

Bureaucratic Responses to the Cross Pressures of Political Neutrality in Relation to Cultural Orientation and Role Perception: The Case of Korean Civil Servants*

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Abstract: Relying on the premise that variations in civil servants' responses to the dilemma of political neutrality might arise from preferences reflecting the unique cultural characteristics of their countries and their role perceptions, this study investigates whether such factors affect the response choices of Korean civil servants to the cross pressures of political neutrality. Although this study focuses on Korea, its findings, implications and theoretical underpinnings may be generalizable to other contexts, as the study explores dilemmas civil servants in most countries commonly face in administrative practice.

Keywords: dilemma, political neutrality, accountability, role perception

INTRODUCTION

Civil servants often find themselves in situations in which they must choose between conflicting values and duties that underpin the work they are charged with performing. For example, duties associated with political neutrality often present this problem because political neutrality can have at least two potentially conflicting meanings. One meaning demands civil servants' obedience to their political superiors, whereas the other seeks to ensure civil servants' professional autonomy.

Although these two aspects of political neutrality constitute the very ethos of public administration, which civil servants must heed in making decisions and taking action (Denhardt, 1989), there is no simple formula for balancing them when

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they conflict with each other. Thus, civil servants in most countries face the difficult task of weighing these two sides of political neutrality when performing their job (Matheson Weber, Manning, & Arnould, 2007, p. 9; Furi, 2008). It has long been assumed that the responses of civil servants to the dilemma of political neutrality are affected in particular by their cultural orientation (Quinn, 1988; Hofstede, 1980) and role perception (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999; Schuler, 1979). This study investigates whether these two important factors affect the patterns of civil servants' response choices in Korea, where the dilemma of political neutrality has recently begun to manifest itself as the country progresses toward a more democratic society. The response patterns we are most interested in are those of Korean civil servants to orders with which they professionally disagree.

The study begins with an in-depth discussion of the potential conflict between civil servants' political responsiveness and professional autonomy. Subsequently, it introduces theories of cultural orientation and role perception in the context of bureaucratic responses to the dilemma of political neutrality. It then examines the responses of Korean civil servants to the dilemma of political neutrality based on an empirical survey. Finally, the study explains the survey results and outlines their theoretical and practical implications.

THE POLITICAL RESPONSIVENESS VERSUS PROFESSIONAL AUTONOMY OF CIVIL SERVANTS

Political Responsiveness: Ethics as Obedience to Authority

The political neutrality of civil servants is defined in several interrelated—and competing—ways (Kernaghan, p. 1976; Saltzstein, p. 1992; Sossin, p. 2005). For instance, political neutrality can mean not subjecting personnel decisions, such as appointments and promotions of civil servants, to political will. It can also refer to prohibiting civil servants from engaging in political activities, such as running for public office or campaigning in partisan elections. The problem is that other meanings of political neutrality can pull civil servants in conflicting directions, particularly with regard to the duty to be politically responsive to the government that employs one and the duty to protect the public interest using one's independent professional judgment. These two potentially conflicting duties frequently present serious ethical challenges to civil servants in most countries.

In the policy process, political responsiveness demands more than the dispassionate, "neutral competence" of civil servants, which refers to the "ability to do

the work of government expertly and to do it according to explicit, objective standards rather than to personal or party or other obligations and loyalties” (Kaufman, 1956, p. 1060). Both scholars and politicians have strongly expressed the belief that “responsive competence” rather than neutrality is of paramount importance in the operation of modern governmental bureaucracies (Rourke, 1992, pp. 540-545; West, 2005, pp. 147-150). Responsive competence refers to the ability of civil servants to receive the political ideas endorsed by political leaders with a proper level of enthusiasm (Aberbach & Rockman, 1988, p. 429; West, 2005, p. 153). Civil servants’ responsive competence with respect to the desires of the president, for example, may be “developed and adapted in light of his political needs and willingly made available to him” (Moe, 1985, pp. 239-40).

In the era of the administrative state, the necessity of responsive competence stems from the realization that the policy objectives of a government will be more easily accomplished if civil servants sympathize with its political goals (Rourke, 1992, pp. 543-545; West, 2005, p. 149). The classic view, which is also based on responsive competence, is that a civil servant must obey his or her superiors and carry out their decisions even when they insist on a course of action that is in conflict with the recommendations made by the civil servant (Levitan, 2007, p. 18).

In this respect, political responsibility is confined to the internal relations of the organization, that is, to the responsibility of the civil servant to heed the directives of elected officials, superiors, and so forth and distinct from the responsibility of the organization to citizens, policy clients, and so forth.

According to this view of political neutrality, which demands responsive competence, civil servants are ethically neutral in the sense that they do not exercise independent moral judgment when responding to the president and his or her political appointees (Thompson, 1985, p. 556). Fulfilling this duty of political neutrality means observing “ethics as authoritative obedience”; the job of a civil servant is understood to entail the civil servant’s adapting to whoever his or her political superiors might be (Jennings, 1991, pp. 69-77). Ethics is defined as those standards by which actions are determined to be right or wrong; it concerns a broader class of conduct than legal norms (Kazman & Bonczek, 1998; Berman & West, 2006, p. 191). On this view, civil servants are nothing more than implementers who do what is necessary to complete a job; responsibility for policy outcomes falls exclusively on the shoulders of civil servants’ political superiors. As long as civil servants follow the policies or orders of their political superiors, they are neither morally nor legally responsible for the harmful results of their actions (Thompson, 1980, pp. 905-906). When pushed too far, however, responsive competence can lead to the development of a bureaucratic mentality in which civil servants divorce themselves

from the basic philosophical, social, and political controversies underlying the decisions they are called on to execute (Levitan, 2007, p. 15).

Professional Autonomy: Ethics as the Practice of Moral Judgment

The contrasting view of political neutrality emphasizes the professional autonomy of civil servants (Levitan, 2007, p. 17; Sossin, 2005, pp. 29-30). According to this view, civil servants should remain sufficiently independent to exercise impartial judgment in the public interest on the basis of their expertise and in line with professional norms rather than being blindly responsive to the whims of their political superiors. Professional norms refer to those norms developed by public administrations to guide the behaviors and decisions of civil servants in the direction of the public interest. These norms thus invoke a certain ethical responsibility that calls on civil servants to screen the policies or directives of their political superiors (Kearney & Sinha, 1988, p. 575; Waldo, 1981, p. 105; Denhardt, 1989). Professional autonomy suggests that civil servants must freely express their opinions if professional norms or individual conscience impels them to do so (Christensen, 1991, p. 310).

Thus, according to this view, civil servants, as guardians or trustees of the public interest, have a responsibility to oppose or resist any policies or directives from their political superiors that undermine the public interest (Christensen, 1991, p. 310; Box, 1992, pp. 326-327). Civil servants must support their political superiors but must also tell them—when necessary—that their policies could cause serious problems and must attempt to persuade them to modify the policies. Chaleff (2009, pp. 13-14) has called the actions of civil servants that are based on their professional autonomy “courageous followership.” Scholars with the perspective that independent actions by civil servants are essential when political superiors no longer reflect the true will and interest of the people belong to the “discretionist school” (Fox & Cochran, 1990). Because this duty of political neutrality focuses on civil servants’ individual responsibility and asserts that they are ethically obligated to render moral judgments regarding the well-being of society in the course of their actions, discharging this duty is regarded as treating “ethics as the practice of moral judgment” (Jennings, 2007, pp. 79-85).

The idea that civil servants can be impartial, however, has been challenged. Like all other political actors, they too, it is argued, are self-interested actors who can lose sight of their duty to answer to the public interest (Hummel, 1987; Tull-ock, 1965). Moreover, their technocratic attitudes can foster the development of social and political insensitivity among their ranks (Christensen, 1991, p. 311; Put-

nam, 1977, p. 408). The professional autonomy of civil servants also is criticized for undermining the political accountability necessary for democratic viability (Pops, 1991, p. 272).

Response Patterns of Civil Servants

A dilemma is a trade-off in which the final result is less than optimal regardless of the option chosen (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004, p. 162). In the real world, most civil servants do not know how to balance the two duties of political neutrality, and they are likely to face a dilemma in which they must abrogate one moral conviction or value to uphold another (Gortner, 1991, p. 41).

When civil servants are asked to implement policies forwarded by their political superiors that go against their professional judgment or individual conscience, they have four possible responses: exit, voice, neglect, and loyalty (Hirschman, 1970; Lowery & Rusbult, 1986; Golden, 1992).

Exit refers to when civil servants resign from their positions in response to morally reprehensible policies or directives of their political superiors. In the perspective of classical public administrative ethics, once a policy decision has been made, the only choices of civil servants are to obey or resign. If they do not want to obey the order of their superiors, they ought to resign from office. However, it is so difficult for many civil servants to choose this option. Vested rights in the organization can be a powerful incentive to hold on to their position (Thompson, 1985, p. 556).

Voice is when civil servant express disagreement over policies or directives they disagree with and attempt to change them. Voice may be expressed in a number of ways, ranging from mere grumbling to violent protests. The more justified civil servants' opposition, the more justified they are in using more extreme methods (Thompson, 1985, p. 557). It is, however, not easy for civil servants to oppose directives from superiors in government, so the voice response is regarded as a proactive and ethically courageous choice.

Neglect describes the approach of civil servants who, due to a lack of conviction, exert less effort and enthusiasm in implementing policies and directives they object to (Rusbult Zembrodt, & Gunn, 1982). It differs from voice in that it is not a direct and active expression of their dissent. Rather, civil servants responding with neglect passively and implicitly accept directions at odds with their beliefs about what is in the public interest. When the costs of exit and voice are high, neglect is more likely to be chosen (Withey & Cooper, 1989). Thus, many civil servants facing the dilemma of political neutrality would be likely to choose neglect in the hierarchical and exclusive climate of the government.

Loyalty implies that civil servants faithfully execute policies or directives they disagree with, despite that disagreement. In the perspective of classical public administrative ethics, ideal civil servants should not inject personal values into the process of implementing policy and should be a reliable and loyal instrument of the goals of the organization. If civil servants whose opinions are at odds with those of their superiors choose loyalty, it may mean that they value organizational judgment over than their own individual judgment or, conversely, it may signify that they are embracing passive behavior to avoid costs of exit or voice (Withey & Cooper 1989, p. 522).

CULTURAL ORIENTATION AND ROLE PERCEPTION

Civil servants' response choices can be affected by many factors, including what the issue at hand is, the nature of the policy area they work in, what stage of the decision-making process they are facing (Christensen, 1991, p. 318), what sort of monitoring system is in place (Welsh & Ordóñez, 2014), the political and cultural characteristics of the bureaucracy they work in (Quinn, 1988; Hofstede, 1980), what motivates them (Dyne, Ang, & Botero, 2003), their social identity (Rubin & Hewstone, 1998), their perception of inequity (Gino & Pierce, 2009), and their role perception (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999; Schuler, 1979). Of these factors, this study concentrates on the two most important factors affecting the patterns of Korean civil servants' response choices to the dilemma of political neutrality: their cultural orientation and role perception. The response patterns in which we are most interested are civil servants' behaviors when facing orders with which they professionally disagree.

Cultural Orientation

As is well known, civil servants' patterns of responses to the political neutrality dilemma tend to reflect the cultural characteristics of their country, which have a strong influence on civil servants' ethical decision making (Aberbach, Putnam, & Rockman, 1981, pp. 21-22; Gortner, 1991; Almond & Powell, 1978, pp. 41-42). Cultural characteristics are shaped by the history of a nation and by past and ongoing social, economic and political processes (Almond & Powell, 1978, p. 25). According to Palazzo, Krings, and Hoffrage (2012), ethical decision making results from a complex interplay between individual sense-making activities and cultural context factors, such as values and customs.

The individual-collective dimension and the vertical (hierarchical)-horizontal dimension are the dimensions of national cultures most widely used in the examination of the relationship between national cultures and civil servants. The difference between the individual and collective dimensions is that a person who embraces individualism emphasizes his or her own goals while a person who espouses collectivism values the goals of his or her group (Triandis & Gelfand, 1998), whereas the distinction between the horizontal and vertical (hierarchical) dimensions refers to differences in attitudes toward hierarchies (Shavitt, Zhang, Torelli, & Lalwani, 2006, p. 336). In accordance with these dimensions, there are four ideal types of culture: vertical (hierarchical), horizontal, individualist, and collectivist.

A vertical (hierarchical) culture is characterized by high levels of power distance in which people occupying higher positions are regarded as more powerful and are treated with a greater degree of respect (Hofstede, 1984), and so civil servants in this culture are thus likely to be submissive to their superiors and obey orders without questioning.

A collectivist culture can be defined as the tendency to value the self not for its own sake but as a part of a collective (Triandis & Gelfand, 1998; Hofstede, 1984; Hofstede, Neuijen, Ohayv, & Sanders, 1990; Gelfand, Erez, & Aycan, 2007). Therefore, civil servants in such a culture have strong bonds with the members of their groups and might be somewhat reluctant to express their opinions to their superiors.

In a horizontal culture individuals are seen as equal to all other individuals. Such an orientation highlights equality of participation in decision making. Therefore, civil servants in an egalitarian culture are likely to feel mostly comfortable stating their opinions, regardless of their disagreement with their superiors.

Finally, an individualist culture refers to a culture in which people define themselves as individuals and form looser ties with their groups than do those in a collectivist culture (Vitell, Nwachukwu, & Barnes, 1993). Civil servants in this kind of culture can easily distance themselves from their groups and thus may feel comfortable using their professional judgment to assess the rightness of orders from their superiors.

Role Perception

Civil servants perform multiple roles in their organizations, such as that of subordinate, neutral agent, expert, and even representative (Romzek & Dubnick, 1987, 1994; Romzek & Ingraham, 2000; Gregory, 2003, p. 342). In the organizational

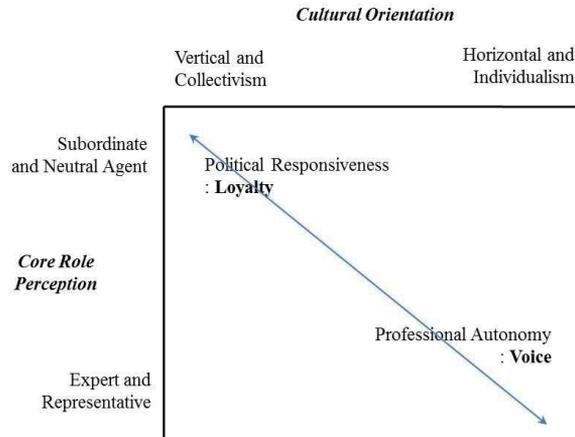
behavior literature, employee role perception has been found to be one of the most important components in understanding the behavior and performance of an individual in the workplace. Role perception reflects norms, expectations, and contextual demands as understood by civil servants (Biddle, 1986). Civil servants may regard certain roles as being more significant than others, and these perceptions can influence their behavior (Gordon & Gordon, p. 1982). If a civil servant sees him- or herself primarily as a subordinate, he or she will tend to follow rules and operating procedures faithfully rather than performing his or her job independently. Similarly, if a civil servant believes that being a neutral agent of the law is more important than his or her other roles, he or she will be unlikely to express his or her concerns regarding orders that he or she views as problematic. Hierarchical accountability as subordinates and legal accountability as neutral agents have long been regarded as the classic and objective duties of civil servants (Romzek & Dubnick, 1994).

By contrast, if a civil servant perceives his or her primary role to be that of an expert, he or she might actively resist ill-advised orders from superiors and fully express his or her professional opinion. Likewise, if a civil servant believes that being a representative for his or her constituents is more important than his or her other roles, he or she might risk losing opportunities for promotion in his or her service to the public (Cheung, 2009). Professional accountability as experts and political accountability as representatives have been considered the ethical and subjective duties of civil servants (Romzek & Dubnick, 1994, p. 271).

To understand the responses of civil servants facing a dilemma of political neutrality, we can map a conceptual framework of responses based on various combinations of the cultural context and the role perception of the civil servant. Role perception is context bound, and civil servants construct and enact their primary roles in organizations in the given context. Figure 1 shows that despite their disagreement with orders from political superiors, civil servants might obey those orders when the organizational culture is more hierarchical and collective and when civil servants perceive their core roles to be that of a subordinate and a neutral agent (see the upper left of figure 1). The combination of these cultural characteristics and the perception of a passive role can lead to civil servants being loyal to political leaders.

By contrast, when civil servants perceive their primary roles to be that of an expert and a representative, then in the context of horizontal and individualistic cultures, they may be willing to express their opinions to their political superiors. This situation, which combines these cultures with the perception of an active role, can lead employees to voice disagreement with the directives and policies of their political superiors (see the bottom right part of figure 1).

Figure 1. A Conceptual Framework of Responses



The Cultural Orientation and Role Perceptions of Korean Civil Servants: The Cultural and Political Roots

Korean civil servants have executed political decisions faithfully for several decades, and this behavior reflects the cultural and political characteristics of South Korea. The Korean people have been deeply influenced by Confucian culture, which has long been an integral element of Korean society. Among the many components of Confucianism, the most salient in the present context are hierarchical harmonization (in contrast to egalitarian harmony) and familism. Confucianism conceptualizes people in terms of vertical relationships. A hierarchy of duties and relationships is specified for everyone, from the highest to the lowest person. A person's adherence to his or her proper role and a recognition of his or her place in the hierarchy is important, and part of this role is to obey his or her superior. Social stability and harmony are believed to depend on the observance of these relationships (M. Kim 1991, p. 33). Familism is another notable component of Confucian culture. In familism, the father-son paternalistic relationship is extended to others, such as teachers, superiors, and leaders, who in turn accept parent-like authority and responsibility for subordinates, while subordinates in turn tend to accept the views and ideas of their leaders, believing that their leaders have accumulated more wisdom than they have (Paik, 1990). They also think of work as an extension of family relations and are loyal to organizations and leaders. These tendencies lead to a collectivist orientation.

Given these Confucian cultural components, it might be assumed that Korean civil servants have cultural orientations close to hierarchical and collectivist orientations. Additionally, the unique relationship between political power and bureaucracy that has characterized Korean politics and public administration for a considerable period of time underwrites civil servants' belief that loyalty to politicians, including the president, is the appropriate bureaucratic response to directives from above. Civil servants played a leading role in South Korea's rapid and sustained economic growth, which began in the 1960s and continued over the course of several decades. However, civil servants were only able to occupy such a position under the auspices and supervision of the powerful presidents who ruled for nearly three decades prior to the democratization that began in the late 1980s (Paik, 1991). These authoritarian presidents weakened the power of countervailing political forces, such as the legislature and political parties, and the power of civil society. Under these circumstances, civil servants were naturally more sensitive to the wishes of the president and his political appointees than to the wishes of other political actors, including the public (Jun & Park, 2001).

Although civilian presidents have been elected since 1994, the legacy of the authoritarian presidency is strong. Reform-minded democratically elected civilian presidents have pushed through various reforms via political appointees to the bureaucracy. Taking these administrative practices for granted, civil servants have remained committed to implementing policies that are consistent with the vision of the president (Jun & Park, 2001, p. 7; Park, 2012, p. 145).

Considering the bureaucratic history of South Korea, one might expect Korean civil servants to view themselves as subordinate and neutral agents. Both the cultural and political characteristics of Korean society could lead to the assumption that Korean civil servants are accustomed to political responsiveness as a duty of political neutrality. However, with continued recent industrialization, South Korea has been rapidly evolving into a more democratic society. As a result of this process, citizens with stronger democratic values are beginning to expect civil servants to be proactive professionals or representatives.

In addition, Korean civil servants have been extensively exposed to the liberalism and globalization of the last two decades. These political and cultural changes might have weakened the traditional bureaucratic ethos that venerated hierarchy and obedience among civil servants. In fact, our study was prompted by our suspicion that these new political and cultural influences may have led Korean civil servants to have revised their perceptions of and responses to their duty of political neutrality.

RESEARCH FOCUS AND METHODS

This study examines the underlying assumptions in the scholarly literature regarding the bureaucratic responses to the dilemma of political neutrality in South Korea using the model depicted in figure 1. One important area of interest of this investigation was whether the perceptions of Korean civil servants with respect to political neutrality are indeed consistent with the traditional political and cultural characteristics of South Korea. However, our primary aim was to uncover the pattern of responses of Korean civil servants to the dilemma of political neutrality in relation to their cultural orientations and role perceptions.

For this purpose, we distributed a questionnaire to a convenience sample of 300 civil servants from 10 ministries in South Korea. A total of 187 respondents returned usable questionnaires over a period of three months. The characteristics of the respondents are shown in table 1. Most respondents are males in their early 40s, on average. Their average length of service is 180 months. Most are college graduates. Their ranks are 36%, 25%, and 28% for grades 4, 5, 6 and lower, respectively.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Demographic Characteristics	Sample
number of cases	187
percentage of male to female	71/26
average age	43
average tenure in months	180
percentage that have completed an undergraduate degree	94.6
percentage of rank 4/5/under 6	36/25/28

Independent Variables: Cultural Orientation and Role Perception

We tested four hypotheses to explore the influence of the cultural orientation and role perceptions of civil servants on their responses to the dilemma of political neutrality. Respondents' cultural orientations were measured using Triandis and Gelfand's (1998) four types of cultural orientation: horizontal individualism, vertical individualism, horizontal collectivism, and vertical collectivism; we classified the cultural orientations of individuals as either individualist or collectivist and then divided them into horizontal and vertical dimensions. Horizontal individualists see themselves as autonomous and believe that equality among individuals is

important. Vertical individualists, by contrast, acknowledge and accept inequality among individuals while regarding themselves as free. Horizontal collectivists consider their identity to be defined by their group membership, but they believe that all members are all equal. Finally, vertical collectivists also see their identity in terms of group membership, but they willingly accept inequalities or hierarchies within the group. Triandis and Gelfland developed 16 items to measure these cultural orientations—four items for each of the four cultural orientations. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each item on a 9-point scale (1=never or definitely no, 9=always or definitely yes). As shown in table 2, horizontal individualism, vertical individualism, horizontal collectivism, and vertical collectivism were measured for each of the four items.

Table 2. Variables and Items

Variables	Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Horizontal Individualism	I'd rather depend on myself than others. I rely on myself most of the time; I rarely rely on others. I often do my own thing. My personal identity, independent of others, is very important to me.	.676
Vertical Individualism	It is important that I do my job better than others. Winning is everything. Competition is the law of nature. When another person does better than I do, I get tense and aroused.	.755
Horizontal Collectivism	If a coworker gets a prize, I feel proud. The well-being of my coworkers is important to me. To me, pleasure is spending time with others. I feel good when I cooperate with others.	.869
Vertical Collectivism	Parents and children must stay together as much as possible. It is my duty to take care of my family, even when I have to sacrifice what I want. Family members should stick together, no matter what sacrifices are required. It is important to me that I respect the decisions made by the groups I am a member of.	.756
Subordinate	My first priority is to faithfully execute directives from superiors or higher authorities. My core role is to enthusiastically and faithfully execute the ruling government's policies.	.70
Neutral agent	My first priority is to enforce the law strictly. In my role as a civil servant, it is most important to fully implement the legislative policies of the National Assembly.	.695
Expert	My first priority is to do my job professionally based on my knowledge and experience. In my role as a civil servant, it is most important that I trust my professional judgment and do my job so as to promote the public interest.	.808

Representative	My first priority is to do my job, taking into account the opinions of various stakeholders. In my role as a civil servant, it is most important that I respond equally to all people and rely the social demands made by various stakeholders.	.87
Exit	In a hypothetical situation, you receive a directive from a superior reflecting the political position of the incumbent government in relation to your work, but the directive is significantly inconsistent with your professional judgment, and you are concerned about the results of implementing it. What would you and your colleagues do in such a situation? I would seek a change in the duties or attempt to change job positions to escape from the situation.	-
Voice	I would actively express my opinions or explain the injustice of the directive to my superior and attempt to persuade him or her.	-
Neglect	I would postpone the full-fledged implementation of the directive or passively execute it at a level that was sufficient to avoid serious problems.	-
Loyalty	I would trust the superior or the higher authority and follow the directive.	-

Four factors were derived from a factor analysis, and all items were classified by cultural orientation. All factors have eigenvalues greater than 1 (horizontal individualism=4.587, vertical individualism=2.657, horizontal collectivism=1.712, vertical collectivism=1.207). Using the Keyer-Meiser-Olkin and Bartlett’s tests, we found that all factors were valid (KMO=.783, Bartlett’s test $\chi^2=1168.511$, $df=120$, $sig.=.000$). In addition, as shown in table 2, the Cronbach’s alpha values are all greater than 0.6, showing that they are reliable.

Meanwhile, following Romzek’s (2000) classification, we classified the perceptions of civil servants of their roles into four types: subordinate, agent, expert, and representative. As table 2 shows, each role was measured using two items. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement using a 7-point scale (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree). The Cronbach’s alpha values are all greater than 0.5, indicating reliability.

Dependent Variables: Responses

To create dependent variables in the form of responses to survey items, we constructed a scenario through which to examine the choices civil servants would make when faced with a dilemma of political neutrality. It is a hypothetical situation in which a civil servant receives a directive from a superior reflecting the political position of the incumbent government; the directive is significantly inconsistent with his or her professional judgment, and he or she is concerned about what the effects would be of implementing it. Respondents were asked what they and their colleagues would do in such a situation and were asked to indicate to what

extent they agreed or disagreed with each of the four strategies we have outlined—exit, voice, neglect, loyalty—using a seven-point scale (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree).

Hypotheses

What follows are hypotheses derived from the variables based on the conceptual framework (figure 1) and based on the situation in which a civil servant is faced with the dilemma of political neutrality.

Our first hypothesis is that if a civil servant has a strong vertical collectivist orientation, he or she will show greater agreement with the loyalty response. Vertical collectivists willingly accept the inequalities resulting from the hierarchy within their group while valuing their membership in a group; thus, they are highly likely to show a submissive attitude (loyalty) toward the directives of their superiors even when those directives are inconsistent with their own judgment. Our second hypothesis is that if a civil servant has a strong horizontal individualist orientation, he or she will show greater agreement with the voice response. Horizontal individualists tend to stress equality among members of their group while valuing their autonomy; thus, they are likely to actively speak their mind and to raise objections to directives of their superiors that are inconsistent with their judgment. Our third hypothesis is that the more a civil servant perceives his or her core role to be that of a subordinate or an neutral agent, the greater his or her agreement will be with the loyalty response. (In the case of vertical individualism and horizontal collectivism, the relationship between cultural orientation and response is ambiguous, and we do not offer a hypothesis here about this relationship.) The more civil servants emphasize the hierarchy of their group or the enforcement of organizational rules and procedures, the greater the likelihood that they will obey their superiors, despite their disagreement with them, and so our fourth hypothesis is that the more a civil servant perceives his or her core role to be that of an expert or a representative, the greater his or her agreement will be with the voice response; that is, they will be more likely to voice their opinions about directives that are inconsistent with their own judgment and to persuade the superiors that the decision is ill advised.

We tested these four hypotheses to explore the influence of the cultural orientation and role perception of civil servants on their responses to the dilemma of political neutrality.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Statistics

Results of descriptive statistics regarding the cultural orientation of civil servants and their perceived roles are as follows: respondents scored highest with respect to horizontal collectivism (mean 6.84), followed by horizontal individualism (mean 6.64), vertical collectivism (mean 6.59), and vertical individualism (mean 5.36) (see table 3). The analysis of the role perception of respondents suggests that the most strongly perceived role is that of neutral agent (mean 5.54), followed by expert and representative (mean 5.48, respectively), and then subordinate (mean 5.17). Last, respondents indicate that the most common response of themselves and their colleagues to the dilemma of political neutrality would be voice (mean 4.53), followed by loyalty (mean 4.16), neglect (mean 4.01), and exit (mean 3.43). Though the difference in the means among response variables is relatively small, civil servants preferred the voice response to the loyalty response.

Table 3. Results of Descriptive Statistical Analysis

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation
Horizontal Individualism	6.64	.181
Vertical Individualism	5.36	1.24
Horizontal Collectivism	6.84	.088
Vertical Collectivism	6.59	.251
Subordinate	5.17	.020
Neutral Agent	5.54	.219
Expert	5.48	.016
Representative	5.48	.011
Exit	3.43	1.34
Voice	4.53	1.36
Loyalty	4.16	1.267
Neglect	4.01	1.272

Table 4. Correlations among Variables

	Exit	Voice	Neglect	Loyalty	Subordinate	Neutral Agent	Expert	Representative	Horizontal Individualism	Vertical Individualism	Horizontal Collectivism	Vertical Collectivism
Exit	1											
Voice	.140	1										
Neglect	.096	-.053	1									
Loyalty	.037	-.168*	-.091	1								
Subordinate	.037	-.168*	-.091	1								
Neutral Agent	-.040	.025	-.043	.424**	1							
Expert	-.027	.185*	-.042	-.023	.245**	.424**	1					
Representative	-.069	.192**	-.210**	.102	.365**	.554**	.388**	1				
Horizontal Individualism	.033	.287**	-.110	-.047	.163*	.394**	.392**	.393**	1			
Vertical Individualism	.121	-.012	.096	.215**	.245**	.148*	.151*	.193**	.264**	1		
Horizontal Collectivism	-.131	.255**	-.139	.069	.363**	.333**	.248**	.399**	.300**	.000	1	
Vertical Collectivism	-.032	.071	-.159*	.298**	.518**	.381**	.200**	.421**	.240**	.345**	.369**	1

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$. Two tailed tests.

The Features of Civil Servants' Responses to the Dilemma

The correlation matrix reveals that the differences in responses to the dilemma of political neutrality may be related to cultural orientation and role perception (see table 4). The voice response was significantly positively related to the role perception of representative ($r = .192$, $p < .01$), horizontal individualism ($r = .287$, $p < .01$), and horizontal collectivism ($r = .255$, $p < .01$), while it was negatively related to role perception of subordinate ($r = -.168$, $p < .05$). The loyalty response had significantly positive relationships with the role perception of neutral agent ($r = .424$, $p < .01$), vertical individualism ($r = .215$, $p < .01$), and vertical collectivism ($r = .298$, $p < .01$). The neglect response was significantly negatively related to the role perception of representative ($r = -.210$, $p < .01$) and vertical collectivism ($r = -.159$, $p < .05$). There was

no significant correlation between the exit response and cultural orientation and role perception. Results of correlations suggest that voice and loyalty responses are closely related to civil servants' horizontal-vertical orientation.

Table 5 presents regression results regarding how respondents differ in their responses to dilemma of political neutrality based on cultural orientation and role perception.

As shown in table 5, the vertical individualist orientation, the vertical collectivist orientation, and the role perception of subordinate were statistically significant factors influencing civil servants to choose the loyalty response to the dilemma. Vertical individualism and vertical collectivism have significantly positive effects on the loyalty response ($p < .1$), meaning that respondents will be more submissive if they have strong vertical orientation, regardless of where they fall on the individual-collective orientation spectrum. The more respondents perceive their core role to be that of subordinate, the more likely they are to be submissive ($p < .01$). If respondents see their core role as being to realize the directives of their superiors in accordance with their place in a hierarchy, they will carry out the directives of their superiors, even if they judge them to be inappropriate. Therefore, results support the hypothesis that if a civil servant has strong vertical collectivist orientation, he or she will have a submissive attitude and the hypothesis that if a civil servant perceives him- or herself to be a subordinate, he or she will exhibit a submissive attitude.

The horizontal individualist orientation and the horizontal collectivist orientation were statistically significant effects leading respondents to choose the voice response. Horizontal individualism and horizontal collectivism have significantly positive effects on the voice response ($p < .05$), meaning that respondents will resist directives they deemed inappropriate if they have a strong horizontal orientation, regardless of whether they are more individualist or more collectivist. If civil servants value equality among members of their groups, they will actively voice their opinions. Such results support the hypothesis that if a civil servant has strong horizontal individualist orientation, he or she will choose the voice response.

Role perceptions of neutral agent and representative were statistically significant factors influencing respondents to choose the neglect response to the dilemma of political neutrality. The more respondents perceive their core role as a civil servant to be that of a representative, the less likely they are to neglect their professional duties ($p < .01$), and the more they perceive their core role to be that of a neutral agent, the more likely they are to neglect their professional duties ($p < .05$). Since the role representative emphasizes the ethical and subjective duties of civil servants, respondents who see themselves as representatives will actively carry out

their duties. By contrast, if respondents perceive themselves to be neutral agents of the law, they will respond to directives by neglecting their professional duties while perfunctorily observing laws. For neutral agents, complying with laws is more important than being loyal to superiors or adhering to what they regard as their professional obligation by voicing their opinions. Therefore, when faced with the dilemma of political neutrality, neutral agents are likely to delay implementation of the directive or passively implement it instead of showing the loyalty response or the voice response.

Finally, the role perceptions of neutral agent and representative were statistically significant influences leading respondents to choose the exit response. Role perception as a neutral agent has statistically positive effects on the exit response when civil servants face the dilemma of political neutrality but see their primary role to be that of neutral agent ($p < .05$). By contrast, role perception as representative has statistically negative effects on the exit response ($p < .1$). It suggests that respondents are less likely to exit when they think their primary role is to be a representative. However, this exit model was statistically insignificant ($p = .172$), and so its reliability is limited.

In summary, our results support three of the four hypotheses we posited regarding the responses of civil servants to the dilemma of political neutrality (our final hypothesis was not statistically supported). When Korean civil servants are faced with a dilemma in which their duty to make professional decisions conflicts with their duty to be political responsive to directives of their superiors, they respond in a number of ways. If civil servants have a vertical collectivist orientation that emphasizes importance of groups and assumes members of a group should accept inequality that follows from the hierarchy of the group, then they follow directives of their superiors, per our first hypothesis. If civil servants have a horizontal individualist orientation that emphasizes their autonomy and values equality among members of a group, however, then they follow their own judgment, in line with our second hypothesis. Finally, the more civil servants perceive their core role to be that of subordinate, the greater their tendency to be submissive to their superiors, as specified in our third hypothesis.

Table 5. Multiple Regression Analysis of Responses to the Dilemma

		Loyalty		Voice		Neglect		Exit	
		β	t score (p-value)	β	t score (p-value)	β	t score (p-value)	β	t score (p-value)
Cultural Orientation	Horizontal Individualism	-.085	-.994 (.322)	.207	2.342* (.021)	-.098	-1.057 (.292)	-.012	-.129 (.898)
	Vertical Individualism	.160	1.854† (.066)	-.103	-1.15 (.252)	.121	1.294 (.198)	.122	1.290 (.199)
	Horizontal Collectivism	-.034	-.395 (.693)	.228	2.556* (.012)	-.034	-.360 (.720)	-.098	-1.036 (.302)
	Vertical Collectivism	.175	1.879† (.062)	-.028	-.287 (.775)	-.151	-1.505 (.134)	-.120	-1.176 (.242)
Role Perception	Subordinate	.332	3.599** (.000)	-.146	-1.206 (.229)	.071	.716 (.475)	-.023	-.230 (.818)
	Neutral Agent	-.035	-.351 (.726)	.128	.456 (.649)	.216	2.039* (.043)	.282	2.618* (.010)
	Expert	-.061	-.737 (.462)	.072	1.067 (.288)	.019	.213 (.831)	-.038	-.417 (.677)
	Representative	-.034	-.360 (.720)	.015	.120 (.904)	-.277	-2.704** (.008)	-.205	-1.975† (.050)
Control Variables	Age	-.025	-.186 (.853)	-.196	-1.40 (.164)	-.284	-1.947 (.053)	-.205	-.400 (.689)
	Gender	.125	1.495 (.137)	.051	.584 (.560)	-.064	-.706 (.481)	-.059	-.551 (.582)
	Tenure	.244	1.859 (.065)	-.014	-.106 (.915)	.090	.636 (.526)	.011	.079 (.937)
	Rank	.148	1.332 (.185)	-.346	-3.015 (0.003)	-.208	-1.731 (.086)	-.148	-1.214 (0.227)
		R ² =.252 Adj.R ² =.191 F=4.148 p=.000**		R ² =.2 Adj.R ² =.135 F=3.078 p=.001**		R ² =.129 Adj.R ² =.058 F=1.819 p=.049*		R ² =.102 Adj.R ² =.029 F=1.4 p=.172	

† p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01

CONCLUSION

It has been assumed that Korean civil servants have a strong vertical collectivist orientation and that they tend to perceive their role to be that of a subordinate, owing to the political and cultural characteristics of the country over the last half century or so. However, the results of this study do not support these conventional assumptions. The respondents' vertical orientation was weak, but their horizontal orientation was relatively strong. In addition, when faced with the dilemma of political neutrality, they preferred the voice response to the loyalty. In the case of role perception, Korean civil servants most strongly perceived their role to be that

of a neutral agent, but they almost as equally strongly saw themselves as experts and representatives. They identified the least with the subordinate role. These findings imply that civil servants in South Korea are perhaps now beginning to break from traditional orientations and practices, such as obedience, loyalty, and faithfulness to political superiors. The analyses suggest that civil servants might voice their opinions more often when confronted with the dilemma of political neutrality if horizontal individualism among them strengthens and if they are willing to play a more active role as representatives in the political system. The analyses thus imply that the responses of civil servants to the dilemma of political neutrality are influenced by their cultural orientations and role perceptions. In terms of organizational management, this result means that the Korean government, which has long been authoritarian, must take measures to build a more horizontal and individualist culture in public organizations to ensure the political neutrality of civil servants. Additionally, in terms of personnel management, measures should be introduced to induce civil servants to respond more actively as professionals and representatives.

However, this study has some limitations. First, it does not consider certain important factors that could affect civil servants' responses to the dilemma of political neutrality, such as the impact of laws and regulations. Second, respondents are likely to advance a self-image in a self-reporting questionnaire that is more of an ideal than a reality. As a result, the findings of this study that suggest Korean civil servants see themselves more as experts or representatives than subordinates and that they favor the voice response may not be borne out in practice. Korean civil servants have been accused of undesirable behaviors such as blame avoidance and organizational silence, and so it is possible that the findings reflect their social desirability bias. Third, the sample of this study was obtained by convenience sampling and does not adequately represent the population. This study is also limited by the fact that it focuses only on South Korea. These vulnerabilities make it difficult to generalize the findings of analyses.

Nevertheless, the results of this study are meaningful. The finding that civil servants' cultural orientation and role perception affect their response to the dilemma of political neutrality has general relevance because it suggests typical ways in which civil servants respond to the dilemma of political neutrality and what affects their response. Our theoretical discussion also has generalizable implications, as we explore dilemmas that civil servants in most countries commonly face in administrative practice. We believe that this study can contribute to understanding and answering the question of how to lead civil servants in the direction of striking a balance between being politically responsive and maintaining their professional autonomy.

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