

Murdoch, Zuzana; Geys, Benny

**Working Paper**

## Instrumental calculation, cognitive role-playing, or both? Self-perceptions of Seconded National Experts in the European Commission

WZB Discussion Paper, No. SP II 2011-110

**Provided in Cooperation with:**  
WZB Berlin Social Science Center

Suggested Citation: Murdoch, Zuzana; Geys, Benny (2011) : Instrumental calculation, cognitive role-playing, or both? Self-perceptions of Seconded National Experts in the European Commission, WZB Discussion Paper, No. SP II 2011-110, Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung (WZB), Berlin

This Version is available at:  
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# WZB

Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin  
für Sozialforschung



Zuzana Murdoch  
Benny Geys

## **Instrumental Calculation, Cognitive Role- Playing, or Both? Self-Perceptions of Seconded National Experts in the European Commission**

**Discussion Paper**

SP II 2011–110

December 2011

**Social Science Research Center Berlin (WZB)**

Research Area

**Markets and Politics**

Research Professorship & Project

**The Future of Fiscal Federalism**

Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung gGmbH  
Reichpietschufer 50  
10785 Berlin  
Germany  
[www.wzb.eu](http://www.wzb.eu)

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Affiliation of the authors other than WZB:

**Zuzana Murdoch**

University of Agder

University of Agder, Department of Political Science, 4604 Kristiansand, Norway

**Benny Geys**

Norwegian Business School (BI), WZB and Vrije Universiteit Brussel

Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Department of Applied Economics, 1050 Brussels,  
Belgium

Abstract

## **Instrumental Calculation, Cognitive Role-Playing, or Both? Self-Perceptions of Seconded National Experts in the European Commission**

Zuzana Murdoch and Benny Geys\*

Most work studying micro-processes of integration – i.e. how agents develop identities and decision-making behaviours within a particular institution – offers explanations based on either instrumental rationality or socialisation. This article proposes a two-dimensional framework that allows analysing under which conditions both logics of social action co-exist. Our empirical analysis employs a unique dataset from a 2011 survey of all 1098 currently active Seconded National Experts (SNEs) in the European Commission, and is supportive of the model's theoretical predictions. We find that a) instrumental cost-benefit calculation and cognitive role-playing (as semi-reflexive socialisation) often simultaneously influence SNEs' (perceptions of their) behaviour, and b) this joint presence of both logics of social action depends on certain scope conditions (i.e., SNEs' education, length of prior embeddedness and noviceness).

*Keywords: Socialisation, rational action, European Commission, Seconded National Experts, survey*

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\* Corresponding author: Zuzana Murdoch, Tel: 004738141054; e-mail: zuzana.murdoch@uia.no. We appreciated helpful comments from Jeff Checkel, Liesbeth Hooghe, Thomas Risse, Jarle Trondal, Michael Zürn and two anonymous referees, and are grateful to CLENAD (especially its president Matthew Snoding) and Nina Bonge (WZB Berlin) for invaluable assistance with the survey. Zuzana Murdoch appreciated the hospitality of the Otto-Suhr-Institute for Political Science at Freie Universität Berlin as well as WZB Berlin, and thanks the E.ON Ruhrgas scholarship programme for financial support. Benny Geys gratefully acknowledges financial support from FWO-Vlaanderen (grant number G.0022.12).

## 1. Introduction

Substantive transformations in the European administrative space are generating a ‘New Executive Order’ in Europe (July 2008 Special Issue of *West European Politics*; Trondal 2010). Amongst others, the rising use of compound procedures in decision-making and policy implementation (Thatcher 2005; Hofmann 2008) fills Europe’s administrative bodies with European and member-state bureaucrats, experts and politicians. Besides raising issues of accountability and legitimacy (Curtin and Egeberg 2008; Hofmann 2008), this also leads to an increasing interplay of structures, identities and interests amongst and within bureaucratic staff, and blurs the boundaries of their organisational affiliation (Olsen 2002). Interestingly, such blurred boundaries are not exclusive to the European administration. In fact, similar transformation processes have been observed in other international organisations such as the United Nations, NATO, NAFTA or ASEAN (e.g., Kydd 2003; Johns 2007).

This changing reality – i.e., (inter)national bureaucrats increasingly becoming servants of several masters (Johns 2007) – has implications for, and raises the importance of, research on bureaucrats’ organisational identities and what affects their decision-making behaviour (Bauer 2012; Hooghe 2012). Traditionally, bureaucrats’ preferences or actions have often been assumed to *either* follow the norms and/or structural cues defining a given organisation, *or* to be guided by goals and cues brought by themselves to the situation (Johnston 2007; Trondal 2007); Arguments based on partial or full socialisation and rational utility maximisation “have been set in sharp conflict with each other” (Bauer 2012: 9). However, empirical analyses based on either approach have been, at best, inconclusive (e.g., Hooghe 2002, 2005; Trondal 2010; Bauer 2012). Moreover, particularly in environments where “organizational boundaries that distinguish members from nonmembers are increasingly less transparent and knowable” to all participants (Bartel and Dutton 2002: 115), the dichotomy between self-interest and socialisation is likely to become insufficient (Bauer 2012; Hooghe 2012).

Consequently, several scholars have taken up calls to abandon the “tyranny of dichotomies” (Olsen 2009: 191; Jupille *et al.* 2003; Zürn and Checkel 2005) and allow for multiple logics of action to influence individuals’ preferences or actions. In such models, different logics of social action have been placed in a researcher-imposed temporal order (e.g., Cowles *et al.* 2001; Schimmelfennig 2005), viewed as independent competing explanations (e.g., Bauer 2012) or assumed to drive individuals’ preferences under specific conditions (e.g., Chong 2000; Hooghe 1999a,b; 2000a,b; 2002). Consequently, hypotheses are made as to the conditions under which one or the other logic of action gains the upper hand. Yet, in reality, it is hard to imagine people who are exclusively guided by, say, environmental expectations and are not affected by private rewards, or vice versa. In this article, we therefore focus on the counterpart to existing analyses, and assess under which conditions both logics of action *co-exist* (and thus simultaneously affect individuals).

Analytically, we combine insights from two neo-institutionalist approaches – Organisation Theory and Rational Choice – to develop a theoretical framework resting on the social mechanisms of cognitive role-playing and instrumental calculation. While the former represents the effects of semi-reflexive socialisation (i.e. internalisation of behavioural roles,

created by formal organisational structures; Egeberg 2004; Checkel 2005), the latter stands for the effects of utility-maximising instrumental activity through evaluation of costs and benefits from given actions. We then calibrate the model using a number of scope conditions derived from the foregoing literature (i.e. SNEs' education, autonomy from domestic organisations, length of prior embeddedness and noviceness). This allows us to derive predictions that go beyond specifying the conditions under which individuals *only* follow organisational role expectations *or only* pursue private goals through utility-maximising calculations, but explicitly aim at identifying conditions under which *both* simultaneously play a role.

Empirically, we analyse data from a unique new survey administered between January and April 2011 to all 1098 currently active Seconded National Experts (SNEs) in the European Commission. Given the characteristics of secondment to the European Commission, this allows analysing individuals with a particularly strong interplay of structures, identities and interests. Moreover, as most studies of bureaucrats' identities and decision-making behaviour rely on survey- or interview-based data of permanent officials (e.g., Hooghe 2005, 2012; Kassim *et al.* 2008; Bauer 2012), it also permits the analysis of a relatively neglected group of bureaucrats (see, however, Suvarierol and van den Berg 2008; Trondal *et al.* 2008; Trondal 2010). The findings, based on a sample of 452 SNEs, support our model's predictions. First, instrumental calculation *and* cognitive role-playing often simultaneously define how SNEs perceive their decision-making. This suggests that theoretical approaches positing them as mutually exclusive miss important aspects of how agents develop identities and decision-making behaviours within a particular institution. Second, this simultaneous presence of both factors depends, in line with theoretical predictions, on specific conditions (i.e., SNEs' education, length of prior embeddedness and noviceness).

The next section develops our theoretical argument and discusses its testable implications. Section 3 contains the empirical analysis, while section 4 summarizes our main findings and presents some avenues for further research.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

### *2.1. Choice and commensurability of theories*

A priori, any attempt to bring together *instrumental action* – driven by the consequentialist logic of optimising individuals (March and Olsen 1989) and central to rationalist theories – and *socialisation* – driven by a 'logic of appropriateness' (March and Olsen 2006) and a key concept of constructivist theories – is challenged by the underlying (meta)theories' ontological and epistemological differences. One way to bridge this divide is to search for terms that are mutually translatable, i.e. commensurable, to both frameworks. While this is, per definition, impossible at the level of abstract meta-theories, "finding ways to understand each other" is more real in the empirically-oriented perspective of *middle-range* theories (Jupille *et al.*, 2003: 17-18; Zürn and Checkel, 2005). Following this view, our model draws on Rational Choice Institutionalism (RCI) and Organisation Theory. Although there obviously are crucial differences between both theories, we will argue that a theoretical dialogue between them is feasible as they concur on the general concept of *strategic optimising*; more

specifically, while in Organisation Theory this optimising refers to the strategic *design* of the organisational structure in order to trigger desirable behavioural roles, in RCI it relates to actors' strategic *use* of those roles.

*RCI*, one of the approaches under the umbrella of Rational Choice Theory, shares this theory's core assumptions of methodological individualism, utility-maximisation and recognition of institutional and/or strategic constraints on individual choice.<sup>1</sup> Especially the latter two assumptions are critical for our analysis. First, while an individual is always viewed as driven by cost/benefit calculations (i.e. 'logic of consequentiality'; March and Olsen 1989), the concept of utility need not be materialist; utility can also be of immaterial nature (Ferejohn 1991; Johnston 2001) and derive from, for instance, social standing and/or influence (Schimmelfennig 2002). Second, while individual instrumental action in RCI is understood to be constrained – or 'bounded' – by the environment, these constraints can be of social, institutional and/or material character (Granovetter 1985). Life in a social environment, for example, constrains agents by the scripts and consistency requirements of their roles (or "framework of appearances"; Goffman 1959: 242; Schimmelfennig 2002). Crucially, however, given the consequentialist logic underlying behaviour, these constraints (i.e. roles' fundamental rules) are seen as "resources for strategies" which can be used to one's advantage (Edgerton 1985: 12-14); thus leading rational agents to engage in "impression management" (Goffman 1959: 238). RCI thus allows for the possibility that normative and/or cognitive-cultural structures influence individual actions, and that agents can use the roles embedded in such structures strategically to achieve, preserve or increase their standing and/or influence (Schimmelfennig 2002).

*Organisation Theory* posits that identities and behaviours of organisational actors are not only defined, but also (de)activated, by specific organisational structures. Structures act as a complexity-reducing mechanism: they deconstruct complex tasks into sub-tasks that can be carried out within relatively independent units of governance (Egeberg 2004). In essence, institutions are viewed as normative constructions that shape the understanding, behaviour and preferences of agents, while agents 'play a role' defined by the organisational structures. Hence, the formal design of the organisation triggers individuals' actions and identities because it induces appropriation of its preferred behavioural role expectations through a 'logic of appropriateness' (March and Olsen 2006). Consequently, identities and decision-making behaviour can easily be (re)moulded through redesigning structural characteristics (Egeberg 2004). This implies that Organisation Theory allows conceptualisation of strategic optimising of institutional structures.

From this discussion, it is clear that Organisation Theory concurs with RCI on the general concept of *strategic optimising*; with the crucial difference that RCI refers to actors' strategic use of relevant roles while Organisation Theory refers to the strategic design of organisational structures. Hence, while the unit of analysis is different, the concept of strategic optimising is commensurable. This establishes that there are fruitful assumptive openings within both

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<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, it differs from this second-order theory by being substantive and domain-specific in character.

theories to conduct a carefully constructed dialogue (Jupille *et al.*, 2003), and implies the feasibility of a (limited) incorporative approach that results in a two-dimensional framework incorporating both underlying logics of social action (i.e., instrumental action and socialisation). Still, given the rationalist nature of the concept of *strategic optimising*, it is important to note that we thereby do *not* impose a rationality requirement at the level of individuals' decision-making or identity-formation within institutional structure(s). Indeed, both instrumental cost-benefit calculators (i.e., the RCI perspective) and role-enactors (i.e., the Organisation Theory perspective) can either be fully structurally determined or retain a possibility to choose their actions depending on the constraints of the 'choice architecture' they face (Hollis and Smith 1994; Thaler and Sunstein 2008). That is, structures can be so strong that both rational choice and role-playing leave the actor only one option, or they can be so indeterminate that rational agents and role-players retain some scope for choosing their actions. The central question, however, is how they choose their actions (should such possibility exist) – by maximizing utility or through logic of appropriateness, or both?

## 2.2. Operationalisation and hypotheses

We now particularise the theoretical framework by characterising specific social mechanisms and scope conditions.<sup>2</sup> We thereby identify two social mechanisms, each corresponding to its relevant social theory of action.

- i) The mechanism of *instrumental calculation* (theory of rational action; Checkel 2005; Johnston 2005) is defined as an agent's explicit evaluation of the social influence that can be gained from their decision-making behaviour. In other words, agents assess the influence that can be gained from their decisions, and settle on those most likely to aid in the pursuit of their private goals and improve their personal benefit (Johnston 2001, 2005; Schimmelfennig 2002). Below, we measure it via SNEs' direct and explicit aim to further their future career possibilities.
- ii) The mechanism of *cognitive role-playing* (theory of practical action; DiMaggio and Powell 1991) is invoked to capture how actors enact organisation-specific roles with a degree of automaticity. The Commission is formally organised along two primary principles (purpose and process) and one secondary (territory) – each with corresponding relevance criteria for role expectations (see Egeberg, 2006; Trondal *et al.* 2008).<sup>3</sup> Hence, its bureaucrats are guided to act *departmentally* (defined by "administrative rules and procedures codified in portfolios"; i.e. department or unit representative), *epistemically*

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<sup>2</sup> While these are specific to the empirical application (i.e. Seconded National Experts in European Commission; see below), the theoretical argument itself has broader applicability. It could also be employed in studies assessing, for instance, the trust-generating capacity of civic engagement (e.g., Geys, 2011) or identity formation in urban gangs or rebel factions in civil wars (Jeffrey Checkel and Michael Zürn, personal communication, May/June 2009).

<sup>3</sup> On the principle of *purpose*, the Commission is sectorally divided into Directorate Generals (DGs). This specialisation activates patterns of co-operation and conflict among DGs along sectoral (i.e. departmental) cleavages (Egeberg 2006) and triggers portfolio (sector), DG and unit identities, roles and decision-making behaviour in employees (Trondal *et al.* 2008). The Commission's principle of *process* – such as administration, legal service, personnel service, and so on – encourages horizontal integration of functional departments, which induces departmental and epistemic (i.e. independent expert) identities, roles and decision-making behaviour. Finally, the secondary principle of *territory* introduces territorially defined logics of behaviour (i.e. national and supranational).



(defined by “professional expertise”; i.e. as an independent expert), or according to *territorially* defined logics of behaviour (i.e. national or supranational; e.g., representative of the Commission as a whole) (see Trondal, 2006: 148). Consequently, and following Trondal (2006), we operationalise the cognitive role-playing mechanism via these four behavioural roles: epistemic, sectoral, national and supranational.

Having defined and operationalised the two main social mechanisms, we finally calibrate the model by considering under which conditions both mechanisms jointly – though not necessarily equally strongly – play a role in explaining bureaucrat’s decision-making behaviour. Such introduction of scope conditions can here be interpreted as placing actors’ behaviour on a *continuum*, rather than dichotomy, between both underlying logics of social action. Note, however, that reference to such continuum reflects the idea that the explanatory power of both mechanisms and their underlying logic of social action lies away from the extreme points (i.e. neither obtains 0% or 100% explanatory power). It does *not* imply that we collapse both concepts into a one-dimensional space where higher *absolute* importance of one mechanism must be accommodated by lower *absolute* importance of the other. Instead, their *relative* importance can vary even though both mechanisms increase, or decrease, in absolute importance.

Guided by earlier research on EU bureaucrats (e.g., Schimmelfennig 2002, 2005; Checkel 2005; Hooghe 2005) and the extensive organisational literature (Gulick and Urwich 1937; Cyert and March 1992), we include four scope conditions: i.e., autonomy from domestic institutions, education, length of domestic embeddedness and noviceness. Clearly, this list is not exhaustive. However, concentrating on central factors brought forward in earlier EU research allows for closer comparability of our findings with such studies.

### 2.2.1. Scope Condition 1: Autonomy from domestic institutions

Organisation Theory suggests that embeddedness in *current* structures can override (pre)socialisation from *previous* structures because *current* structures are more prevalent than *previous* ones (Egeberg 2004). Yet, in practice, this principle of ‘organisational recency’ is dependent on the agent’s age (Johnston 2005), consistency of the effects of current structures over time (see below) and pre-supposes a clear separation of primary and secondary affiliations. The latter, however, is not the case for SNEs. As they work for the Commission while being paid by their home governments (more details on the secondment process below), there is no clear separation of primary and secondary affiliations. When the boundaries of one’s organisational affiliation become blurred in this way, the influence of current structures might be curtailed and may become open to individuals’ cost-benefit analysis of various available roles. If so, individuals’ behaviour can become guided both by organisational role expectations and instrumental calculations.

To assess this possibility, we look at SNEs’ *actual* (rather than legal and formal) autonomy from their domestic administration during secondment. Specifically, the principle of ‘organisational recency’ predicts that the more autonomous SNEs are from their home administration during secondment, the less relevant home administrations’ behavioural role

expectations become. This, clearly, need not directly entail that SNEs start following Commission's role expectations. It might also imply a more central role for the pursuit of individual career options (i.e., cost-benefit calculations taking a more prominent role). As autonomy from domestic institutions thus allows greater leeway for Commission's role expectations and/or individual's career pursuits to shape SNEs' decision-making, we obtain two distinct predictions. First, when autonomy strengthens the effect of Commission's role expectations on SNEs' decision-making, it will do so against the background of persisting rational calculations. Hence, larger autonomy increases the probability that Commission's role expectations and instrumental calculations jointly affect SNE decision-making. Second, the reduced relevance of home administrations' behavioural role expectations directly decreases the probability that such role expectations and instrumental calculations jointly affect SNE decision-making (since, obviously, one element of such tandem becomes less prevalent). Hence, our first set of hypotheses is:

*SH1: Greater autonomy from domestic organisations:*

- a) increases the likelihood that Commission's behavioural role expectations and cost-benefit calculations jointly define SNEs' decision-making behaviour,*
- b) decreases the likelihood that home administration's behavioural role expectations and cost-benefit calculations jointly define SNEs' decision-making behaviour.*

### 2.2.2. Scope Condition 2: Education

Educational institutions are generally viewed as people's first and most intense period of socialisation (Hooghe 2005; Johnston 2005; Zürn and Checkel 2005). In the case of SNEs, one can expect that the nature and institution(s) of their education give them access to professional "enclaves" within international institutions (Egeberg 2004: 8). This might not only facilitate their adoption of specific behavioural roles, but can also increase their awareness of the social and personal value of certain decision-making behaviours from a career-perspective. In other words, education supplies SNEs with initial socialising and strategic short-cuts that are central for their socialisation into, and their instrumental evaluation of, behavioural role expectations. Crucial, however, is whether or not education moulds SNEs in line with European or national identities and behaviour, whereby the former (latter) is likely to increase the effect of Commission's (home country's) behavioural role expectations (Hooghe 2005). Moreover, as internationally educated people may be more open and have a wider range of career options, career-related cost-benefit calculations may play a more prominent role than for nationally educated individuals; suggesting that the above-described effects will be stronger for bureaucrats with an international education.<sup>4</sup> Hence, we hypothesise that:

*SH2: More 'international' ('national') education increases the likelihood that Commission's (domestic institution's) behavioural role expectations and SNEs' cost-benefit calculations jointly define SNEs' decision-making behaviour. The effect is stronger for 'international' education compared to 'national' education.*

### 2.2.3. Scope Condition 3: Length of domestic embeddedness

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<sup>4</sup> We are grateful to an anonymous referee for pointing this out to us.

As indicated in section 2.2.1., for *current* structures to override the pre-socialisation effects of *previous* structures requires consistency of their effects over time (Egeberg 2004; Hooghe 2005). Length of embeddedness within both structures is thereby a crucial factor (Hooghe 2005).<sup>5</sup> Specifically, longer full and continuous affiliation to previous primary structures makes those behavioural role expectations stickier and harder to dislodge. The resulting strengthening of the importance of domestic role expectations in SNEs' decision-making behaviour makes that any current process of shaping their decision-making will be – at least – susceptible to, and – at most – driven by, instrumental calculations. In other words, for SNEs with longer affiliation to their domestic structures, the adoption of Commission's behavioural role expectations is more likely to go together with instrumental motivations. If, however, role expectations from the current structures fail to re-define decision-making behaviour, the resulting dominance of domestic role expectations also precludes a role for cost-benefit calculations. Consequently, we hypothesise that:

*SH3: Longer previous embeddedness in domestic organisations*

- a) increases the likelihood that Commission's behavioural role expectations arises jointly with SNEs' cost-benefit calculations.*
- b) decreases the likelihood that domestic institution's behavioural role expectations and cost-benefit calculations jointly define SNEs' decision-making behaviour.*

#### 2.2.4. Scope Condition 4: Noviceness

Being a novice – or having no prior relevance criteria to draw upon – can lead employees to be more ready to mimic old hands' behaviour and be more susceptible to a new organisation's behavioural role expectations (Johnston 2001; Hooghe 2005). As cost-benefit calculations always maintain some role in our setting, this implies that the Commission's behavioural role expectations are most likely to have decisive effects on shaping decisions of those SNEs who are novices, while the effect of instrumental cost-benefit calculations will be relatively less relevant. With experience, the latter may come to play a more substantial role as individuals not only learn any given institutions' role expectations, but also when and how they can make strategic use of such expectations. That is, experienced SNEs gain the ability to strategically use their knowledge to engage in impression management (Goffman 1959; Schimmelfennig 2002). Hence, we hypothesise that:

*SH4: Noviceness decreases the likelihood that behavioural role expectations and cost-benefit calculations jointly define SNEs' decision-making behaviour.*

As an overview, we present a visual rendition of the model in Figure 1. The continuum between both social mechanisms, which represents the central feature of our model, is presented by the black, boldface bidirectional arrow. The probability of SNEs being located along this continuum, predicted to depend on our four scope conditions (indicated at the figure's left-hand side), will be analysed in the empirical section below.

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<sup>5</sup> Next to length, intensity is often argued to be essential. As SNEs work full-time in the Commission during secondment, we do not differentiate length and intensity.

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Figure 1 about here

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### 3. Empirical Analysis

#### 3.1. Data

The empirical analysis, as mentioned, concerns national experts seconded to the European Commission on temporary (maximum four years) contracts. During secondment, these bureaucrats (SNEs) remain permanent and fully paid employees of their home administrations, but are formally required to “behave solely with the interest of the Commission in mind” (Commission 2008, Art. 7:1a). What the latter statement implies, however, is less than clear. Indeed, being non-statutory staff, SNEs are not legally bound by the Commission’s usual employment contract or the obligations (and benefits) of its staff regulations, and the relevant corpus of rights and regulations is entrenched in a set of decisions that is only partially published in the Official Journal of the European Union. As connections between SNEs and their Member State of origin are recognised and accepted up to a point by the host institution during secondment, and SNEs must be taken back by their home institution after secondment at a rank at least equal to the one they had prior to their secondment to the Commission, this creates substantial ambiguities regarding SNEs’ institutional boundaries. These ambiguities are important, as they can weaken the automaticity of relevant role enactment and allow for the simultaneous influence of instrumental calculation. Moreover, prior to their secondment, SNEs often obtain formal and informal briefings about life and work during and after secondment to the Commission (Norwegian government 2008; Trondal *et al.* 2008). These briefings prepare them for the Commission’s behavioural expectancies as well as inform them about secondment’s network and career value *before* their own posting. Clearly, this may further weaken the automaticity of relevant role enactment.

The dataset derives from a unique new survey administered between January and April 2011 to all 1098 currently active SNEs in the European Commission. We received 667 responses, representing a response rate of just over 60%. After removing respondents lacking all information necessary for the analysis, the final sample contains 452 respondents (or just over 41% of the total SNE population). Although background characteristics for all 1098 SNEs were unavailable to us, this sample appears quite representative. Respondents cover 32 nationalities (with France, Italy and Germany each representing 6-7% of the sample)<sup>6</sup> and display a reasonable gender (40.4% female) and age distribution (no age group represents more than 6.7% of the sample, and about 55% is between 33 and 47 years old). These numbers very closely match the distribution of Commission permanent staff at the AD level with respect to age (53% between the age of 33 and 47), gender (40.3% female) and nationality (e.g., Italy, France and Germany represent 4.8%, 5.6% and 5.6%, respectively, of

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<sup>6</sup> This exceeds the current number of 27 EU Member States since SNEs can also come to the Commission from, for instance, EFTA member-countries (such as Norway and Iceland) or Turkey.

Commission AD-level staff).<sup>7</sup> As there is no reason to assume that SNEs are substantially different from permanent Commission staff in these respects, this suggests our sample is quite representative of the overall SNE population. Concerning their institutional background, it should be noted that SNEs are over-represented in policy-intensive areas (such as Health or Trade) compared to administrative areas (such as Human Resources), which is likewise reflected in our sample (e.g., DG Health is most represented, covering 6.6% of the sample). Finally, our respondents are fairly evenly spread across the 4-year SNE-term (34% in their first year, 18%, 27% and 21% in years two, three and four, respectively).

### *3.2. Empirical model and operationalisation*

To generate our dependent variable, we first recoded the raw data in terms of dichotomous constructs relating to utility-maximising cost-benefit calculation and cognitive role-playing. Our first social mechanism – i.e. instrumental calculation – is measured based on respondents’ answer to “What were your reasons for becoming SNE?”. We thereby follow Chong (2000) and Hooghe (2005) by focusing on individuals’ private goals and, especially, their career concerns. In our sample, 190 SNEs (35%) state they joined the Commission in order to “advance my career”. Career benefits from secondment thus clearly are perceived by many SNEs as an asset to be striven for, and SNEs are coded 1 on this variable if they belong to this group, 0 otherwise.

Our second social mechanism – i.e. cognitive role-playing – is measured using respondents’ answer to: “In your daily work, to what extent do you feel you act as a representative of [the Commission/your country’s government]?”. The options provided derive from Commission’s formal organisation along the principle of territory (see above). Although the Commission is mainly organised along the principles of purpose and process (see note 3), we focus on the principle of territory here since this provides a national/supranational tension that is unique to the Commission’s formal organisation (compared to national bureaucracies). The answer – provided on a six-point scale from ‘fully’ to ‘not at all’ (see Table 1) – thus captures the strength of SNEs’ national or European “attachment” (Hooghe 2005: 874), and provides a measure for the (self-perceived) extent to which values, rather than utility-calculations, underlie SNEs’ decision-making behaviour (Trondal 2006, 2010). Strong European (national) attachment is thereby seen to support the structuring importance of Commission-specific (country-specific) behavioural roles on SNEs. SNEs are coded 1 if they ‘fully’, ‘very much’ or ‘fairly much’ feel like a representative of the Commission (their home country), 0 otherwise (though all results are robust to coding only ‘fully’ or ‘very much’ answers as 1).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> ‘AD’ refers to individuals at the level of administrators/advisors and higher. This is the most relevant comparison group since SNEs’ positions are generally equivalent to AD-level positions. For more details on Commission permanent staff, see [http://ec.europa.eu/civil\\_service/about/figures/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/civil_service/about/figures/index_en.htm).

<sup>8</sup> One could argue that “acting as a Commission/country representative” not fully captures the importance of Commission’s behavioural role expectations. To check the robustness of our results to the choice of this particular question, we ran the same analysis using the question “When putting forward a proposal, how much emphasis do you put on the best interests of [your home country/the Commission]”? As before, high emphasis on Commission (home country) interests is seen to support the structuring importance of Commission-specific (country-specific) behavioural roles. The findings using this alternative measure leave our main inferences unaffected (see Table 2 below; full details upon request).

Table 1 about here

Jointly, these two variables allow us to code our central outcome variable: i.e. the combination of instrumental calculation with supranational/national role-playing. This variable – referred to as ‘Strat\_Role’ below – obtains a value of 1 when both social mechanisms are present, 0 otherwise. SNEs with a non-zero coding thus are situated along the continuum between both mechanisms and are influenced by both underlying logics of social action, rather than at one of its extremes.<sup>9</sup> Importantly, we analyse the Strategic calculation/Supranational role-playing and Strategic calculation/National role-playing combinations separately, since this allows a more detailed analysis of the conditions under which specific territorial roles co-exist alongside strategic calculations of social influence. Note also that the dichotomisation of both underlying variables implies that SNEs will *either* be at an extreme point *or* in the middle between both social mechanisms. An analysis using more fine-grained coding for the underlying variables would not retain this feature. However, this would induce its own methodological concerns with respect to, for instance, the exact functional form to be imposed on the connection between both mechanisms. To avoid such complications, we retain the simpler dichotomous constructs in the current analysis.<sup>10</sup>

Then, we define measures for our four scope conditions. Specifically, we operationalise SNEs’ autonomy based on a self-evaluation of their contacts with the domestic administration – i.e. “While on secondment, how often do you have contacts with your home institution?” – on a five-point scale from ‘very often’ (0) to ‘never’ (5) (objective data on SNEs’ contacts are, unfortunately, unavailable). We code education as ‘national’ when an SNE did not have *any* education abroad, while it is ‘international’ when (s)he had at least part of his/her education abroad (see also Hooghe 2005). Given that the maximum possible length of secondment contracts to the Commission equals four years, we code SNEs as having ‘strong’ primary, domestic embeddedness when they have held the post in their domestic institutions for at least four consecutive years.<sup>11</sup> Finally, to assess the effect of noviceness, we include the number of years an SNE has been on secondment at the Commission (Hooghe 2005) and an indicator variable equal to one for those SNEs who have *not* been on secondment at the Commission before.

Finally, we add several control variables to minimize potential missing variable bias. Particularly, we control for SNEs’ age (in years), gender (dummy equals 1 if male) and level of education (dummy equals 1 if PhD). Moreover, to account for potential shifts in SNEs’

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<sup>9</sup> Clearly, when the dependent variables have value 0, it may still be that one of the two underlying variables has value 1. To evaluate whether this ‘intermediate’ group affects our findings, we re-ran the analysis reported below excluding all 65 SNEs for which only one social mechanism is present. This leaves our findings qualitatively unaffected.

<sup>10</sup> Still, preliminary analyses employing the full 6-point scale of the cognitive role-playing variables – and turning to an ordered logit model to accommodate the step-wise nature of the resulting dependent variables – induced qualitatively similar inferences.

<sup>11</sup> While the four-year cut-off is theoretically appealing given the length of the secondment contract, cut-offs at three, five or six years of domestic experience do not affect our findings (details upon request).

behaviour in the final year of secondment – similar to final-term effects often observed in legislator’s behaviour (e.g., Besley and Case 1995) – we introduce a dummy variable equal to 1 if this is the SNE’s final year of secondment.<sup>12</sup> This leads to the following regression model (with subscript *i* referring to SNEs).<sup>13</sup>

$$\text{Strat\_Role}_i = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{Autonomy}_i + \beta_2 \text{InternatEdu}_i + \beta_3 \text{Primacy}_i + \beta_4 \text{Novice}_i + \beta_5 \text{FirstSecondment}_i + \delta \text{Controls}_i + \varepsilon_i$$

Where *Strat\_Role* is vector comprising two elements: a) “*Strat\_Role (internat.)*” representing the combination of strategic calculation and supranational role-playing, and b) “*Strat\_Role (nat.)*” representing the combination of strategic calculation and national role-playing. The regression model is estimated separately for both these dependent variables.

### 3.3 Empirical results

Table 2 summarizes our main results, using a logistic regression approach to accommodate the dichotomous nature of our dependent variable. We cluster standard errors by SNEs’ country of origin to account for potential non-independence of responses deriving from the same country – except in columns (3) and (6), where we cluster standard errors by SNEs’ DG or service. In columns (1) and (4), we provide a baseline estimation using only the key variables of interest, while columns (2) and (5) add all control variables. As mentioned, columns (3) and (6) use a different approach to estimate the coefficients’ standard errors, to evaluate how robust our results are to the different distributional assumptions underlying such choices. Finally, column (7) assesses the robustness of our findings to a different operationalisation of the role-playing mechanism: i.e. based on the extent to which SNEs take the interests of the Commission into account when drafting proposals in their daily work (see note 8 for more details). Note that while table 2 directly assesses whether the co-existence of both logics of social action depends on certain scope conditions as hypothesised in SH1-SH4, it does not allow evaluating which social mechanism is the main driver of such effects. Hence, in table 3, we report on a number of auxiliary regressions taking a closer look at both social mechanisms individually (effectively repeating the same analysis for our variables measuring ‘instrumental calculation’ and ‘cognitive role-playing’).

*Tables 2 and 3 about here*

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<sup>12</sup> We experimented with additional control variables including indicator variables for the number of postings an SNE had during his/her current secondment, whether or not his/her work portfolio matched his/her home-country experience, or whether (s)he perceives to work in a politically sensitive area. As these failed to generate significant results, and did not affect the findings reported below, we present the more parsimonious version of the model here (details available on request).

<sup>13</sup> In a previous version of this article, we employed a dataset based on 26 in-depth interviews with SNEs in the European Commission to test the model’s predictions. While this smaller dataset is unrelated to the one currently employed, the results from QCA analysis (Ragin 1987) as well as difference-in-means t-tests and Kolmogorov-Smirnov distribution tests based on contingency tables (cf. Salk and Shenkar 2001) are qualitatively similar to those presented (details upon request). This attests the robustness of our results also with respect to different datasets and methodological techniques.

Our results first of all provide partial support for hypothesis SH1. Particularly, in table 2, we find that SNEs' autonomy from domestic institutions is positively related to the joint presence of Commission's behavioural role expectations and cost-benefit calculations (SH1a), while it is negatively related to the joint presence of domestic institution's behavioural role expectations and cost-benefit calculations (SH1b). While the former fails to reach statistical significance at conventional levels throughout the analysis (column (1) through (3)), the latter is consistently statistically significant well beyond the 99% confidence level (columns (4) through (6)). From table 3, we learn that these effects appear mostly driven by the fact that autonomous SNEs are significantly more likely to profess acting in line with Commission's role expectations, and (statistically insignificantly) less in line with domestic institutions' role expectations.

With respect to hypothesis SH2, we find that the effect of an international education is positive and statistically significant in columns (1) through (3), while it fails to reach significance at conventional levels in columns (4) through (6). This is in line with hypothesis SH2 and suggests that while instrumental, career-oriented motivations are especially important for internationally educated SNEs, Commission's behavioural role expectations simultaneously retain high relevance to their decision-making processes in their daily work. This is further substantiated in table 3, where columns (1) and (3) show a positive effect of international education on SNE's career-oriented motivations *and* the importance of Commission's role expectation, respectively (Note also that both effects are statistically significant beyond the 90% confidence level when using one-tailed tests, which would be appropriate here given our directions predictions).

The effect of SNEs' length of domestic embeddedness (labelled 'Primacy') is negative in column (1), but statistically insignificant at conventional levels. Still, given that such length is critically constrained by SNEs' age, it is important to control directly for age to avoid biased inferences. Columns (2) and (3) show that this is indeed essential. While SNEs' age has a strong negative direct effect (we return to this below), controlling for it in the estimation makes the effect of SNEs' home-institution embeddedness become stronger in terms of both the size of the coefficient estimate and its statistical significance.<sup>14</sup> The effect itself is consistent with hypothesis SH3a: i.e., for SNEs with longer affiliation to their domestic structures (i.e., beyond four years), the adoption of Commission's behavioural role expectations is more likely to go together with instrumental motivations. The reason, however, does *not* appear to lie in the fact that longer embeddedness makes domestic behavioural role expectations stickier (Johnston 2001; Hooghe 2005) – as longer domestic embeddedness *reduces* the probability that domestic institution's role expectations play an important role (column (2) of table 3). Instead, it appears that longer domestic embeddedness strongly increases the importance of instrumental cost-benefit calculations (column (2) of table 3). One potential explanation is that individuals with substantial domestic public-administrative experience are better aware of when and how they can make strategic use of

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<sup>14</sup> This is not driven by the slight reduction in the size of our sample that occurs when adding our control variables. Indeed, replicating the analysis in columns (1) and (4) for same sample as in columns (2), (3), (5) and (6) provides the same results as those reported in columns (1) and (4) (available upon request).



Commission's institutions' role expectations. That is, these SNEs gain the ability to strategically use their knowledge to engage in impression management (Goffman 1959; Schimmelfennig 2002). Even though columns (4) through (6) consistently report the positive coefficient estimate proposed in Hypothesis SH3b, this fails to be significant at conventional confidence levels.

Finally, table 2 indicates that the effect of previous secondment experience is not robust in terms of statistical significance across all estimations. However, SNEs in the early years of their secondment ("Novice") as well as young SNEs are more likely to be characterised by the presence of both social mechanisms. This effect holds for both Commission's (in columns (1) through (3)) and domestic institution's role expectations (in columns (4) through (6)) when regarding SNEs' years of secondment experience, but only for Commission's role expectation when regarding SNEs' age. While the direction of these effects is at odds with our formulation of hypothesis SH4, these results tie in with Hooghe's (2005: 871) finding that instrumental rationality "is most likely to trump socialisation when an individual's career chances are at stake". As adhering to Commission's behavioural roles is required to gain access to useful contacts and legitimise future career demands, new and/or young SNEs – who are much more likely than older SNEs to have come to the Commission in a bid to boost their future career prospects (see also column (1) in table 3) – readily adjust to this 'frame' for, at least in part, instrumental reasons. As a result, it is 'novices' rather than 'old hands' who appear more concerned with, and active in, impression management (Goffman 1959; Schimmelfennig 2002).

As these results are robust to various extensions and alternative specifications (see, for instance, notes 8 through 12 and 14), they strongly support the existence of conditions under which *both* instrumental cost-benefit calculation *and* cognitive role-playing simultaneously influence SNEs' (perceptions of their) decision-making behaviour. This substantiates our theoretical framework's postulation of a continuum, rather than dichotomy, between both underlying logics of social action. Clearly, the mere existence of such continuum is established by the presence of SNEs for which our central outcome variable is coded as 1. Yet, the analysis additionally describes condition(s) under which this is most likely to take place. SNEs described by these conditions thus appear to be – at least in part – strategically using their awareness of territorially defined behavioural roles in the Commission in a way they think best serves their purpose (Goffman 1959; Schimmelfennig 2002). While supportive of our theoretical model, these findings are also intuitively reasonable and suggest a richer, and arguably more realistic, understanding of human behaviour that is likely to be especially relevant when multiple institutional affiliations make institutions' effects upon actors more ambiguous. While such multiplicity of structures, identities and interests lies at the heart of secondment processes analysed here, the increasing complexity of decision-making processes across many international institutions (see introduction) also gives it more general relevance.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Taking up the call to abandon the "tyranny of dichotomies" (Olsen 2009: 191; Jupille *et al.* 2003; Zürn and Checkel 2005), various scholars have in recent years analysed individuals'

preferences or behaviour from a perspective that allows for a multiplicity of logics of social action (e.g., Chong 2000; Hooghe 1999a,b; 2000a,b; 2002; Cowles *et al.* 2001; Schimmelfennig 2005; Bauer 2012). In general, however, such models have aimed to establish conditions under which one logic of action takes precedence over the other(s). In this article, we provided a complementary perspective and focused on the conditions under which *both* instrumental cost-benefit calculation *and* behavioural role criteria (indicating semi-reflexive socialisation) simultaneously affect (micro)integration processes – and multiple logics of social action thus co-exist.

Using data from a new survey of Seconded National Experts in the European Commission, we illustrate that *both* instrumental optimising *and* cognitive role-playing are often simultaneously at play – and that such co-existence predictably varies depending on certain scope conditions. While taking one further step towards solving the puzzle of agents' micro-level integration, our analysis remains open to a number of extensions. From a theoretical point of view, we do not account for the roles of persuasion (e.g., Risse 2004; Abdelal *et al.* 2009) or mimicking<sup>15</sup> – and extensions of the model including these factors should be important aims for future research. From an empirical point of view, incorporating a longitudinal research design would allow important insights into the determinants of the *process* of identity change (Bauer *et al.*, 1998), while moving beyond dichotomous measures would allow more detailed analyses of exact placements and/or movements along the proposed continuum. Also, as all previous work in this field, we rely on survey-based evidence. As this constrains the analysis to individuals' self-perceptions of their behaviour, the link to actual decision-making would be fascinating to explore in future research. One possible approach to fill this gap would be to assess whether different motivations come to the fore under different types of decisions or in different decision contexts (e.g., in crisis situations, or when there is a conflict between the position of the SNE's Member State and that of the EU commission). Finally, SNEs are subject to different operational rules and have different career plans and time horizons compared to permanent officials in the Commission. This creates a particular incentive structure, and future research should analyse whether our results also hold for permanent bureaucratic staff.

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<sup>15</sup> Mimicking differs from rational, strategic adaptation in the sense that there is no means-end calculation involved. In fact, the 'end' itself would be uncertain as it occurs when one does not yet have an idea of what rewards might be reaped. Yet, it differs from cognitive role-playing in that it is not solely driven by institutional structures (Johnston 2005).

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Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

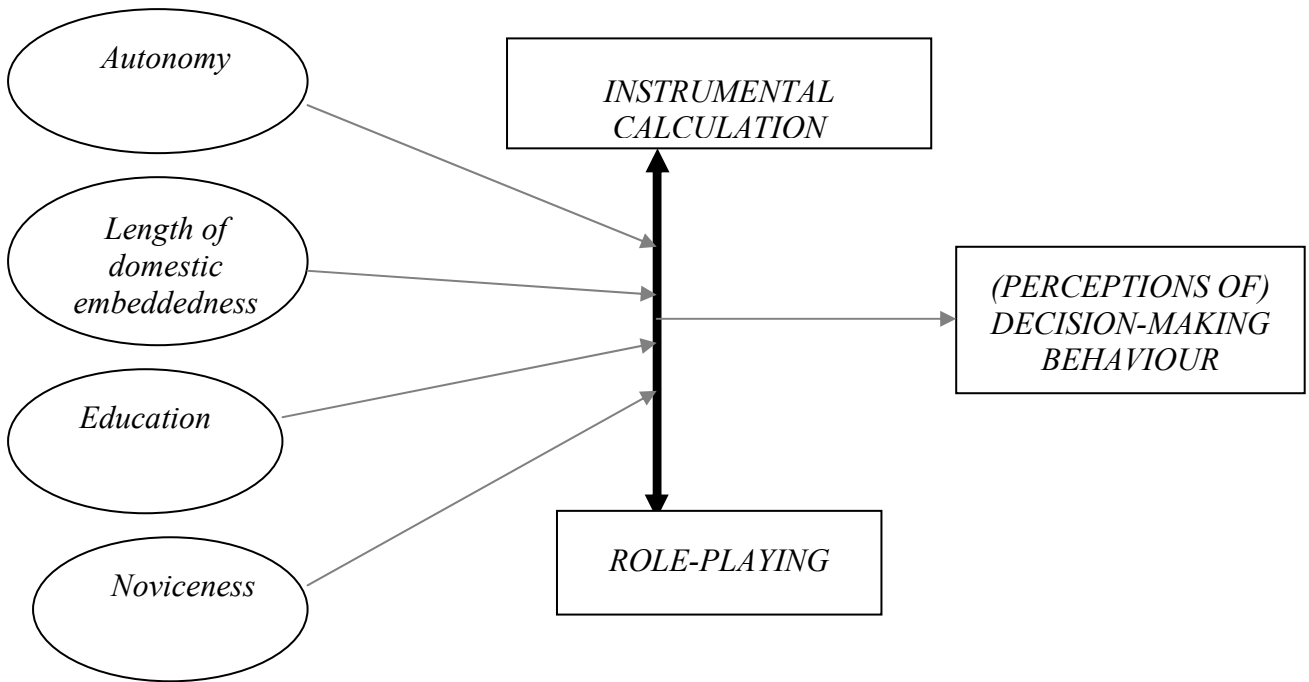


Table 1: Commission SNEs acting as representative of Commission/country

	Fully	Very much	Fairly much	Fairly little	Very little	Not at all
Country representative	0.9%	3.1%	12.4%	28.7%	23.4%	31.6%
Commission representative	19.0%	34.7%	33.6%	8.2%	3.1%	1.5%

Note: Data from authors' own 2011 survey; N=452; Question: "In your daily work, to what extent do you feel you act as a representative of [the Commission/your country's government]?". Answers provided on a six-point scale from 'fully' to 'not at all'.

**Table 2: Baseline Estimation Results**

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
	Strat_Role (internat.)	Strat_Role (internat.)	Strat_Role (internat.)	Strat_Role (nat.)	Strat_Role (nat.)	Strat_Role (nat.)	Strat_Role (interest)
Autonomy (5-point home-country contact scale from ‘very often’ (0) to ‘never’ (5))	0.090 (1.02)	0.067 (0.67)	0.059 (0.62)	-0.519 *** (-4.34)	-0.595 *** (-4.35)	-0.593 *** (-5.26)	0.058 (0.54)
Internat. Education (dummy)	0.553 ** (2.08)	0.676 * (1.88)	0.647 *** (2.90)	-0.049 (-0.13)	0.058 (0.14)	0.062 (0.14)	0.594 * (1.72)
Primacy (1 if <4 years at home institution)	-0.078 (-0.33)	-0.624 ** (-2.48)	-0.639 ** (-2.18)	0.178 (0.73)	0.068 (0.28)	0.070 (0.25)	-0.221 (-0.82)
Novice (year of secondment)	-0.119 ‡ (-1.48)	-0.287 ** (-2.50)	-0.300 *** (-2.69)	-0.086 (-1.12)	-0.199 ‡ (-1.47)	-0.197 (-0.97)	-0.229 ** (-2.06)
First secondment (dummy)	-0.820 ** (-2.34)	-0.739 * (-1.87)	-0.736 (-1.39)	0.237 (0.44)	0.348 (0.61)	0.348 (0.78)	-0.317 (-0.88)
Male (dummy)	-	0.514 ** (2.01)	0.499 ** (2.28)	-	-0.646 *** (-3.04)	-0.643 ** (-2.30)	-0.118 (-0.40)
Age (years)	-	-0.067 *** (-4.97)	-0.067 *** (-4.94)	-	0.021 (1.25)	0.021 (1.41)	-0.041 *** (-2.79)
PhD (dummy)	-	-0.383 * (-1.79)	-0.369 (-1.05)	-	0.225 (0.90)	0.244 (0.43)	0.205 (0.68)
Final year of secondment (dummy)	-	1.186 *** (3.03)	1.225 *** (3.72)	-	0.500 (0.81)	0.496 (0.78)	0.911 ** (2.41)
Intercept	-0.825 ** (-2.13)	2.280 *** (3.48)	2.339 *** (3.28)	-0.117 (-0.28)	-0.345 (-0.40)	-0.352 (-0.33)	0.711 (0.78)
Wald chi <sup>2</sup>	23.03 ***	114.16 ***	93.94 ***	21.44 ***	37.61 ***	92.19 ***	39.53 ***
N	452	417	416	452	417	416	417

Note: Dependent variable is Strat\_Role (1 if both instrumental calculation and cognitive role-playing are present). In columns (1) through (3) the role-playing mechanism is measured using information on SNEs’ acting as “representative of the Commission”, while in columns (4) through (6) it uses “representative of my national government”. In column (7), role-playing is measured using information on the “emphasis SNEs put on Commission interest when putting forward a proposal” (see also note 8). In all cases, t statistics based on standard errors corrected for country-level clustering between brackets (except in Columns (3) and (6), where we cluster at the DG-level), \*\*\* significant at 1%, \*\* at 5%, \* at 10% and ‡ at 15%. Wald Chi<sup>2</sup> attests to the joint significance of all variables in the model.



Table 3: Separate Results for each Social Mechanism

	(1) Career	(2) Nat. Role	(3) Internat. Role
Autonomy (5-point home-country contact scale from 'very often' (0) to 'never' (5))	0.014 (0.16)	-0.074 (-1.09)	0.434 *** (5.38)
Internat. Education (dummy)	0.538 ‡ (1.47)	-0.262 (-1.13)	0.327 (1.36)
Primacy (1 if <4 years at home institution)	-0.562 ** (-2.33)	0.380 * (1.69)	-0.061 (-0.30)
Novice (year of secondment)	-0.242 *** (-2.68)	0.052 (0.52)	0.075 (0.98)
First secondment (dummy)	-0.805 ** (-2.47)	0.070 (0.19)	-0.253 (-0.73)
Male (dummy)	0.330 (1.31)	-0.182 (-0.96)	0.371 ** (2.25)
Age (years)	-0.065 *** (-4.71)	0.000 (0.02)	-0.012 (-0.98)
PhD (dummy)	-0.208 (-0.81)	0.296 (1.21)	0.094 (0.44)
Final year effect (dummy)	0.776 ** (2.30)	-0.624 ** (-2.28)	-0.100 (-0.28)
Intercept	2.677 *** (4.43)	-	-
Wald chi <sup>2</sup>	73.57 ***	14.18	58.82 ***
N	417	417	417

Note: Dependent variables are Career (1 if SNE came to Commission for career-reasons), International Role (SNEs' acting as "representative of the Commission"; 6-point scale from 'fully (0) to 'not at all' (5)) and National Role (SNEs' acting as "representative of my national government"; 6-point scale from 'fully (0) to 'not at all' (5)). In all cases, t statistics based on standard errors corrected for country-level clustering between brackets, \*\*\* significant at 1%, \*\* at 5%, \* at 10% and ‡ at 15%. Wald Chi<sup>2</sup> attests to the joint significance of all variables in the model.