PUBLIC PROCUREMENT SPECIALISTS: THEY ARE NOT WHO WE THOUGHT THEY WERE

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ABSTRACT. Recently there has been an impressive growth in the scholarly literature on public procurement. The study of the administrative roles assumed by public procurement specialists is, however, one area that remains largely underexplored. Somewhat curiously, the professionals making a career in the field are often an afterthought when it comes to empirical research. Outside of anecdotal accounts, there is little that is known in terms of the roles that procurement specialists assume on daily basis. In this respect, there is an important knowledge gap within the field's body of literature. This article attempts to address this knowledge gap through an exploratory empirical evaluation of the administrative behaviors of public procurement specialists.

INTRODUCTION

There is a growing recognition among scholars that in an age in which governance is being defined by contractual relationships and networks, public procurement is becoming an increasingly central aspect of public administration. In the past two decades much has been written about public procurement and its effects on economic and social patterns. Research in the field has developed dramatically both in terms of its quality and its quantity (Thai & Piga, 2007). Indeed, students of public procurement have examined an array of critical questions and topics, ranging from requisition practices to e-procurement and the internationalization of the field. Yet, there is one facet of public procurement that, for perhaps curious reasons,

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remains largely underexplored – that of the roles assumed by public procurement specialists. Paradoxically, the individuals who lie at the very core of the process and who play a fundamental part in shaping the practice, receive only a meager amount of scholarly consideration. Within this context, there is a significant gap within the body of scholarly literature that has yet to be adequately addressed.

There are several forces at work behind this remarkable lack of scholarly attention. First, many, perhaps justifiably so, find little academic glamor in studying public procurement specialists. Unlike legislators, city managers or organizational elites, it is believed that public procurement specialists have little to offer in terms of exciting research findings or consequential generalizable results. Second, there is perhaps an inherent danger in revealing that procurement specialists might not behave exactly in the manner they are typically depicted by anecdotal accounts. There are a number of important consequences that would come with the realization that specialists might routinely deviate from being mere "enforcers of procurement ordinances." Many of these nonconformities would raise conceptual and ethical questions that we might not yet be ready to tackle. Possibly due to the latter, some scholars simply prefer to steer clear of such complexity. Finally, the fragmented nature of public procurement as a field makes the study of procurement specialists rather challenging. The profession is still in its early stages of evolution and there isn't yet a consensus regarding major definitions, concepts or development paths (Thai, 2001).

The above mentioned reasons do not, however, justify leaving the existent knowledge gap unaddressed. There is much to be gained from a rigorous and systematic inquiry into the roles assumed by procurement specialists. Constructing working understandings about the routine decision-making and behaviors of public procurement specialists is important for manifold reasons. First, and foremost, their roles have changed significantly in the last two decades. It is now common for procurement specialists to assume responsibilities that in the past have been legislatively set outside of the realm of their decision-making. Second, currently public procurement specialists face administrative tasks and policy issues that are significantly more complex than in the past. Of specific interest in this case is the role played by procurement specialists in managing and evaluating the performance of contractual agreements for the

delivery of public services. Third, public procurement has always been an important policy tool (McCrudden, 2004). Within the context of the financial constraints faced by governments at all levels, but also due to the politicization of public administration, the significance of the latter has become that much more evident. Last but not least, it is hard to envision the professional growth of the field without having a detailed understanding of the roles assumed by individuals operating within it.

This article attempts to address the existent need within the literature by providing empirical clarity to our understandings of the everyday roles enacted by public procurement professionals. In particular, it seeks to answer two conceptual questions. First, what are the administrative roles assumed by public procurement specialists? And second, what are the implications associated with the uncovered behavioral patterns? The research questions are answered based on the data obtained from a self-administered survey of a random sample of the National Institute of Governmental Purchasing (NIGP) members. The article's primary theoretical contribution can be located within its application of an extant role typology to a previously unexplored subpopulation of public administrators. To the author's best knowledge, this represents the first study that empirically examines the administrative roles assumed by public procurement specialists.

The narrative of this article is organized within four sections. The first section briefly discusses the literature on administrative roles. Here the writing focuses on public procurement specialists. The following section introduces the methodological approach employed for purposes of answering the research questions. The third section of the article presents the results of the empirical analysis, while the section that follows discusses in detail the implications of the empirical findings. As it is customary for writings of this character, a brief set of conclusions settles the article's narrative.

ADMINISTRATIVE ROLES

A Broad Perspective

Scholars have long argued that agencies and institutions impose on their members specific and well delineated roles (Biddle, 1979; DiMaggio & Powel, 1991; Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal,

1964; Mintzberg, 1973; Mosher, 1968). Roles, which are typically defined as sets of expectations (Biddle, 1979), guide administrative behaviors. Individuals are educated into a specific role by their social contexts as well as by organizational structures. Administrators are cultured into administrative roles through both formal and informal organizational channels. Once a certain role is assumed, it guides an administrator's behaviors within the frame of everyday decision-making. While within the professional demands placed on them by organizations individuals might have to assume a number of roles, normally, over time, one of the roles becomes dominant and dictates the bulk of one's behaviors and decision-making patterns (Biddle, 1979; Merton, 1949; Sieber, 1974). DiMaggio and Powell (1991) have argued that roles can become so powerful that they can persist long after the institutional rationale behind them has disappeared.

Selden, Brewer and Brudney (1999) defined an administrative role as "a cohesive set of job-related values and attitudes that provides the public administrator a stable set of expectations about his or her responsibilities" (p. 175). One's role is, hence, shaped by one's job and organizational context. One's on the job set of expectations is generally stable and does not vary significantly over time (Biddle, 1979). For established roles, changes in expectation sets are incremental and take time to become institutionalized. This would mean that if a specific role becomes enacted, it will be diachronically resilient and would provide a rather stable framework for predicting individual behaviors.

Currently the literature on administrative roles offers at least two easily recognizable typologies. The first one is Downs' (1967) classical discussion of administrative behavior. Downs (1967) identified five roles that administrators could assume within an organizational context: climber, conserver, zealot, advocate and statesman. A second, more recent typology is provided by Selden et al. (1999); the scholars delineated five administrative roles: steward of public interest, adapted realist, businesslike utilitarian, resigned custodian and practical idealist (Table 1).

The empirical conceptualizations constructed in this article are based on the typology provided by Selden et al. (1999) rather than that offered by Downs (1967). The former is preferred to the latter for several reasons. First, it represents a more recent scholarly effort;

TABLE 1
Administrative Roles

Role	Role description
Stewards of the Public Interest	They search for opportunities to participate in the formulation of "good" public policy. A "good" public policy is one that incorporates the needs of all citizens. They are committed to social and political goals, and policy efficiency is not a priority. They see themselves as serving the public and furthering the public interest, independent of perspectives of management or elected public officials.
Adapted Realists	They seek to balance equity and fairness. They are committed to both effective management and equity considerations. They reject the general value of neutrality, but they also recognize that they must work within the constraints imposed by the system in order to survive in a bureaucracy.
Businesslike Utilitarians	They value efficiency as an organizational and individual goal. When faced with a decision, they will opt for the most efficient solution. They do not make exaggerated claims and reject any politicization of their role. They do not seek to further the interest of those less privileged or minority citizens. They are ambivalent about their relationship with elected public officials.
Resigned Custodians	They see themselves as neutral agents, who know their boundaries. They work within the rules and the expectations of supervisors and elected public officials. They feel no inclination to play a mediator role between elected and nonelected officials.
Practical Idealists	They see themselves as highly responsible and professional. They work efficiently and accurately while also advocating policy positions and legislation in the public interest. They do not see themselves as agents of elected officials. They reject neutrality, but also the politicization of the public service.

Adapted from Selden et al. (1999).

therefore, it provides a more complete account of the current devolutionary changes within the nature of governance. Second, the typology has been empirically constructed and tested. Third, it has been conceptualized based on Denhardt and deLeon's (1995) framework of administrative responsibility, which is often found to be one of the better ways of capturing the complexity of the decision-

making challenges faced by public administrators on daily basis (Selden et al., 1999; Sowa & Selden, 2003). Finally, the roles identified by Selden et al. (1999) are sufficiently well defined for an empirical evaluation of behaviors across the entire professional universe of public administrators. In other words, although the role conceptualization is suitably broad to permit transferability across organizational and institutional boundaries, it is at the same time satisfactorily specific to allow to empirically locate the behaviors of administrators within a specific role.

The Procurement Context

Public procurement is generally defined as the acquisition, renting, leasing, contracting, purchasing and contract management within public administration (Thai, 2001, pp. 42-43). The growing devolving nature of governance since 1990s has placed an increasingly complex set of demands on procurement specialists (Cooper, 2003; McCue & Roman, 2012; Roman, 2013a; Thai, 2008). Now, it is common for individuals employed in the field to be expected to undertake roles that might not have customarily been the domain of public procurement (Diggs & Roman, 2012; OECD, 2009; Roman, 2013a). Furthermore, historically, even if not explicitly stated, public procurement has been frequently placed at the forefront of achieving social policy (see Arrowsmith, 1995; Bolton, 2006; Knight, Harland, Telgren, Thai, Callender, & McKen, 2007; McCrudden, 2004) and motivating innovation (see Mowery & Rosenberg, 1979; Palmberg, 2004; Roman & Thai, 2013; Rothwell & Zegveld, 1981; Rothwell, 1984). More recently, it has been suggested that public procurement should move away from "arm's length" relationships and towards long terms strategic partnerships, which have the potential of creating important levels of social capital (Erridge & Greer, 2002; Steane & Walker, 2000). Finally, there is a renewed attention from both scholars and practitioners regarding the use of public procurement as an innovation and transformation motivating mechanism (Edler & Georghiu, 2007; McCue & Roman, 2012). The success of all these more recent developments rests, however, in part, perhaps even entirely, on the ability and willingness of the professionals in the field to embrace the new demands and conditions (Roman, 2013a).

Traditionally, procurement has not been considered a central function in public administration; as a result, many agencies built in

only limited roles within their organizational structures for procurement staff and projected them to be marginally involved in strategic decision-making (Erridge & Greer, 2002; Roman, 2013b). Within the same vein, public procurement is routinely identified as an area dominated by technical competency, neutrality and efficiency (Baily, Farmer, Crocker, Jessop, & Jones, 2008; Emmett & Wright, 2012; Thai, 2001, 2008). In their everyday roles individual are not expected to deviate from being strict enforcers of procurement ordinances. "Procurement professionals have dual responsibilities: they make sure that operational agencies comply with procurement regulations, and they are directly involved in procuring goods, services and capital assets as authorized and funded" (Thai, 2001, p. 29). Involvement in policy formulation and advocacy type behaviors are neither normatively recommended nor structurally supported. Specialists are encouraged to uphold professional standards and are typically advised against engaging in any type of actions that might be interpreted as rule nonconformity (Thai, 2001).

Despite these recent transformations in the profession and the obvious benefits[1] that would come with a large scale and detailed evaluation of the roles assumed by procurement specialists, there has yet to be an organized empirical inquiry in the area. As it stands, we are not able to satisfactorily describe the profession from the perspective of the roles assumed by procurement professionals. Most of our knowledge is derived from anecdotal accounts and case studies. It is specifically this gap in scholarly literature that the research presented here is envisioned to address. Using Selden et al.'s (1999) administrative role framework as the conceptual starting point and frame of reference, and drawing from the existent body of literature, it is hypothesized that practical idealist, businesslike utilitarian and resigned custodian are the three most common roles assumed by public procurement specialists.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Sampling Frame

The data used for the purposes of answering the research questions posed here came from surveying a random sample of NIGP members. The sampling frame was found appropriate for the scope of this study for several reasons. First, NIGP is a well-established national and international professional organization and its

membership is fairly representative of the larger universe of public procurement specialists. Second, NIGP has a well-developed research program and its members have routinely shown willingness to participate in research. Third, the researcher has previously worked with this sub-population group; as such, acceptable levels of trust and accessibility for the scope of this research were already established. Finally, NIGP's membership, as a professional group, might have a more homogenous set of expectations than other public procurement professionals at large. The latter would make the empirical identification and delimitation of administrative roles clearer. This would also make the sampling frame particularly well fit for studying administrative roles.

Instrument

The survey instrument for this research was adapted from the work of Selden et al. (1999) and is provided in appendix A. The language of the instrument was significantly modified from the original study. First, the phrasing of each item was revised and simplified. Any unnecessarily ambiguous or value-laden terms were replaced or removed. Second, scale items were transformed into action oriented statements. Finally, double-barreled statements were re-written in a manner that still fit with the overall tested construct, but without motivating confusion. Each one of the role constructs was evaluated using four Likert-type items (Table 2).[2]

A pre-final version of the instrument was self-administered by ten highly experienced procurement specialists. After the completion of the survey they were asked to critically review the instrument and to recommend changes that they found appropriate. Based on the results of the pilot test, the instrument was reviewed and slightly modified. The specialists' suggestions have led to several changes, mainly within the language and phrasing of the instrument items.

Data Collection

The survey instrument was administered using SurveyMonkey during February-March of 2013. A random sample of 2,000 contacts was drawn from NIGP's membership list, which in January 2013 contained approximately 16,000 names. The on-screen presentation of the survey was broken down into five distinct pages. The first page

TABLE 2
Instrument Items for Role Constructs

Steward of Public Interest	1. I use organizational channels to advocate for policy positions that I find to be important. 2. I seek opportunities to participate in the formulation of public policy issues that I find to be important. 3. I encourage procedures that support greater public access to programs and services. 4. As an administrator, I encourage certain values over others.
Adapted Realist	5. In my work, I try to balance fairness and efficiency concerns. 6. I am committed to management objectives. 7. In my work I attempt to reflect most current managerial perspectives. 8. To survive in the organization, I follow the rules when strictly necessary.
Business-like Utilitarian	9. In my decisions, I give priority to efficiency over fairness. 10. I believe efficiency is the most important goal in my work, even if my supervisors do not agree. 11. Regardless of political pressure, I take the decision which is best for my organization. 12. If it is not the most efficient choice, I do not advance the interests of minority citizens.
Resigned Custodian	13. I behave according to the wishes of my superiors. 14. I follow the rules as closely as possible. 15. I do not assume a public leadership role in policy issues. 16. In my work, I try to be as neutral as possible.
Practical Idealist	17. I primarily implement policy, not formulate it. 18. I keep politics out of my decision-making. 19. I am committed to my professional standards. 20. I attempt to be as responsive as possible.

included instructions only. The role measuring items were introduced on the second page. Respondents were given twenty statements, whose order was randomized for each respondent, and they were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each statement. The model items were measured using a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree."

A total of 512 specialists responded to the survey invitation (25.6% response rate). Nineteen respondents, however, only partially completed the survey and were not included in the final sample employed for the analysis (hence a completion rate of 96.28% and an effective response rate of 24.65%). In order to check for any possible

significant nonresponse bias an independent sample t-test on the responses for the construct items for early and late respondents was conducted. The survey responses were ordered based on their time of receipt, with the first 10% labeled as early respondents and last 10% labeled as late respondents. There were no major concerns regarding possible non-response bias. The only statistically significant difference in means (p<.05) was observed for item 11 – "regardless of political pressure, I take the decision which is best for my organization" (Appendix B).

Construct Reliability[3]

The reliability of the role constructs represented a major factor in the successful completion of this research effort. Given that the survey instrument was noticeably modified from the original study, this represented a first large-N de facto test of the instrument. In order to make any type of empirical deductions or generalizations, it was critical that the role items used for the scale construction had high levels of interrelatedness. Cronbach's alpha is typically the preferred measure by scholars when examining a construct's internal reliability. Cronbach's alpha gives an estimate of the consistency of an entire scale (Cronbach, 1951; Nunnally, 1979). The conventional cut-off limit for alpha is suggested to be .70; yet, values as low as .60 are often believed to be acceptable, especially in the case of semi-exploratory research (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010; Robinson, Shaver, & Wrightman, 1991). It should be noted here, that more recently scholars have raised concerns about the usefulness of Cronbach's alpha as an evaluator of construct reliability (Green & Yang, 2009; McCrae, Kurtz, Yamagata, & Terracciano, 2011; Sijtsma, 2009). Composite reliability values derived through structural equation modeling (SEM) are becoming a popular alternative among scholars. Peterson & Kim (2013), however, have determined that although Cronbach's alpha does somewhat underperform composite reliability values derived through SEM, for practical purposes, the difference is not consequential.[4]

All five constructs used in this research for role identification were found to be exhibit acceptable levels of inter-item consistency. The alpha values in all cases were above .65 (Table 3). Taken together, then, the role scale was found to be adequate for categorizing individual behaviors within specific administrative roles.

TABLE 3
Cronbach's alphas

Constructs	Cronbach's alpha
Steward of Public Interest	0.765
Adapted Realist	0.675
Businesslike Utilitarian	0.763
Resigned Custodian	0.733
Practical Idealist	0.651

Coding

In order to code specialists within roles, responses for each construct were indexed. A respondent was coded into a corresponding role based on the construct for which the respondent had the highest index average. This approach was preferred to a construct sum index because it allowed the researcher to code individuals even if one did not provide a response to all the items within a construct. In cases when a respondent would have the same average within two constructs, the number of items responded to within each construct was used as a first tiebreaker, while the inter-items variance was the second tiebreaker employed. For instance, if a respondent obtained similar averages for two constructs and replied to the same number of items within each construct – the respondent was coded within the construct for which there was the smaller inter-item variance. Each respondent's self-identification (page 3 of the survey) was used as the final tiebreaker in the coding process. In 67 of 493 cases one of the tie-breakers had to be employed.

FINDINGS

Descriptive Statistics

An inspection of the sample's descriptive statistics (Table 4) reveals that the sample exhibits important levels of diversity and variation. On the whole, the sample is representative of NIGP's population (NIGP, personal correspondence).

The Roles Assumed by Public Procurement Specialists

It is found that the two most dominant roles assumed by public procurement specialists are that of practical idealists (30%) and

TABLE 4
Sample's Descriptive Statistics

Employed by:	
City / town government	123 (24.9%)
State/provincial government	117 (23.7%)
County/regional government	109 (22.1%)
College / university	42 (8.5%)
Special authority / district	41 (8.3%)
School system	39 (7.9%)
Federal government	17 (3.4%)
Other (please specify)	5 (1%)
Position:	
Non-manager	246 (49.9%)
Manager	182 (36.9%)
Senior executive/director	65 (13.2%)
Highest Education Level:	
Less than high school degree	6 (1.2%)
High school degree or equivalent	16 (3.2%)
Some college but no degree	94 (19.1%)
Associate degree	40 (8.1%)
Bachelor degree	208 (42.2%)
Graduate degree	128 (26%)
Did not indicate	1 (0.2%)
Political Ideology:	
Strongly liberal	16 (3.2%)
Liberal	82 (16.6%)
Moderate	215 (43%)
Conservative	154 (31.2%)
Strongly conservative	17 (3.4%)
Did not indicate	9 (1.8%)
Race:	
White	387 (78.5%)
Black or African American	71 (14.4%)
Other	18 (3.7%)
Asian	12 (2.4%)
Am. Indian or Alaska Native	3 (0.6%)
Native Haw. or Pacific Islander	1 (0.2%)
Did not indicate	1 (0.2%)
Gender:	
Female	285 (57.8%)
Male	208 (42.2%)

adapted realist (29%) (Table 5). Specialists who assume the role of practical idealist are guided in their everyday behaviors by professional norms. Although they acknowledge that they are not neutral and they do become involved in policy matters whenever necessary, they also refuse to be drawn in political maneuvering. Those who assume the role of adapted realist typically attempt to balance equity and fairness with individual concerns. They also, however, realize too well that they have to work within organizational constraints. The latter requires them to become exquisite navigators of the organizational space.

The third most common role among public procurement specialists is that of steward of public interest. Approximately one in five specialists, makes it at a primary rule for oneself to routinely and actively seek opportunities to get involved in policy formulation and to not shy away from advocating for policy positions that one finds to be important. For these type of specialists involvement in matters of public policy defines their administrative role. Such specialists take it upon themselves to delineate what public interest is and to identify the best means of achieving it. Getting involved in policy formulation and imposing their values on the procurement process is a priority. Contrary to what one might otherwise expect, position is not a significant predictor of the assumption of this role. Regardless of their positions, specialists were just as likely to assume the role of steward of public interest as any other role.[5]

The two least common roles assumed by public procurement specialists are those of resigned custodian and businesslike utilitarian. Relatively few individuals in the profession behave as neutral agents working solely within the boundaries imposed by

TABLE 5
Roles Assumed by Procurement Specialists

Role	Frequency	Percent
Practical Idealist	150	30.40%
Adapted Realist	143	29.00%
Steward of Public Interest	97	19.70%
Resigned Custodian	68	13.80%
Businesslike Utilitarian	35	7.10%
Total	493	100%

procurement ordinances and do not seek to participate in policy in formulation. In fact, less than one in ten specialists holds efficiency as the foremost important professional value.

DISCUSSION

Implications of the Findings

Contrary to what was hypothesized at the start of article, neither resigned custodian nor businesslike utilitarian is found to be a dominant role assumed by professionals in the field. Actually, despite what might otherwise be suggested by scholarly and professional literature, there is only a small probability of a procurement specialist behaving as an efficiency maximizing "technocrat."

There are several critical implications that are bound to come with the findings of this study. First, they would suggest that the literature on public procurement needs to significantly re-evaluate its perspectives on the routine behaviors and decision-making patterns of public procurement professionals. Procurement specialists assume a much more diverse set of roles than they are typically credited with in the literature. They are not, as it were, who we thought they were. They are more vibrant in their roles and perhaps much more willing to become directly involved in policy formulation than we are currently comfortable to acknowledge. Of particular interest within this context appears to be the question of proper training. Active involvement in matters of policy imposes somewhat different training requirements and educational demands. Communication, representation, stewardship, accountability and ethics become critical considerations in public procurement's transition from a mere "back office" function to a powerful policy tool.

A second major implication of the findings is directly linked with the realization that public procurement specialists are redoubtable enforcers of values. Through their interpretations of what is "good" and "bad" for the public interest, procurement specialists are powerful policy shapers in their own right. Procurement ordinances might not be as rigid and constricting as professional literature might lead one to believe. It appears that procurement ordinances do allow for ample discretionary room. Specialists realize the latter and routinely embrace such opportunities. This finding falls in line with previous research that has suggested that specialists in the field

stand ready to use available discretion to infuse the process with what they find to be appropriate values (see Diggs & Roman, 2012; Roman, 2014).

Although active involvement on the part of procurement specialists in policy formulation might certainly lead to improved outcomes, hence more often than not welcomed; such behaviors do provide the fertile grounds for conflict and politics. Personal driven biases, embedded in one's set of values, might often enter the decision-making equation. Over time and on aggregate, value based incremental decision-making can amass a profound impact on a given community or economy. In such cases, technical-based training does little in terms of preparing one for the realities of one's job demands. Whether involvement in policy formulation is normatively desirable or whether specialists have the appropriate grounding to do so are questions that remain to be answered. Such questions are beyond the scope of this work, but, as the findings would suggest, they are questions that certainly need to be asked. This is especially important since the current public procurement curriculum does not appear to reflect the transformations within the profession and overall nature of governance, and might fail to address the corresponding educational needs in an adequate manner.

Third, and intriguingly so, the empirical results suggests that efficiency is not a leading value among the ranks of public procurement specialists. This would challenge the traditionally prevailing narrative regarding the fundamental makeup of the field. Despite what some might suggest, efficiency, as a value, does not significantly impact decision-making. There are at least two possible explanations for this finding. First, there is much more that goes into providing "most value for the money" than efficiency. That is, efficiency is just one criterion that determines what constitutes value. Other social prerogatives such as equity, representation and responsiveness are often found to be just as important valuation criteria as efficiency. Second, the results might capture the fact that similar to budgeting, public procurement is unavoidably a political process. In their efforts to determine from whom, what, how and when to procure – public procurement specialists are active participants in the politics of the procurement process.

Finally, as it was hypothesized at the start of this article – professional standards shape the bulk of the behaviors in the field.

Indeed, the results show that practical idealist, which is in essence a professionalism-based role, is the most common role assumed by public procurement specialists. This confirms the field's professionalization trends that scholars have previously noted (see Thai, 2001, 2008; Thai & Piga, 2007). Still, even if these dynamics might explain a great deal of the daily behaviors and decision-making patterns by specialists, they are also insufficient, as shown the number of other important roles, to delineate complete understandings.

There is certainly an administrative comfort identifying public procurement specialists as nothing more than resigned upholders of procurement ordinances and mere efficiency maximizers. Although convenient in its simplicity, there is of course much that such an interpretation misses, perhaps even hides. One would be hard pressed to convincingly argue that there is any meaningful benefit in enforcing a perspective that is unrepresentative of the practices in the field. Holistically, the findings of this research should, at the very least, provide the basis for breaking the myth that procurement specialists are mainly resigned, efficiency seeking, custodians.

Limitations

No empirical study in social sciences is without its methodological limitations. Rather than assuming that they can be easily decrypted throughout the body of the manuscript, it is perhaps better to have them clearly stated here. A first possible limitation of this research is associated with the fact that although NIGP's membership is diverse and far reaching, it, too, might fall short of being a genuinely representative sample of the richly diverse population of procurement specialists. Secondly, as it is characteristic for self-administered surveys, it is never safe to assume that the stated behaviors do authentically reflect one's behaviors in practice. Indeed our survey answers are many times guilty of imitating our "ideal self" rather than our "real self." The latter should certainly be kept in mind before thinking of indulging into any sweeping generalizations.

A third possible limitation deals with the survey instrument. The research presented here was the first large-N application of the developed instrument. Whilst the instrument was adapted from previous work and drew on an extensive literature review – this represents the first time when it is evaluated in its current form.

Furthermore, the ten procurement specialists who were involved in the pilot test were not selected at random. They were strategically chosen based on their experience in the field. This, too, is a limitation within the design of the study and it deprived the research of the benefits that come with a full-fledged pilot study. Even though, the obtained alpha levels are acceptable, there is obviously much more to be done here before one can argue that this is a fully validated instrument. Some improvements were perhaps missed in the instrument's validation choice at the pre-administration stage. Finally, the possible research bias that might have seeped through the choice of survey language is always a concern. There is, however, only so much that can be done on this front and often a researcher has to admit that full objectivity is simply impossible.

CONCLUSION

Whether the scholarly literature is able to take the turn suggested here remains to be seen. One would hope, however, that if nothing else this article would stimulate a re-evaluative re-identification within the literature. Future research should also attempt to employ a 360-degree perspective; the way that others understand the role of procurement specialists is surely just as important as the way professionals in the field see themselves. There are many good reasons for scholars writing on the topic to delineate procurement professionals in a more colorful set of democratic nuances than the one suggested within orthodox perspectives; that is, seeing the procurement actor as nothing more than "a faithful enforcer of procurement ordinances." The failure to do so would simply buttress unrepresentative images and would most likely preclude many from embracing public procurement within the appropriate levels of significance.

There is also much at play in the game of realizing that procurement specialists are much more than "technocrats" and that they often seek active involvement in policy formulation. To a large extent, there is a great deal of risk that might be associated with such recognition. We would have to admit, for instance, that the procurement process is not necessarily fully satiated with professional unbiasedness. Specialists do indeed embrace opportunities to become involved in matters of policy. For a field that is seeking to construct its professional identity on technical

competency and professional neutrality, this represents a somewhat uncomfortable question. It is a question that many would perhaps prefer not to raise. Yet, as this article's underlying argument suggests, there is an important need and benefit in doing so. The schism between the politically favored narrative and the reality of practice is not necessarily productive and will surely motivate a lot of ambiguity and confusion. A more comprehensive understanding of the roles assumed by public procurement specialists, even if we might not be fully at ease with the uncovered, will be beneficial for the field, especially in terms of developing appropriate training and educational frameworks. Continuing to remain silent about the policy roles that procurement specialists often play is in many ways negating the added public value that a recognized and organized policy involvement on the part of procurement specialists could produce.

NOTES

1. A more complete understanding of the roles assumed by procurement specialists is critical for the professional growth of the field, especially considering the increasing responsibilities imposed on them. It will also provide the grounds for developing improved theoretical perspectives and frameworks. The latter is important for both theory and practice. In terms of practice more representative and detailed theoretical frameworks will be critical for constructing more effective reform efforts. Whereas from an academic perspective, improved understandings will lead to higher quality research.

2. The final version of the instrument was reviewed and received exempt status from the Institutional Review Board.

3. A total of 35 data elements were missing. Little's MCAR test revealed that elements were missing at random. When examining constructs' reliability, the missing elements were replaced with each variable's mean. Since only 35 out 9860 total data elements for the five role constructs were missing, no cases were deleted.

4. In addition, for construct validity, confirmatory factor analysis was undertaken. With the exception of variables 3 (.48) 7 (.40) and variable 17 (.4), all other variables had loadings of at least .5. According to Hair et al. (2010) for large samples even loadings as

low as .35 can often be considered acceptable. For the model, CMIN/DF = 3.625, CFI = .849, RMSEA = .073 - all indicating reasonable fit.

5.

	-2 Log Likelihood	Chi-Square	Sig.
Intercept Only	1403.665		
Final	1167.762	235.903	.000
		Model Fitting Criteria	Likelihood Ratio Tests	
		-2 Log Likelihood of Reduced Model	Chi-Square	Sig.
Intercept		1167.762[a]	.000	.
Expectation of policy involvement		**1178.419**	**10.658**	**.031**
Stakeholders' expectations		**1178.238**	**10.476**	**.033**
Administrative discretion		**1248.669**	**80.907**	**.000**
Job satisfaction		1171.389	3.627	.459
Position		1172.202	4.440	.350
Years in current position (log)		1169.809	2.047	.727
Log tenure		**1179.959**	**12.197**	**.016**
Years in public service		**1186.585**	**18.823**	**.001**
Education		1172.604	4.843	.304
Political ideology		1173.548	5.786	.216
Minority association		1171.973	4.212	.378
Gender		1170.620	2.858	.582
Age		1169.428	1.666	.797

Notes: The chi-square statistic is the difference in -2 log-likelihoods between the final model and a reduced model. The reduced model is formed by omitting an effect from the final model. The null hypothesis is that all parameters of that effect are 0.

[a]. This reduced model is equivalent to the final model because omitting the effect does not increase the degrees of freedom.

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APPENDIX A
Survey Instrument

PAGE – 1
Directions:
In what follows, you are going to be provided with several statements. Please read each statement carefully and indicate whether the statement is representative of your everyday experience. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the statement on a scale of 1 to 7.
Where:
1-strongly disagree
2-disagree
3-somewhat disagree
4-neither disagree nor agree,
5-somewhat agree
6-agree
7-strongly agree

1. **Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements:**

- I use organizational channels to advocate for policy positions that I find to be important.
- I seek opportunities to participate in the formulation of public policy issues that I find to be important.
- I encourage procedures that support greater public access to programs and services.
- As an administrator, I encourage certain values over others.
- In my work, I try to balance fairness and efficiency concerns.
- I am committed to management objectives.
- In my work I attempt to reflect most current managerial perspectives.
- To survive in the organization, I follow the rules when strictly necessary.
- In my decisions, I give priority to efficiency over fairness.
- I believe efficiency is the most important goal in my work, even if my supervisors do not agree.
- Regardless of political pressure, I take the decision which is best for my organization.
- If it is not the most efficient choice, I do not advance the interests of minority citizens.
- I behave according to the wishes of my superiors.
- I follow the rules as closely as possible.
- I do not assume a public leadership role in policy issues.
- In my work, I try to be as neutral as possible.
- I primarily implement policy, not formulate it.
- I keep politics out of my decision-making.
- I am committed to my professional standards.
- I attempt to be as responsive as possible.

PAGE – 2

2. **Please, indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements:**

- If I would have to choose, I would choose to work in this organization again.
- I expect to be involved in policy formulation.
- I constantly receive feedback in terms of what is expected of me.
- I believe that my organization's stakeholders expect me to be involved in policy formulation.

- I believe that other professionals in positions and organizations similar to mine are expected to be involved in policy formulation.
- I feel that I enjoy a high level of discretion in terms of my decision-making.
- I could face penalties if I get involved in policy formulation.
- I am satisfied with my job.

PAGE – 3
3. Please read the five job role descriptions and select the one that accurately captures your current role:

- On my job, I balance equity and fairness with individual concerns. I am committed to both management and organization. I work within system constraints, rules and proper lines of authority.
- On my job, I advocate for policy positions and participate in the formulation of policy. I serve the public and I attempt to further the public interest. I use my experience to delineate what is in the best interest of the public.
- On my job, I am as efficient as possible. Sometimes I challenge what more senior agency officials tell me to do if it is not best for the organization. I keep my promises and I advance the interest of the minority citizens only if it is the most efficient thing to do.
- On my job, I am a neutral agent. I work within the boundaries imposed by rules, regulations and expectations of those more senior than me and to elected officials. I don't play a mediator role. I complete the task set for me and I do not participate in policy formulation.
- On my job, I am as professional as possible. I work efficiently, quickly and accurately. When possible, I advocate for policy positions and legislation. I support equity and I am not neutral, but I do not act as an agent of elected officials.

PAGE – 4
4. Where do you work?
Federal government
State/Provincial government
County/Regional government
City / Town government
School System
College / University

Special authority / district
Other (please specify)

5. What position category best describes you?
Non-manager
Manager
Senior executive/director
Elected official
Other (please specify)

6. How many years have you been in your current position?

7. How many years have you been with your current organization?

8. How many years have you been employed in the public sector?

9. What is the population size of the community that you serve?

10. Please indicate your highest level of education
Less than high school degree
High school degree or equivalent (e.g., GED)
Some college but no degree
Associate degree
Bachelor degree
Graduate degree

11. Which of the following best describes the field in which you received your highest degree?
Public Administration
Business Administration
Political Science
Economics
Mathematics
Science
Healthcare
Medicine
Computing
Engineering
Technology
Other (please specify)

12. How would you describe your political ideology?
Strongly liberal
Liberal
Moderate
Conservative
Strongly conservative

13. Do you consider yourself a minority?
 Yes
 No

14. What is your race? (mark one or more)
White
Black or African American
Asian
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
American Indian or Alaska Native
Other

15. What is your gender?
Female
Male

16. What is your age?

APPENDIX B
Differences in Responses between Early and Late Respondents

Construct Item	t	Sig.	Mean Diff.	Std. Error
V1	0.348	0.729	0.089	0.256
V2	0	1	0	0.293

APPENDIX B (Continued)

Construct Item	t	Sig.	Mean Diff.	Std. Error
V3	-0.448	0.655	-0.102	0.228
V4	0.241	0.81	0.061	0.254
V5	1.391	0.168	0.267	0.192
V6	0.101	0.92	0.02	0.202
V7	0.619	0.537	0.122	0.198
V8	1.332	0.186	0.449	0.337
V9	-0.428	0.67	-0.155	0.362
V10	-1.303	0.196	-0.449	0.345
V11	**-2.901**	**0.005**	**-0.755**	**0.26**
V12	0.267	0.79	0.092	0.346
V13	-0.021	0.984	-0.006	0.31
V14	-0.926	0.357	-0.204	0.22
V15	0.98	0.329	0.327	0.333
V16	0.984	0.327	0.286	0.29
V17	1.75	0.083	0.571	0.327
V18	1.146	0.255	0.286	0.249
V19	0.204	0.838	0.032	0.156
V20	1.487	0.14	0.245	0.165