensive multi-purpose authorities are typically found in urban areas. In rural or small town areas, a two-tier system typically prevails. County councils or shires are the upper tier authority and district councils the lower tier.
Our central contention is that perceptions of red tape are not necessarily uniform within an organization. In some circumstances, a rule may be burdensome for some groups but functional for others. Bozeman (2000, p. 83) notes that red tape can be viewed as a subject-dependent concept and he defines this as stakeholder red tape: ‘a rule that remains in force and entails a compliance burden, but serves no objective valued by a given stakeholder group’. The concept of stakeholder red tape was developed to bring in the views of external stakeholders: citizens, clients, business, trade unions, and so on. In this study, we offer a slightly different twist. We examine organizational red tape from the vantage point of different public services, or internal stakeholders, thereby moving away from the dominant mode of analysis where the compliance burden is on the organization as a whole (Rainey et al. 1995; Bozeman 2002, p. 82). We suggest that it is likely that different groups of managers or occupational groups with common interests and functions may have very different views about whether or not rules on hiring and firing staff or the length of time it takes to purchase equipment are red tape or rules functioning normally. Moreover, at the service level, it seems likely that the degrees of professionalization and marketization will influence perceptions of red tape.

There is also practical utility in focusing upon these variables because they are likely to include some features of policy design and implementation. It is possible that excessive micro-management in the development of policy or management reforms might heighten perceptions of red tape in professionalized public organizations. In addition, some unintended consequences of marketization may include increased burdens on public officials who are responsible for overseeing the marketization process and thus increase rule density. In short, we anticipate that the typically universalistic approach in policy and management reforms that are applied to public organizations are going to produce uneven impacts on perceptions of red tape across different services.

Hypotheses
As has been said, to date, the majority of red tape studies have either focused on differences between public and private organizations or sampled just one type of public organization delivering a specialized service and having a common organizational goal (for reviews, see Pandey and Scott 2002; Walker and Brewer 2008). These studies have typically examined red tape at the organizational level, which implicitly assumes that perceptions of the level and type of red tape present in an organization are uniform across the organization. As has been said, this study examines English local government and the different services within it. Since these services have different goals and functions (welfare distribution, regulatory and service delivery), and their power can vary from removing a child from a family to protect the child’s interests to providing library services or public swimming pools, these variations between services suggest that red tape is subject-dependent and perceptions of red tape will vary across services. The first hypothesis is:

H1: The extent of red tape will vary across services.

The degree of professionalism of a service could affect the perceived level of red tape (see, for example, Scott and Pandey 2000; Pandey and Welch 2005). Professional groups who entered the welfare state have been able to professionalize service delivery functions to reflect their orientations and practices, and this has resulted in distinctive forms of organization. Most notable has been the development of custodialism – an approach centred on existing services, and maintaining minimum standards of provision that are wed to the conceptions of practice held by service providers themselves (Lipsky 1980;
Ackroyd et al. (1989). While public sector professionalism has been attacked in an attempt to weaken its power and influence, research evidence suggests that management reforms are usually rebuffed and the professions have maintained the key facets of their professional behaviour: autonomy, discretion over the nature and content of work, market closure and commitment to the profession beyond the immediate organization (Ackroyd et al. 1989; Brint 1994; Exworthy and Halford 1999; Laffin 1999; Kirkpatrick et al. 2005).

In professionalized services, higher levels of red tape might be perceived because of professionals’ desire to achieve high levels of autonomy (for a similar argument, see Pandey and Welch 2005). Professional services have a tradition of higher levels of self-regulation and may thus find that the rules, regulations and procedures placed upon them in a public organization produces a tipping point; that is, turning a rule into red tape at an earlier stage than other non-professional services who do not seek such extensive autonomy.

Analysis among professionals supports this argument (Kirkpatrick et al. 2005). Recent changes in public management and organization has been argued to result in ‘a growing burden of red tape and administration in public services’ (Kirkpatrick et al. 2005, p. 175). Nonetheless, while this has swept across all public organizations, those with stronger professional groups, such as NHS hospital doctors, have maintained high levels of attachment to professional culture and values and professional control over day-to-day work practices. They have also maintained high levels of professional closure. This has resulted in highly professionalized services, such as the police, general practitioners, social workers and teachers decrying the growth of red tape (Regulatory Impact Unit 2000, 2001; Home Office 2001; Social Services Inspectorate 2002). No such voices are heard from non-professionalized services, such as waste management. We suggest that the higher levels of informality associated with professional groups leads them to believe that the tipping point (the point at which a functional rule becomes red tape) occurs earlier than with members of non-professional services. Consequently, they will perceive the level of red tape to be higher. The second hypothesis is therefore:

H2: Professional services will perceive a higher level of red tape than non-professional services.

The rate, pace and intensity of management reform has varied over the last few decades and it has had differential impacts (Walsh 1995; Boyne et al. 2003; Kirkpatrick et al. 2005). However, the impact of reform has now evened out and has been applied more uniformly, particularly within local government. For the first time, the UK Local Government Modernisation Agenda, launched in the early 2000s, applied reforms across the whole of local government rather than focusing upon particular services. Regimes such as Best Value, Community Planning, and Local Public Service Agreements have touched all services. This would suggest that management reforms are now more evenly implemented and variations across different local government services are reduced.

Marketization is one area, however, where variation between services is likely to persist, a product of prior practices. In the UK case, reform on contracting and the externalization of services was rolled out slowly and unevenly across local government from the early 1980s when council housing maintenance and waste management was exposed to market pressures (Walsh 1995). It was assumed that the exposure of public services to the market would therefore reduce the level of red tape in a service. While evidence on the impact of contracting-out services is not comprehensive it does suggest that an awareness of costs and efficiency grew and that it brought about improvements in management in
contracted-out organizations that are somewhat removed from a local authority (Wilson and Game 1998). These arguments are implicit in the Labour government’s policy debate which suggests that red tape can be overcome through market processes and the associated flexibility and empowerment that are associated with it (OPSR 2002). We, however, argue the converse, that marketization has heightened the perception of red tape from the perspective of local government officers (but not necessarily those who are working in contracted-out agencies or private or non-profit organizations with service delivery responsibility). As we noted above, evidence on the impact of marketization has varied. Some examples have been successful while others have been less so (Boyne 1998a). Other evidence points towards increased transaction costs within public organizations that have marketized services; this is most typically associated with the costs of contract management and compliance (Boyne 1998b), and notably where contracts were won in-house, which was often the case for many English local authorities (Boyne et al. 2003). Contract management results in new rules and regulations and evidence suggests that public managers often have difficulty managing contracts, which results in processes that are ‘formal, control oriented, and hierarchical in their relationships’ (Van Slyke 2007, p. 181). We note that such high levels of control are often associated with or viewed as red tape. Therefore, the third hypothesis is:

H3: Services that have experienced a high degree of marketization will perceive a higher level of red tape than those that have not.

Professional and marketized services have been hypothesized to create higher levels of perceived red tape. This argument is based on the degree of professional autonomy and behaviour by public officials in market settings. Research evidence suggests that contract management is likely to be more complex in services where outcomes are harder to specify (Brown and Potoski 2004). It is likely that outcomes are hard to specify in professionalized services (Kirkpatrick et al. 2005), suggesting that these two concepts will reinforce one another. Thus a professional service that is autonomous and marketized is even more likely to see rules, processes and procedures as problematic, or as red tape. By contrast, services that are non-professional and traditionally provided are likely to perceive lower levels of red tape. The fourth hypothesis is:

H4: Services with a high level of professionalization and marketization will perceive the level of red tape to be higher than services which have low levels of professionalization and marketization.

DATA AND METHODS
Unit of analysis
This study uses the services or programme areas of English local government are the unit of analysis. Table 1 presents all of the services provided by English local government. Our focus is upon a subset of these services: benefits and revenues, corporate services, culture and leisure, education, housing, land-use planning, social services, and waste management.

Table 1 also illustrates how service delivery varies between different types of authorities. Unitary authorities (formed by combining the functions of district and county councils in geographical areas) are the only type of council to provide all service types listed in table 1. The only service to be provided by all types of authorities is corporate services. In London boroughs, metropolitan councils and unitary authorities, some functions are combined
TABLE 1 The structure of service provision in English local government

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<td>Met Councils</td>
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<td>Benefits and revenue**</td>
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<td>Highways</td>
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<td>Housing**</td>
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<td>Leisure and culture**</td>
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<td>Passenger transport</td>
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<td>Libraries</td>
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<td>Recreation</td>
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<td>Planning**</td>
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<td>collection disposal</td>
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Notes: *Greater London Authority functions include transport, economic development, environment, strategic planning, fire, tourism culture and health promotion.
**Services included within this study.

and are shared between county and district councils: these include planning, waste management, and leisure and culture. Below we briefly outline the main characteristics of each service (for a more detailed discussion of the functions of local government, see Chandler 2001).

Benefits and revenues is an administrated service that collects local property taxes and pays welfare benefits in respect of supply-side housing subsidies and relief against local property-based taxation for needy households. Alongside the delivery of specific public services, local authorities have corporate services to ensure that democratic processes and outcomes are achieved, to coordinate and plan services between different professional or policy domains, and to achieve core government-wide values and missions.

Culture and leisure services are a diverse collection of services. Libraries and museum services are provided at the county level and leisure services (for example, sports facilities) at the district-level. Service can include operating art galleries, sports stadiums (including those of professional football teams), and sponsorship of the arts – for instance, of symphony orchestras. At the other extreme, they can be concerned with construction and maintenance of village halls and small parks. Local authorities are not directly involved in the delivery of education – as a result of many decentralizing reforms, this is carried out at the school level. However, the education authority plays an important administrative and strategic role: it allocates resources and provides and co-ordinates cross-school services such as transport and peripatetic and special needs teaching as well as employing teachers. Nonetheless, while individual schools may succeed or fail, the local authority takes overall
responsibility for the education of children within its boundaries. Alongside primary and secondary school education, authorities are also responsible for the provision of adult education, youth services and under-fives education.

Housing services include the management of council housing, a strategic enabling role to ensure that local housing needs are met, together with a statutory responsibility for homeless households. Strategic land-use planning is managed at the county level and the detailed operation of the planning system (through development control) is undertaken at the local level by district councils. The strategic role includes establishing authority-wide policies for the location of new development such as housing, industry, shopping and leisure facilities and transport to serve all of these needs. Alongside these functions, planning authorities have responsibility for listed buildings, control of advertising, and nature conservation issues.

Social services are provided to vulnerable children, families and elderly people by professional social workers and care staff. Other services include adoption and fostering services and sensory impairment and disability services. Waste management involves collecting domestic and business refuse as well as recycling. Collection takes place at the local district level and disposal is at the county level. In unitary authorities, London boroughs and metropolitan councils, these functions are combined.

**Data source**

Within each local authority, we collected data across the eight corporate and service areas. To ensure maximum representation of all services and to collect varying perspectives, we surveyed a number of informants. For corporate services, we surveyed the chief executive and two other managers with cross-organizational responsibility for improvement. Within the seven programme areas, we also surveyed the chief officer, who is the most senior officer with specific service delivery responsibility, and three service managers or front-line supervisory officers. This strategy was adopted to capture a range of different perceptions within services (Bowman and Ambrosini 1997; Walker and Enticott 2004). Service means were calculated and standardized by the number of respondents.

Data are taken from an electronic survey of English local authorities. The survey was conducted by email following a pilot in 17 local authorities that tested the survey administration technique and item quality (Enticott 2003). Email addresses were collected from authorities and questionnaires delivered as an Excel file attached to an email. The electronic questionnaires were self-coding and converted to SPSS for analysis. Informants had eight weeks to answer the questions and return the file by email. During the survey period, three reminders were sent to informants who had not yet responded. The survey explored informants’ perceptions of organization and management, notably culture, structure, strategy making and strategy content, together with drivers of service improvement, background variables, and a management reform regime called ‘Best Value’ (Boyne et al. 2004). All survey questions were in the form of a seven point Likert scale and informants (corporate respondents) were asked to rate their authority or (for chief officers or service managers) service on different dimensions of red tape and management.

A representative sample of 100 English local authorities forms the core of the survey. Representativeness is based upon background variables including deprivation, population, and performance (see Martin et al. 2003). The survey was conducted annually from 2001 until 2004. The 2004 survey was administered to 175 authorities (the 100 representative authorities plus all other upper tier councils) and responses were received from 166 authorities – a response rate of 95 per cent. This included some 785 services and 1,232
officer. Response rates by services were as follows: benefits and revenues 94, corporate
130, culture and leisure 101, education 91, housing 94, land-use planning 89, social services
73 and waste management 113.

Measures

Red tape

Five measures of red tape were collected in the survey. Two are global measures (one each
for internal and external red tape), and three are subsystem measures (targeting specific
aspects of personnel or administrative red tape) (see Pandey and Scott 2002; Brewer 2005,
2006; Walker and Brewer 2008). In the survey, we followed Bozeman (2000) and others’
lead by defining red tape as ‘burdensome rules and procedures that negatively affect
performance’. Immediately after reading this definition, informants were asked to agree
or disagree with five statements on red tape.

Internal measure of red tape: for the global internal measure of red tape question, informants
were asked to agree or disagree with the following statement: ‘the level of red tape is
high in our service/authority’. We also included several personnel and administrative
subsystem measures. The two measures of personnel red tape were: ‘even if a manager is
a poor performer, formal rules make it hard to remove him or her from the organization’
(labelled ‘personnel 1’) and ‘the formal pay structures and rules make it hard to reward
a good manager with higher pay here’ (‘personnel 2’). The administrative-based red tape
measure was: ‘reorganizing an organizational unit or department can be achieved within
two or three weeks in our service/authority’. While most prior research has combined
subsystem measures, we sought to explore the impact of different types of red tape on
governmental performance.

External measure of red tape: we also developed a global measure of public managers’
perceptions of external red tape. Given that we were unable to measure external stake-
holders’ views on the extent of red tape in their local authorities, we measured this
construct by asking informants to agree or disagree with the following statement –
drawn from various sources cited above: ‘administrative rules and procedures are open
and responsive allowing stakeholders (users, businesses, government agencies, and so on)
to freely interact with our service authority’. This measure and the administrative-based
red tape measure were reversed for the empirical analysis so that all five measures of red
tape would tend in the same direction.

Professionalization

Professionalization embraces a bundle of concepts that includes expert knowledge,
discretion over the nature and content of work, market closure and commitment to the
profession beyond the immediate organization (Kirkpatrick et al. 2005). In this study, we
operationalize professionalization as the existence of an externally accredited professional
body across the whole service domain. This ensures that there is only one institution that
establishes professional rules and procedures in a service area and that the entire service
domain is covered, thereby ensuring a consistency of approach. This measure is simple to
operationalize and captures key aspects of professionalization and custodial management.
Services defined as professional in this study are: education, housing, land-use planning
and social services. In the 1980s, the education service in the UK was ‘deprofessionalized’
by the then Conservative administration though it remains a professionally organized area of local government service (Hoyle and John 1998). Housing is professionalized, though the level of professionalism has been characterized as low (Kirkpatrick et al. 2005). Land-use planning has a long-standing professional body and has some success in achieving closure in the public sector where most practice officers are members of the Royal Town Planning Institute (Thomas 1998). Social services have a large number of field and residential staff holding professional qualifications and the degree of closure is moderate (Kirkpatrick et al. 2005).

Librarians, although arguably part of education, are included the culture and leisure service category; there are professional bodies for librarians; not all activities in this grouping, however, have a professional body to represent their members (for example, recreation workers). Waste management is a mainly blue-collar service with few professional qualifications and no long-standing professional body to represent its members. Benefits and revenues is an administrative service, again with few professional qualifications. Corporate services are a range of services and activities and are not collectively defined, nor do they have a key single professional body. Staff in corporate services are likely to hold a range of professional service area qualifications or be trained and accredited as lawyers or accountants.

**Marketization**

Marketization is operationalized by a measure of the extent to which services have been subjected to market forces, either through competition or externalization. This captures the extent to which market structure has been introduced into an area and suggests that a service will be familiar with key aspects of market behaviour (Boyne et al. 2003).

Benefits and revenues, corporate services, education and land-use planning are scored low on marketization. Both benefits and revenues remain largely bureaucratically organized. While some authorities have sought to expose the service to market forces, it is largely an administrative service provided in-house. Corporate services include a range of different functions. There is some evidence of contracting in the corporate centre: for example, the outsourcing of IT and legal services in the late 1990s. However, it is not possible to outsource the key functions of democratic accountability and internal management co-ordination. The education service has been subject to a wide range of reforms over the last two decades. Assessments of these reforms, however, suggest that while they were extensive, behaviour was not fundamentally changed (Boyne et al. 2003). Land-use planning is a professional service and one that has typically remained bureaucratically managed (Thomas 1999); it has only experienced major changes in the way it is managed since the election of the Labour administration in 1997.

Culture and leisure services experienced marketization pressures during the 1980s and 1990s. User charges, for example, were introduced in the museum and recreation sectors and many authorities have outsourced the management and delivery of sports facilities to independent providers (Kawashima 1999). Many housing authorities have externalized their housing role to housing associations, non-profit organizations funded and regulated by a non-departmental government body called the Housing Corporation. During the 1990s, contracting was introduced into the sector and rents have been pushed up to market levels. In addition, large swathes of housing have been privatized under a sales to sitting tenants scheme launched in 1980 (Walker 2001). In social services, large aspects of service delivery have been externalized or contracted to other agencies through various community care reforms (Kirkpatrick et al. 2005). For example, residential care has been
externalized to voluntary and private organizations while many youth services are now provided by voluntary organizations. Waste management has experienced substantial marketization having been subjected to contracting since the early 1980s (Boyne 1998c).

RESULTS: VARIATIONS IN RED TAPE ACROSS LOCAL GOVERNMENT SERVICES

To test H1, we examine univariate statistics and undertake factor analysis on the measures of red tape for the English local government services in our sample. Hypotheses 2 and 3 are tested by computing and examining difference in means tests (t-tests) on the professional and non-professional and traditionally provided and marketized services. We then proceed to test H4 – the relationship between perceived level of red tape and professionalized and marketized services – by conducting an ANOVA test on the services following their categorization as either high or low on the dimensions of professionalization and marketization.

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the five measures of red tape. The pattern of results reveals some differences, but also broad similarities across types of local government service. Across all eight services examined the responses indicate that the extent of external red tape is consistently scored lower (mean 3.089) than the other four measures, which have substantially higher mean scores. ‘Personnel 2’ red tape is seen as the most pervasive (mean 5.474), followed by ‘administrative’ (4.792), ‘personnel 1’ (mean 4.623) and ‘internal’ (mean 4.269). These results indicate that, in English local government, global measures of red tape are likely to receive a lower rating than subsystem measures from services. This might be because the three examples of subsystem red tape have strong resonance with officers in these particular services of English local government. Alternatively, it may simply occur because subsystem measures are components of the more comprehensive, global measure. However, additional research developing a larger range of red tape measures would be required to explore these two points of speculation (for steps in this direction, see Coursey and Pandey 2007).

The eight service areas vary in their perceived levels of red tape. Land-use planning offers neither a high nor low assessment. Benefits and revenues recorded the highest perceptions of red tape for ‘personnel 1’ (mean 4.973) and ‘administrative’ (mean 5.184).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Area</th>
<th>Internal</th>
<th>Personnel 1</th>
<th>Personnel 2</th>
<th>Administrative</th>
<th>External</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benefits and revenues</td>
<td>4.394</td>
<td>4.973</td>
<td>5.566</td>
<td>5.184</td>
<td>3.055</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate</td>
<td>3.753</td>
<td>4.382</td>
<td>4.852</td>
<td>4.850</td>
<td>3.048</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture and leisure</td>
<td>4.309</td>
<td>4.926</td>
<td>5.834</td>
<td>4.901</td>
<td>3.208</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>4.302</td>
<td>4.158</td>
<td>5.150</td>
<td>4.742</td>
<td>3.049</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>4.574</td>
<td>4.735</td>
<td>5.785</td>
<td>4.66</td>
<td>3.145</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land-use planning</td>
<td>4.357</td>
<td>4.573</td>
<td>5.923</td>
<td>5.013</td>
<td>2.853</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social services</td>
<td>4.482</td>
<td>4.425</td>
<td>5.441</td>
<td>5.031</td>
<td>3.404</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waste management</td>
<td>4.280</td>
<td>4.760</td>
<td>5.419</td>
<td>5.127</td>
<td>2.992</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4.269</td>
<td>4.623</td>
<td>5.474</td>
<td>4.972</td>
<td>3.089</td>
<td>785</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and offer assessments of the remaining two dimensions of red tape that are above the mean for all services. By contrast, education offers the lowest assessments for both personnel measures (mean ‘personnel 1’ 4.158 and ‘personnel 2’ 5.150). Housing services rate ‘internal’ red tape highest (mean 4.574) and ‘administrative’ red tape lowest (mean 4.660). Among the eight service areas, corporate services rate all red tape measures below the mean for all services and ‘internal’ red tape the lowest of all (mean 3.753). This is interesting and suggests that officials with service delivery responsibility who are closer to the heat of action may be more aware of red tape (for similar evidence, see Walker and Brewer 2008).

Social services are likely to see the level of red tape as high for four of these measures: ‘internal’, ‘personnel 1’, ‘administrative’ and ‘external’. This may be due to legislative micromanagement and chronic concerns about overspending on social welfare. By contrast, education services seem to produce low levels of subsystem red tape (‘personnel 1’, ‘personnel 2’ and ‘administrative’). This could be due to the highly professionalized and democratic nature of public education. Waste management produces the lowest levels of ‘external’ red tape (2.90) and corporate services the lowest levels of ‘internal’ red tape (3.75). These low levels of ‘internal’ red tape reported by corporate officers may result from their more generalized role of overseeing local government operations rather than being directly involved in service delivery.

To determine if there are distinct underlying attitudes towards red tape among the different groups of services, the items were factor analysed. Table 3 presents the rotated principal-components analyses for each service. A notable feature of these factor-analytic results is the variation across services. One-factor analytic solutions are found for three services and two-factor solutions for five services. Within the services with a two-factor analytic result there is also variation in the measures within each factor. The percentage of variance explained by the factor solutions ranges from 42 per cent (waste management) to a high of 62 per cent (benefits and revenues). This finding of variation across services helps explain why previous studies have had difficulty specifying the multi-dimensional nature of red tape and obtaining useful factor-scores and reliability coefficients for empirical analysis.

The three services with a one-factor solution were corporate, culture and leisure, and waste management. These services do not differentiate between different types of red tape; rather, they see an overall or composite level. Interestingly, all these services were rated low on the two dimensions we used to explore variation, professionalization

Table 3  Factor analytic results for red tape in eight services areas in English local government

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Corporate</th>
<th>Benefits and revenues</th>
<th>Culture and leisure</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Housing</th>
<th>Planning</th>
<th>Social services</th>
<th>Waste management</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F1</td>
<td>F1</td>
<td>F2</td>
<td>F1</td>
<td>F2</td>
<td>F1</td>
<td>F2</td>
<td>F1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>.704</td>
<td>.215</td>
<td>.644</td>
<td>.692</td>
<td>.231</td>
<td>.446</td>
<td>.586</td>
<td>.408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel 1</td>
<td>.756</td>
<td>.840</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.724</td>
<td>.834</td>
<td>.298</td>
<td>.821</td>
<td>.109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel 2</td>
<td>.697</td>
<td>.812</td>
<td>.127</td>
<td>.718</td>
<td>.893</td>
<td>-.001</td>
<td>.828</td>
<td>.122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative</td>
<td>.700</td>
<td>.539</td>
<td>.466</td>
<td>.538</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.709</td>
<td>.172</td>
<td>.852</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External</td>
<td>.679</td>
<td>-.004</td>
<td>.869</td>
<td>.673</td>
<td>.107</td>
<td>.856</td>
<td>.151</td>
<td>.865</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

% of variance 50.11 34.08 28.09 46.22 31.16 29.78 35.09 33.39 31.87 27.33 28.81 24.34 42.10

Eigenvalue 2.506 1.704 1.405 2.31 1.558 1.489 1.755 1.669 1.59 1.367 1.441 1.217 2.105

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and marketization. Benefits and revenues identify a subsystem red tape factor with ‘personnel 1’, ‘personnel 2’ and ‘administrative’ red tape and a weaker second factor that captures the ‘internal’ and ‘external’ measures. This implies that benefits and revenue services see the detailed personnel and administrative forms of red tape in a different light compared to the global, broader-brush measures. Personnel red tape is the primary form of red tape seen in the education service with the global measures and ‘administrative’ red tape forming the second factor. Social services first red tape factor brings the two measures of ‘personnel’ red tape together with ‘external’ red tape. The second factor-analytic result draws together ‘internal’ red tape and ‘administrative’ red tape. Finally, housing and planning services identify the same factor-analytic results. The first factor links ‘internal’ red tape with the two measures of ‘personnel’ red tape and the second combines ‘administrative’ with ‘external’ red tape.

These results provide support for H1: red tape varies widely across services. Given that a single local authority delivers a range of services, it is also likely that perceptions of red tape will vary within an authority (for evidence, see Walker and Brewer 2008). This suggests that red tape and its effects are not unitary. Rather, the evidence suggests that red tape is a subject-dependent concept and much of the prior research on red tape needs to be reconsidered in this light.

Table 4 presents the results of the difference of means test for professional and non-professional services. Professional services included education, housing, land-use planning and social services. The analysis indicates that there are differences for three of the five red tape measures. Professional services are likely to see higher levels of ‘internal’ and ‘personnel 2’ red tape. Professional services therefore see more global red tape within a service and find it harder to reward good performing managers with more pay. On the latter point, they may feel that their status as a professional service with a perceived higher level of autonomy is restricted by rules, procedures and behaviours in relation to red tape. However, not all the results are as hypothesized. In particular, non-professional services are likely to perceive that red tape is worse for ‘personnel 1’: they feel restrictions in the ability to remove poorly performing managers. There were no statistically significant differences between professional and non-professional services in relation to ‘administrative’ and ‘external’ red tape. These results are mixed, but they do not justify rejecting the hypothesis that higher levels of red tape will be seen by professional

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 4</th>
<th>Perceptions of red tape in professional and non-professional services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>347</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-professional</td>
<td>435</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-professional</td>
<td>435</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-professional</td>
<td>435</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>344</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-professional</td>
<td>435</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>347</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-professional</td>
<td>435</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p. < .05; **p. < .01.
services. Alternatively, such differences might result from imprecise definitions and categorizations, and these need to be revisited in future research.

Table 5 presents the t-test results where the sample of services has been separated into those that have been exposed to marketization processes and those that have not. The direction of the t-statistic in every case is positive. This indicates that marketized services all perceive higher levels of red tape than non-marketized services. The t-score is significant in four out of five cases, thus these differences are not due to chance alone but reflect very different views among the two groups of services. Services that have been exposed to market processes see higher levels of ‘internal’, ‘personnel 1’ and ‘2’ and ‘external’ red tape than those that remain traditionally provided. The only variable that is not significant is the subsystem measure ‘administrative’. This indicates that both groups of services perceive the same level of red tape in relation to organizational restructuring. These results offer a high level of support for H3.

To test H4 on the relationship between red tape and services that have scored high on both professionalization and marketization, we mapped services onto the two-by-two matrix presented in figure 1, above. This resulted in the following classification. Services that scored low on both measures were corporate, and benefits and revenues (top left and group 1). Services with a high professional and low marketization score were culture and leisure, and waste management (top right and group 2), while education and land-use planning were the converse (professional and traditionally provided) (bottom left and group 3). Housing and social services were scored as high on both measures (bottom right and group 4). The mean responses for the groups of services discussed were aggregated and a difference of means test was computed across the four groups via ANOVA. In this analysis we also undertook a test on an additive index of all the red tape measures. Table 6 presents these ANOVA results. The final column indicates if the means differed across the four groups and reports the results of the Tukey post hoc test that identifies where the differences exist.

To confirm our hypotheses, we would expect to see differences between groups 1 and 4. We would also expect to see only limited differences between groups 2 and 3 because the two groups report high levels on one of the two variables used in this analysis. These differences should, however, be minimal since the hybrid groups likely mask significant differences. Commencing with the all red tape measure, the F score is statistically significant and the post hoc test reveals that the difference is between groups 1

### Table 5: Perceptions of red tape in traditionally provided and marketized services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Red tape</th>
<th>Service type</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>Marketized</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>4.401</td>
<td>2.289*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>401</td>
<td>4.162</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel 1</td>
<td>Marketized</td>
<td>380</td>
<td>4.733</td>
<td>1.961*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>4.512</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel 2</td>
<td>Marketized</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>5.623</td>
<td>3.029**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>399</td>
<td>5.324</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative</td>
<td>Marketized</td>
<td>378</td>
<td>5.007</td>
<td>0.755</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>401</td>
<td>4.940</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External</td>
<td>Marketized</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>3.166</td>
<td>1.670+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>401</td>
<td>3.007</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p. < .1; *p. < .05; **p. < .01.
and 4. The means indicate that group 4 perceives higher levels of red tape than group 1. This provides broad support for H4. When we examine the five measures of red tape, the picture is a little more complex. This is to be expected given the results recorded for H2 and the uneven pattern of factor analyses reported earlier. We find support for H4 for the ‘internal’ and ‘personnel 2’ measures of red tape – in both cases the difference in means are statistically significant between groups 1 and 4. For ‘personnel 1’, the differences are between groups 2 and 3. The services scoring high on marketization see more red tape than those who are classified as professional. For ‘personnel 2, there are also differences between groups 2 and 4 and 3 and 4. All services that score highly on any dimension of professionalization and marketization are likely to perceive more red tape affecting their ability to reward well performing staff. There were no statistically significant differences between any of the four groups of services and the red tape measures ‘administration’ and ‘external’. This mirrors the findings reported in tables 4 and 5 – where none or weakly significant results were recorded.

This finding is interesting considering the wide variations in internal global and personnel-related measures of red tape across services. Apparently informants do not think these differences translate into differences in the amount of red tape that officials encounter when implementing reorganizations or the amount of red tape citizens experience when trying to access services. Yet we should also be mindful of another finding in this study: those who are closer to the mainsprings of red tape will perceive it as more prevalent and complex (see also Walker and Brewer 2008).

Of the six measures reported in table 6, there are statistically significant differences between groups 1 and 4 on three occasions. These results provide relatively strong support for H4 and suggest that marketization and professionalization are useful and important concepts that can be used to further understand the perceived impact of red tape in public service organizations.

### Table 6: Highly professional and marketized services perceive higher levels of red tape (ANOVA results)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Low marketization and low profession</th>
<th>High profession and low marketization</th>
<th>Low profession and high marketization</th>
<th>High profession and high marketization</th>
<th>F (and differences between groups)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>4.025</td>
<td>4.330</td>
<td>4.298</td>
<td>4.534</td>
<td>4.017**(1 + 4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel 1</td>
<td>4.633</td>
<td>4.362</td>
<td>4.838</td>
<td>4.598</td>
<td>2.994*(2 + 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel 2</td>
<td>5.156</td>
<td>5.532</td>
<td>5.615</td>
<td>5.634</td>
<td>5.547**(1 + 4, 2 + 4, 3 + 4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative</td>
<td>4.992</td>
<td>4.876</td>
<td>4.985</td>
<td>5.037</td>
<td>.532</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External</td>
<td>3.051</td>
<td>2.952</td>
<td>3.094</td>
<td>3.258</td>
<td>1.588</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All red tape</td>
<td>21.857</td>
<td>22.039</td>
<td>22.830</td>
<td>23.071</td>
<td>3.209*(1 + 4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>167</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p. < .05; **p. < .01; ***p. < .001.
CONCLUSIONS

In this paper we have examined variations in red tape across service areas in English local government. We have also offered an explanation for these variations based on two concepts: professionalism and marketization. The results show that red tape does vary across services, both in its level and the composition of its parts. For example, some services report high levels of ‘internal’ red tape (for example, housing, and social services) while others report lower levels (for example, corporate, and waste management). The evidence clearly shows that red tape is a complex phenomenon that is likely to be perceived differently across services. This suggests that reconceptualizing red tape as a subject-dependent concept provides a very valuable tool for understanding and interpreting red tape in public organizations. Second, we have provided evidence on two factors that are likely to affect red tape: professionalism and marketization. This is an early step toward developing a theoretical framework that will explain red tape more fully. To date, the majority of variables examined in a search for explanations of the determinants of red tape have been management variables. Our alternative framework consists of two organizational variables, professionalism and marketization, the latter a measure of structure. The findings, while not definitive, provide support for the hypothesis that professionalism and marketization have joint effects on the perceived level of red tape in a public agency. Highly professionalized services are likely to perceive high levels of red tape, as are those that have been exposed to market processes, and they are more likely to perceive higher levels of red tape than those who are non-professional and do much of their work in-house.

These findings have some relatively clear policy implications. Levels of red tape in English local government authorities seem to be high, both according to our findings and as echoed in the UK policy debate on management reform. This raises an important question: to what extent do these different levels and types of red tape affect governmental performance? In one study, Brewer and Walker (2010) examined the effects of different types of red tape on different dimensions of governmental performance and found differential results; that is, the effects varied by type of red tape and dimension of performance. This study paints an even more complex picture as we document variegated patterns of red tape among eight core services.

Our finding that high professionalization and high marketization increase perceptions of red tape suggests that policy-makers should weigh the costs of imposing additional red tape with other factors that affect governmental performance or public value. Concerns about increasing accountability often lead to micromanagement and increased levels of red tape. Yet these responses may levy a corresponding cost on governmental performance. Similarly, marketization is often viewed as a panacea to traditional rule-bound bureaucracy that will lead to simplification in service delivery. Our results suggest the opposite: marketization is strongly associated with increased complexity and rule proliferation – at least through the eyes of public officers who oversee service delivery.

One final thought on policy and management implications relates directly to our theoretical framework: public managers may have greater success affecting professionalization issues in public services, while policy-makers probably wield greater influence over issues of marketization. Certainly both factors seem to be joint drivers of red tape, so the bottom-line implication is that policy-makers and public managers may need to work together to curb excessive levels of red tape.
We believe that this study pushes theoretical and empirical work on red tape in some new directions. First, recent research on red tape has mostly been conducted in the US. This study moves to a new venue – UK English local government. It thus provides for some useful comparisons and speculation on the international implications of red tape. Second, while previous research has tended to focus on specific agencies or policy sectors, this study casts a wider net. We investigate red tape across eight core services in English local government, thus providing what we believe is the most comprehensive portrait of red tape at a single level of government to date. Importantly, we provide comparisons of services and some suggestions about what may be causing variation. Thirdly, previous research has used a variety of red tape measures. We utilize several of those measures, thus connecting with previous research, but we also include a measure of external regulatory red tape, which is a neglected form. Additional research, therefore, is needed on external red tape: What levels of red tape do external stakeholders perceive? Which dimensions of red tape do they identify? Do they perceive differences between different services? Through such research, Bozeman’s theory of stakeholder red tape can be unpacked and empirically explored.

To the extent that the perceptions of internal and external red tape documented in this study are accurate, it appears that internal red tape is more of a problem than the external variety. This finding might arise in part from the unitary form of government in the UK which is a centralized system that tends to produce a standardized operating environment for English local authorities. A lingering question in this study is how well perceptual measures of red tape correspond with more objective measures. Researchers need to continue exploring and clarifying the red tape concept, and they need to mount studies that examine how well perceptual and more objective measures of the concept relate.

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