

Crafting Effective Public Management - reflections from central europe



Ronald G Young
February 2018

CONTENTS

Preface

Purpose

Part I

Why government matters to me...

An Overview of the writing about reforming government systems

Part II

Reform gets underway 1965-1995

Notes on key readings

Part III; State Building in "impervious regimes" 1995-2015

Part IV; Back to the Balkans - Why are the new EU member states so impervious to public concerns?

- Training - some advice
- Structural Funds - the value of nothing.....

Part V; Inconclusion

Annexes

Preface

*So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years -
Trying to learn to use words, and every attempt
Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure
Because one has only learnt to get the better of words
For the thing one no longer has to say, or the way in which
One is no longer disposed to say it. And so each venture
Is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate
With shabby equipment always deteriorating
In the general mess of imprecision of feeling,
Undisciplined squads of emotion. And what there is to conquer
By strength and submission, has already been discovered
Once or twice, or several times, by men whom one cannot hope
To emulate - but there is no competition -
There is only the fight to recover what has been lost
And found and lost again and again; and now under conditions
That seem unpropitious. But perhaps neither gain nor loss
For us, there is only the trying. The rest is not our business.*

TS Eliot; The Four Quartets

I've been doing "reform" and "development" for so long that I've just begun to realise how odd if not questionable an activity it is.....preying on people's dissatisfactions and hopes.....and yet more and more consultants, academics and development workers get paid good money to keep churning out reports and books which identify organisational failure....

It doesn't seem to matter whether the change programmes are those inside the private or public sector - they are all controlled by the same type of person in the Corporate Consultancy or national/international Funding Body..... they make the same sorts of assumptions.....use the same sort of models.....and generally fail...

I'm at last beginning to pick up a sense that something is wrong....although there are huge political and financial interests in keeping a sense of dissatisfaction (if not amnesia and bafflement) in so many about the health of our organisations...

[The Emperor has no clothes](#) post referred to some recent critical assessments in both the field of public management and development. And this book on [Reinventing Organisations](#) also seems to be making waves - taking us back to management books of the 1980s and echoing the work of maverick Richard Semmler....

Is it too much to suggest that there is a link here with the "slow food" and the "limits to growth" movements? All signalling a wider revolt against the way advertising, marketing and the corporate media has so insidiously, in the post-war period, developed a collective sense of dissatisfaction??

For the first part of my working life I was an "insider" working to improve a very large (public) organisation - with a strategy and structures which tried to use the energies of a range of people which the organisation's "logic" had trained it to ignore....These were its lower-level officials, its

more junior politicians and, above all, citizen activists whom we brought into new structures we established in the early 80s. I'm glad to say that this sort of work was so strongly accepted and "embedded" (to use an important concept in the change literature) that it has continued to this day in the structures and strategies of the Scottish Government....

But my role fundamentally changed after 1990 to that of an "Outsider" - the European Commission (and the small private "consultancies" it sub-contracts) funded me to appear in capitals and to "effect change"... using increasingly detailed prescriptions and tools which I wrote about with increasing frustration.....What I enjoyed was identifying and working flexibly with people in central asia who wanted to change their institutions for the better - but the rigidity with which EC programmes are designed made that increasingly impossible....

That's when I came across the notion of "[good enough governance](#)" which challenged the push global bodies such as The World Bank were making (at the start of the new millennium) for "good governance" - including the development of indices to measure the extent of progress "developing countries" were making in reaching the standards of public management apparently possessed by "developed" countries.

We need to explore this "good enough" concept in all our thinking but, above all, we need to have an outright ban on externally-imposed organisational change....and a requirement that anybody proposing change should have to justify it to a panel of self-professed sceptics....

"Getting to Denmark" is the rather ironic phrase used in the last decade to refer to one of the basic puzzles of development - how to create stable, peaceful, prosperous, inclusive, and honest societies (like Denmark). We owe the phrase to Francis Fukuyama - of "End of History" and [The Origins of Political Order](#) fame - although the issue is one to which thousands of experts have bent their minds and careers for more than half a century.

Fukuyama's small 2004 book "[State-Building: Governance and World Order in the 21st Century](#)" appeared at the end of a decade which had seen organisations such as The World Bank lead the charge against the very notion of the State. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, after all, had confirmed the anti-state, pro-greed philosophy which had begun to rule Britain and America during the Reagan and Thatcher years and became enshrined in the global ideology which has ruled us since - of ruthlessly transferring state assets to the private domain.

Fukuyama's focus on how state capacity could be strengthened went, therefore, against the grain of a lot of thinking - although his main interest was trying to understand what makes some states successful and others fail? To what extent can we transfer our knowledge about what works in one state to another? Are "technocratic" fixes enough?

We know what 'Denmark' looks like, and something about how the actual Denmark came into being historically. But to what extent is that knowledge transferable to countries as far away historically and culturally from Denmark as Somalia and Moldova?"

In 2011 I presented [a critical overview of these various efforts](#) to a network of Schools of Public Administration in Central and Eastern Europe ([NISPAcee](#)) but was disappointed by the way the members of the network aped instead the "best practice" nonsense from the west....

This is a collection of short reflective notes about the efforts we have seen in the past 50 years to improve the machinery of government - with an emphasis on the role of the EU and its various programmes. They draw on

- my pretty extensive reading of that extensive section of the literature on public administration reform which focusses on British experience (since 1970); but also on that of the various countries of central Europe and central Asia with which I have become familiar since 1991.
- my own experience as a political change-agent for 22 years and then consultant on administrative reform for the past 25 years

With the exception of some 30 pages, they are, in effect, chatty notes on my everyday reading and thinking in a period - after 2010 - when I had basically "hung up my boots".

The text can (with the exception of those same 30 pages) and should be read in conjunction with [No Man's Land - journeys across disputed territories](#) which gives more detail on the various projects which have engaged me since the late 60s and the lessons which I have drawn from them.....

PURPOSE

Books about what used to be called "[the machinery of government](#)" are normally written by academics - with readership limited to students and other academics. In 1991, however, a book called [Reinventing Government](#) caught the imagination of policy-makers throughout the world and energised a huge amount of restructuring of state agencies and indeed their transfer in many cases to the private sector. Coincidentally, the new word "governance" suddenly appeared on the scene.....and "change management" was on everyone's lips....

Verily these were stirring times....

There is an element of the confessional in this little book - The first section of part II was written in the late 1990s as I was trying to explain to a Central European audience the huge organisational changes which had been (and still were) taking place in the UK in the first 30 years of my personal intellectual development (1968-1998). Separated geographically by then for almost a decade from that world, I could perhaps aspire to a measure of....

"Managing Change" may have been at the height of fashion back home but the projects funded by Europe (and America) were not in the business of "catalysing" change but rather "imposing" it...."This is the way it is to be"!! I vividly remembering the ticking off I got from the German company which employed me when, as Director of an Energy Centre in Prague, I offered some ideas for how the centre's work might better fit the Czecho-Slovak context (it was 1992) "We do not pay you to think - we pay you to obey".....And it became obvious to me that these centres (funded by the European Commission) which purported to be helping countries of the ex-soviet bloc adjust to new ways of energy conservation were in fact little more than fronts for the selling of western technology...

Others have documented in the years immediately after 1989 efforts to offer "the social economy" as a relevant model to help deal with the traumatic destruction of the industries and agriculture of these countries..... A "no-no"!!

"Best practice" was the phrase which the British private sector consultants were bringing with them to projects and was one which I was starting to take objection to. It was in Tashkent that I first drafted material to make a point about the relative novelty of the government procedures in Europe which passed for "best practice" (whether in matters of hiring or procurement) and the number of exceptions one could find not just in southern European countries but even in the heart of Europe.....Clearly there was, as writers such as Ha-Joon Chang have documented in the development field, a lot of kidology going on!

Despite such protestations, describing and pushing "best practice" was, however, precisely what such projects were doing those days....."

One of the great joys of living and working in a foreign culture is that it makes one so much more aware of the ambiguity of language and the need to avoid jargon.....

In a sense the eight or so years before my first big project (Tashkent 1999-2002) were largely an apprenticeship as I learned both a new role; new subjects (transition; a national rather than local focus); and a more effective way of presenting ideas

I was the Leader of what was a fairly large team in Uzbekistan for three years - but there was little or no pressure for any real change - which gave me the luxury of being able to write material for the small number of officials who did seem to be interested.

I took to doing regular - and highly interactive - sessions with middle-level officials at the Presidential Academy of Public Administration - in a training centre set up by the project. I learned quite a lot as a result - about European systems of local government; privatisation; and that dreadful thing called "human resource management". I was particularly proud of the little series of publications I left behind eg the 60 page [Transfer of Functions - European Experience 1970-2000](#).

All of this was to prove invaluable to me in the two projects which immediately followed.

In Azerbaijan I was Team Leader from 2003-2005 on a Civil Service project which worked with a network of personnel managers and, very much against the odds, managed eventually to have a Civil Service Agency set up to introduce new-fangled merit-based appointments. It's apparently still going strong.....

The early days were difficult - a civil service Law had been passed by Parliament but no one knew what to do with it.....A previous Team Leader had resigned in frustration. Instead of an office in the prestigious Presidential Office Building, I was offered rooms in the nearby Presidential Academy of Public Administration. There I befriended some staff with whom I started to work on lectures and 3 books..... totally outside my Terms of Reference. I like to think that my method of working won friends and influenced people.... Although it did cause some problems with the European Commission monitors who watched with bemusement...

But the European Office supported me and I began to acquire friends in the President's Office and Parliament who actually encouraged me to campaign publicly - with lots of press interviews and even a television hook-up with the public!

The three books I co-authored were published with European funds and the first on public management and the civil service to be available in the Azeri language. So I was proud of that too....

I had no sooner finished that work than I was flying to Bishkek to take up a two-year project as Team Leader in Kyrgyzstan (2005-7) which helped establish a Local Government Board; did a lot of training of municipal people....and also left three books behind - one of which tells a good story about learning and strategic change - [Developing Municipal Capacity](#) and strongly challenged the prevailing assumptions in the capital about whose capacities needed developing!

Only one of these had been in my terms of reference - [Road Map for Kyrgyz Local Government](#) (2007) which I regard as one of the best things I ever produced...

The more I worked on it, the more I appreciated the potential of this device. The opening page warns that -

A road map does not give a route - YOU choose the route. A roadmap simply locates the key features (mountains, rivers and swamps) you need to be aware of when trying to travel from the A to the B of your choice. So this is not an attempt to force foreign models on the local situation
Another point about a road map is that it cannot cover every changing detail nor tell you how you should approach certain situations - sometimes a large bump in the road or impatience can have fatal consequences!

So a road map is only a guide - local knowledge, judgment and skills are needed to get you to your destination! And, like a map, you don't have to read it all – only the sections which are relevant for your journey!
So don't be discouraged by the size of the booklet – simply dip into the sections which seem most useful to you

Such projects always have an "inception period" (generally a month) to allow the team and beneficiary to take stock of the situation and make adjustments...which even paymasters realise are needed when a President flees the country - as happened in March 2015 as I was completing my round of visits not only to "beneficiaries" but other "stakeholders" such as UNDP, The World Bank and US Aid. I took full advantage of that period (which involved my own flight - back to Baku for a week of safety) to ensure the "maximum feasible flexibility" in the project.

One of the high points of the project for me was when, at a Conference of the municipalities, I invited the participants to play a game similar to "Pin the Tail on the Donkey".

As you will see from the annexes of the Road Map, I simply reminded people of

- the main elements involved in making a successful car trip (features of the car; geography; roads; petrol stations);
- listed the key players in the local government system (politicians; laws; citizens; lobbies)
- invited them to pin the appropriate label on the map

At that point, I decided that it was time to see how the newest members of the European Union were coping.....and I had acquired in a remote village in the Carpathian mountain what (thanks to her labours) became, after 2000, a lovely old house with superb vistas from front balcony and back terrace of two spectacular mountain ranges.....

I got the chance to spend summer 2007 there before being tempted by one of the last Phare-funded projects which bore the highly poetic title - *"Technical Assistance to the Institute of Public Administration and European Integration - for the development of an in-service training centre network linked to the implementation and enforcement of the Acquis"*. The project's aim was to -

" build a system for in-service training of Inspectors and other stakeholders to satisfy clearly identified training needs and priorities in the field of *acquis communautaire* implementation". Five fields were selected by the Institute for the initial development of training and training material - Food safety; Environment; E-government; Consumer protection; and Equal opportunities

The project appointed Bulgarian specialists in these fields to manage this process of designing and delivering training. In six months the project was able to -

- Produce 18 training
- Draft Guidelines for assessing training; how to carry out assessment which helps improved training.
- Produce a Training of Trainers' Manual; and a Coaching Manual
- Run 30 workshops in the 6 regions for 500 local officials
- Draft a Discussion Paper to identify the various elements needed to help improve the capacity of Bulgarian state administration. This offered examples of good practice in both training and implementation.

"Procurement issues" (for which read a combination of Bulgarian and Italian corruption) delayed the start of the project by some 4 months.....and continued to plague us for the remainder of the year. But it was, for me again. A marvelous learning opportunity during which I learned so much about both the fundamental issue of "compliance with European norms" - as well as [how effective training could and should be organized](#).....

OK - enough of the confessional.....

What is the purpose of this little book?????

More importantly, in what sense is it different from any other book on the subject you will read??

Well, for a start, it challenges us to recognize the confused nature of what is available in the field! Is it public administration.....public management...consultancy....good govern"ance"political science.....common sense????????

We have heard too much from the academics, the spin doctors and the peddlers of snake oil from the likes of the World Bank and the OECD (behind which are senior civil servants putting a gloss on their CVs). It is the time for the lower level practitioners to share their uncertaintiesafter all "we have nothing to lose but our chains"the chains on our mind that is....

The book has five sections -

- Part I is an overview
- Part II represents my attempt to make sense of what was happening in the first phase of the reshaping of public management (from 1970) when everything we had taken for granted about the organisation of government was being turned on its head. It builds in a book I wrote in 1999 and blogposts on the lessons of PAR in the last few years
- Part III is a story less often told - of how this was affecting the countries which had previously been in the communist block (and whose "mentalities" are arguably still there). It includes a section of the major paper I presented on the issue to two Annual Conferences of NISPAcee
- Part IV focuses on my more recent experience with training and Structural Funds in south-east Europe. It is a story I don't see other people even trying to tell.....
- Part V

PART I

Two issues have dominated my life - for the first 20 years what we in Scotland initially called (in the early 70s) "multiple deprivation" but which has subsequently become better known as "inequality", Straddling then the worlds of politics and academia, I helped [shape a social strategy](#) which is still at the heart of the Scottish Government's work

In the 1990s , however, I changed both continents and roles - and found myself dealing, as a consultant, with the question of how new public management and governance systems could be built in ex-communist countries which gave ordinary ordinary citizens in ex-communist countries a realistic chance to give vent to their voice and opinions - against the "powers that be" who rapidly were revealed to bethe reinvented apparachniki.....

Until recently I saw these two strands of my life as very separate - but I realize that there is a profound cultural link between the 2 fields of work.

I start by describing the culture of West of Scotland public agencies as I experienced them in the late 1960s and 1970s; then describe the 2 key organisational innovations some of us introduced to one of the UK's largest public bodies in the mid 70s. Readers will forgive me for going into some detail since these innovations have been neglected in subsequent social history.....

In the early days people sometimes asked what, as a western consultant, I could bring to the task of crafting state bodies in such countries. **They didn't realise that, in many respects, Scotland was, until the 80s and 90s, culturally and institutionally, more socialist than countries such as Hungary.** The scale of municipal power was particularly comprehensive in Scotland where the local council still owned three quarters of the housing stock, 90% of education and most of the local services - including buses. Only health and social security escaped its control: these were handled by Central Government. Local government simply could not cope with such massive responsibilities (although such a view was rejected at the time).

This was particularly evident in the **larger housing estates** in the West of Scotland which had been built for low-income "slum" dwellers in the immediate post-war period -

- there were few services in these areas
- employment was insecure
- schools in such areas had poor educational achievement and were not attractive to teachers/headmasters
- local government officials were not trained in management : and treated their staff in a dictatorial way
- who in turn treated the public with disdain

The contemptuous treatment given by local council services seemed to squash whatever initiative people from such areas had. They learned to accept second-class services. Behind this lay working and **other conditions so familiar to people in Central Europe**

- the culture was one of waiting for orders from above. There were few small businesses since the Scots middle class have tended to go into the professions rather than setting up one's own business

- work was in large industrial plants
- for whose products there was declining demand
- rising or insecure unemployment
- monopolistic provision of local public services
- and hence underfunding of services - queues and insensitive provision
- hostility to initiatives, particularly those from outside the official system.
- elements of a "one-party state" (the Labour party has controlled most of local government in Scotland for several decades).

As a young councillor in the late 60s, I made an immediate impact by the way I mobilised tenants about the patronizing way they were being treated by the local municipality, I was lucky because, Labour having lost local power to a group of "liberals", I had the freedom to flay "the system" with all my energies. In a sense I was giving the national liberals a taste of their own medicine since they were just beginning to invent a new form of "pavement politics".....The community groups I worked with were very effective in their various projects concerned with adult education and youth, for example and one of the most powerful lessons I learned was how much many professionals in the system disliked such initiative.

But it was still a bit of a shock to realise how suspicious my own Labour colleagues were of the people they were supposed to support! Instead they echoed the reservations and criticisms of the officials. One of the things I was learning was the subtle and often implicit ways those with power made sure they kept control - whether in the formality of language used or in the layout of meetings.

I drew on this experience when, in 1977 I wrote a major [article about community development](#) - which was reproduced in a book of Readings about the subject in the early 80s

In 1974 I found myself in a lead role as new structures were set up for Europe's largest regional authority; -

At the end of Strathclyde Region's first year of existence in 1976, a major weekend seminar of all the councillors and the new Directors was held to review the experience of the new systems of decision-making. The exhilarating experience a few of us had had of working together across the boundaries of political and professional roles first to set up the new Departments and second on the deprivation strategy was something we wanted to keep. And other councillors wanted that involvement too.

Our answer was "**member-officer groups**". These were working groups of about 15 people (equal number of officials and councillors) given the responsibility to investigate a service or problem area - and to produce, within 12-18 months, an analysis and recommendations for action. Initially social service topics were selected - youth services, mental handicap, pre-school services and the elderly - since the inspiration, on the officer side, was very much from one of the senior Social Work officials.

The council's organisational structure was also treated in this way in the late 1970s (the extent of external assistance sought was that every member of the group was given a copy of a Peter Drucker book as text!) - and a group on Community Development helped pave the way for the first local authority Committee for Community Development. And eventually, in the mid-1980s, even more traditional departments such as Education succumbed to this spirit of inquiry!

The member-officer groups broke from the conventions of municipal decision-making in various ways -

- officials and members were treated as equals

- no one was assumed to have a monopoly of truth : by virtue of ideological or professional status
- the officers nominated to the groups were generally not from Headquarters - but from the field
- evidence was invited from staff and the outside world, in many cases from clients themselves
- it represented a political statement that certain issues had been neglected in the past
- the process invited external bodies (eg voluntary organisations) to give evidence
- the reports were written in frank terms : and concerned more with how existing resources were being used than with demands for more money.
- the reports were seen as the start of a process - rather than the end - with monitoring groups established once decisions had been made.

The achievements of the groups can be measured in such terms as -

- the acceptance, and implementation, of most of the reports : after all, the composition and the openness of the process generates its own momentum of understanding and commitment !
- the subsequent career development of many of their chairmen
- the value given to critical inquiry - instead of traditional party-bickering and over-simplification.
- the quality of relations between the councillors : and with the officials

With this new way of working, we had done two things. First discovered a mechanism for continuing the momentum of innovation which was the feature of the Council's first years. Now more people had the chance to apply their energies and skills in the search for improvement.

We had, however, done more - we had stumbled on far more fruitful ways of structuring local government than the traditional one (the Committee system) which focuses on one "Service" - eg Education which defines the world in terms of the client group: of one professional group and is producer-led. And whose deliberations are very sterile - as the various actors play their allotted roles (expert, leader, oppositionist, fool etc).

As politicians representing people who lived in families and communities, we knew that the agendas of the Committees we spent our time in were not really dealing with the concerns of the public: were too narrowly conceived; and frustrated creative exchange. For this, we needed structures which had an "area-focus" and "problem focus". We were in fact developing them -

- in the neighbourhood structures which allowed officers, residents and councillors to take a comprehensive view of the needs of their area and the operation of local services:
- and in the member-officer groups.

But they were running in parallel with the traditional system.

The structures we developed gave those involved (not least the officials) a great deal of satisfaction. The challenge, however, was to make those with the conventional positions of power (the Chairmen and Directors) feel comfortable with the challenges raised by the new structures. We were aware that our basic messages to professional staff about -

- the need to work across the boundaries of departments
- the need for consultative structures in the designated priority areas
- the capacity of people in these areas

represented a fundamental challenge to everything professional staff stood for. This was expressed eloquently in an article in the early 1980s - "Insisting on a more co-ordinated approach from local government to the problems of these areas, trying to open up the processes of decision-making and to apply "positive discrimination" in favour of specific (poorer) areas challenge fundamental organising beliefs about urban government - viz the belief that services should be applied uniformly, be organised on a departmental basis; and hierarchically"

What we were doing was in fact running two separate systems - a traditional one and a more innovative one which defied traditional lines of authority. The latter was more challenging - but, paradoxically, left with the younger officials and politicians to handle. And, during the Eighties, more "alternative" systems were developed - such as 6 Divisional Deprivation Groups which to whom the Policy sub-Committee passed the responsibility for managing the urban programme budget in their area.

For 20 years - long before the concept of "cultural change" became fashionable in management - I was therefore in the middle of efforts to change organisational cultures. That helped me not only to see the world from other people's standpoints but also to learn new skills of networking.

It was indeed for this reason that the Head of Europe's WHO's Health Prevention Division commissioned me in 1990 to represent her on missions to the Health Ministries of the newly-liberated countries of Central and Eastern Europe (inc Russia).

And, when, a few months later, the EC started its programme of Technical Assistance to these countries (PHARE), I was one of its earliest consultants

The Continental Divide in Public Admin Studies

Of course Africa and Asia were well-frequented haunts of "development consultants" (and had been for some decades) but they were a different breed - with a different language as well as funding. Although I was then one of a small minority, there must now (particularly with the hundreds of billions of EC Structural Funds) be several millions of such "experts" these days who are paid (good wages) to do (short-term) contract work to get public organisations to operate "more effectively".

And academic institutions throughout the world churn out thousands of papers and books every year about the "development work" which is going on.....critical, well-intentioned and often well-writtentake. for example, [this impressive list](#) from the [Effective States and Inclusive Development Research Centre](#) at the University of Manchester.

Curiously, however, only a tiny number of people seem to have tried to make sense of the efforts at "good governance" in central and east Europe and Asia - Tony Verheijen's [Administrative Capacity in the new EU Member States - the Limits of Innovation](#) (2006) and Nick Manning's [International Public Administration Reform - implications for the Russian Federation](#) (2006) were two - and in 2009 a collection of papers was published about [Democracy's Plight in the European Neighbourhood: Struggling Transitions and Proliferating Dynasties](#)

"public administration reform" efforts have been analysed in very different ways in "developed" and "developing" countries respectively.... There is almost **a state of apartheid between the two bodies of literature** which are perhaps best exemplified by using the words "managerial" and "economic" for the literature which has come in the last 25 years from the OECD (using largely the [concepts of New Public Management](#)) whereas the UNDP and The World Bank use the language of "capacity development" and "politics" ([the WB in the last decade certainly](#)) in the advisory documents they have produced for what we used to call the "developing" world (mainly Africa).

In fact probably at least four bodies of literature should be distinguished - which can be grouped to a certain extent by a mixture of language and culture. I offer this table with some trepidation - it's what I call "impressionistic" and raises more questions than it answers -

The Different Types of commentary on state reform efforts

Source	Culture	Occupational bias of writers	overviews which give a good sense of status of reform
Anglo-saxon;	adversarial	Academic Eg Chris Pollitt; Chris Hood, Mark Moore, Colin Talbot	International Public Administration Reform - implications for Russia Nick Manning and Neil Parison (World Bank 2004)
West European;	consensual	Lawyers, sociologists Eg Thoenig; Wollman	State and Local Government Reforms in France and Germany (2006) Public and Social Services in Europe ed Wollman, Kopric and Marcou (2016)
Africa and Asia	clientelist	Foreign consultants Eg Tom Carothers	Governance Reform under Real-World Conditions - citizens, stakeholders and Voice (World Bank 2008) People, Politics and Change - building communications strategy for governance reform (World Bank 2011)
Central and East European	clientelist	Local consultants	Public Administration in the Balkans - overview (SIGMA 2004) Poor Policy Making in Weak States ; Sorin Ionita (2006) Administrative Capacity in the new EU Member States - the Limits of Innovation? Tony Verheijen (World Bank 2007) The Sustainability of Civil Service Reforms in ECE ; Meyer-Sayling (OECD 2009) Democracy's Plight in the European Neighbourhood: Struggling Transitions and Proliferating Dynasties (2009) A House of Cards? Building the rule of law in ECE ; Alina Mungiu-Pippidi (2010)
South European?	clientelist	Local consultants	

People in Central Europe wanting to get a sense of how a system of government might actually be changed for the better are best advised to go to the theories of change which have been developed in the literature on international development eg the World Bank's 2008 [Governance Reform under Real-World Conditions - citizens, stakeholders and Voice](#) and its [People, Politics and Change - building communications strategy for governance reform](#) (2011). The paper by Matthew Andrews which starts part 2 of the first book weaves an interesting theory around 3 words - "acceptance", "authority" and "ability".

Is there **acceptance** of the need for change and reform?

- of the specific reform idea?
- of the monetary costs for reform?

- of the social costs for reformers?

within the incentive fabric of the organization (not just with individuals)?

Is there **authority**:

- does legislation allow people to challenge the status quo and initiate reform?
- do formal organizational structures and rules allow reformers to do what is needed?
- do informal organizational norms allow reformers to do what needs to be done?

Is there **ability**: are there enough people, with appropriate skills,

- to conceptualize and implement the reform?
- is technology sufficient?
- are there appropriate information sources to help conceptualize, plan, implement, and institutionalize the reform?

My previous post had quoted extensively from Sorin Ionita's [Poor Policy Making in Weak States](#). Ionitsa had clearly read Matt Andrew's work since he writes about Romania that

*"constraints on improving of policy management are to be found firstly in **low** (political) **acceptance** (of the legitimacy of new approaches and transparency); secondly, in **low authority** (meaning that nobody, for example, knows who exactly is in charge of prioritization across sectors) and only thirdly in low technical **ability** in institutions"*

A diagram in that World Bank paper shows that each of these three elements plays a different role at what are four stages - namely conceptualisation, initiation, transition and institutionalisation. However the short para headed "Individual champions matter less than networks" - was the one that hit a nerve for me.

*"The individual who connects nodes is the key to the network but is often not the one who has the technical idea or who is called the reform champion. His or her skill lies in the ability to bridge relational boundaries and to bring people together. **Development is fostered in the presence of robust networks with skilled connectors acting at their heart.**"*

My mind was taken back more than 30 years when, as the guy in charge of Strathclyde Region's strategy to combat deprivation but, using my combined political and academic roles, established an "urban change network" to bring together once a month a diverse collection of officials and councillors of different municipalities in the West of Scotland, academics and NGO people to explore how we could extend our understanding of what we were dealing with - and how our policies might make more impact. Notes were written up and circulated.....and fed into a process of a more official evaluation of a deprivation strategy which had been formulated 5 years earlier.

The central core of that review (in 1981) consisted of 5 huge Community Conferences and produced a little red book called "Social Strategy for the 80s" which was of the first things a newly-elected Council approved in 1982. It was, for me, [a powerful example of "embedding" change](#).

It is a truism in the training world that it is almost impossible to get senior executives on training courses since they think they have nothing to learn - and this is particularly true of the political class. **Not only do politicians (generally) think they have nothing to learn but they have**

managed very successfully to ensure that no one ever carries out critical assessments of their world. They commission or preside over countless inquiries into all the other systems of society - but rarely does their world come under proper scrutiny. Elections are assumed to give legitimacy to anything. Media exposure is assumed to keep politicians on their toes - but a combination of economics, patterns of media ownership and journalistic laziness has meant an end to investigative journalism and its replacement with cheap attacks on politicians which simply breeds public cynicism and indifference. And public cynicism and indifference is the oxygen in which "impervious power" thrives!

The last of the assessments for central Europe I have in my files is Mungiu-Pippidi's from 2010 (!!)

and most of the papers in that box of my table talks of the need to force the politicians in this part of the world to grow up and stop behaving like petulant schoolboys and girls. Manning and Ionitsa both emphasise the need for transparency and external pressures. Verheijen talks of the establishment of structures bringing politicians, officials, academics etc together to develop a consensus. But Ionitsa puts it most succinctly -

"If a strong requirement is present - and the first openings must be made at the political level - the supply can be generated fairly rapidly, especially in ex-communist countries, with their well-educated manpower. But if the demand is lacking, then the supply will be irrelevant".

Curiously, however, only a tiny number of people¹ seem to have tried to make sense of the efforts at "good governance" in central and east Europe and Asia. Certainly those who write about administrative efforts in central Europe and the Balkans do so from a commitment to the neo-liberal values which underpin New Public Management (NPM)²

A few years ago, Tom Carrothers - one of the Carnegie Foundation's best writers - [produced a paper](#) which echoes the [concerns I have been articulating](#) since the mid 90s of the assumptions international agencies have been bringing to their well-endowed programmes.

Carrothers gives us eight injunctions -

- recognise that governance deficiencies are primarily political
- give attention to the demand for governance, not just the supply
- go local
- strive for best fit - rather than best practice
- take informal institutions into account
- mainstream governance (ie don't just run it as an add-on)
- don't ignore the international dimensions
- reform thyself

In 2007 and 2011 I presented my critique³ to a network of Schools of Public Administration in Central and Eastern Europe ([NISPAcee](#)) but have been disappointed by the way the members of the network have simply aped "best practice" nonsense from the west....

¹ Tony Verheijen's [Administrative Capacity in the new EU Member States - the Limits of Innovation](#) (2006) and Nick Manning's [International Public Administration Reform - implications for the Russian Federation](#) (2006) were two - and in 2009 a collection of papers was published about [Democracy's Plight in the European Neighbourhood: Struggling Transitions and Proliferating Dynasties](#)

² http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/21366/12/12_chapter2.pdf

³ <http://www.mappingthecommonground.com/the-long-game>

Leaders are supposed to be promoters of their protégés; and clan-based loyalties take precedence over public duties for salaried public officials. Such behaviour can be found not only in the central government but also in local administration, the political opposition, academia and social life in general, i.e. so it permeates most of the country's elites. Classic studies of Mezzogiorno in Italy call this complex of attitudes "amoral familism": when extended kin-based associations form close networks of interests and develop a particularistic ethics centered solely upon the group's survival. This central objective of perpetuity and enrichment of the in-group supersedes any other general value or norm the society may have, which then become non-applicable to such a group's members. At best, they may be only used temporarily, as instruments for advancing the family's goals – as happens sometimes with the anti-corruption measures.

Since Romanian society, like others in the Balkans, still holds onto such pre-modern traits, its members are neither very keen to compete openly nor are they accustomed to the pro-growth dynamics of modernity. Social transactions are regarded as a zero-sum game; a group's gain must have been brought about at the expense of others. This may be a rational attitude for traditional, static societies, where resources are limited and the only questions of public interest have to do with redistribution.

Further Reading

Organ culture in cEE http://193.231.19.17/kozgazdaszforum.ro/admin/upload/3_2014_6_cikk2.pdf

Is corruption understood differently in different cultures? Anthropology meets political science; Bo Rothstein and David Torsello (2013)

http://www.qog.pol.gu.se/digitalAssets/1443/1443545_2013_5_rothstein_torsello.pdf

<http://www.tlu.ee/stss/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/kollmorgen.pdf>

<http://consirt.osu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/CONSIRT-Working-Papers-Series-7-Sarracino-Mikucka.pdf>

<https://www.oecd.org/edu/ceri/The%20Nature%20of%20Policy%20Change%20and%20Implementation.pdf>

http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/tools-and-methods-series-concept-paper-n%C2%B01-public-sector-reform-introduction_en

http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/tools-and-methods-series-reference-document-no-4-analysing-and-addressing-governance-sector_en

http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/tools-and-methods-series-reference-document-no-6-toolkit-capacity-development-2010_en

http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/tools-and-methods-series-reference-document-no-8-engaging-and-supporting-parliaments-worldwide_en

http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/tools-and-methods-series-reference-document-no-9-support-justice-reform-acp-countries_en

http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/tools-and-methods-series-concept-paper-n%C2%B02-supporting-anti-corruption-reform-partner-countries_en

<http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/mn-bb-16-005-en-n.pdf> no 23

When will it ever change?

In which I argue that -

- People were overly optimistic in 1990/91 when they talked of one or two generations being necessary for a democratic culture to take hold in central Europe
- most locals in Bulgaria and Romania are fatalistic about the glacial pace of reform
- but know exactly where the blockages are
- and few external academic or consultants have even bothered to explore what progress (if any) has been made in improving state capacity in this part of the world - in the ten years during which billions of euros of European Structural Funds has been under local control. I

Ralf Dahrendorf was a famous German sociologist/statesman who wrote in 1990 an extended public letter first published under the title "Reflections on the Revolution in Europe" and then expanded as [Reflections on the Revolution of our Time](#). In it he made the comment that it would take one or two years to create new institutions of political democracy in the recently liberated countries of central Europe; maybe five to 10 years to reform the economy and make a market economy; and 15 to 20 years to create the rule of law. But it would take maybe two generations to create a functioning civil society there. A former adviser to Václav Havel, [Jiri Pehe, referred a few years ago to that prediction](#) and suggested that

"what we see now is that we have completed the first two stages, the transformation of the institutions, of the framework of political democracy on the institutional level, there is a functioning market economy, which of course has certain problems, but when you take a look at the third area, the rule of the law, there is still a long way to go, and civil society is still weak and in many ways not very efficient."

He then went on to make the useful distinction between "democracy understood as institutions and democracy understood as culture"

"It's been much easier to create a democratic regime, a democratic system as a set of institutions and procedures and mechanism, than to create democracy as a kind of culture - that is, an environment in which people are actually democrats".

These are salutary comments for those with too mechanistic an approach to institution-building. Notwithstanding the tons of books on organisational cultures and cultural change, political cultures cannot be engineered. Above all, they will not be reformed from a project approach based on using bodyshops, cowboy companies, short-term funding from the EC Structural Funds and [the logframe](#). The European Commission made a decision in 1997 which shocked me to the core - that EC technical assistance to central European and Balkan countries would no longer be governed by "developmental" objectives but rather by their ability to meet the formal legal requirement of the *Acquis Communautaire* (AC).....ie of EU membership

In the mid 90s, the Head of the European Delegation to Romania ([Karen Fogg 1993-98](#)) used to give every visiting consultant a summary of Robert Putnam's [Making Democracy Work - civic traditions in modern Italy](#) (1993). This suggested that the "[amoral familism](#)" of southern Italian Regions (well caught in a [1958 book of Edward Banfield's](#)) effectively placed them 300 years behind the northern regions.

Romania, for its part, had some 200 years under the Ottoman and the Phanariot thumbs - but then had 50 years of autonomy during which it developed all the indications of modernity (if plunging latterly into Fascism). The subsequent experience of Romanian communism, however, created a society in which, paradoxically, deep distrust became the norm - with villagers forcibly moved to urban areas to drive industrialisation; the medical profession enrolled to check that women were not using contraceptives or abortion; and Securitate spies numbering one in every three citizens. The institutions of the Romanian state collapsed at Xmas 1989 and were subsequently held together simply by the informal pre-existing networks - not least those of the old Communist party and of the Securitate. Tom Gallagher's "[Theft of a Nation](#)" superbly documented the process in 2005.

These were the days when a body of literature called "[path dependency](#)" was raising important questions about how free we are to shake off cultural values.... Authors such as de Hofstede; Ronald [Inglehart](#); Frans [Trompenaars](#); and Richard Lewis (in his [When Cultures Collide](#)) were telling us how such values affect our everyday behaviour.

Sorin Ionitsa's booklet on [Poor Policy Making in Weak States](#) (2006) captured brilliantly the profound influence of the different layers of cultural values on political and administrative behavior in Romania which continue to this day. His focus was on Romania but the explanations he offers for the poor governance in that country has resonance for many other countries and therefore warrant reproduction -

- "The focus of the political parties is on winning and retaining power to the exclusion of any interest in policy - or implementation process"
- "Political figures fail to recognise and build on the programmes of previous regimes - and simply don't understand the need for "trade-offs" in government. There is a (technocratic/academic) belief that perfect solutions exist; and that failure to achieve them is due to incompetence or bad intent".
- "Policymaking is centred on the drafting and passing of legislation. "A policy is good or legitimate when it follows the letter of the law - and vice versa. Judgments in terms of social costs and benefits are very rare".

"This legalistic view leaves little room for feasibility assessments in terms of social outcomes, collecting feedback or making a study of implementation mechanisms. What little memory exists regarding past policy experiences is never made explicit (in the form of books, working papers, public lectures, university courses, etc): it survives as a tacit knowledge of public servants who happened to be involved in the process at some point or other. And as central government agencies are notably numerous and unstable - i.e. appearing, changing their structure and falling into oblivion every few years - institutional memory is not something that can be perpetuated"

The booklet adds other "pre-modern" aspects of the civil service - such as unwillingness to share information and experiences across various organisational boundaries. And refers to the existence of a "dual system" of poorly paid lower and middle level people in frustrating jobs headed by younger, Western-educated elite which talks the language of reform but treats its position as a temporary placement on the way to better things.

"Entrenched bureaucracies have learned from experience that they can always prevail in the long run by paying lip service to reforms while resisting them in a tacit way. They do not like coherent strategies, transparent regulations and written laws - they prefer the status quo, and daily instructions received by phone from above. This was how the communist regime worked; and after its collapse the old chain of

command fell apart, though a deep contempt for law and transparency of action remained a 'constant' in involved persons' daily activities.

Such an institutional culture is self-perpetuating in the civil service, the political class and in society at large". "A change of generations is not going to alter the rules of the game as long as recruitment and socialization follow the same old pattern: graduates from universities with low standards are hired through clientelistic mechanisms; performance when on the job is not measured; tenure and promotion are gained via power struggles.

"In general, the average Romanian minister has little understanding of the difficulty and complexity of the tasks he or she faces, or he/she simply judges them impossible to accomplish. Thus they focus less on getting things done, and more on developing supportive networks, because having collaborators one can trust with absolute loyalty is the obsession of all local politicians - and this is the reason why they avoid formal institutional cooperation or independent expertise. In other words, policymaking is reduced to nothing more than politics by other means. And when politics becomes very personalized or personality-based, fragmented and pre-modern, turf wars becomes the rule all across the public sector."

Ionitsa's booklet was, of course, written more than a decade ago but I see nothing to suggest that much has changed in Romania in the intervening period. Since 2007, of course, it has been Romanian experts who have been employed as consultants but they have essentially been singing from the same song-sheet as western consultants

I've used the phrase "[impervious regimes](#)" to cover the mixture of autocracies, kleptocracies and incipient democracies with which I have become all too familiar in the last 27 years; have faulted the [toolkits and Guides which the European Commission offers](#) consultants; and proposed some ideas for a different, more incremental and "learning" approach.

I'm glad to say that just such a new approach began to surface a few years ago - known variously as "[doing development differently](#)", or the [iterative](#) or [political analysis](#).....it was presaged almost 10 years ago by the World Bank's [Governance Reforms under real world conditions](#) written around the sorts of questions we consultants deal with on a daily basis - one paper in particular (by Matthew Andrews which starts part 2 of the book) weaves a very good theory around 3 words - acceptance, authority and ability. I [enthused about the approach in a 2010 post](#)

But there is a strange apartheid in consultancy and scholastic circles between those engaged in "development", on the one hand, and those in "organisational reform" in the developed world, on the other.....The newer EU member states are now assumed to be fully-fledged systems (apart from a bit of tinkering still needed in their judicial systems - oh.... and Hungary and Poland have gone back on some fundamental elements of liberal democracy.....!). But they all remain sovereign states - subject only to their own laws plus those enshrined in EC Directives.... Structural Funds grant billions of euros to the new member states which are managed by each country's local consultants who use the "best practice" tools - which anyone with any familiarity with "path dependency" or "cultural" or even anthropological theory would be able to tell them are totally inappropriate to local conditions.....

But the local consultants are working to a highly rationalistic managerial framework imposed on them by the European Commission; are, for the most part, young and trained to western thought. They know that the brief projects on which they work have little sustainability but - heh - look at the hundreds of millions of euros which will continue to roll in as far as the eye can see.....!!!

Someone in central Europe needs to be brave enough to shout out that "the Emperor has no clothes!!" To challenge the apartheid in scholastic circles....and to draw to attention the relevance of Ionitsa's 10- year old booklet and [Governance Reforms under real world conditions](#)

from Avoiding Best practice

The authors are part of an increasing number of people who want, like me, to "[do development differently](#)" - a few years back it was called.... [political analysis](#)..... [From Political Economy to Political Analysis](#) (2014) is an excellent overview of the thinking process

Although I would express the ideas a bit more simply -

- Fixing on an issue widely seen as problematic
- Getting people to admit that it can't be solved by the usual top-down approach
- Getting wide "buy-in" to this
- Bringing people together from all sectors which are touched by the issue
- Starting from an analysis of where we find ourselves (reminds me of a philosophical colleague known for his phrase "We are where we are"!)
- Avoiding polarisation
- Working patiently to seek a feasible and acceptable solution

Fairly simple steps - which, however, conflict with prevailing political cultures - and not just in Central Europe!!

Close Encounters of the...bureaucratic kind

2018 marks 50 years for me of "close encounters" with "state structures" (or more emotively - "bureaucracy"). Except that I am a political "scientist" - trained in the 1960s in the Weberian tradition - and therefore tend to think "[the exercise of rational-legal authority](#)" when I hear that pejorative term.

Weber - like most classical philosophers and sociologists - was intrigued a hundred years ago by the source of social obedience. Why do people obey the rulers? And he produced the most satisfactory answer - with a famous three-fold classification - traditional, charismatic and rational-legal authority.....

By 1945 the world had had its fill of charismatic authority and settled amicably in the 1950s, for the most part, for "rational-legal" authority - although, by the 1960s, clever people such as JK Galbraith started to mock it and such as Ivan Illich and Paole Freire to critique it.

Toffler's "Future Shock" (1970) was probably the first real warning shot that the old certainties were gone - and organizational change has become non-stop since then.

I've operated at the community, municipal, Regional and national levels of public management - in some ten countries in Europe and Central Asia and have tried, over this half-century, to keep track

of the more important of the texts with which we have been deluged (in the English language) about the efforts of administrative reform.

I do realize that I am a bit naïve in the faith I still pin on the written word - in my continual search for the holy grail. After all, it was as long ago as 1975 - when I wrote my own first little book - when I first realized that few writers of books are seriously in the business of helping the public understand an issue - the motive is generally to make a reputation or sell a particular world view.... Still I persist in believing that the next book on the reading list will help the scales fall from my eyes! So it's taken me a long time to develop this little table about patterns of writing about admin reform.....

Communicating administrative reform

Source	Numbers Active in the field	Who they write for	In what format	With what "Tone"
Academics	Too many!	One another - and students	Academic journal articles; and books	Aloof, qualified and opaque
Journalists	Fair number	The public - and professionals	PR handouts generally; more rarely an article	Breathless; More rarely critical
Politicians	A few	The electorate	PR handouts; more rarely a pamphlet	Critical of past; optimistic of the future
Think-Tankers	A lot	Opinion-makers	Booklets; and PR material	Ditto
Consultants	Even more!	Senior civil servants	Confidential reports; very rarely booklets and even a few books	Celebrating their "product"
Senior civil servants	Few	One another; OECD works	Descriptive papers and reports	Ditto
Global organs (eg World Bank, ADB, WHO)	More than we think	A global network inc Cabinet Offices, Ministers, think-tanks; journalists;	well-researched, well-produced reports and websites	Omniscient, dry
Mugwumps - sitting on fences	Very few	The poor middle-ranking official who is expected to achieve the required change	Toolkits; manuals; roadmaps; notebooks	Open, humorous

The fads and fashions of organizational "reform" include "reengineering", "transformation"even "revolution" and we no longer know who to believe or trust - let alone obey.....

Sometimes I try to make sense of this avalanche of material eg the early part of the [In Transit - notes on good governance](#) (1999) tries to explain and summarise the key development from the 70s for young Central European reformers - or [The Long Game - not the log-frame \(2011\)](#) where I tried

to give a sense of the various organisational models with which consultants were trying to entice central European policy-makers.

19 September

How the attack on the State Harms us all

We're all ambivalent about "the State"....We slag it off with pejorative terms...and often profess to anarchistic and libertarian tendencies....In my formative period in the early 70s I was very taken with the concept of [The Local State](#) whose corporatist tentacles we saw strangling everything in Scotland. Cynthia Cockburn's 1977 book on the subject and the products of the [national CDP Project](#) were the most powerful expression of this critique - although Newcastle sociologists such as [John Davies and Norman Dennis](#) had led the way with their books on "The Evangelical Bureaucrat" and "Public Participation and Planner's Blight".

Local planners had status in those days - I actually taught them for quite a few years - using texts such as [Critical Reading in Planning Theory](#)

I was an active social democrat, consciously using the levers of (local) state power open to me to push the boundaries of opportunity for people [I saw as marginalized and disenfranchised](#)

That period of my life lasted from 1974-90 and is captured in [From Multiple Deprivation to Social Exclusion](#)

Since then, my focus has been more single-mindedly on *the development of institutional capacity in the state bodies* of ex-communist countries. The World Bank reflected the prevailing opinion of the early 90s in asserting that the state should simply be allowed to crumble..... and only came to its senses (partly due to Japanese pressure) with its 1997 Report - [the State in a Changing World](#)

By the time of my exodus from Britain, the country had already had a full decade of Thatcher - and of privatisation. I confess that part of me felt that a bit of a shake-up had been necessary.....but it was George Monbiot's [The Captive State](#) (2000) - 3 years after New Labour's stunning victory - which alerted me to the full scale of the corporate capture of our institutions and elites regardless of political affiliationAnd why did this capture take place? Simply because of a set of insidious ideas about freedom which I felt as I grew up and have seen weld itself into the almost irresistible force we now call "neoliberalism".....But it is a word we should be very careful of using....partly because it is not easy to explain but mainly because it carries that implication of being beyond human resistance....

The sociologists talk of "reification" when our use of abstract nouns gives away such power - abstracting us as human agents out of the picture. [Don't Think of an Elephant - know your values and frame the debate](#) is apparently quite a famous book published in 2004 by American psychologist George Lakoff - which gives a wonderful insight into how words and phrases can gain this sort of power - and can be used deliberately in the sorts of campaigns which are now being waged all around us...

Amidst all the causes which vie for our attention, it has become clear to me that the central one must be for the **integrity of the State** - whether local or national....I know all the counter-arguments - I am still a huge fan of community power and social enterprise. And the state's increasingly militaristic profile threatens to undermine what's left of our trust. But those profiled

in "[Dismembered - how the attack on the State harms us all](#)" are the millions who work in public services which are our lifeblood - not just the teachers and health workers but all the others on whom we depend, even the much maligned inspectorates - all suffering from cutbacks, monstrous organizational upheavals and structures....

I am amazed that more books like this one have not been forthcoming...

Coincidentally, I have also been reading the [confessions of a few political scientists](#) who argue that it lost its way in the 70s and, for decades, has not been dealing with real issues. I do remember Gerry Stoker saying this to the American professional body in 2010 and am delighted that [more have now joined him in a quest for relevance](#)

And I'm looking forward to the publication in a few weeks of [The Next Public Administration - debates and dilemmas](#); by Guy Peters (and Jon Pierre) who is one of the best political scientists of his generation.

For too long, "the State" has been the focus of irrelevant academic scribbling....at last there are some stirrings of change!

1 October

We need to talk about..... "The State"

We need to talk about....the State. Or at least about the "machinery of government" about whose operations I am most familiar - in local and regional government in Scotland from 1968-90 and then in local and national systems of government in some 10 countries of central Europe and central Asia from 1991-2012.

Terminology is admittedly confusing....my first love, for example, was "public administration" since, at one fell swoop in 1968 I became both a Lecturer (officially in Economics) and a locally-elected reformist politician. From the start, I saw a lot wrong with how "public services" impacted on people in the West of Scotland - and I strongly associated with the national reform efforts which got underway from 1966, targeting both local and national systems of government and administration.

Major reforms of the "Civil Service" and of English and Scottish systems of local government were duly enacted - and I duly found myself in a powerful position from the mid 1970s to 1990 to influence [strategic change in Europe's largest Regional authority](#)

But, by the late 70s, national debate focused on "**state overload**" and on "**ungovernability**" and the discourse of private sector management was beginning to take over government.

The 80s may have seen a debate in UK left-wing circles about both the nature of "the local state" and the nature and power of "The State" generally but it was privatization which was driving the agenda by then. "Public Administration" quickly became "public management" and then "New Public Management"....

Indeed by the 90s the debate was about the respective roles of state, market and society. Come 1997 and even the World Bank recognized that the undermining of the role of the State had gone too far.

But it has taken a long time for voices such as Ha-Joon Chang and Marianna Mazzucato to get leverage.....and the space to be given for talk about a positive role for the "public sector".

In the meantime talk of "platform capitalism", the P2P "commons" and automation confuses most of us... and the last remnants of European social democratic parties have, with a couple of exceptions, totally collapsed. **So do we simply give up on the idea of constructing a State which has some chance of working for the average Joe and Jill?**

Because I'm a bit of a geek, I've long followed the discussion about Public Admin Reform and PMR.....trying to make sense of it all - initially for myself....but also for those I was working with....For the past 40 years I have been driven to draft and publish - after every "project" or intervention - a reflective piece.....I

Those I wrote a decade or so ago about the possibilities of reform systems of power and government in central Asia...

And then a British book about "the attack on the state" provoked me into identifying some questions about this huge literature which academics hog to themselves - but which need to be put out in the public domain. I found myself putting the questions in a table and drafting answers in the style required by the fascinating series such as "A Very Short Introduction" or "A very short, fairly interesting and reasonably priced book about....",

The State (at both local and national levels) is a constellation of diverse **interests** and power - to which we can give (rather arbitrarily) such terms as "public", "professional", "party", "commercial" or "security". But, the questions begin.....

- In what sense can we say that something called the state exists?
- What can realistically be said about the interests which find expression in "the state"?
- How does each particular public service (**eg health, education**) work?
- How satisfied are citizens with the outcomes of state activities?
- Why is the state such a contested idea?
- Where can we find out about the efficiency and effectiveness of public services?
- Where can we find rigorous assessments of how well the "machinery of government" works?
- What Lessons have people drawn from all the "reform" experience?
- How do countries compare internationally in the performance of their public services ?
- Has privatisation lived up to its hype?
- what alternatives are there to state and private provision
- why do governments still spend mega bucks on consultants?
- do Think Tanks have anything useful to contribute to the debate?
- whose voices are worth listening to?
- What challenges does the State face?
- If we want to improve the way a public service operates, are there any "golden rules"?

The next post will try to present a table which addresses these questions - with all the hyperlinks which my readers now expect.....

Miniatures and Matrices – 4th in series

I've been reflecting a lot this year on my working experience of organizational change - now equally divided between the UK (the first 25 years) and central Europe and central Asia (the last 25 years). I do so in a coat of many colours - scholar, community activist, politician, consultant, straddler of various worlds (not least academic disciplines), writer and....blogger.

I have always been a fan of tables, axes and matrices - by which I mean the reduction of ideas and text to the simple format of a 2x2 or 6x3 (or whatever) table. It forces you to whittle text down to the bare essentials. Perhaps that's why I love these Central Asian and Russian miniatures so much

So I put the questions posed in the previous post (now 15 in number) into such a table with just 2 columns for responses - "how I felt each question has been dealt within the literature" and "where the clearest answers can be found". Of course, the literature is predominantly anglo-saxon - although the experience covered is global.



This proved to be an extraordinarily useful discipline - leading to quite a bit of adjustment to the original questions. It's a long table - so I'll make a start with the first five questions -

- How does each particular public service (**eg health, education**) work?
- What can realistically be said about the interests which find expression in "the state"?
- How satisfied are citizens with the outcomes of state activities?
- Why is the state such a contested idea?
- Where can we find out about the efficiency and effectiveness of public services?

Basic Question	How extensively has it been explored	Some Good answers
<p>1. How does each particular public service (eg health, education) work?</p> <p>How does it define and deal with challenges?</p>	<p>Each country has its own legal and cultural histories which affect the shape and funding of services. Globalisation and Europeanisation have posed state bodies with profound challenges since the 1980s - with functions transferring from state to private and third sector sectors (and, in some cases, back again) and an increasing emphasis on mixed provision and "partnerships"</p> <p>Thousands of books give analytical treatment of each of our public services - some with a focus on policy, some on management.</p> <p>Measurement and comparison of performance - at both national and international level - have become dominant themes</p> <p>Less emphasis since 2010 on Capacity building and strategic thinking - seen as luxuries for services under</p>	<p>Public and Social Services in Europe ed Wollman, Koprivic and Marcou (2016)</p> <p>The New Public Governance - emerging perspectives on the theory and practice of public governance; ed Stephen Osborne (2010)</p> <p>What are Public Services Good At?; Demmke (2008) Parliaments and Think</p>

	severe pressure because of cuts and austerity...	Tanks occasionally report on strategic work
2. What can realistically be said about the <u>interests</u> which find expression in "the state"?	<p>The 1970s and 80s saw an active debate in political science and sociology about the nature of The State (national and local) - and the public, professional, political, commercial and other interests one could find represented there.</p> <p>As the state has "hollowed out" in the past 30 years - with privatisation and "contracting out" - political scientists became more interested in identifying the narratives which justified the remaining structures (see 8 and 9 below).</p> <p>It has been left to journalists such as Jones and Monbiot to look at the issue of interests - particularly commercial and ideational - of the new constellation of the state.</p>	<p>The State of Power 2016 (TNI)</p> <p>The Establishment - and how they get away with it; Owen Jones (2014)</p> <p>Democracy Incorporated - managed democracy and the spectre of inverted totalitarianism; Sheldon Wolin (2008)</p> <p>The Captive State; George Monbiot (2000)</p>
3. How <u>satisfied are citizens</u> with the outcomes of state activities?	Despite the constant political and media attacks on public services, the general level of satisfaction of the British public remains high - particularly for local institutions	<p>Opinion polls - Gallup, European Union</p> <p>Parliamentary Select Committee on PA eg this 2008 report on citizen entitlements</p>
4. Why is the state such a <u>contested idea</u> ?	<p>In the 1970s a new school of thinking called "public choice theory" developed a very strong critique not so much of the public sector but of the motives of those who managed it. The argument was not a pragmatic one about performance - but rather that politicians and bureaucrats had private interests which they always put ahead of any notion of public interest; and that private sector provision (through competition) would therefore always be superior to that of public provision.</p> <p>Although it was initially treated with derision, it was the basic logic behind Margaret Thatcher's push for privatisation which became global after the fall of the Berlin Wall</p>	<p>Reinventing Government (by Osborne and Ted Graeber) popularised the new approach in 1992</p> <p>Public Choice Primer (IEA 2012) is the clearest justification of this powerful school of thinking</p>
5. Where can we find <u>reliable analyses of the efficiency and effectiveness</u> of public services?	<p>In the UK a powerful National Audit Office (with more than 600 staff) investigate Departments of State (inc Hospitals). It is overseen by Parliament's most powerful Select Committee - the Public Accounts Select Committee.</p> <p>For 25 years local authority budgets in England and Wales were overseen by an Audit Commission which was, very curiously, abolished</p> <p>Attack on public spending "waste" has long been a favourite subject for the media - with quite a few books devoted to the subject.</p>	<p>National Audit Office Public Accounts Select Committee</p> <p>Global league tables for health and education sectors</p> <p>The Blunders of our Governments (2013) The most accessible and comprehensive treatment</p>

The State of the State - part 5

It's strange that "Public Bureaucracy" seems to be of so little interest to the public - since one state alone (eg the UK) can spend no less than 800 billion pounds a year to give its citizens services....

A month ago in [one of this series of posts](#), I actually identified 8 very distinct groups of people (academics, consultants, think tankers, journalists etc) who write about public services - from a variety of standpoints - using a variety of styles (or tones) and formats of writing. We could call them "the commentariat".

It has to be said that little of their material is easy to read - it has too much jargon; it takes 10 pages to say what could be said in 1. Those who write the material do not write for the general public - they write for one another in academia and global institutions. On the few occasions they write snappily, they are selling stuff to governments.

The media do give a lot of coverage to various scandals in particularly the welfare and health services - but rarely give us an article which sheds any real light on what is being done with these hundreds of billions of euros....We are treated, instead, as morons who respond, in Pavlovian style, to slogans.

I am, of course, being unfair to journalists. They write what they are allowed to by newspaper and journal editors and owners - who generally have their own agenda. And who wants to read about the dilemmas of running public services or arguing about their "functions" being "transferred"? Just looking at these words makes one's eyes glaze over!!

It seems that only journals like "The New Yorker" who can get away with articles such as [The Lie Factory](#) - about the origins, for example, of the consultancy industry.

And yet there is clearly a public thirst for well-written material about serious and difficult topics.

Take a book I am just finishing - journalist Owen Jones' [The Establishment - and how they get away with it](#) (Penguin 2014) can boast sales approaching 250,000. For only 9 euros I got one of the best critiques of British society of the past decade.....

I remember being in New York in 1992 and finding a copy of [Reinventing Government](#) (by Osborne and Ted Graeber) in one of its famous bookstores - which went on to become the world's bestseller on government (with the exception perhaps of Machiavelli's The Prince?). I simply don't understand why someone can't do that again with all that's happened in the past 25 years....

In 2015 Penguin Books made an effort in this direction with a couple of titlesMichael Barber's [How to Run a Government so that Citizens Benefit and Taxpayers don't go Crazy](#) (2015) and [The Fourth Revolution - the global race to reinvent the state](#); by John Micklethwait and Adrian Woolridge (2015). I've refused so far to buy the second since it is so obviously a right-wing tome - and the second suffers for me in too obviously being the special pleading of someone who was Tony Blair's Head of Delivery in the British Cabinet and has now reinvented himself as a Deliverology Guru.

Over my lifetime, I've read/dipped into thousands of books about managing public services and organisations generally. About a dozen have made a lasting impression on me - I'll reveal them in a

future post...Let me, for the moment, continue some of the questions I think we should be asking about the state - and our public services -

Question	How has "the commentariat" dealt with the question?	Recommended Reading
6. Has <u>privatisation</u> lived up to its hype?	<p>There is now quite a strong backlash against the performance of privatised facilities - particularly in the field of water and communal services - with the Germans in particular mounting strong campaigns to return them to public ownership....</p> <p>A lot of such services remain monopolies - occupying the worst of all worlds since privatisation creates "transaction costs" (both in the initial sale process and subsequent regulatory bodies) and boosts executive salaries and shareholders' profits - thereby adding significant additional costs. The only advantage is an artificial one - in the removal of the investment cap.</p>	<p>Reclaiming Public Services; TNI (2017)</p> <p>Our Public Water Future (2015 Public services international research unit)</p> <p>Private Island - why Britain now belongs to someone else; James Meek (2014)</p>
7. What are the realistic <u>alternatives to state and private</u> provision of Public Services?	<p>A hundred years ago, a lot of public services (even in the education and health field) were charitable. That changed in the 40s - but the 80s saw the welfare state being challenged throughout Europe. In the UK, government started to fund social enterprises working with disadvantaged groups - new Labour strengthened that work.</p> <p>The 2010 Coalition government started to encourage mutual structures for public services</p>	<p>Social Enterprise - a new phenomenon? (2014)</p> <p>The Three Sector Solution; (2016)</p> <p>Becoming a Public Service Mutual (Oxford 2013)</p>
8. Where can we find rigorous assessments of how <u>well the "machinery of the state" works?</u>	<p>The process of changing the way the British "machinery of government" started in the 1970s and has been never-ending. Although the emphasis during the Conservative period from 1979-97 was transfer of functions to the private sector, a lot of regulatory bodies were set up to control what became private monopolies - in fields such as rail and, in England, water.</p> <p>And, in an effort to mimic real markets, the health service was also the subject of a major division between purchasers and suppliers.</p> <p>Such innovations were eagerly marketed by international consultants - and copied globally</p> <p>New Labour was in power between 1997 and 2010. Its Modernising Government programme was developed with a strong emphasis on sticks and carrots - eg naming and shaming.</p> <p>Curiously, there are far more books describing the intentions and activities of specific programmes of change than assessments of the actual impact on organisations.</p> <p>A Government that worked better and cost Less?; Hood and Dixon (2015) is one of the few attempts to assess the effects</p>	<p>The two clearest and most exhaustive UK books analysing in detail the reasons for and the shape and consequences of the large number of change programmes between 1970 and 2005 were written by someone who was both an academic and practitioner - Chris Foster author (with F Plowden) of "The State Under Stress - can the hollow state be good?" (1996); and British Government in Crisis (2005)</p> <p>Transforming British Government - roles and relationships ed R</p>

	<p>of the British changes of the past 40 years.</p> <p>This OECD paper looks at the earlier period</p>	<p>Rhodes (2000) is a good if outdated collection</p> <p>An International Comparison of UK Public Administration (National Audit Office 2008)</p>
<p>9. <u>What Lessons have people drawn</u> from all this experience of changing the way public services are structured and delivered?</p>	<p>We have now almost 50 years of efforts to reform systems of delivering public services - and the last 20 years has seen a huge and global literature on the lessons.....</p> <p>Academics contribute the bulk of the publicly available material on the subject - with Think Tankers and staff of global institutions (World Bank; OECD; EC) the rest. Consultants' material is private and rarely surfaces - apart from their marketing stuff.</p> <p>Michael Barber was Head of New Labour's Delivery Unit in the early 2000s and has now become a "deliverology" consultant to governments around the world. He shares his advice here - How to Run a Government so that Citizens Benefit and Taxpayers don't go Crazy (2015)</p> <p>Chris Pollitt and Rod Rhodes are 2 of the top political scientists studying the changes in the structure of the state who can actually write well (!) - see Rethinking policy and politics - reflections on contemporary debates in policy studies). Their basic message seems to be that a lot of civil servant positions were disposed of; new jargon was learned; management positions strengthened - but "stuff" (ie crises) continued to happen!</p> <p>The Fourth Revolution - the global race to reinvent the state; John Micklewaithe and Adrian Woolridge (Penguin 2015) is a rare journalistic entry into the field (to compare with Toynbee and Walker; and Barber).</p>	<p>Although the OECD work is funded by the tax receipts of member bodies, their published material is generally behind a paywall.</p> <p>International Public Administration Reform by Nick Manning and Neil Parison (World Bank 2004) had some good case studies of the early wave of efforts.</p> <p>Two of the best collections of overviews are - Public and Social Services in Europe ed Wollman, Kopric and Marcou (2016) AND The New Public Governance - emerging perspectives on the theory and practice of public governance; ed Stephen Osborne (2010)</p>
<p>10. Is anyone <u>defending the state</u> these days?</p>	<p>We have become very sceptical these days of writing which strikes too positive a tone. "Where's the beef?" our inner voice is always asking - ie what interests is this writer pushing?</p> <p>Paul du Gay is a rare academic who has been prepared over the years to speak up for the much-maligned "bureaucrat" and his is the opening chapter of a 2003 collection of very useful articles</p> <p>The Toynbee and Walker book is another rare defence....this time from journalists</p>	<p>Dismembered - the ideological attack on the state; by Polly Toynbee and D Walker (Guardian Books 2017)</p> <p>"The Values of Bureaucracy"; ed P du Gay (2003) - googling the title should give you a complete download)</p>

Why are Academics Blind-siding us?

This is the last part of my tabular presentation of what the commentariat have been saying in the past 50 years about the management and delivery of public services - although it's certainly not my last word on the subject!

This is a subject to which I've devoted most of my life but I have to say that the result of this particular exercise leaves me with the powerful feeling that tens of thousands of academics have been wasting their lives - and the time of their students and of others hoping to get some enlightenment from the writing on the subject

"New public management", "governance", "public value", "new public governance" - the terms, strategies and debates are endless - and little wonder since the discussion is rarely about a concrete organization but, rather, about the system (of thousands of organisations) which makes up the entire public sector.

In the 1990s "the management of change" became a huge new subject in management literature - chapter 6 of my book [In Transit - notes on good governance](#) (1999) discussed the literature on management in both sectors - and the earliest book quoted is from 1987.

In the private sector, change was handled according to the perceptions of each Chief Executive and his team. **But not so in the public sector - where reform was determined at the highest political level and its shape uniformly laid down.**

Academics were slow to get involved - effectively as historians and classifiers.....at a very high level of abstraction....as will be seen from my summary of chapter 4 of [In Transit - notes on good governance](#)

Question	How it's dealt with by the commentariat	Typical Products
11. How do states <u>compare in quality of public services?</u>	<p>"Benchmarking" national policy systems has become an important activity of bodies such as the World Health Organisation (WHO) - until 2000 The Commonwealth Fund is now the main source for a global assessment of Health systems. The OECD does a global education survey.</p> <p>Occasionally efforts are made to benchmark entire systems of public admin</p> <p>"Peer Review" is also a widespread activity within the EC eg this recent one on the Polish educational system</p>	<p>Health systems overview article</p> <p>An International Comparison of UK Public Administration (National Audit Office 2008)</p>
12. Why do governments still <u>continue to pay consultants</u> vast sums of money?	<p>Private consultants now run a global industry dispensing advice to governments which is worth at least 50 billion euros a year. Statistics are not easy to find - but the UK alone spends 1.3 billion pounds a year - see Use of consultants and temporary staff (NAO 2016) - which is actually about half of the figure ten years ago!</p> <p>Some will argue that this is a small sum to pay for good, independent advice to help ensure that public services are</p>	<p>Michael Barber How to Run a Government so that Citizens Benefit and Taxpayers don't go Crazy (2015)</p> <p>Ed Straw's Stand and Deliver - a design for successful government</p>

	<p>kept up to date.</p> <p>The trouble is that no one really knows whether it is good advice. It is a highly secretive industry - with reports seen only by senior civil servants and the odd Minister.</p> <p>Management consultancy in the private sector has been the subject of at least two highly critical studies (Hucynszki; Micklewait and Woolridge) - which suggest a world of senior executives subject to fads and fashions and given to imposing their will on the work force in an autocratic way. This is even more likely to happen in public bureaucracies which have the additional problem of a political layer on top.</p>	<p>(2014)</p> <p>John Seddon's Systems Thinking in the Public Sector - the failure of the Reform regime and a manifesto for a better way (2008)</p>
13. Role of Think-Tanks?	<p>A few Think Tanks have a reasonable track record in this field - generally those who draw on retired civil servants for their insights... eg The Institute of Government</p> <p>The Demos Think Tank was a favourite with New Labour in its early years of the ambitious Modernising Government programme.</p> <p>The Centre for Public Impact is a new body which promises great things from its use of Big Data -We will see.....</p>	<p>Policy-making in the Real World (Institute of Government 2011)</p> <p>Professionalising the Civil Service (Demos 2017)</p> <p>eg The Public Impact Gap (2017)</p>
14. What challenges and choices does the state face in the future?	<p>The focus of these questions has been organisational - there are a couple of important elephants in the room namely finance and technology which are dealt with in other bodies of literature</p>	<p>Governance in the Twenty First Century (OECD 2001) is one of the rare books which tries to deal with future challenges</p>
15. What are the best Toolkits, manuals, roadmaps etc for people to use who want to engage in reform efforts?	<p>Change Here! Managing change to improve local services (Audit Commission 2001)</p> <p>Supporting small steps - a rough guide for developmental professionals (Manning; OECD 2015)</p> <p>A Governance Practitioner's Notebook - alternative ideas and approaches (Whaites et al OECD 2015)</p> <p>OECD Public Governance Reports - Slovakia (2015)</p> <p>I am not a fan of deliverology but.....</p> <p>Michael Barber's How to Run a Government so that Citizens Benefit and Taxpayers don't go Crazy (2015)</p> <p>To Serve and to Preserve; improving public administration in a competitive world (Asian Development Bank 2000)</p>	<p>The Essential Public Manager; by Chris Pollitt (2003) is, by far and away, the best book to help the intelligent citizen make sense of this field</p> <p>Although I'm no fan of the World Bank, 2 titles (from the Development field!) offer the best insights - People, Politics and Change - building communications strategy for governance reform (World Bank 2011)</p> <p>Governance Reform under Real-World Conditions - citizens, stakeholders and Voice (World Bank 2008)</p>

Those who went before....

The field of what is variously called "public management reform", "institutional development" or capacity development now attracts hundreds of thousands of academics and consultants - but, when I started to challenge the local bureaucracy in Scotland in the late 60s there was a mere handful of writers challenging public bureaucracy - basically in the UK and the US.

In the US they were following (or part of) Johnston's Anti-Poverty programme and included people such as Peter Marris and Martin Rein whose [Dilemmas of Social Reform](#) (1967) was one of the first narratives to make an impact - although Illich (*Deschooling Society* 1971) and Freire (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 1968).

In the UK it was those associated with the 1964-66 Fulton Royal Commission on the Civil Service; with the Redcliffe-Maud and Wheatley Royal Commissions on Local Government; and, those such as Kay Carmichael who, as a member of the Kilbrandon Committee, was the inspiration for the Scottish Social Work system set up in 1969.

In the 70s, people like John Stewart of INLOGOV inspired a new vision of local government...and my ex-tutor John MacIntosh with a focus on devolution;even the conservative politician Michael Heseltine had a vision of a new metropolitan politics.....Colin Ward (Tony Gibson)

It was people like this that set the ball of organizational change rolling in the public sector.... tracked by such British academics as Chris Hood, Chris Pollitt and Rod Rhodes - and which have supplied a living first for thousands of European academics who started to follow the various reforms of the 1970s in the civil service and local government; and then the privatization and "agencification" of the 1980s. Consultants then got on the bandwagon when british administrative reform took off globally in the 1990s.

Working on the tables incorporated in the past few posts has involved a lot of googling - and shuffling of books from the shelves of my glorious oak bookcase here in the Carpathian mountains to the generous oak table which looks out on the snow which now caps those mountains..... Hundreds of books on public management reform (if you count the virtual ones in the library) - but, for me, there are only a handful of names whose writing makes the effort worthwhile. They are the 2 Chris's - Chris Hood and Chris Pollitt; Guy Peters; and Rod Rhodes. With Chris Pollitt way out in front.....Here's a brief selection of his most recent writing -

There have been many failures in the history of public management reform - even in what might be thought of as the best-equipped countries. Six of the most common seems to have been:

- **Prescription before diagnosis.** No good doctor would ever do this, but politicians, civil servants and management consultants do it frequently. A proper diagnosis means much more than just having a general impression of inefficiency or ineffectiveness (or whatever). It means a thorough analysis of what mechanisms, processes and attitudes are producing the undesirable features of the status quo and an identification of how these mechanisms can be altered or replaced. Such an analysis constitutes a model of the problem. This kind of modelling is probably far more useful to practical reformers than the highly abstract discussions of alternative models of governance with which some academics have been more concerned (e.g. Osborne, 2010). [For a full exposition of this realist approach to programme logic, see Pawson, 2013. For an explanation of why very general models of governance, are of limited value in practical analysis see Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011, pp11-25 and 208-221]

- **Failure to build a sufficient coalition for reform, so that the reform is seen as just the project of a small elite.** This is particularly dangerous in countries where governments change rapidly, as in some parts of the CEE. Once a government falls or an elite is ousted, the reform has no roots and dies.

- **Launching reforms without ensuring sufficient implementation capacity.** For example, it is very risky to launch a programme of contracting out public services unless and until there exists a cadre of civil servants who are trained and skilled in contract design, negotiation and monitoring. Equally, it is dangerous to impose a sophisticated performance management regime upon an organization which has little or no previous experience of performance measurement. And it is also hazardous to run down the government's in-house IT capacity and rely too much on external expertise (Dunleavy et al, 2006). In each of these cases in-house capacity can be improved, but not overnight.

- **Haste and lack of sustained application.** Most major management reforms take years fully to be implemented. Laws must be passed, regulations rewritten, staff re-trained, new organizational structures set up, appointments made, new procedures run and refined, and so on. This extended implementation may seem frustrating to politicians who want action (or at least announcements) now, but without proper preparation reforms will more likely fail. Endless reforms or 'continuous revolution' is not a recipe for a well-functioning administration

- **Over-reliance on external experts rather than experienced locals.** As management reform has become an international business, international bodies such as the OECD or the major management consultancies have become major players. A fashion has developed in some countries to 'call in the external experts', as both a badge of legitimacy and a quick way of accessing international 'best practice'. Equally, there is perhaps a tendency to ignore local, less clearly articulated knowledge and experience. Yet the locals usually know much more about contextual factors than the visiting (and temporary) experts. .

- **Ignoring local cultural factors.** For example, a reform that will work in a relatively high trust and low corruption culture such as, say, Denmark's, is far less likely to succeed in a low trust/higher corruption environment such as prevails in, say, some parts of the Italian public sector. In the EU there are quite large cultural variations between different countries and sectors.....

I would suggest a number of 'lessons' which could be drawn from the foregoing analysis:

1. *Big models, such as NPM or 'good governance' or 'partnership working', often do not take one very far. **The art of reform lies in their adaptation (often very extensive) to fit local contexts.** And anyway, these models are seldom entirely well-defined or consistent in themselves. Applying the big models or even standardized techniques (benchmarking, business process re-engineering, lean) in a formulaic, tick-box manner can be highly counterproductive*

2. *As many scholars and some practitioners have been observing for decades, there is no 'one best way'. The whole exercise of reform should begin with a careful diagnosis of the local situation, not with the proclamation of a model (or technique) which is to be applied, top down. 'No prescription without careful diagnosis' is not a bad motto for reformers.*

3. *Another, related point is that task differences really do matter. A market-type mechanism may work quite well when applied to refuse collection but not when applied to hospital care. Sectoral and task differences are important, and reformers should be wary of situations where their advisory team lacks substantial expertise in the particular tasks and activities that are the targets for reform.*

4. *Public Management Reform (PMR) is always political as well as managerial/organizational. Any prescription or diagnosis which does not take into account the 'way politics works around here' is inadequate and incomplete. Some kernel of active support from among the political elite is usually indispensable.*

5. *PMR is usually saturated with vested interests, including those of the consultants/advisors, and the existing public service staff. To conceptualise it as a purely technical exercise would be naive.*
6. *Successful PMR is frequently an iterative exercise, over considerable periods of time. Reformers must adapt and also take advantage of 'windows of opportunity'. This implies a locally knowledgeable presence over time, not a one-shot 'quick fix' by visiting consultants.*
7. *It does work sometimes! But, as indicated at the outset, humility is not a bad starting point.*

12 October

What If???

As I suspected, I'm still worrying away at some of the issues raised by the series of posts about the massive changes to our public services in recent decades - and how they have been covered in "the literature". I realize that I left out an important strand of thinking - and that the series leaves the impression of inevitability....

The last post paid tribute to some of the people who, in the 1960s, most clearly articulated the demand for a major shake-up of Britain's public institutions - the "modernization" agenda which initially brought us huge local authorities and merged Ministries with well-paid managers operating with performance targets.

"Scale" and "management" were key words - and I readily confess to being one of the cheerleaders for this. The small municipalities I knew were "parochial" and lacked any strategic sense but - of course - they could easily have developed it.....



Were the changes inevitable?

I have a feeling that quite a few of the early voices who argued for "reform" might now have major reservations about where their institutional critique has taken us all - although it was a global discontent which was being channeled in those days....

However not all voices sang from the same hymn sheet..... **The main complaint may then have been that of "amateurism" but it was by no means accepted that "managerialism" was the answer.** 1968, after all, had been an expression of people power. And the writings of Paolo Freire and Ivan Illich - let alone British activists Colin Ward and Tony Gibson; and sociologists such as Jon Davies and Norman Dennis - were, in the 70s, celebrating citizen voices against bureaucratic power.

The therapist [Carl Rogers](#) was at the height of his global influence. And voices such as [Alain Touraine](#)'s were also giving hope in France.....

The managerialism which started to infect the public sector from the 70s expressed hierarchical values which sat badly with the egalitarian spirit which had been released the previous decade....

But, somehow, all that energy and optimism seemed to evaporate fairly quickly - certainly in the British "winter of discontent" and Thatcher rule of the 80s. What started as a simple expression of the need for some (private) "managerial discipline" in the public sector was quickly absorbed into a wider and more malevolent agenda of privatization and contracting out.....And, somehow, in the UK at any rate, progressive forces just rolled over.... Our constitutional system, as Lord Hailsham once starkly put it, is an "elective dictatorship".

The core European systems were, however, different - with legal and constitutional safeguards, PR systems and coalition governments - although the EC technocracy has been chipping away at much of this.

Just why and how the British adopted what came to be called New Public Management is a story which is usually told in a fatalistic way - as if there were no human agency involved. The [story is superbly told here](#) - as the fatal combination of Ministerial frustration with civil service "dynamic conservatism" with a theory (enshrined in Public Choice economics) for that inertia.... **A politico-organisational problem was redefined as an economic one and, heh presto, NPM went global**

In the approach to the New Labour victory of 1997, there was a brief period when elements of the party seemed to remember that [centralist "Morrisonian" bureaucracy had not been the only option](#) - that British socialism had in the 1930s been open to things such as cooperatives and "guild socialism". For just a year or so there was (thanks to people such as [Paul Hirst](#) and [Will Hutton](#)) talk of "[stakeholding](#)". But the bitter memories of the party infighting in the early 80s over [the left-wing's alternative economic strategy](#) were perhaps too close to make that a serious option - and the window quickly closed.....Thatcher's spirit of "dog eat dog" lived on - despite the talk of "Joined Up Government" (JUG), words like "trust" and "cooperation" were suspect to New Labour ears. [Holistic Governance](#) made a brief appearance at the start of the New Labour reign in 1997 but was quickly shown the door a few years later....

"What if?....."

The trouble with the massive literature on public management reform (which touches the separate literatures of political science, public administration, development, organizational sociology, management....[even philosophy](#)) is that it is so complicated that only a handful of experts can hope to understand it all - and few of them can or want to explain it to us in simple terms.

I've hinted in this post at what I regard as a couple of junctures when it might have been possible to stop the momentum....

I know the notion of [counterfactual history](#) is treated with some disdain but the victors do sometimes lose and we ignore the discussion about "junctures" at our peril.

The UNDP recently published [a good summary](#) of what it called the three types of public management we have seen in the past half century.

There are different ways of describing the final column but this one gives a sense of how we have been moving..

	Old Public Admin	New Public Management	New Public Service
Theoretical foundation	Political theory	Economic theory	Democratic theory
Model of behaviour	Public interest	self-interest	Citizen interest
Concept of public interest	Political, enshrined in law	Aggregation of individual interests	Dialogue about shared values
To whom civil servants responsive	Client	customer	citizen
Role of government	rowing	steering	Serving, negotiating
Mechanism for achieving policy	programme	incentives	Building coalitions
Approach to accountability	hierarchic	market	Public servants within law, professional ethics, values
Admin discretion	limited	wide	Constrained
Assumed organisational structure	Top down	decentralised	collaborative
Assumed motivation of officials	Conditions of service	Entrepreneurial, drive to reduce scope of government	Public service, desire to contribute

17 October

The regulation state <http://regulation.huji.ac.il/papers/jp39.pdf> 2011

Plain Speech; and the 21st Century Public Manager



Readers will have noticed my growing impatience with the opacity of the "academic turn" to the writings of those who purported to be explaining what has been happening to our public services in the past 30-40 years - about the only writer I exempted was Chris Pollitt whose [The Essential Public Manager](#) (2003) is, by far and away, the best book to help the intelligent citizen make sense of this field. It's friendly; brings in individuals to play roles illustrating contemporary debates;; clearly summarises different schools of thought on the key issues; and leaves the reader with guidance for further reading....

Most authors in this field, however, are writing for other academics (to impress them), for students (to give them copy for passing exams); or for potential customers in senior government positions (to persuade them to offer a contract) - they are never writing for citizens. As a result, they develop some very bad habits in writing - which is [why this new book](#) should be in their family's Xmas stocking this year. It offers priceless advice,

including -

1. Bait the hook

"When you go fishing, you bait the hook with what the fish likes, not with what you like." An obvious principle, easily lost sight of. Putting yourself in the audience's shoes governs everything from the shape of your argument to the choice of vocabulary. Ask what they do and don't know about the subject, and what they need to; not what you know about it.

Ask what they are likely to find funny, rather than what you do. What are the shared references that will bring them on board? Where do you need to pitch your language? How much attention are they likely to be paying?

This is what Aristotle, talking about rhetoric, called ethos, or the question of how your audience sees you. And the best way for them to see you is either as one of them, or someone on their side. As the speech theorist Kenneth Burke wrote - another line I never tire of quoting - "You persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, identifying your ways with his."

2. Be clear

A lot of style guides, with good reason, tell their readers to write Plain English. There's even a [Plain English Campaign](#) that does its nut, year-round and vocationally, about examples of baffling officialese, pompous lawyer-speak and soul-shrivelling business jargon.

Plain English (the simplest word that does the job; straightforward sentences; nice active verbs etc) is far from the only style you should have at your command. But if you depart from it, you should have a reason, be it aesthetic or professional. The plainer the language, the easier the reader finds it; and the easier the reader finds it, the more likely they'll take in what you're saying and continue reading. Surveys

of the average reading age of British adults routinely put it between nine and 13. Trim your style accordingly.

[Steven Pinker](#) talks about "classic style" (he borrows the notion from the literary critics Francis-Noël Thomas and Mark Turner). This, as he sees it, is a variation on Plain English that compliments the reader's intelligence and talks to him or her as an equal. He gives a cute example. "The early bird gets the worm" is plain style, he says. "The second mouse gets the cheese" is classic. I half-buy the distinction; though much of what Pinker credits to the classic style is exactly what's asked of any good instance of the plain. And the examples he offers convey quite different thoughts, and (a bit unfairly) attribute a cliché to the plain style and a good joke to the classic.

3. Prefer right-branching sentences

Standard-issue sentences, in English, have subject-verb-object order: dog (subject) bites (verb) man (object). There are any number of elaborations on this, but the spine of your sentence, no matter how many limbs it grows, consists of those three things.

If you have a huge series of modifying clauses before you reach the subject of the sentence, the reader's brain is working harder; likewise, if you have a vast parenthesis between subject and verb or even verb and object. The reader's brain has registered the subject (dog) and it is waiting for a verb so it can make sense of the sentence. Meanwhile, you're distracting it by cramming ever more material into its working memory. "My dog, which I got last week because I've always wanted a dog and I heard from Fred – you know, Fred who works in the chip shop and had that injury last year three days after coming home from his holidays – that he was getting rid of his because his hours had changed and he couldn't walk it as much as it wanted (very thoughtful, is Fred), bit me ..."

4. Read it aloud

Reading something aloud is a good way of stress-testing it: you'll notice very abruptly if your sentences are tangled up: that overfilling-the-working-memory thing can be heard in your voice. The American speechwriter Peggy Noonan advises that once you have a draft, "Stand up and speak it aloud. **Where you falter, alter.**"

I was about to write to Chris Pollitt to encourage him to produce a new edition of his book (which is 14 years old) but, magically, came across [The Twenty First Century Public Manager](#) (2017) – a rare book which, like Pollitt's, looks at the complex world facing an individual public manager these days and the skills and outlook they need to help it survive.

Which took me in turn to [The Twenty First Century Public Servant](#) – a short report which came out in 2014.....and reminded me of a book which has been lying on my shelves for all too long – [Public Value - theory and practice](#) ed John Benington and Mark Moore (2011) which is put in context by a very useful article [Appraising public value](#)

In fact, the concept of "public value" was first produced by Moore in 1995 [in Creating Public Value - strategic management in government](#). This celebrated the role of strategic leaders in the public sector and tried to explore how, in a climate which required strong verification of performance, the public sector might be able better to demonstrate its legitimacy.... Here is how [one british agency understood the challenge](#) in 2007 and a [short summary of the debate](#) there has been about the concept. As you can imagine there's at least [one dissertation on the subject](#)....'

I can't say I'm greatly convinced that all the "sound and fury" has produced anything all that substantial...but, if I can keep my eyes open long enough, I will go back to the 2011 book by Benington and Moore (which does include chapters by interesting characters such as Colin Crouch and Gerry Stoker) and let my readers know....

The debate continues to this day - with a [well-written 2016 symposium here](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/14719037.2017.1383783?needAccess=true) about the issue
The craft of Dutch city managers
<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/14719037.2017.1383783?needAccess=true>

1. What exactly is the difference between managing services in the public sector - and managing them in the private sector?

People who have tried to answer this question have focused on various things -

- on administrative and management practices - and the inferior performance we generally experience in the public sector
- on the institutional and legal environment which seems to explain this.
- More rarely, on the political and ideological question of what activities belong in the public sector⁴.

And many discussions move between the two levels in a rather confusing way.

One set of authors⁵, for example, suggested the following distinctive features for public administration bodies -

- accountability to politicians
- difficulty in establishing goals and priorities
- rarity of competition
- relationship between provision, demand, need and revenue
- processing people
- professionalism and line management
- the legal framework.

But, when you think about it, these features (apart from the first) are true of very many large private companies - where competition can be minimal or "fixed" (ie manipulated).

The definitive book on the subject⁶ points out that MacDonald's - the burger makers - is a bureaucracy par excellence - a uniform product produced in a uniform way. So what makes a government bureaucracy behave so differently and be seen so differently? Three reasons - according to Wilson. Government agencies -

- can't lawfully retain monies earned;
- can't allocate resources according to the preferences of its managers;
- must serve goals not of the organisation's choosing, particularly relating to probity and equity.

⁴ The economic literature refers to "public goods" or "natural monopoly".

⁵ Handbook of Public Services Management Pollitt C and Harrison S (Blackwell 1992)

⁶ Wilson JQ Bureaucracy - what Government Agencies do and why they do it (Basic Books 1989)

They therefore become constraint-oriented rather than task-oriented. He goes on to suggest that agencies differ managerially depending on whether their activities and outputs can be observed; and divides them into four categories (production; procedural; craft; and coping agencies).

In the 1980s the term "public management" began to appear - replacing that of "public administration". Behind that lay a view that private management systems, practices and skills were needed to shake up the system and make it more relevant to the needs of the citizen (more "customer-friendly" in the business language which has become increasingly used).

A new way of looking at how to operate public services was enshrined in something called "New Public Management" which swept the world⁸ but which has, in the last few years, received a rather more critical⁹ appraisal. Hood¹⁰ spells out in more detail the different elements of NPM -

No	Doctrine	Meaning	Typical Justification
1	Hands-on professional management of Public Organisations	Visible management at the top; free to manage	Accountability requires clear assignment of responsibility
2.	Explicit standards and measures of performance	Goals and targets defined and measured as indicators of success	Accountability means clearly stated aims
3.	Greater emphasis on output controls	Resource allocation and rewards linked to performance	Need to stress results rather than procedures
4.	Shift to disaggregation of units	Unbundle public sector into units organised by products with devolved budgets	Make units manageable; split provision and production; use contracts
5.	Greater competition	Move to term contracts and tendering procedures	Rivalry as the key to lower costs and better standards
6	Stress on private sector styles of management practice	Move away from military- style ethic to more flexible hiring, pay rules, etc	Need to apply "proven" private sector management tools
7.	Stress on greater discipline and parsimony	Cut direct costs; raise labour discipline	Need to check resource demands; do more with less

The texts on the "new public management" (NPM) are generally unsatisfactory. They consist generally of breathless reviews of the various changes which have taken place in the organisation of public services (particularly Anglo-Saxon) - contrasting the badness of the old with the vigour of

⁷ Public Management in the Central and Eastern European Transition - concepts and cases by G Wright and J Nemec (NISpace 2002)

⁸ D Osborne popularised the new approach in Reinventing Government) A good overview of the concepts and practical issues can be found in The State under Stress - can the Hollow State be Good Government? by Foster C and Plowden (Open University Press 1996)

⁹ Mark Moore's Creating Public Value - strategic management in government - apart from being one of the most practically helpful books for public managers - contains in its introduction a very good overview of the literature (Harvard 1995)

¹⁰ In The Art of the State (OUP 1998)

the new. Sometimes, but rarely, an attempt is made to assess the impact on the consumer of the reforms. Even more rarely does anyone try to explore whether and why certain services are "non-marketable" and therefore need to remain "public. McKevitt¹¹ identifies three distinctive features to core "public services" -

- differential information between providers and suppliers
- the provision of socially important and interdependent services
- the concept of professionalism as a relation of trust and agency between providers and clients.

McKevitt also notes the three very different reasons (sovereignty, natural monopoly and social welfare) for the functions remaining in the public sector. The heart of his book is an exploration of the tension between the legitimacy of claims from (a) government (b) clients and (c).

How much is really new?

In all the excitement of new rhetoric, it is all too easy to imagine that we are confronting these issues for the first time: in fact argument about how to run government and public services goes back many centuries and the present debates are in some ways a replay, in different language, of those debates. Whilst the technology and skills have certainly presented us with new opportunities, perhaps a touch of humility or sense of history might help us in these frenetic times?

1988 saw the publication of a particularly interesting and strangely neglected book¹² which took such a perspective and managed to produce 99 different "solutions" which had been advanced at one time or another to the issue of improving administrative performance.

If ever we needed a lesson in the need for a measure of scepticism toward the enthusiastic marketing of the latest management fashion, we have it in the brief list of these 99 solutions - many of which happily contradict one another. Sometimes the need for continuity in staffing is stressed: sometimes the need for turnover. Sometimes openness; sometimes secrecy.

Hood and Jackson suggest that we tend to use three general "stereotypes" in our thinking about organisations -

	Military Stereotype	Business Stereotype	Religious Stereotype
Slogan	Run it like the army	Run it like a business	Run it like a monastic order
Work force	Limited career	Hired and fired	Service for life
Motivation	Fear of punishment Hope of honours	Fear of dismissal Hope for money	Fear of damnation Hope for salvation
Control	Audit of war	Impersonal	Faith; social acceptance
Objective setting	Orders of day	Profit	Worked out at length in discussion and reflection
Belief	Obedience to leadership brings efficiency	Incentives to reduce waste and search for innovations	Lifetime internal commitment limits rash selfish ideas

¹¹ McKevitt D Managing Core Public Services (Blackwell 1998)

¹² Administrative Argument by Hood and Jackson (now out of print)

Public Administration Reform gets underway

In which

Should be read in conjunction with [administrative reform with Chinese and European characters](#)

. What does the Western experience of administrative reform tell central europeans about the trajectories and possibilities of internal reform?

.1 Cautionary remarks

Every country - like every individual - is different. Each country has its very specific history, social structure and cultural norms. Attempts simply to transplant foreign experience are generally doomed to failure¹³. This is emphasised in a good Chinese exposition of their traditions in a challengingly entitled paper - *Western System versus Chinese system*¹⁴.

Despite paying lip service to this (and the need for local ownership", western agencies and consultancies continue to use the fatuous language of "best practice".

Of course we can, should and do learn from the success and failure of others. When I was a regional politician in Scotland in the 1980s, I was keen to learn the lessons from the American "war on poverty" and made my first trip to the USA in 1987 with a Fellowship to see how the Allegheny area of Pennsylvania had coped with the massive decline of the steel industry which we were then experiencing - and some of the lessons were picked up in how we progressed from our work on community enterprise to explore the possibilities of community banking. At this time a whole literature about "learning policy lessons across boundaries of time and space" was developing - and later picked up by the New Labour Government¹⁵.

More than 30 years' experience is available about other countries' attempts to make their systems more effective. Is possible to identify clear patterns and practical lessons from such rich, varied and complex experience? This section has to compress 40 years of personal experience of (and of reading about) organisational reform into a short space - and this is perhaps why it adopts a politico-historical approach which is not often found in the literature.

.2 Why did the nut suddenly crack? The ideology of Western administrative reform of the past 25 years¹⁶

A breakdown in confidence

The role and power of the State increased very significantly in Western European countries after the Second World War. Three main factors contributed to this -

- a determination to avoid the serious economic depression of the 1930s
- the demonstrable effectiveness with which victorious Governments had wielded new economic and strategic powers for the conduct of the war
- Keynes' intellectual legitimisation for a more interventionist role for Government.

¹³ See "Institution-Building in central and east Europe" by S. Eriksonin *Review of Central and East European Law* (2007) for an interesting discussion of policy influence and its constraints in this field http://www.difi.no/filearchive/rceel_publicert_version_-2-vra5a.pdf

¹⁴ <http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/cpi/documents/briefings/briefing-61-chinese-western-system.pdf>

¹⁵ http://people.exeter.ac.uk/ojames/psr_3.pdf and also http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/2056/1/WRAP_Stone_wp6901.pdf

¹⁶ this is an update of chapter 4 of my book *In Transit – notes on good governance* which I wrote and published in a self-funded version in Romania in 1999. I find the text still valid a decade on - the first 100 pages can be accessed at <http://publicadminreform.webs.com/key%20papers/In%20Transit%20-%20first%20part%20of%201999%20book.pdf>

For more than 20 years - as the European and American economies, and their companies, expanded - it seemed that a magic formula for economic prosperity had been discovered in the concept of the "Mixed Economy".

The various revolutions of 1968 were the first signs that something was wrong - that people felt an important part of themselves excluded and alienated by the remote decision-making of Governments and large Corporations alike. And that they were increasingly unhappy with the decisions being taken on their behalf. It was, however, the oil-crisis of 1973 which started the intense questioning of both the scale and results of government spending the turmoil in thinking and practice about the operation of the machinery of Government which OECD countries have experienced in the past 30 years.

A time of experimentation and confusion

Box 1 lists the various efforts which EU countries have made to improve the operation and machinery of government over the past 30 plus years -

Box 1: Some examples of administrative reform

- trying to strengthen the "policy analysis" capacity of government (making it more aware of options)
- developing the managerial skills of the civil service
- reforming and restructuring local government
- "regionalising" certain central government functions
- trying to strengthen the supervision ("watchdog") powers of Parliament over the Executive
- "zero budgeting" and other types of budgetary reform
- merging Ministries to get better coordination
- creating accountable units of activity : with clear tasks, responsibilities and performance indices (OECD 1995)
- developing systems of performance review of government programmes
- "contracting-out" public services after competitive bidding to private companies : for a limited period of time
- "hiving off" Ministry functions to agencies
- increasing the accountability of senior civil servants : limited term contracts.
- establishing Regional Development Agencies
- establishing "citizen contracts"
- establishing quasi-markets
- introducing performance management

Those undertaking the changes have been practical people: and practical people get impatient of anything that smacks of theory. With hindsight, however, it can be seen that these various solutions were attempted "solutions" to three differently defined problems -

- **managerial problems** : which identifies as the main problem the skills and behaviour of the paid, permanent staff of the Public Service and therefore puts the emphasis on new techniques and structures (eg budgetary information on an output basis : more open appointments procedures : coordination devices) and on the need for stronger managerial skills and delegated responsibilities.
- **political problems**: which targets weaknesses in the quality and influence of politicians and the public in policy-making: apparently unable to control an all-too powerful bureaucracy. The role of politicians is very much to make the system of government accountable. The British Select Committees and US Investigative Committees are examples of such efforts at greater accountability.

Local government reorganisation also comes into this category. The power of politicians does of course vary in different systems. In the West, reformist politicians in central and local government felt relatively weak in the face of the power of civil servant and professional bureaucracies, business and trade unions. Increasing the influence of politicians at national, local and regional level has therefore been one approach to the problem of bureaucratic power. There is a view that British politicians had by 2010 been too successful in asserting their power. In some ex-Communist countries the situation has been very different - with the politician being the pinnacle of a tightly-controlled hierarchy of power: in other words part of the bureaucracy which has to be challenged!

- **Lack of coordination between both management and political systems - and wider parts of the 'governance' system.** The world was becoming less deferential in the 1970s - that's when we first started to hear the language of "stakeholders" - people who insisted on their voices being heard. And "governance" was the term invented to indicate the search for new ways of these various groups (both within and external to the formal system of government) to communicate and consult with one another to achieve more consensual policy-making and robust policies.

Table 1 is one prepared by me in the 1970s to try to make sense of the various (and contradictory) fashions and "fix-its" to which local government in Britain was then being subjected. The first column lists these three different perception; the second how they displayed themselves (symptoms); the third how the sort of solutions technocrats came up with - and the final column indicates how those of a more political bent were disposed to deal with the problem.

Table 1; Symptoms and responses to three different explanations of government problems

Definition of Problem	Symptoms	Technocratic Solutions	Political Solutions
1. MANAGEMENT Weakness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over-hierarchical structures • Inadequate skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delay • Lack of creativity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management information systems • Training • Delegation • MBO 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited-term contracts for senior officials
2. Problems in POLITICAL Process <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adversary process • Internal structures • Rewards/support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low polls • Crisis management • Petty arguments • Recruitment problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training for politicians • Office support • Performance review committees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mixed policy task-forces • Investigative Parliamentary Committees
3, POOR COORDINATION <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political/official • Interdepartmental • Political/community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passing the buck • Inter-organisational disputes • Foul-ups • Public distrust 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate planning • Departmental mergers • Liaison structure and posts • Working parties • Public consultation • Public relations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political executives • All-purpose municipal councils • Neighbourhood committees

Political impotence

The UK has been the trailblazer on administrative reform over the last 40 years¹⁷. But, despite the confident note struck by the hundreds of documents which have poured over the period (during the Blair years from its Cabinet Office), the task of making government "more business-like" or more effective has been a frustrating one for the reformer - particularly in the first decade or so¹⁸ - for reasons set out in the next box.

Box 2: why reform was so difficult in the 1970s

- the electoral cycle encourages short-term thinking
- there did not seem to be a definable "product" or measure of performance for government against which progress (or lack of it) can be tested.
- and even if there were, politicians need to build and maintain coalitions of support : and not give hostages to fortune. They therefore prefer to keep their options open and use the language of rhetoric rather than precision!
- The machinery of government consists of a powerful set of "baronies" (Ministries/Departments), each with their own interests
- the permanent experts have advantages of status, security, professional networks and time which effectively give them more power than politicians who often simply "present" what they are given.
- a Government is a collection of individually ambitious politicians whose career path has rewarded skills of survival rather than those of achieving specific changes
- the democratic rhetoric of accountability makes it difficult for the politician to resist interference in administrative detail, even when they have nominally decentralised and delegated.
- politicians can blame other people : hardly the best climate for strategy work

These forces were so powerful that, during the 1970s, writers on policy analysis seemed near to giving up on the possibility of government systems ever being able to effect coherent change - in the absence of national emergencies. This was reflected in such terms as state overload" and "disjointed incrementalism"¹⁹; and in the growth of a new literature on the problems of "Implementation" which recognised the power of the "street-level" bureaucrats - both negatively, to block change, and positively to help inform and smooth change by being more involved in the policy-making²⁰.

Neo-liberals and public choice theorists give a convincing theory

In the meantime, however, what was felt to be the failure of the reforms of the 1970s supplied the opportunity for neo-liberalism in the UK. Ideas of market failure - which had provided a role for government intervention - were replaced by ideas about government failure. The Economist journal expressed the difference in its own inimitable way - *"The instinct of social democrats has been invariably to send for Government. You defined a problem. You called in the social scientists to propose a programme to solve it. You called on the Government to finance the programme: and the desired outcome would result. What the neo-liberals began to say was the exact opposite of this.*

¹⁷ a useful short paper by a civil servant which takes the story to 2000 is at <http://www1.worldbank.org/publicsector/civilservice/rsUK.pdf>

¹⁸ and in 2002 the New Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair famously talked "the scars on his back from dealing with the civil service"

¹⁹ in the language of Charles Lindblom

²⁰ One of my Professors – Lewis Gunn – wrote a famous article in 1978 entitled *"Why is Implementation so difficult"* which identified conditions for "perfect implementation" - which I used in one of my recent EU projects which was charged to help assist "compliance" with EU legislation.

There probably wasn't a problem: if there was, social scientists probably misunderstood it: it was probably insoluble: and, in any case, government efforts to solve it would probably make it worse"

The very concept of rational government acting dispassionately in the public interest was attacked by neo-liberals on three grounds -

"Vote-maximising politicians, as the public choice theorists demonstrated (Buchanan and Tullock 1962) will produce policies that do not necessarily serve the public interest, while utility-maximising bureaucrats (Niskanen 1971) have their own private agenda for the production of public policies. The growth of the welfare state had brought with it an army of professional groups, who supplied the services. These were teachers, doctors, dentists, planners etc. They existed in bureaucratic organisations which were sheltered from the winds and gales of competitive forces. Provided free of charge at the point of consumption, there will always be an excess demand ; at the same time it is in the interest of monopolised professional providers to over-supply welfare services. Public expenditure on welfare services, in the absence of market testing, exceeds its optimum".

*"The problems don't end there. Professional groups decide upon the level, mix and quality of services according to their definition and assessment of need, without reference to users' perceptions or assessments of what is required. The result is that not only is public expenditure on welfare services too high; it is also of the wrong type". And finally the issue of efficiency; in the absence of the profit motive and the disciplinary powers of competitive markets, slack and wasteful practices can arise and usually do. Within bureaucracies, incentives seldom exist to ensure that budgets are spent efficiently and effectively. Often there is no clear sense of purpose or direction."*²¹

And thus was born NPM

New Public Management (NPM) was not a coherent theory - rather a tag put on a collection of measures brought in from the business world. Fundamental concepts of public administration - eg hierarchy, equity and uniformity - were unceremoniously dumped.

Box 3 How the new business thinking affected the UK

- government structures were broken up - either by "hiving off" into independent units or by a sharp distinction being made between contractor and provider. Two thirds of Civil servants are now in free-standing agencies whose Chief Executives have been openly appointed.
- direct hierarchical supervision were replaced by contractual relationships
- recruitment, grading and pay rigidities were broken apart in the search for greater productivity.
- considerations of equity, impartiality and justice were replaced by those of consumer choice
- decisions uniform universal provision gives way to user charges and choice among competing providers
- accountability only through elected bodies was bypassed by Citizen charters, ombudsman and control through non-elected quangos"

It seemed, however, that in the worship of the private sector, the public sector had to start at the beginning of the learning curve - and succumb to all the simplistic assumptions of the early part of capitalism ie belief in scale. Ferlie et al²² sketched out Four different marks of NPM -

²¹ Peter Jackson Privatisation and Deregulation : the Issues (1993)

²² in The New Public Management in Action (Oxford 1996)

NPM 1 **FORDIST MODEL**

- increased attention to financial control : strong concern with value-for-money and efficiency gains : getting more for less : growth of more elaborate cost and information systems
 - a stronger general management spine : management by hierarchy : a "command and control" model of working : clear target-setting and monitoring of performance : a shift of power to senior management
 - an extension of audit, both financial and professional : an insistence on more transparent methods for the review of performance : more standard setting and bench-marking.
 - greater stress on provider responsiveness to consumers : a greater role for non-public sector providers : more market-mindedness
 - deregulation of the labour market and increasing the pace of work : erosion of nationally-agreed pay and conditions : move to highly paid and individually agreed rewards packages at senior level combined with more short-term contracts. Higher turnover
 - a reduction of the self-regulatory power of the professions : a shift in power from professionals to managers : drawing in of some professional to management
 - new forms of corporate governance: marginalisation of elected local politicians and trade unionists : moves to a board of directors model : shift of power to apex of organisation.
- This is a reasonable description of British trends in the 1980s.

NPM 2 **DOWNSIZING AND DECENTRALISATION**

- move from management by hierarchy to management by contract : creation of more fragmented public sector organisations at local level
- split between small strategic core and large operational periphery : market testing and contracting out of non-strategic functions
- moves to flatter structures : staff reductions at higher and lower levels
- split between public funding and independent sector provision: emergence of separate purchaser and provider organisations
- attempt to move away from standardised forms of service to one characterised by more flexibility and variety.

This is the phase Britain moved into in the 1990s

NPM 3 **IN SEARCH OF EXCELLENCE**

(a) Bottom-up Form: radical decentralisation : emphasis on OD and learning organisation. The French reforms fall more into this category - as do the operations of the more progressive German, Dutch and British local authorities of the 1990s.

(b) Top-Down Form: managed culture change programmes: stress on charismatic forms of top-down leadership. Corporate training, logos etc.

NPM 4 **PUBLIC SERVICE ORIENTATION**

- concern with service quality
- reliance on user voice rather than customer exit as feedback. Concept of citizenship
- desire to shift power back from appointed to elected local bodies : scepticism about role of markets in local public services
- community development
- belief in continuing set of distinctive public service values and tasks : stress on participation and accountability as legitimate concerns of management in the public sector

The Scandinavian reforms fall into this category - and the counter-attack in Britain in the early 1990s²³ and the 2000s concept of public value²⁴

²³ eg Stewart and Ranson - Management for the Public Domain : enabling the learning society (Macmillan 1994)

But with different impacts

In 1995 Sylvia Trosa²⁵ looked at the very different approaches taken by Britain, France and Australia: the British and Australian changes being very much imposed on a resistant system by strong political leaders - the British "revolution" in particular being based on a quite explicit critique of the possibilities of the system reforming itself by normal methods of persuasion. This contrasts very much with the French - and German - approaches: where there has been more apparent confidence in the public service system - and where modernisation was seen as a matter for incremental and internally driven change.

French thinking is still affected by the Rousseauist sense of the "General Will" - and is to be seen in their formalised system of national planning, in the operation of their highly professional ENA elite who occupy most of the key positions in both the public and private sector - and in their structure of territorial administration of the State. And their attempt over the past 15 years to decentralise that system has demonstrated that same centrally-driven and consensual approach.

Hood has given us an interesting classification of the scale of the move to New Public Management (NPM) on the basis of the political incumbency - although globalisation has made these political terms largely meaningless these days eg the New Labour government is widely seen as even more right-wing (save in the public spending of its latter years) than the Thatcher governments.

Table 2; Varied NPM take-up across the political spectrum

NPM emphasis	Political Left	Centre	Right
High NPM	Sweden	Australia Canada New Zealand	United Kingdom
Medium NPM	France	Austria Denmark Finland Italy Netherlands Portugal United States	France
Low NPM	Greece Spain	Germany Switzerland	Japan Turkey

From what is set out in section 4, China would probably find itself in the same box as New Zealand or the UK

²⁴ first developed by Mark Moore in his 1995 book of that name, taken up briefly by the UK Cabinet Office in the late 2000s and usefully summarised by Colin Talbot at http://www.workfoundation.co.uk/Assets/Docs/measuring_PV_final2.pdf. See also Annex to this paper.

²⁵ Moderniser L'Administration (1995)

.3 Making sense of it all

So far, I have tried to -

- emphasise how varied were the „explanations“ we had in the 1970s about the sort of problems which created the need for „reform“
- show how differently therefore (despite the talk of New Public Management - NPM) reform programmes developed in different countries.
- explain how, in the 1970s, the new breed of policy analysts had almost given up on the hope of getting the bureaucracy to operate in the interests of the public - „disjointed incrementalism“ was the best that could be hoped for.
- how public choice theory came along to give an ideological explanation for reform failure - and also justification for what came to be called NPM but which was simply the (simplistic) treatment of government as a business.
- Although the extreme version of NPM is discredited, the love affair with (generally outdated and discarded) management practices continues with the current emphasis on performance management and measurement.

I personally was fighting bureaucracy in the 1970s and 1980s with a different (and simpler) theory - what I called the „pincer approach“ - a combination of community action from below and strategic management led by politicians and explained in paper 50 of my website - *Organisational Learning and Political Amnesia*²⁶. I was intrigued in 2006 to see that, almost a decade after the strenuous efforts of New Labour to modernise government, the Cabinet Office produced an expanded version of such a theory as their “model of public service reform”²⁷. It had four (rather than two) forces - top-down performance management, user pressure from below and market incentives and staff capacity from the sides.

The role of OECD and World Bank

The power of neo-liberal thinking within The World Bank has been well known. What is not so well known is the role of the OECD in pushing the New Public Management agenda²⁸. Unlike the World Bank, the OECD performs a very useful networking role in bringing senior civil servants and other together to share their experience and learn from one another. The briefing papers and Final Reports it produces are very clearly presented and probably the most accessible (if not only) material national civil servants read on this topic. An OECD Conference in 1999 produced a whole range of fascinating papers on the process of change (which generally academics can't follow) - and they returned to this subject with a rather more abstract paper on *Managing Change in OECD governments - an introductory framework*²⁹ in 2008.

What the academics have made of it all

Not a great deal of NPM is the short answer - at least not those (including such well-known names as Christopher Hood³⁰, Guy Peters³¹, Chris Pollitt³² and Herbert Wolman³³) who have elected to keep

²⁶ <http://www.freewebs.com/publicadminreform/key%20papers/Lessons%20from%20SRC%20experience.pdf>

²⁷

http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100125070726/http://cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/cabinetoffice/strategy/assets/sj_report.pdf

²⁸ <http://www.carleton.ca/cgpm/Projects/reform/Inversions%20without%20End.pdf>

²⁹ <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/53/18/42142231.pdf>

³⁰ whose *The Art of the State - culture, rhetoric and public management* (Oxford 2000) reduced the writing to four schools of thinking - hierarchist, individualist, egalitarian and fatalist.

away from The World Bank's "filthy lucre". A huge academic industry has duly grown around administrative reform in the past few decades - a lot of it very theoretical. University developments have encouraged academics to do consultancy work and, provided this does not get out of hand, this has given the academic a better understanding of practical realities. The academic role generally we might say is that of observer, classifier, pedant, tester of hypotheses and, in some cases, evaluator. In this field, what the best of them (mentioned above) have done is to -

- map the developments,
- note some of the rhetorical aspects
- develop (as we have seen above) different typologies
- set up some test and explore results of reform programmes

NPM is, of course, not the only game in town - and there has been a strong reaction against a lot of it in the past decade³⁴. Peters suggests that administrative reform can be reduced to four schools of thinking - often confused in practice. They are - "market models" (A); "the Participatory State" (B); "Flexible Government" (C); and "Deregulated Government" (D).

Table 3; Peters' Four models of government

	A	B	C	D
Principal diagnosis	Monopoly	Hierarchy	Permanence	Internal Regulation
Structure	Decentralisation	Flatter Organisations	"Virtual Organisations"	No particular recommendation
Management	Pay for performance	TQM; teams	Managing temporary personnel	Greater managerial freedom
Policymaking	Internal markets Market incentives	Consultation Negotiation	Experimentation	Entrepreneurial government
Public interest	Low cost	Involvement	Low cost Coordination	Creativity Activism

After reviewing the nature and policies of each model, he identifies **four basic questions** and looks at how each model tries to deal with them -

³¹ whose The Future of Governing : four emerging models (Kansas Univ Press 1996) was a breath of fresh air at the time

³² Public Management reform - a Comparative Analysis (first edition Oxford 2000) by Pollitt and Boueckert is still the basic text on the subject

³³ who has edited about the only study made of Evaluation in public sector reform – concepts and practice in international perspective (2003) http://books.google.com/books?id=e8bsrrWlaCwC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_slider_thumb#v=onepage&q&f=false

³⁴ the strongest attacks have probably been from Dreschler whose article The Rise and Demise of NPM can be found at www.freewebs.com/publicadminreform/key%20papers/Dreschler%20on%20Rise%20and%20Demise%20of%20NPM.doc. Gerry Stoker is also a clear and critical commentator on the British scene.

Table 4; How each model tackles the four basic questions

Basic Question	A	B	C	D
Co-ordination	Invisible hand	Bottom up	Changing organisations	Managers' self interest
Error detection	Market signals	Political signals	Errors not institutionalised	Accept more error
Civil Service	Replaced with market	Reduce hierarchy	Temp employment	Eliminate regulations
Accountability	Thro' market	Thro' consumer complaints	Not clear	Through ex-post controls

Some consultant perspectives

The previous section mentioned a few of the best-known academic writers in this field. There is, finally, a small group of individuals who work or have worked in or with government as Consultants and who have published extensively about administrative reform drawing on that experience. Four in particular are worth mentioning - Christopher Foster³⁵ and Geoff Mulgan³⁶ covering the British experience - the former in a more distanced and theoretical way although he has the longer experience of the role of adviser; Nick Manning³⁷ and Tony Verheijen³⁸ as international advisers.

.4 Case-study of UK - permanent revolution!

The last thirty years has seen a large variety of mechanisms introduced to improve the system of public administration. There is, therefore, a very large "toolbox" now available for reformers. The "reforms" which have been attempted by OECD countries over the past 30 years have come in waves or fashions and are listed in box 8 - in chronological order. Basically there has been a process of learning - with "vanguard" countries such as Britain starting an activity, not getting much progress or impact with it and then either modifying it or moving to a different initiative. Slowly some success is generated - and others begin to follow, but with their own modifications in the light of lessons and their distinctive needs.

³⁵ The State under Stress – can the hollow state be good government? Co-authored with F Plowden (1996) and British Government in Crisis (2005)

³⁶ He was Head of the Strategy Unit in Blair's Cabinet Office – and a prolific writer. See his Good and Bad Power –the ideals and betrayals of Government (2006) and a wider piece on policy-making <http://www.opendemocracy.net/content/articles/PDF/1280.pdf>

³⁷ Particularly the comparative papers he edited for the World bank's work on PAR commissioned by the Russian Federation in the early 2000s - <http://www.gsdr.org/docs/open/SD24.pdf>

³⁸ who has focussed mainly on civil service systems – and has not been heard of recently - <http://www.google.com/books?hl=ro&lr=&id=ZiHCCR1JxogC&oi=fnd&pg=PR3&dq=Tony+Verheijen&ots=cAgEVyX1n2&sig=ydY3b9m9DUlsTHV7dEgJUoQMbuc#v=onepage&q&f=false>

Box 5: the waves of reform in the UK

1960s - management systems

- strengthening the "**policy analysis**" capacity of government (to get more relevant and better policies)
- opening up the civil service to new talent
- developing the **managerial skills** of the civil service -
- merging Ministries in an attempt to get better **co-ordination**
- trying to strengthen the **supervision** ("watchdog") powers of Parliament or independent audit over the Executive

1970s - Budgetary reform and decentralisation

- **budgetary reform** - concerned to ensure a focus less on inputs than on what results specific bits of public spending were supposed to be achieving ("outputs")
- creating **accountable units of activity** : with clear tasks, responsibilities and performance indices
- developing systems of **performance review** of government programmes
- creating larger units of local government (mergers) to allow **transfer of functions to local government**
- "regionalising" certain central government functions ("deconcentration")

1980s - privatizing; increasing accountability

- transferring state assets (such as electricity) to the private sector
- "contracting-out" public services after **competitive bidding** to private companies : for a limited period of time
- "hiving off" Ministry functions to **Agencies** - which focused on a narrow range of activities (eg issuing of passports) and operated with more financial and personnel freedom than state bodies
- More open recruitment
- deregulation

1990s - focus on consumer; and drive for quality

- establishing "**citizen contracts**" and service standards
- new forms of **audit and grant allocation** - to encourage good practice
- purchaser-provider split

2000s - Modernising Government

- targets (Performance Service Indicators)
- "best value" control of local government
- performance management

2010 - Cutbacks - Big Society

Initially the drive for change came from newly-elected politicians and their advisers - impatient with civil servants they saw living too much in the past. So the emphasis was on opening up the system to new people - and developing new skills. It was then realized that the new civil servants with their new approaches were still working in old centralized systems which crushed their initiatives - so the attention turned in the 1970s to budget reform, new management systems and decentralisation.

The strengthening of local government was a path most European countries followed in the **decade from 1975** - driven by a growing public dissatisfaction with bureaucracy. This produced real results.

It has released new energy - and removed both a financial and administrative burden from many central systems³⁹.

The 1980s, however, saw political impatience with the pace of change. Four new approaches were introduced in many countries -

- An important range of state activities were seen as better handled by the private sector - and duly privatized. These included housing, electricity, gas and water; and parts of transport and postal systems⁴⁰. And commercial systems such as transport were de-regulated.

And where the nature of the services made it impossible to privatize, they -

- Were managed on fixed-term contracts by private companies who won these contracts on competitive procurement; or
- Were managed by Agencies - which were state bodies given a large degree of commercial freedom
- had "quasi-market" regimes introduced which required clear statements of service outputs

It's important to emphasise that the source of change here was external - from newly-elected politicians like Margaret Thatcher who thought in a radical "out-of-the box" way. She forced through changes which were deeply unpopular within the "establishment". But she won - she broke the forces of inertia.

And the various initiatives required the development of detailed indices of performance and customer satisfaction - which have been used by public administration bodies in the latest wave of reforms.

A later wave puts the **emphasis on the citizen - as consumer**. By the 1990s, citizen expectations of services had risen enormously. They were beginning to make invidious comparisons between the ease of obtaining services in the private sector - shops and bank for example - and the difficulties and indignities with which they were met when they encountered public services.

One of the first - and very simple - ways of dealing with this was the British Citizen Charter scheme which got underway in the early 1990s

1999 Modernising Government

implementation

Then performance!!!

³⁹ Although the UK has gone in the opposite direction and increased its control over local government - even if the more recent types of control are more benign eg league tables and competitions for best practice awards.

⁴⁰ One of the unforeseen consequences of privatisation was a complex new regulatory system which had to be created to protect the consumer from the abuse of monopoly power.

NOTES ON KEY READINGS

The next 60 odd pages can be skimmed - they represent commentary on various texts which came to my attention over the past decade....

Cook-books, self-help manuals and desert-islands

July 19, 2009 at 9:41 AM



I have hundreds of books about public admin reform in my library (mainly in my virtual library). But what beneficiaries want to know is - "What's the bottom line? We know that academics talk a lot of shit. Just tell us what we should do. Give us a manual...."

I am always excited when I discover such manuals. And I will shortly try to put onto the website some of the more useful texts I have found in my work. However, when I was asked recently to bid for a project which would have required me to draft about 10 such manuals, I declined. Let me explain why.

I love cooking - and have quite a collection of cookery books. I think 50 at the last count. They get increasingly attractive and popular. Millions of copies are bought. (They also seem to be getting heavier! I use one as a door stopper - The Cook's Book - step-by-step techniques and recipes for success every time from the world's top chefs).

The curious thing, however, is how little I actually use them to cook with! They are nice to glance at. They certainly get the juices and inspiration running. But I then will do one of two things. Often, from laziness or fear of failure and ridicule, I will return to my tried and tested recipes. But sometimes I will experiment, using the recipe as an inspiration - partly because I don't actually have all of the ingredients which I am told are required but partly because it's more fun! There's a moral there!

Or think of all the self-help (and diet) books which have been published in the last 50 years. I have a fascinating book 50 self-help classics - 50 inspirational books to transform your life from timeless sages to contemporary gurus. Have they made people happier, slimmer?? Can they?

The word "manual" comes from the world of military, construction or do-it-yourself. Manuals give (or should!) clear and logical descriptions of the steps required to assemble a machine or artefact. Human beings and organisations are not, however, machines!!

There are no short-cuts to organisational change - although the project cycle management approach which is the basis of EC Technical Assistance would have us believe there are!!

A marvellous book appeared in 1991 (sadly long out of print) and set out and classified 99 different - and mutually inconsistent - principles and injunctions which various serious writers had offered over the decades for helping managers in the public sector operate it effectively!

And more than a decade ago, two books ridiculed the simplistic nature of the offerings of management consultants in the private sector. *Management Gurus - what makes them and how to become one* appeared in 1996 (one of my googlebooks) and *The Witchdoctors-making sense of the management gurus* (also 1996). If the books had any effect, it was only to drive consultants into the more gullible public sector! (see David Craig's "Plundering the Public Sector" for proof that I'm not joking!)

I used to criticise the EC for not giving any intellectual leadership to those working on its programmes of technical assistance. Well, they have certainly made up for lost time in the last few years. At the last count I had 12 substantial manuals in my virtual library from them, the last one with the curious sub-title of "backbone strategy" (for improving the operation of their PIUs). But, in my view at any rate, they are not fit for much.

One of the longest- running and appreciated radio programmes in the UK is BBC's Desert Island Discs. The format is simple. A famous person is interviewed about his/her life and, on the belief that they have been shipwrecked and have to select the most important music and a single book to keep them company. Excerpts of their favourite music are played. At the end, the question is asked "Apart from the bible, what book would you wish to take with you??!!" (Presumably they now add "or Koran"?)

The question for today is what single book would you put in the hands of your beneficiary?

- In Uzbekistan I gave the Deputy Prime Minister I was working with either Guy Peter's *The Future of Governing*; four emerging models or Chris Hood's *The art of the state* (see my google books). I think it was the former. Both books suggest that all writing on government reform can be reduced to 4 schools of thinking. This sort of classification I always find helpful.
- In Azerbaijan, I gave my beneficiary (who was subsequently appointed Minister for the new Civil Service Agency which came from my work) a Russian version of Robert Greene's "48 laws of power"! Greene is a modern Machiavelli. And life for a reformer is tough in Azerbaijan!
- And, in the mid-1990s, I used to buy and distribute Stephen Covey's *Seven Habits of Effective People* since it was about the only title in those days translated into central european languages.

If you had to choose one book for your beneficiary, what would it be??

[googlebooks and change management](#)

August 1, 2009 at 7:42 AM



Virtually all the stuff people write on admin reform is academic and technical and seems scared of raising questions about impact on people. Robert Greenleaf's writings on servant-leaders are amazing. He was a remarkable guy. A Quaker revolutionary inside the massive ATT who then started a new life at 60.....

Another task which has taken up my time is a request from a friend for papers on change management strategies. He's trapped inside a legalistic system doing legal annotations for an education system and wants to give them a sense of how change actually takes place and the practical steps which can be taken. It's encouraged me to go back to and revise the chapter in the book I wrote 10 years ago on change management.

Writers such as Alvin Toffler and Marlynn Fergusson were, in the early 1970s, two of the key popularisers of the notion that Wes societies faced a scale of technical, social and economic change so massive as to constitute a new phenomenon.

But it was academics such as Warren Bennis, Chenne and Donald Schon (*Beyond the stable state* (1970) who were the key writers who laid the foundations - and people like Peter Senge and Rosabeth Kantor followed up in the 1980s. And, behind them, lay the unsung discipline of organisational development. Emery, Trist, Greenleaf, Harrison.

But the popular texts we were getting 10 years ago were all based on the experience of change in the private sector. And were written as if "change" was something which had suddenly appeared in the world in 1970! That's why I enjoy so much the writing of people such as Anthony Jay (Management and Machiavelli - sadly not in googlebooks) and Robert Greene - whose 48 Laws of Power I gave to one of my beneficiaries (in Russian). In the last week I've been captivated by his latest book - The 33 strategies of War. His style is to use stories of historical events - and to go back to the wisdom of the ancients.

The excellent website Open Democracy had an interesting article today on how the climate for work in [building democratic systems in transition countries](#) has worsened in recent years.

It contains an extended excerpt from a recent Tom Carothers paper which put me onto the Carnegie Foundation website on which I found another paper of his Does Democracy Promotion have a Future? (2008) which is a very [useful and critical assessment of the history and future of democracy assistance efforts](#).

His first paper explores a distinction between 2 styles of assistance - political and developmental and he then assesses the argument that USA programmes have been rooted in the first category and European programmes in the second. From his references I picked up a useful-looking googlebook -

[Democracy, Europe's core value? On the European profile in world-wide democratic assistance](#); ed Marieke van Doon and von Meijenfeldt (2007)

[why public admin needs to reinvent itself](#)

on September 7, 2009 at 6:30 AM



I'm struggling with what I feel are some important thoughts - so bear with me. All my adult life, I've had a passion for what we might call "the machinery of government" - namely the way institutions of government operated and related to citizens and their needs. When I started on the reform path - almost 40 years ago - trying to reform the bureaucracy was considered a foolhardy enterprise. Now every self-respecting government leader is into it.

But what is there to show for the incredible effort and spending on reform efforts in Europe (let alone globally) over the past 25 years? The academic judgement is that very little has been achieved. Consultants, officials and politicians all have vested interests in suggesting otherwise - although few of these 3 groups actually put anything coherent into print. We are generally left with the strategy documents they have sponsored.

My emergence into working life in the late 1960s coincided with the optimism of a new period of social engineering when people began to believe that it was both necessary and possible to change state bureaucracy for the better. Some thought this could be done by internal reform - with better management systems. Others felt that it required strong external challenge ? whether from the community or from the market. One of the best writers in the business, Guy Peters, argues (in his book Ways of Governing) that the reforms can be reduced to four schools of thinking. They are - "market models" (A); "the Participatory State" (B); "Flexible Government" (C); and "Deregulated Government" (D). You can see a couple of useful tables which summarise the key components of these 4 schools in [my annotated bibliography in "key papers"](#).

But so much of the literature of public management (or public administration, to use the older term) complacently argued that a combination of voting in a pluralist system, good civil service and management systems, media coverage and ethics would keep officials and politicians in check. Hardly surprising that, in reaction, public choice theory went to the opposite extreme and assumed that all actors pursued their own interests - and that privatisation and "command and control" was the way forward. Where the new approach has been implemented, the results have been catastrophic - with morale at rock bottom; and soaring "transaction" costs in the new contract and audit culture.

What, then is left of public management? The discipline of Economics is having to reinvent itself - with "behavioural economics" leading the way . No longer do the younger economists build models based on individualistic rationality - they at last recognise that human beings are social and complex.

And psychologists such as Martin Seligman have (claimed to) moved that discipline away from its fixation on illness to pose question about the preconditions for happiness ("Positive Psychology" :)). So what is public management doing?

Public management is hardly a discipline per se. It is rather parasitic on other social sciences. But hundreds of university departments, courses and books use that phrase and therefore purport to be of use to those in government wanting to improve the structures, skills and tools they use. And this is one subject which cannot say it exists "for knowledge's sake" only! This is a subject (like medicine) which has to demonstrate its relevance for those in charge of state and municipal departments who are seeking the public interest.

Citizens and public staff alike are disillusioned (at least in anglo-saxon countries) with the management culture of public services. Public management needs to be reinvented. And, unlike, the new psychology's focus on the positive, that rethink perhaps need to focus more on the failures, disasters, corruption, repression and boredom which characterises current PA.

(to be continued)

[why organisations are so awful](#)

I've just come across a nice googlebook which pursues the theme - [The Book of F-Laws](#) by Russell Ackoff and H Addison (updated commentary by S Bibb). Russell Ackoff was, of course, the guru of systems thinking in the 1960s. You can also get a [summary version](#)

[measuring capacity](#)

"Capability reviews" carried out on departments were started in the UK in 2005 and were reviewed earlier this year. Not many civil services carry out such an exercise - let alone transparently. So its worth reading [the assessment - carried out by the National Audit Office](#)

One of its criticisms, however, is that little attention is paid in the reviews to final outputs!!

This site also contains a rather interesting comparative assessment of the UK public services - carried out by a company of private consultants. At first sight it looks pretty negative - but then, of course, it would be!

Otherwise no work for the consultancy companies who have been handed billions of pounds by the government in the past decade. As David Craig's books show, the money has been scandalously counterproductive. How do these people sleep at night??

This is the first clear and practical statement I've seen of (a) the characteristics of a good public admin system; (b) how different countries rate under such criteria. It's so important that I've put it into "key papers".

review of public admin reform experience

September 15, 2009 at 2:21 AM



I've been very critical in recent blogs of the reform regimes of the past 2 decades. The British experience is both the most radical, most varied and best documented - but its basic "market" model is the one which the OECD has been marketing in its various documents (eg PUMA) over this period.

But clearly the EU contains very diverse traditions. German and French central governments have been largely impervious to the

New Public Management - since the respect for the state and civil servants remains reasonably high. German municipalities, however, have been much affected by it. Scandinavian administration offers a completely different, much more decentralised and democratic, model. So my criticisms are aimed only at those regimes which have swallowed the "market" model hook, line and sinker. It's a pity that so little exists in the English language about the French experience with "quality circles" - and that the English lack the curiosity or humility to ask why, for example, the French health system comes first in the global league tables.

I've also been calling for a fundamental reappraisal of public administration - and of what we have learned from all the changes. Over the weekend I discovered that the Royal Academy of Arts (of all organisations!!) has set up a Public Service Trust which is encouraging just such a dialogue - which, it promises, will bring together practitioner and academic perspectives. It has published a couple of papers which you can find [on its website](#). One is on the history of the UK reform - and the other on drivers of change. Two things, however, make me rather suspicious of the venture. First one of the major funders is a large consultancy company - Ernest and Young. Second, its chairman is a banker! Such people should be in sackcloth and ashes in monasteries - not daring to tell us how to reform our public services!!

And my first skim of the "history" document confirms my scepticism - it makes the fashionable suggestion that we need a "holistic" approach but then says nothing in its 65 pages to say what that might mean. And the "history" is the sort which a first year university undergraduate with no practical experience would write. The only benefit I got from reading the document was a reminder of how fatuous the [2008 UK government strategy document of reform](#) was. You can find it at -

Those of you who want to know more of the reform experience in other administrative traditions should have a look at [Transcending new public management ? the transformation of public sector reforms](#); T Christensen and Per Laegreid (2007) which covers some of the Scandinavian experience - who always bring a freshness to the subject. I wonder why that is!

For some insights into the French and German experience see [State and local government reforms in France and Germany](#); By Vincent Hoffmann-Martinot, Hellmut Wollmann

Please note that I've updated the list of googlebook references - in the "key papers" part of the site.

Another interesting paper I've just downloaded focuses on the more limited field of civil service reform - and [what international experience](#) tells us. It's produced by the British think tank IPPR and is available on their website

[quality assurance](#)

September 16, 2009 at 5:30 AM



Today's theme is quality assurance.

The fashion of "Total Quality Management" has been assessed in various places - . The verdict is that there are few successes - although authors such as Likert continue to proselytise the Toyota way. As I understand it, TQM does not bring a battery of Stalinist controls with it - it is rather a cultural change enacted in the workforce over a longer period of time than politicians or American shareholders are prepared to countenance.

As I've said before, the public sector tends to borrow the worst aspects of the private sector - so the "quality" movement in the public sector bears little relationship to the philosophy of TQM, seem to legitimise a throwback to Stalinism and has led to a huge expansion of the control and inspection regime. That, in turn, has attracted a critical literature - particularly Michael Power and Chris Hood.

I came across a nice book yesterday which looks at the quality assurance explosion in the public sector from the angle of those implementing these regimes - [The new bureaucracy; quality assurance and its critics](#); Max Travers (2007)

One quibble I have with the books is that they do not give enough coverage to the real Europe - too much anglo-american coverage. Jean-Claude Thoenig's summary of the French approach in his "institutional theories and public institutions" is very helpful but few book-length studies on European practices exist. The Scandinavians produce a lot in English about their work - and one of the few books on recent French and German development is [State and local government reforms in France and Germany](#)

Glancing at the articles reminded me of the quite excellent manual on public admin (Serve and Preserve) which the Asian Development Bank issues some years back. It's still available on a [chapter- by-chapter basis on their website](#) -

innovation in government

September 20, 2009 at 3:40 AM



I mentioned recently the rather academic paper produced for the OECD in managing change in governments. It has a back-up [literature review](#) which is actually very well written. Access it at - It encouraged me to go on the website of the UK cabinet office's strategy unit for the first time for many years - lots of "reflective" material there on administrative change. I've put inverted commas since too much of it is rhetoric rather than thought. But there is a [comparative paper](#) which looks worthwhile... Also very useful is a paper on [cultural change](#)
<https://www.oecd.org/edu/ceri/The%20Nature%20of%20Policy%20Change%20and%20Implementation.pdf>

manifesto for better public services

September 23, 2009 at 12:35 AM



The Demos website led me to another of their September publications - which expresses exactly my own feelings about the UK reform regime and where it should now go. Its title - [Leading from the Front](#) - reflects its basic argument that power should be returned to the front-line professionals - and the Stalinist measurement and control infrastructure should be dismantled. Unfortunately we have sold this model back to the central europeans. I found the monitoring culture of the young public manager here in Romania quite frightening... Came across a good canadian site - and this nice "[not a toolkit](#)" on performance measurement

systems thinking again

October 3, 2009 at 5:36 AM



I return to a subject which has a certain fascination - exactly what can systems thinking contribute to the various efforts to give citizens the services they might reasonably expect?? Peter Morgan has written one of the most useful papers on this - as part of the review of capacity development the last entry spoke about (you will find his paper amongst the thematic papers - [reflections](#)" And this paper put me on to another useful UK paper on the subject - Jake Chapman's "[System failure - why governments must learn to think differently](#)". First published by the UK Thinktank Demos in 2002, it had such a response he issued a subsequent version and developed an Open University course - all before John Seddon appeared on the scene...

capacity development

October 3, 2009 at 4:24 AM



There are few websites or organisations I am very enthusiastic about. But I encountered one when working in Kyrgyzstan which did and continues to impress. It's the European Centre for Development Policy Management which, at the time, was conducting a comparative study for the EC on decentralisation - and set up an E-network to encourage a dialogue between European delegations on its drafts. Kyrgyzstan was one of their selected sites - and they duly carried out a visit and

allowed me (a rare non EC Delegation type) into their deliberations. You can find the publication which resulted from this on [their website](#)

They are the main sponsor of a useful [journal on capacity development](#). I would also recommend their major contribution [on this subject](#) which they published in 2008 -

[scandinavian openness](#)

October 6, 2009 at 4:06 AM



Glorious autumn days - with the mountain ridges sparkling with clarity and the trees turning red....

Two interesting papers - one by JP Olsen of Norway - who turned 70 recently! It's the sort of wise review of the trends of the past few decades one expects from someone of that age - "[Ups and downs of bureaucracy](#)" and can be accessed at the Norwegian political science website ARENA

And Chris Pollitt's "[Buying and borrowing public management reforms](#)" (2004) is a helpful overview for those starting foreign assignments -

Sage publications have given another month's free viewing of their journals - gets a bit confusing and indigestible as Wiley's offer is also still running. So several years' of back numbers of Political Quarterly, Public Administration, PAR, International Journal of Administrative Sciences etc have to be quickly scanned and downloaded

The 2004 special issue of Political Quarterly was on "The future of the State". That journal (with Parliamentary Affairs) is a rare bird in the clarity of its language and the special issue has good articles by writers such as Guy Peters, Gerry Stoker, David Marquand. They in turn put me on to two interesting overviews carried out a few years back for the Swedish and Finnish governments respectively who were concerned with the apparent loss of control which various developments (such as agentification and EU membership) had caused - and wanted independent (and transparent) advice on the options.

The Finnish study was done in 2000 by Guy Peters and Derry Ormond (ex-Head of OECD PUMA and a charming and very open guy) and is more concise. Its title is "[A possible governance agenda for Finland](#)" and it has 87 pages.

The Swedish paper is a bit too academic for me - and was not really commissioned. It was written by Per Molander, Jan-Eric Nilsson and Allen Schick in 2002. It is 170 pages long - with the title "[Does anyone govern?](#)".

The most stimulating and useful sorts of publications are those commissioned by governments. A few good minds are brought together by a relaxed and confident government system to explore an issue - and come up with options. And the whole endeavour is made available free of charge. Unfortunately they are rare events. I can think of Nick Manning's [collection of case studies for the Russian Federation](#) (also in 2002 - although it was really the World Bank which was the commissioning agency)

the search for the holy grail

October 7, 2009 at 5:02 AM



One of my problems has always been that I imagine that the next book I read will give me the key to the problematics about effective organisations. In reality, the next book confuses even more - by introducing a plausible new idea or praxis...

I'm not an academic - so I can't be satisfied with critiquing ideas - I'm looking for what works!

And Toyota have gained a reputation for working! And so, inevitably, the reformers and consultants in the public sector seek to identify the essence of that success and transfer it into a message of reform for the public sector. So the last Amazon delivery here contained 2 books - by Jeffrey Liker - on their principles and operations. I've started the first - and can relate to it. It tells stories - amazing stories - about a different way of doing business which one idealistically imagines should be seen in the public sector. The ideas may be radical - but the company is well-known for being conservative - taking time to think things through - but implementing fast. This is what is needed in the UK where ideas are valued - but not implementation.

At the same time I dip into an academic study of the application of business reengineering ("big-bang") principles to a UK hospital - [Reengineering Health Care - the complexities of organisational transformation](#) by Mc Nulty and Ferlie and reel away, appalled and injured by the jargon and complexity. See for yourself at

Ricardo Semler is the MD of Semco which has turned traditional management principles on their head - he writes about this in 2 books Maverick and The Seven-Day Weekend. There is a link here with cooperatives - the underrated organisational principle.....

looking for solutions for UK public finances

October 7, 2009 at 10:29 AM



One of my "favourite links" is Craig Murray's blog. A quote from today's which addresses the key question to which the UK party conferences are now addressing - how UK public finances can deal with the massive support they have given the banking system.

"My solutions are more radical. The local government system suffers from a disconnect between provision and finance. It is administered locally but financed centrally. Your council tax only accounts for a tiny percentage of the council's expenditure, so the ability to relate performance and provision to cost is lost on the taxpayer/voter. At least 80% (100% in wealthy areas) of all local services, including education, should be funded through wholly variable local income tax. National income tax would be correspondingly reduced and council tax abolished. Up to 20% central government subsidy might be paid to poorer regions.

If voters were paying 15% of their income in tax to the local authority, they would take much more interest in local government, and wonder why they were paying for over-inflated and almost completely useless social services departments, and why the deputy manager of the leisure centre was on £85,000 pa. I can think of no single change which would lead to a more radical reduction of government expenditure.

"The other major change would be smaller, leaner public services which simply go on with delivering the service direct, with minimal administration. This is the opposite of what the Tories would do. In particular, we need to cut out the whole complex administration of "internal markets" within the public

services, where vast arrays of accountants and managers spend their wasted lives processing paper payments from the government to the government.

Let me tell you a true story which is an analogy for the whole rotten system. As Ambassador in Tashkent, I had staff from a variety of government departments - FCO, MOD, DFID, BTI, Home Office etc. In addition to which, some staff sometimes did some work for other than their own department. This led to complex inter-departmental charging, including this:

"I was presented with a floor plan of the Embassy building, with floor area calculated of each office, corridor and meeting room. I then had to calculate what percentage of time each room or corridor was used by each member of staff, and what percentage of time each member of staff worked for which government department. So, for example, after doing all the calculations, I might conclude that my own office was used 42% of the time on FCO business, 13% of the time on BTI business, 11% on DFID, etc etc, whereas my secretary's office was used

"I then would have to multiply the percentage for each government department for each room, lobby and corridor by the square footage of that room, lobby or corridor. Then you would add up for every government department the square footages for each room, until you had totals of how many square feet of overall Embassy space were attributable to each government department. The running costs of the Embassy could then be calculated - depreciation, lighting, heating, maintenance, equipment, guarding, cleaning, gardening etc - and divided among the different departments. Then numerous internal payment transfers would be processed and made.

"The point being, of course, that all the payments were simply from the British government to the British government, but the taxpayer had the privilege of paying much more to run the Embassy to cover the staff who did the internal accounting. That is just one of the internal market procedures in one small Embassy. Imagine the madnesses of internal accounting in the NHS. The much vaunted increases in NHS spending have gone entirely to finance this kind of bureaucracy. Internal markets take huge resources for extra paperwork, full stop.

The Private Finance Initiative is similarly crazy; a device by which the running costs of public institutions are hamstrung to make massive payments on capital to private investors. What we desperately need to do is get back to the notion that public services should be provided by the State, with the least possible administrative tail. The Tories - and New Labour, in fact - both propose on the contrary to increase internal market procedures and contracting out. All of George Osborne's vaunted savings proposals yesterday would not add up to 10% of the saving from simply scrapping Trident. Ending imperial pretensions is a must for any sensible plan to tackle the deficit"

Posted by [publicadminreform](#) on October 15, 2009 at 8:23 AM



In June, the UK Parliament's Select Committee on Public Administration published an interesting report on [Good Government](#) - complete with a separate 250 page [Annex with all the exchanges](#) they had with those who gave evidence and many of the papers which were submitted. This Committee - chaired by Tony Wright - is always good value for money - and this report reflects the thinking it has done on a variety of issues over the past 10 years.

The Annex put me on to various bodies and papers I've missed - such as the Institute for Government which has a useful survey of the [British experience of performance management](#) and attitudes of civil servants and local government officials to the recent revamp -

The document, however, makes no mention of the Seddon (systems) critique - and this lacuna worries me. I must admit I still remain cynical about the excessive targeting - and the Select Committee Report indeed makes a simple recommendation in line with the pamphlet I recently mentioned which recommended an abolition of the entire control regime which has grown up in Britain over the past 2 decades.

Its site also referred me to another useful toolkit produced by the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) - [on organisational development and its various tools](#) -

And finally a Bertelsmann Foundation venture - [comparing \("benchmarking"\) various countries on social and institutional issues](#). Very thought-provoking -

New Labour; new-speak

October 16, 2009 at 4:11 AM



"In a damning indictment of Labour's record in primary education since 1997, a Cambridge University-led review today accuses the government of introducing an educational diet "even narrower than that of the Victorian elementary schools".

It claims that successive Labour ministers have intervened in England's classrooms on an unprecedented scale, controlling every detail of how teachers teach in a system that has "Stalinist overtones".

It says they have exaggerated progress, narrowed the curriculum and left children stressed-out by the testing and league table system.

The review is the biggest independent inquiry into primary education in four decades, based on 28 research surveys, 1,052 written submissions and 250 focus groups. It was undertaken by 14 authors, 66 research consultants and a 20-strong advisory committee at Cambridge University, led by Professor Robin Alexander, one of the most experienced educational academics in the country" (Guardian 16 October 2009).

To me, the most significant part of the paper's coverage was the following sentence - "The report notes the questionable evidence on which some key educational policies have been based; the disenfranchising of local voice; the rise of unelected and unaccountable groups taking key decisions behind closed doors; the 'empty rituals' of consultations; the authoritarian mindset, and the use of myth and derision to underwrite exaggerated accounts of progress and discredit alternative views".

It was all supposed to be so different. When New Labour gained power in 1997, the papers which flowed from their new Strategy Unit in the Cabinet Office spoke of a new dawn - "open, evidence-based policy-making". And, since then, we have been buried by an avalanche of papers saying what progress is being made. The paper - [Better Policy-making](#) - which set the tone can be found here

In my more cynical moments, I wonder whether the net result of decades of reform has not been simply to give those in power a more effective language to help hold on to that power while changing as little as possible!

I have a theory that the more an organisation talks of such things as "transparency", "accountability" and "effectiveness", the more secretive, complacent and immoral it is! Emerson put it very succinctly almost a century ago -

"The louder he talked of his honour, the faster we counted our spoons!"

Remember I speak as someone who was an elected Labour representative in municipal and regional governments in Scotland. But that was before the days of New Labour. I was proud of the work we did then - in relation to our social inclusion and community development strategies which formed the basis for both the 1988 Conservative Government's paper "New Life for Urban Scotland" and the Scottish Parliament's 1998 strategy for Social Inclusion.

I contributed to the *Red Paper on Scotland* which Gordon Brown edited in 1975 and to *The Real Divide: poverty and inequality in Scotland* which he and Robin Cook edited in 1981.

But I would not be proud of being Labour 10 years into their rule.

Isolation and rural air is best for creativity! Since I left the mountains 3 weeks ago, I haven't really read or blogged (see separate blog). Now I'm back, I can continue my effort to update and prepare. I think what I shall do is upload useful papers. First a very useful balancing act on [performance measurement](#) -

And I also found various papers on China - the new issue of PAR and a [2004 issue of Chinese public admin review](#)

Saturday, October 17, 2009

ten rules for stifling innovation

In the authoritarian cultures I work in (and who doesn't - these days?), I find my training sessions are enlivened when I have a translated version of the "rules" which Professor Rosabeth Kanter ironically put into her book which reviewed (in the early 1980s) how large organisations (like General Motors and IBM) were trying to restructure themselves to deal with the challenge they faced from small fast-moving and innovative companies.

Basically she found a lot of rhetoric and new structures concealing old behaviour.....Give me please a painting to convey this message!!!!

TEN RULES FOR STIFLING INNOVATION"

1. regard any new idea from below with suspicion - because it's new, and it's from below
2. insist that people who need your approval to act first go through several other layers of management to get their signatures
3. Ask departments or individuals to challenge and criticise each other's proposals (That saves you the job of deciding : you just pick the survivor)
4. Express your criticisms freely - and withhold your praise (that keeps people on their toes). Let them know they can be fired at any time
5. Treat identification of problems as signs of failure, to discourage people from letting you know when something in their area is not working
6. Control everything carefully. Make sure people count anything that can be counted, frequently.
7. Make decisions to reorganise or change policies in secret, and spring them on people unexpectedly (that also keeps them on their toes)
8. Make sure that requests for information are fully justified, and make sure that it is not given to managers freely
9. Assign to lower-level managers, in the name of delegation and participation, responsibility for figuring out how to cut back, lay off, move around, or otherwise implement threatening decisions you have made.

And get them to do it quickly.

10. And above all, never forget that you, the higher-ups, already know everything important about this business.

reinventing the broken wheel



Ilia Beshkov (1901-1958 Bg)

In 1970, SM Miller published a short article - "Reinventing the Broken Wheel" - Lesson-Drawing in Social Policy" - which drew from experience of a variety of Government programmes supposedly aimed at dealing with poverty and inequality. The points should be pinned up in every Cabinet Office throughout the world - viz

- *How a programme starts is important: what it promises, the expectations that it raises. The poor are frequently both suspicious and deceivable - expectations can rise very rapidly and collapse suddenly.*
- *Social Policy cannot substitute for economic policy and actions. Many poverty programmes have attempted to avoid this issue - only to stumble late on this finding.*
- *General economic expansion may not present jobs for the low trained, particularly when dual or segmented labour markets exist. They made need additional help to get and keep jobs or to raise their inadequate incomes.*
- *If social policies do not control major resources in their areas - eg financing in housing - they will be severely limited in what they do*
- *The task is not to integrate the poor and unequal into existing structures eg schools. These structures have gross inadequacies and defects. They must be changed as well - frequently also benefiting the non-poor.*
- *Programmes should be aware of this danger of building up dependencies - and look for ways in which their users can assume responsibility for the programme and themselves.*
- *One-shot, one-time programmes will have limited affects. While the complaint is often made that the poor are handicapped by a short time-span, they who are more frequently handicapped by the short time-span of public policies as policy attention wanders from one issue to another.*
- *Organisation is fateful. How programmes are organised affects what happens to those who deal with them. Where programmes are aimed at the short-run, have uncertain funding, high staff turnover and poor planning and organisation, it will be difficult for people to accept or benefit from them.*
- *People live in communities, in groups, in families. Programmes cannot successfully help them if they are treated as atomistic individuals.*
- *Ambitious, conflicting programme goals and activities lead to trouble. Most programmes have this problem.*

· A programme is what it does; not what it would like to do or was established to do. The distribution of funds and staff time are good indicators of what an organisation actually does rather than what it believes it does or tries to convince others that it does

Local authority services were designed to deal with individuals - pupils, clients, miscreants - and do not have the perspectives, mechanisms or policies to deal with community malfunctioning. For that, structures are needed which have a "neighbourhood-focus" and "problem focus".

The Strathclyde strategy did in fact develop them - in the neighbourhood structures which allowed officers, residents and councillors to take a comprehensive view of the needs of their area and the operation of local services: and in the member-officer groups.

But we did not follow through the logic - and reduce the role of committee system which sustains so much of the policy perversities. That would have required a battle royal! After all, it took another decade before the issue of an alternative to the Committee system came on the national agenda - to be fiercely resisted by local authorities. Even now, the furthest they seem to go in their thinking is the "Cabinet system" - which has been offered as an option several times over the past 30 years (Wheatley; Stewart) but never, until now, considered worthy of even debate. The system of directly elected mayors - which serves other countries well - still does not command favour.

One of the great marketing tricks of the English is to have persuaded the world of our long traditions of democracy. The truth is that our forefathers so mistrusted the dangers of unacceptable lay voices controlling the council chambers that they invented a range of traditions such as the one creating a system of dual professional and political leadership in local government. As the powers of local government increased in the post-war period - this became a recipe for confusion and irresponsibility.

Little wonder that local government was called "The Headless State" (Regan). Chairmen of Committees have been able to blame Directors; and Directors, Chairmen.

In the 1990s it was interesting to see some local authorities now organised on the basis that was beginning to appear obvious to some of us in the late 1970s.

The more progressive councils now have three different political structures -

- One for thinking and monitoring - ie across traditional boundaries of hierarchy, department and agency (our Member-Officer review groups)
- One for ensuring that it is performing its legal requirements (the traditional committee system)
- One for acting in certain fields with other agencies to achieve agreed results (Joint Ventures for geographical areas or issues)

lack of trust

I'm now trying to explore the wider "professional" implications of the case study I described on Oct 28 - both on the blog and on the Guardian's article comments pages. By "professional" I mean the life-long focus I've had on getting government systems to deliver better value to their citizens. The issue the Guardian article confronted was how society (not just teachers) can best deal with disruptive pupils - and, surely, parental satisfaction with the schooling system is a reasonable test for how well a governance system is operating. (In Azerbaijan, I suggested the basic test was how easily people could cross the street!) Those who study and write about government and public administration over-complicate things - we need some simple tests like these! So let's explore what this example of the tools available for disruptive pupil behaviour tells us about the British "governance" system.

The British political, professional and legal systems have made a lot of interventions over the past 30 years into the affairs of the school. Laws, targets, national curricula, guidelines, procedures and outside groups (such as police, social workers and a new breed of auditors) now constrain what teachers can and cannot do. Schools cannot easily get rid of unruly pupils - and have to deal with them in normal classes.

And yet the results of all this effort appear to have made the situation worse. This is ironic - since the NewLabour government boasted in its early years of having found a wider range of policy tools which could be used to fine-tune social behaviour.

I remember so well some of the chapters in Geoff Mulgan's significantly-entitled "Life after Politics - new thinking for the twenty-first century" (1997). In particular Perri 6's "Governing by cultures" - which classified the various tools government had to change social behaviour.

Douglas Hague's title was also interesting - "Transforming the Dinosaurs". That was strong language to use about schools and universities!

And, in 1999, we had the Modernising Government programme - with the Cabinet Office (under Geoff Mulgan) producing several fascinating papers. Part of the new weaponry was "evidence-based policy-making". The tools of (central) government seemed so clear! This was social engineering with a vengeance!

I realise that this does not appear to be very helpful to the parent whose child's education is suffering from the disruptive behaviour. But bear with me.....

Knowing Labour as well as I do (having been a paid-up member since 1959 and a leading regional councillor since 1974), I was disappointed but not surprised that local government did not appear as one of the possible mechanisms of change. New Labour had already absorbed that power ethos which was revealed when Hartley Shawcross spoke in 1946 the famous words - "Now WE are the masters". This gave the game away - what called "the circulation of the elites". That's what passes for democracy in Britain - and, as long as it does, there will be no solution to its (growing) social problems.

Basically, New Labour (despite all the brave words) is no different - it simply does not trust people. And let there be no bones about it - this is an issue of trust. The delivery of public services involves different groups of people - political, administrative, professional and citizen (at national, regional

and local level) - who can and do play different roles in different countries as the level of trust they inspire rises and falls. Different countries have different ideas of those roles.

- In some cases (Scandinavia) it has been the local professionals and local politicians who have been trusted with additional responsibilities in the past few decades.
- In other countries it has been public managers.
- In other countries again managers in the private sector have been the beneficiaries - as functions such as water, transport, health and social policy have been transferred to the private sector.
- And, in some countries, citizens themselves are seen as having important an important role.

In my other blog I've talked about Britain's "command and control" model - which Seddon, amongst others, has criticised. He's right - and yet the aggressive and exclusive manner in which he conducts his work is yet another example of the counter-productive way so many professionals seem to work in Britain.

making sense of public sector reform



A decade ago, I had a few months to prepare for a major new assignment in central Asia - which turned into a 7 year spell in that part of the world. I used those few months to write a small book about what I thought I knew about my discipline. Some of the chapters of that book are "key papers" one, six and thirteen on my website. And what I think I learned from those 7 years is reflected in key paper 3.

Now I face another new continent - and am trying to do the same thing. Perhaps not a book - but a series of reflections. When you're in the middle of an assignment working with a beneficiary, you have to be very practical. The last thing you want is an academic article. But - between assignments - academic journals can give you perspective; help you catch up with changing fashions ("skirt lines are falling this year"); and brief you on development in countries about which you know little.

My language and background is English/UK - so US and Commonwealth developments in public management have been easier to follow in the international journals than French and German. Low country and Scandinavian writers are more comfortable in English and their developments have, therefore, been easier to follow.

Even so, it's obvious from looking at the back numbers of the UK journal *Public Administration*, for example, that I've missed a lot of useful writing about European developments recently. A particularly useful issue was one on traditions of government - and how they've changed recently under the onslaught of NPM.

The UK authors I've found useful are Hood, Pollitt, Stoker and Talbot (academic) and Mulgan and Perić (think-tanks) Today I found another - Martin Evans '[Policy transfer in a global age](#)' All countries, of course, are different - in their values, traditions and structures (see de Hofstede and Trompenaars for more) but the UK is quite exceptional in the ease (speed and extent) with which it can and does change its systems.

For the past 30 years, the country seems to have been in a never-ending process of administrative change.

It's easier to explain the "how" than the "why" of this . Despite the setting up in 1999 of a Scottish parliament and government, the country remains centralised in the worst sense of the word (it was a Conservative Minister who called the system "an elective dictatorship" - and that was in 1976 before the Thatcher and Blair regimes). What this means is that there is no effective political, ethical, social or intellectual force left to challenge the foibles of the executive. Charter 88 recognised this truth long before the rest of us - but it still seems too intellectual a point.

Other countries have coalitions and constitutions to deal with.

Margaret Thatcher thought that markets were the answer - New Labour think central managers are. Although Newlabour is right-wing in its economic approach, it has compensated by the Stalinism of its social and organisational interventions. For all the talk in the 1990s of a third way, of partnerships and networks, NewLabour has not begun to understand what an organic approach to administrative change might look like. The Cabinet strategy unit has basically given rulers a new vocabulary of progressive words to use - behind which hides the old leviathan.

Saturday, November 7, 2009

the scandinavian contribution



The Scandinavian contribution to public administration - at both a practical and theoretical level - is under-estimated.

Sweden, for example, pioneered Agencies and the Ombudsman.

Norway's distinctive take can be seen in the book co-authored by Tom Christensen in 2007 [Organisation for the public sector - instrument, culture and myth](#)

And Scandinavian countries as a whole blazed a trail in the lid 1980s with their "free commune experiment" - whereby municipalities were invited to make bids for being freed (on a pilot basis) from central controls. The process was monitored and

evaluated and, if judged successful, led to legal changes. A real example of pilot work! Google, interestingly, hardly recognises it - so few people now will remember it. Talk about loss of institutional memory!! And in 2004, the Norwegian parliament instituted the [most rigorous review of the state of democracy](#) in their country the world has ever seen. Good article on [its findings and recommendations here](#).

Jon Pierre is a prolific and clear write who is a contributor to Gothenburg University's fairly new Institute on Quality of Government whose papers can be accessed [here](#). I visited the political science people there in the late 1980s to learn about the Scandinavian "free communes experiment" and had a very friendly and lively reception as a local political reformer from another Scandinavian country. After our formal discussions, their Prof (could it have been Pierre??) took me to a night

club whose bouncers took exception to a piece of dust on my coat. When the nearby police were called, I presented them with a rose which I happened to be carrying. The police were not amused - and I will never forget the frisson of recognition I had then about state totalitarianism!

The Institute papers focus on the classic values - and how they have been affected by the new public management. Trust and corruption, for example, figure in their papers. See [an example here](#)

One of the recent paper by Pierre deals with the crucial issue of how the legal tradition can be reconciled with the new logic of markets -

"If we accept the argument that public-sector organizations operate according to a different logic, with a multitude of objectives and with a different organizational structure and leadership compared to for-profit organizations or NGOs then it is only logical to argue that there are, or should be, rather distinct limits to what the public sector can learn from for-profit organizations (Christensen et al., 2007). If we furthermore agree with Suleiman (2003) that the public administration, and indeed the public sector as a whole, is an integral part of democratic governance, it becomes even more obvious that standards and benchmarks from the corporate world really have rather little to offer when it comes to assess the quality of public-sector organizations. Yet, the normative point of departure of NPM was to deny any specificity of the public sector. Public management, to the extent that there was any managerial thinking, was arcane and had not adopted modern corporate philosophies. Indeed, management was believed to be a "generic" organizational task; there do not exist any significant differences between managing public or private organizations (Peters, 2001

The same philosophy was applied to reform of organizational structure, to performance measurement, to customer-provider exchanges, to efficiency improvements, and to organizational leadership and managerial autonomy. Reform only saw one of the two faces of public administration and forgot, or ignored, or circumvented, legality and the role of the public bureaucracy in enforcing the law and ensuring legal security and protection. Today, we seem to be at an impasse where the legal nature of public administration can no longer be ignored or circumvented by administrative reform, yet the architects of reform have few ideas about how to deal with legality or what could replace it. Therefore, we need to think carefully about what legality means to public administration, the extent to which is a critical feature of a public bureaucracy and the extent to which NPM, in various guises, is compatible with legality, transparency, due process, predictability and a public service ethos".

The reference to Suleiman is a fascinating 2003 book about the implications of recent administrative reform - with the provocative title - [Dismantling Democratic States](#)

Saturday, November 14, 2009

organisational narcissism

One of the issues which has puzzled me is the enormous gap between the rhetoric of management books and the organisational reality experienced by both staff and consumers. I found some answers recently in a book which came out a few years back by Shoshana Zuboff and James Maxmin - *The Support Economy: Why Corporations are Failing Individuals and the Next Episode of Capitalism* (2004). Between 1988 and 1994, Zuboff used academic



funding "to follow a group of visionary top managers and watched each one fall prey to corporate politics (which she compares to the 18th century French court), self-interested boards and the whims of financial analysts reacting to short-term fluctuations in a company's earnings"

For Zuboff, managerial capitalism was so successful because it focused inward on the production of products. Henry Ford's staff wanted product differentiation for the rich consumers who were able to buy cars - Ford saw the potential of economies of scale in offering only one product. The new system created great wealth but it also allowed the development of layers of management.

"Organisational narcissism" is the result. Management sits at the centre of this universe and we are on the outer rim of the solar system. We are treated as transactions; we are made to conform to the rules of the organisation. We are treated with indifference and contempt both as employee and as consumer (which is seen as weak and feminine - "production" is the word and the world which matters!)

An early section of the book spells out the nature and implications of the new society of individuals the new-found wealth and technology has created - complex people who want to take control of their lives and whose needs, the authors argue, can best be described in relation to "sanctuary", "voice" and "connection". These new people have outgrown the old organisations which remain rooted in their inward product focus ("dynamic conservatism" was the wonderful phrase used by Donald Schon almost 40 years ago).

This has created a chasm or "transaction gap" between new people and old organisations. A powerful chapter of the book shows the failure of the various "waves of the future" which have swept companies in the last 2 decades - reengineering, quality management, relationship management etc. The basic DNA of the "standard enterprise logic" overwhelmed them all and made consumers and staff alike even more alienated. A very powerful case she describes is that of an airline official in Rome who made it her business to "go the extra mile" but was unable to continue this by the combination of new central diktats and superior disapproval. All too often, the new systems and technologies seem basically to allow more aggressive and intrusive marketing.

"The Support Economy" tries to map out a different system - called "distributed capitalism" in which the individual (thanks to the internet) is at the centre of the universe. Eleven principles are set out - in rather obscure language, it must be said. The essence of business is to supply us - through a system of federations - with levels of support that will allow us to live our lives the way we want to live them. The providers of support will be our advocates acting as intermediaries between us and the supply federations.

This part of the argument is not as convincing - indeed the language becomes very abstract and esoteric. I also missed any references to Richard Semmler - whose Semco company tears up the management books. Companies which remain private (ie not quoted on the stock exchanges) or which are cooperatives have, presumably, more hope. Zuboff does not address this critical issue. And a minority of change endeavours do succeed - that is clearly shown in the chapter which rightly points to the general failure of the various expensive management fads and fashions of the past decades. So, clearly, if preconditions and leadership are right, change does work. Surely that is the area we should be focusing on?

What are the implications of these arguments for those involved in the reform of government systems? After all, most government reforms (certainly advice from management consultants) of the past 2 decades have been based on the assumption of the effectiveness of private management and the positive lessons which are contained in quality management, performance management etc. At one extreme, people could argue that the public sector is better placed to make a success of these ideas - since it does not have the poisonous framework of boards and shareholders expecting short-term profit. But the behaviour of ruling politicians is more and more similar to that myopic framework - and, of course, it has always been more difficult in the public sector to develop measures of performance which (a) can be agreed and (b) don't cause counter-productive reactions (see....).

British government offers an object lesson in what not to do - control things from the centre. "Strong" local government is needed - with electoral and dialogue systems which enforce prior consultation and debate. Independent foundations should carry out the comparative assessments which act as a spur to initiative. Neither officials nor politicians can be relied upon to work for the public good - rather do we need an understanding that professional associations, voluntary groups, parties and officials are four groups with different interests and perspectives between which a balance can and should be struck.

Tuesday, December 8, 2009

are human resources people?



I've mentioned already the inimitable, little bombshell called Scottish Review which pops 2-3 times a week into my electronic letterbox. It's been demonstrating the critical skills which the mainline media have lost by conducting in recent months a simple and one-man campaign to make senior executive pay in Scottish public Agencies and public bodies (such as Health Boards) more transparent and has scored several palpable hits. More of that in a minute.

Today's issue had a short piece sparked off by the author meeting some of his colleagues who had recently retired from middle-level positions in the public service, noticing how more relaxed they looked.

"One in particular had been transformed from a tired and careworn individual to a man with a spring in his step and a smile on his face. These were not people who had been in the wrong job, or had lost interest in their professional responsibilities. On the contrary, they had given many years of good service but had simply been ground down by the system and, in the end, were glad to get out. They mentioned a variety of

factors which had made retirement a welcome release (or, in a few cases, had impelled them to seek early retirement): the lack of any acknowledgement of their contribution; endless pressure to increase output; the insane demands of an oppressive bureaucracy; less and less time to attend to the matters that they regarded as priorities; periodic restructurings which achieved nothing; managers who failed to inspire trust or respect

The writer (Walter Humes) concludes thus "

Despite all the 'supportive' measures introduced by Human Resource units, significant numbers of long-standing employees have ceased to experience the job satisfaction that motivated them previously and have been glad to escape the constraints of the workplace. Their experience should be taken seriously and used as a basis for reviewing current assumptions about how to treat staff. There is a difference between getting the most out of people and getting the best out of them. In my experience, staff are motivated not by the proliferation of back-covering 'policies' and so-called 'entitlements', but by a simple combination of clear expectations, fair treatment, recognition of achievement, backing at times of difficulty, and leadership by example. Underlying all of this is a disturbing question. What kind of people rise to the top when the prevailing culture is one which employs a dishonest rhetoric of employee care, and which alienates the genuinely good guys to the point where they simply want out? It seems a recipe that will allow the calculating, the self-seeking and the cynical to flourish. This perhaps explains why some of our public services are so urgently in need of radical reform. The barbarians are not just at the gate: in some cases, they are running the place"

For the full article see [here](#)

Interesting that I should read this the same day I accessed a very good paper by Chris Demmke of the European Institute of Public Administration which reviews recent development in HRM in European member states - [What are Public Services Good at? Success of Public Services in the Field of Human Resource Management](#); Study Commissioned by the Slovenian EU Presidency Professor Dr. Christoph Demmke/Thomas Henökl, Researcher, EIPA and Timo Moilanen, Researcher, University of Helsinki (EIPA May 2008)

To get a true picture, we always need both academics and vox pop!

Finally revenons aux moutons - pay for senior public executives. Kenneth Roy, the courageous editor of this great little publication, wonders in today's posting whether the Prime Minister has perhaps been following his campaign. Gordon Brown spoke out strongly yesterday about naming and shaming highly paid senior executives in the public sector. One of them actually stated that he would work for 20% less! In recent postings [Roy has been questioning the effectiveness of bodies such as Audit Scotland](#) which are supposedly responsible for ensuring that all is well financially in public bodies

A comment from Marianna Clyde gives a sense of the significance of Roy's campaign -

Well done on lifting the lid on Audit Scotland. There is indeed a cosy little world of consultants and private accountants benefitting at the public expense while the rest of us suffer. And what does Audit Scotland's staff do all day when their work is done for them by private contractors? And doesn't that rather go against the spirit of 'independent auditing' to hire outside firms? How independent is that?

It is also pretty extraordinary that 'in Scotland, executives and non-executives in public bodies have the right to withhold their consent for disclosure [of salaries] and neither the Auditor General nor Audit Scotland can compel them'. Why? What is the legal basis for this? There is a popular conceit in Scotland that we are naturally a more democratic and egalitarian people than the English, and that the coming of the

Scottish Parliament would return us to our 'natural' state. But such disclosures dispel such comfortable myths and show a lazy, slavish, sluggish society apparently at ease with the legitimacy of 'reputation management' as a morally acceptable political technique, a society so comfortable with being managed it has subsumed its critical apparatus and is content to suffer vast and unjust inequalities without asking 'why'? But perhaps no more, if the Scottish Review continues to illuminate the dark corners and ask the awkward questions and expose the fact that Scotland is run by a cliquey, self-satisfied, self-regarding establishment of public sector grandees aided and abetted by their worshipful acolytes in the media and their equally moribund, uncurious politicians in the parliament.

Never since the Letters of Zeno appeared in the Caledonian Mercury in December 1782 ('sleep, in a state, leads to slavery' - Zeno) criticising the lack of accountability of the political system of that time, which kick-started the political reform movement, has a series of articles done more to expose the shortcomings of a growing, unaccountable managerial elite and the growth of its management machine. It would be interesting to know what work the 'consultants' employed by Audit Scotland did. For my hopes for a vibrant, genuinely democratic Scottish society I sincerely wish 'reputation management' wasn't one of them!"

a day's reading



My focus at the moment is a rather challenging assignment in China. Subject to final medical and visa clearance, I depart in 5 weeks and have now started to think myself into the task. I have first to prepare a "Baseline study" on the state of public administration reform there - imagine!! And, as part of that, to draft various briefing papers on the lessons from the countless initiatives of European states in this area eg performance and

quality management.

I want to hit the ground running as far as the second part of the initial work is concerned and am therefore trying to first to track down as many recent assessments on the European experience as I can. I do my best to keep up to date - but it is only in the break between assignments that I have to do the surfing and reading which is needed. Earlier this year, for example, I discovered that I had missed quite a few key documents from the British Cabinet Office and yesterday I came across some interesting reports which the National Audit Office had commissioned from academics on innovation in the public sector. I've not been able to get separate internet references for the various documents but punch "innovation government" in the [NAO search engine](#) and you'll get 3-4 interesting papers. The NAO also commissioned PWC to do a review of "Good Government" which focuses on France and USA.

The Cabinet Office has also published a useful study of what they regard as [good government initiatives here](#)

"Innovation", "good government", "improvement", "quality management", "performance management" etc The language itself confuses - and, to some post-modernists, is itself the product. I hope to return to this issue which is referred to by the academics who have made this their specialism eg Boivard, Brouckaert, Loeffler, Peters, Pollitt. The European Group of Public Administration has had a special committee exploring the issue of productivity in the public sector for some years. [Their papers can be accessed here](#) You can see why I had no time yesterday to blog - I was too busy

surfing!

I also came across an [interesting overview from 2004 by Elaine Kamarck](#). She made some intriguing references to the work of President Vincente Fox of Mexico (2000-2006) and when I googled this item I was referred to an article in an open electronic journal I had forgotten about -

The [International Public Management Review](#). A glance at the article on the [Mexican experience of reform](#) (by Dusaugge) persuaded me that their experience is very relevant to the Chinese! Read it for yourself at And today, I discovered the Scandinavian Journal of Politics - whose articles I am able to access courtesy of Wiley. Some fascinating accounts of what they've been up to which rarely get to the mainstream journals. Sorry I'm not able to share them - I'll try to summarise at some point in the future.

Friday, December 11, 2009

[my list of useful comparative papers on public management reform](#)



Iain MacWhirter is one of the links I recommend in the sidebar - and yesterday's post on the [latest phase of the banker's scam in the UK](#) is a good example of his writing. Cold mist has been surrounding the house for the past few days - and the trees had a delicate glow of snow this morning. But usually the snow is deep by now.

Yesterday I was still collating what I consider are key references for my briefing note on public management reform efforts (in Europe) and beginning to give some thought to the sort of structure my note will need.

First, however, I need to reread the "seminal accounts" - which, despite the large number of academic titles on comparative work in this field, are fairly small in number since most academic overviews which purport to be comparative actually fall into one of two rather different categories. First there are the ad-hoc collections of case-studies illustrating the priorities of a particular country. The best of this are written around a common set of questions - but most leave it to the author to decide how he wants to write about an experience.

The second type is more comparative - but focussed on a particular tool or approach eg financial, performance management, personnel, agencies,



decentralisation etc For example the 2008 book on Managing Performance - international comparisons by Brouckaert and Halligan. A weakness of these books for the practitioner is that they are written to gain points in the academic community - and have therefore to use whatever description they contain into a specialist discourse. Academic discourse is bad enough - but some of the recent post-modernist are evil!

It is for this reason that the most useful books from the practitioner point are those which have been specially commissioned for a customer in the state sector eg OECD or written by an international body. So far my list includes the following -

- Public sector reform in Western Europe (1997) Overview paper by Toone and Raadschelder to a larger academic study
- Why is it so difficult to reform public administration? Government of the future - getting from here to there (1999) Series of OECD Conference papers
- Public Management Reform - a comparative analysis (2000); Academic book by Pollitt and Brouckaert
- Performance or compliance - performance audit and public management in five countries (2002); Academic book by Chris Pollitt
- International Public Administration Reform - implications for the Russian Federation (2003); Commissioned study by Nick Manning and Neil Parison of the World Bank
- Evaluation in public sector reform - concepts and practice (2003); an academic book by Herbert Wollmann
- Responses to country questionnaire (2005); national inputs to an OECD survey
- International Comparison of UK's public administration (2008); Report commissioned by National Audit Office
- Commentary on international models of good government (2008); Report commissioned by National Audit Office

Perhaps the most useful are the Manning report and the second last paper.

The Manning report (about 400 pages) selects countries considered to have some common features with Russian which might make their experience interesting. These are - Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, South Korea, UK, USA on which there are individual chapters. The analysis sets up a typology of perceived problems and subsequent reform tools. Then at the results - suggesting that some countries have forces of resistance which make them "low traction" - for which certain tools only are relevant

The NAO paper is perhaps the most intriguing. It suggests that good public administration can be defined by sets of "values", "outcomes" and "enablers".

Good PAs are responsive, transparent, accountable, equitable and have a public service ethos. These can be measured by high quality services, public confidence and trust, good policy advice, culture of seeking value for money and "stability and continuity"

"Enablers" are Culture of performance, Management; Appropriately skilled public Administration; Good leadership; Capacity for change. The report then identifies comparative indices on these outcomes and enablers to rank the UK system

Friday, July 9, 2010

New approaches to government

Between the 1970s and 1990s I had the opportunity to experiment with different approaches to policy-making - at both the local and regional levels. The Tavistock Institute invited me to join a project in the 1970s which was beginning to think about the network approach to policy-making. And I felt that one of the best things I ever did was to bring together and support over a 2 year period something we called athenetwork of urban change agents - officials, councillors from both Districts and the Region, academics and NGO reps who were invited to attend on the basis of their commitment to deal with the conditions of social injustice.

Since then I have read various key authors such as Mary Douglas, Margeret Wheatley, James Scott and Paul Ormerod who recognise the limitations of crude managerialism. In a way the argument goes back to the writings of such 20th century anarchists as Ivan Illich and Paulo Freiere.

Taylor says simply that Traditional policy interventions - particularly in relation to social problems - have these characteristics:

- They are large scale and expensive.
- They aim for relatively marginal improvement in outcomes e.g. a few percent lower unemployment or higher pupil attainment.
- They seek to minimise risk through systems of regulation, audit, and accountability.

But these design features do not fit the characteristics of social networks interventions, which are:

- They will usually fail.
- Occasionally small interventions will have major impact through contagion effects.
- Sometimes interventions will have an impact very different to those planned (sometimes good, sometimes not).
- An emphasis on social networks changes not just the focus and design of public policy, but the whole way we think about success and failure.

From this blog, I was led on to the various papers on this theme on the RSA website and suddenly found myself on the [Scribd. Site](#) - which allows me not only to download a whole variety of material but also to upload my own papers!

Needless to say I spent half an hour exploring, inserting a profile and uploading a paper -

Searching for the Holy Grail in which I try to set out what I feel I have learned from my 40 years' experience of trying to help different government systems operate more in the public interest. All very interesting - but basically it diverted me from the writing which is the only way to make sense of the stuff founf on the internet!

Let me, at any rate, share a couple of the papers I came across on subjects close to my heart - one a book which had just appeared on [Reforming the worst government in the world](#) -

The other is a useful paper on the [Azerbaijan government system](#) -

Tuesday, August 10, 2010

limits of expertise

I was still trying to make sense of William Davies's intriguing paper from which I quoted yesterday which has, as its title, The Limits of Expertise. I have never tried to explain (even to myself) why I chose the Saul quotation for my masthead on the right - We've spent half a century arguing over management methods. If there are solutions to our confusions over government, they lie in democratic not management processes. It is a reflection, I suppose, of the ambivalence within me about political and managerial roles. For the first 20 years of my adult life. I was a (technocratic) politician; for the last 20 years I have been an apolitical adviser

But in 1974 or so - based on my experience of working with community groups and trying to reform a small municipal bureaucracy - I wrote a pamphlet called From Corporate Management to Community action which reflected my disillusionment with the technocratic fashions of the time. New Labour was a social engineering government with a vengeance - with Brown given the time and opportunity to invent a giant machine for minute tweaking of socio-economic processes across the board. His budgets (companies), tax credits (households) and PSA (public service agreements setting targets for Departments) were infamous for their detail and optimistic assumptions about the link between technical means and social outcomes.

It was not just the sheer arrogance - it was downright ignorance of the literature on the perversity of social interventions - which amazes.

Davies's The Limits of Expertise tries to look at the philosophical underpinnings of what we might call the "policy bent" - by which I mean the incredible growth in the past 20 years of Think Tanks and of interest in policy analysis. That reflects, of course, the huge expansion in universities of social science, paramount amongst which has been economics - with its weird but (until recently) unquestioned assumptions about human nature. He has an interesting argument -

Unforeseen by the policy architects who designed the New Labour platform, the defining problem of the past decade has turned out to be an ethical-political one: antisocial behaviour. Utilitarian calculations can only conceive of the world in economic terms ('economic' in the sense of weighing up profit and loss), and as such are entirely ill-equipped to deal with this problem. It can be bracketed as an aspect of poverty or even biology; it can be tackled through an extension of police and surveillance technologies; or it can be swept under the carpet through mystical references to 'communities' and the voluntary sector. All the while, it looks set to rise in the future, thwarting all our expert analyses of the psychology and economics that supposedly determine it.

For the foreseeable future, our politicians will treat it like crime or unemployment: quantitative phenomena that rise and fall as outcomes of policy and/or the economic weather. In time, however, it may have to be treated as an ethical and political issue. At an ethical level, Richard Reeves points out that there is a growing need to revive respect for 'character'. He points to three dimensions of this: a sense of personal agency or self-direction; an acceptance of personal responsibility; and effective regulation of one's own emotions, in particular the ability to resist temptation or at least defer gratification.

That reminded me of David Cameron's address in November which articulated his [Big Society idea](#). It reads very well - it is quite something for a Conservative Prime Minister to be committed to deal with poverty and inequality. He actually quotes from the recent [Wilkinson and Pickett book](#) which strongly argues that healthy societies are equal ones.

Having proven (to at least his own satisfaction) that big government (spending) has not dealt with the problem of poverty, Cameron then suggests that the main reason for this is the neglect of the moral dimension, refers to various community enterprises, entrepreneurs and goes on -

Our alternative to big government is not no government - some reheated version of ideological laissez-faire. Nor is it just smarter government. Because we believe that a strong society will solve our problems more effectively than big government has or ever will, we want the state to act as an instrument for helping to create a strong society. Our alternative to big government is the big society. But we understand that the big society is not just going to spring to life on its own: we need strong and concerted government action to make it happen. We need to use the state to remake society.

The first step is to redistribute power and control from the central state and its agencies to individuals and local communities. That way, we can create the opportunity for people to take responsibility. This is absolutely in line with the spirit of the age - the post-bureaucratic age. In commerce, the Professor of Technological Innovation at MIT, Eric von Hippel, has shown how individuals and small companies, flexible and able to take advantage of technologies and information once only available to major multinational corporations, are responding with the innovations that best suit the needs of consumers.

This year's Nobel Prize winner in Economics, Elinor Ostrom, has shown through her life's work how non-state collective action is more effective than centralised state solutions in solving community problems. Our plans for decentralisation are based on a simple human insight: if you give people more responsibility, they behave more responsibly.

So we will take power from the central state and give it to individuals where possible - as with our school reforms that will put power directly in the hands of parents.

Where it doesn't make sense to give power directly to individuals, for example where there is a function that is collective in nature, then we will transfer power to neighbourhoods. So our new Local Housing Trusts will enable communities to come together, agree on the number and type of homes they want, and provide themselves with permission to expand and lead that development.

Where neighbourhood empowerment is not practical we will redistribute power to the lowest possible tier of government, and the removal of bureaucratic controls on councils will enable them to offer local people whatever services they want, in whatever way they want, with new mayors in our big cities acting as a focus for civic pride and responsibility.

This decentralisation of power from the central to the local will not just increase responsibility, it will lead to innovation, as people have the freedom to try new approaches to solving social problems, and the freedom to copy what works elsewhere.

It is sad that I never found Blair or Brown singing a song like this. Of course one can make various criticisms - one of the best is in a [TUC blog](#)

But the fact remains that community enterprise (pity he didn't mention cooperatives! is worth supporting. I was very heartened to read in another blog about the continuing success of the [Mondragon Cooperative in Spain](#) which has increased its employment in the last 20 years from 20,000 to 90,000.

I remember visiting Mondragon in 1990 in an endeavour to bring its lessons back to Scotland.

October 13, 2010

performance management

I've written before about my [search for the holy grail](#) and it was in that spirit that I was eager to read Colin Talbot's latest book on [Theories of Performance - organisational and service improvement in the public sector](#) which, hot off the press, winged its way to me this week. Although an academic, he does consultancy, writes in a clear and stimulating way about public management, makes no secret of his youthful Marxism (indeed Trotskyism) and has a [blog](#). It was therefore with some impatience that I galloped through the book and now pause to make sense of it. It is indeed an impressive tour de force - which surveys both the very extensive academic literature and also the global government endeavours in this field over the past few decades. As befits an academic, he roots his contribution conceptually before moving on to survey the field - and this is an important contribution in what is all too often a shamefully theoretically-lite field. For the first time I read a reasonably analytical treatment of the various quality measures which have developed in the last decade such as The Common Assessment Framework. His references to the literature are invaluable (I have, for example, now two new acronyms to set against NPM - PSM ([public service motivation](#)) and new PSL - [public service leadership](#)).

I am also grateful to him for introduction to the concept of [clumsy solutions](#) - which uses culture theory to help develop a better way of dealing with public problems.

On the downside, however, I found the basic focus frustrating - I had hoped (the title notwithstanding) that it would be on the senior manager charged to make things happen. After all, his equally academic colleague Chris Pollit gave us [The Essential Public Manager](#) - so it would be nice to have someone with Talbot's experience, reading and coherence write something for senior managers - and for different cultures. Those trying to design improvement systems in Germany, Romania, China, Estonia, Scotland and France, for example, all confront very different contexts.

And, despite, his introductory references to his consultancy work, the few references he makes are apologetic ("it's not research"). I appreciated his critical comments about the suggestions about gaming responses to the target regime - but was disappointed to find no reference to Gerry Stoker's important article about the [deficiencies of New Labour's target regime](#); a paragraph about Michael Barber's Deliverology book which gives no sense of the dubious assumptions behind his approach; and, finally, really surprised to find no reference to John Seddon's [systems critiques](#). However, it will (I am sure) quickly become the best book on the subject.

Monday, October 18, 2010

A Fine Mess



Let me clarify - the pessimism I feel about the performance capacity of governments relates to my experience and understanding of (a) the UK system since 1968 (when I started my councillor role which was to extend for 22 years) and (b) the so-called transition countries of Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia in which I have worked and lived for the past 20 years.

I have a more open mind about the situation of the Scandinavian countries (in one of which I have briefly worked and lived); of Federal Germany and of the consensual Netherlands (although consensual Belgium and Austria have been disasters).

But the UK system has become ever more centralised and adversarial in my lifetime - and these two characteristics seem to me to affect the chances of policy success in the country

- Policies are imposed - rather than negotiated or thought through
- They are often very poorly designed (eg the poll-tax; rail privatisation; the whole Stalinist target system - with all the counterproductivities that involves)
- Ministers have a high turnover rate (Ministers of Finance excepted)
- Implementation is very poor (see agency theory)
- Morale of public servants is low (political hostility; targets; frequency and number of new initiatives; crude management)
- Changes in government lead to cancellation of programmes

Governance arrangements as a whole do not excite much interest in Britain - but issues relating to the operation of the political system (and of what is felt to be the disenfranchisement of the citizen) do. Concerns about the British political system were so great that a [highly ironic report on the operation of the British system](#) was published by Stuart Weir and Democratic Audit to coincide with the launch of the campaign. A [very good blog put the campaign \(and its prospects\) in a useful wider context](#). If you go back to the diagram at the end of [key paper 5 on my website](#), the electoral system (box 4 top left) is actually only one of 10 sub-systems which have a bearing on the operations of public policies. But (as the 2nd of my blog masthead quotes indicates) it is probably of supreme importance. Which is why the political system so rarely gets reformed (apart from local government!)

I vividly remember a book in the late 1970s (Google does not go that far back!) which looked at various policy initiatives to try to identify the preconditions for successful social policy-making (feasibility and support were 2 of them) and which could produce only a couple of successful policy examples - one of which was the Open University (I would add the [Scottish Children's Hearing](#) approach to juvenile justice which was introduced in 1968 and which appears [still to be going strong](#)).

I would dare to posit that there was probably a Golden Age of government capacity in the UK - not only further back in time (when the political elite were not assailed by the media, lobbies and think

tanks) but also further down in space. David Marquand's recent magisterial [neglected arguments of Leopold Kohr](#). I appreciate the arguments of [Gerry Hassan](#) and [Tom Gallagher](#) about the potentially incestuous nature of political systems in a small country (Hassan talks about the bunker mentality) and Belgium, Iceland and Ireland have hardly surrounded themselves recently with glory - but the issue of decentralisation of power must be one of the options countries look at in our present global crisis.

China is in the news again - with its attitude to the award of the Nobel peace prize to Liu Xiaobo. There are (and have been) so many courageous individuals in that country - and now even [some older members of the elite are calling for an end to the restrictions of freedom of expression](#).... I liked the [jokes which are now apparently circulating about the situation](#).

But apparently [even the Prime Minister is censored](#)!

As I've been writing this, Romanian radio has been playing some Stockhausen which has similarities to Kyrgyz nasal music!!

But revenons aux moutons - which might be rephrased as the autonomy of governments and of the actors who are supposed to manage the machinery of government.

And there are really two sets of questions I now find myself wrestling with.

The question I started with was where we might find examples changes in the machinery of government which might be judged to have made a positive difference to the life of a nation. Those wanting to know what precisely I mean by this phrase are invited to look at the diagram on the last page of [key paper 5 on my website](#).

Politicians find it all too easy to set up, merge, transfer, close down ministries, agencies and local government units. It's almost like a virility symbol - China did it recently when, after some years of study of best practice, they proceeded to set up mega-departments (at a time when the rest of the world thought they were a bad idea!).

- The UK coalition is set on merging/ closing down about 150 quangos. One of them is the Audit Commission which was set up in 1982 by a Conservative Government to keep English local authorities on their toes.
- The Scottish Education Minister thinks that 32 municipal Education Departments is too many for a country of 5 million people. This in a country which has had its local government system completely replaced twice in the last 30 years! From 650 units to 65 in 1974/5; then again to 32 in 1997.
- The New Labour Government proudly published a Modernising Government strategy in 1997 which they sustained for the 13 year of their duration. What did it achieve?

Most academics who explore this question are very cynical - Colin Talbot's book which I reviewed recently is the latest example. My question is whether it is different in transition countries such as Romania and Azerbaijan? They are at a more primitive stage - and some changes in accountability, judicial, electoral and parliamentary systems can presumably make a difference.

Why, for example, should Romania have 2 Chambers?

The second question which I found myself wrestling with last night is the extent to which political and administrative leaders (those with formal positions of power) can actually achieve changes which can reasonably be regarded as significant and lasting - and beneficial for the majority of a country's population?

I came to political activism almost 50 years ago through reading books with such titles as *Conviction* (1958), *Out of Apathy* (1960), *Suicide of a Nation* (1963), *The Stagnant Society* (1961) and [The Future of Socialism](#) (1956) which, I am delighted to see, has been reissued (with a foreword by Gordon Brown).

Fifty years on - after 26 years of Tory rule and 24 years of Labour rule) - we seem to have the [same level of dissatisfaction](#) if of a different sort. I vividly remember how the optimistic mood of the early 1970s about social engineering was transformed in a few years.

The academic literature about "government overload" perhaps captured the mood best (interestingly I can't find a link for this concept!) - although the community development work to which I was strongly attached (and its connection to the powerful anarchical writings of people like [Ivan Illich](#)) also contained its own despair about what government actions could ever achieve.

The influential public choice literature was, frankly, off most people's radar at the time. But these are the main strands of ideology of UK governments over the past 20 years - with Gordon Brown's tinkering from the Finance bunker allowing a vestige of social engineering in the field of social policy.

Of course Tony Blair's Northern Ireland settlement is a good example of what determined government action can achieve - but what else?

I will leave the question in the air for the moment. In the course of drafting this, I have discovered [a marvellous political autobiography of this period](#)

November 9, 2010

[A Lament on the impotence of democratic politics](#)

[Craig Murray's latest post](#) looks at the latest 2 examples of the collusion between government and commercial interests ([Vodafone](#) and BAE systems (the giant aerospace company)); notes the lack of public interest; and draws the pessimistic conclusion that "Conventional politics appears to have become irretrievably part of the malaise rather than offering any hope for a cure. But political activity outwith the mainstream is stifled by a bought media".



It's worth giving the larger quote -

This Vodafone episode offers another little glimpse into the way that corporations like Vodafone twist politicians like around their little fingers. BAE is of course the example of this par excellence. Massive corruption and paying of bribes in Saudi Arabia, Tanzania and elsewhere, but prosecution was halted by Tony Blair "In the National Interest". BAE of course was funnelling money straight into New Labour bagmen's pockets, as well as offering positions to senior civil servants through the revolving door. Doubtless they are now doing the same for the Tories - perhaps even some Lib Dems.

It is therefore unsurprising the BAE were able to write themselves contracts for aircraft carriers which were impossible to cancel and that their New Labour acolytes were prepared to sign such contracts. It is, nonetheless, disgusting. Just as it is disgusting that there is no attempt whatever by the coalition to query or remedy the situation. There is [no contract in the UK which cannot be cancelled by primary legislation](#).

Meanwhile, bankers' bonus season is upon us again and these facilitators of trade and manufacture are again set to award themselves tens of billions of pounds to swell the already huge bank accounts of a select few, whose lifestyle and continued employment is being subsidised by every single person in the UK with 8% of their income. This was because the system which rewards those bankers so vastly is fundamentally unsound and largely unnecessary. Money unlinked to trade or manufacture cannot create infinite value; that should have been known since the South Sea Bubble.

Yet even this most extreme example of government being used to serve the interests of the wealthy and powerful at the expense of everyone else, has not been enough to stir any substantial response from a stupoured, x-factored population, dreaming only of easy routes to personal riches, which they have a chance in a million of achieving.

Conventional politics appears to have become irretrievably part of the malaise rather than offering any hope for a cure. But political activity outwith the mainstream is stifled by a bought media

Sadly the comments on Craig's posting (219 comments at the last count!) failed spectacularly to address the issue - descending to the religious ravings which are becoming an all too familiar part of such threads. My own contribution (at the tail-end) was a rather pathetic appeal for a bit more humility in such discussions.

Instead of asserting opinions, can people not perhaps in these discussions share more quietly and analytically some of the perspectives which are out there on the possibilities of political and social action? For example, I've just finished reading the inspiring 2003 book "One No and Many Yeses" by Paul Kingsnorth. At other levels there are the writings of David Korten and Olin Wright's recent "Envisioning Realistic Utopias". Political parties and corporations remain the last protected species - and we should focus our energies on exploring why this is so; why it is so rarely investigated - and how we change it

All this gets us into the same [territory I was trying to map out recently](#) when I posed the question about what programme elements might actually help release and sustain people power in a way which will force the corruption of modern elites to make significant and lasting concessions?

But, coincidentally, one of my other favourite blogs has produced [a review of David Harvey's The Enigma of Capital](#) which I recently referred to as possibly offering a more solid analysis of the problems we face. Harvey's book is not an easy read - and this review sets the book's main arguments in the wider context of other leftist writers who have faced the fact that there is something systemic in the latest global crisis. At this point, be warned, the language gets a bit heavy!

Looking at the post-2008 financial disasters, it could be considered that capitalism had shown, to use the unfashionable words of Engels, that "the crises revealed the bourgeoisie's incapacity to continue to administer the modern productive forces." (Anti-Dühring) The way was open for groups within a vanguard (renamed 'socialist anti-capitalism') to develop a political project. For Alex Callinicos, this is the occasion to remedy the "chronic weaknesses" of the increasingly diffuse (not to say, chronically ineffective) "alter-globalisation" movement - worldwide protests at capitalist injustice. Demands "against the logic of Capital" would now have resonance. His recent book - *The Bonfire of Illusions* - argued for "democratic planning" "democratically taking control of the financial markets, nationalising under workers' control", "extending social provision" and even a "universal direct income" (Page 141) Callinicos bases his politics on the "strategic role of the organised working class" allied to the anti-capitalist 'movement'. One might say that he considered the moment ripe for his general 'anti-capitalist' strategy, described in *An Anti-Capitalist Manifesto*. (2003). Through trade unions, social associations and party shapes all these forces should be "engaging with states to achieve reforms." This, he asserted, is not 'reformism' but a revolution through "democratic forms of self-organisation" to "progressively take over the management of the economy."

A different 'anti-capitalist' position, with more influence than the organised left usually gives it credit, refuses any engagement with the state and conventional politics - indeed with parties as such. John Holloway, whose presence looms large on this terrain, places faith in a multitude of do-it-yourself 'refusals' of capitalist servitude. In *Crack Capitalism* (2010) he wishes us to develop our "power to". To pursue this objective through established politics, through parties and the state, ('taking power') is to enter a "false terrain". "A political organisation which focuses its action upon the state inevitably reproduces these characteristics of the state as a form of relations." (Page 59) Left-wing parties get absorbed and transformed.

His anti-partyism apart Holloway remains partly on the same terrain as Callinicos. He asserts "capitalism is in its deepest crisis for many years". But instead of making politics, the moment has come simply to "stop making capitalism". Does this, as Harvey claims, depend entirely on a picture of the 'activity of labouring' (Page 133) In fact *Crack Capitalism* supports a 'refusal' so all-encompassing it extends from not turning up to work to guerrilla warfare in the jungle. "We start from being angry and lost and trying to create something else (Page 20 *Crack Capitalism*). How exactly do we halt the "terrific destruction that surround us? For that, "There is no right answer, just millions of experiments." (Page 256)

Harvey does not neglect his own wide-ranging search for shoots of resistance to capitalism. As a result of the crises, there will be, a "prolonged shake-out in which the question of grand and far-reaching alternatives will gradually bubble up to the surface in one part of another." (P 225) There are the "alienated and discontented" who "for whatever reason, see the current path of capitalist development as a dead end if not to catastrophe for humanity." (Page 340) There are the "deprived and dispossessed" - from wage earners, the 'precariat' in unstable employment to the landless. Nevertheless, there are no certainties about "who the agents of change will be". Indeed *The Enigma of Capitalism* is not certain about political agencies at all. The problem is the more acute in that for Harvey, like Callinicos in *The Enigma of Capital* it is the "state-finance nexus" that has to be changed. *The Enigma of Capital* considers that left progress ultimately depends on "seizing state power, radically transforming and reworking the constitutional and institutional framework that currently supports private property, the market system and endless capital accumulation." (Page 256)

There are some left strategies, which have concentrated on changing the institutional framework, the 'state-finance nexus'. Robin Blackburn's response to the "credit crunch" was to advocate a "public-utility finance system" on a supranational and "eventually global basis". Blackburn convincingly argues that a seriously anti-capitalist government would have to grapple with credit and money. Such a regime could "curb corporate excesses, re-direct resources to useful ends, promote egalitarian goals, and build the capacity for popular invigilation and administration of financial and corporate affairs." (*New Left Review*).

No 56. 2009). The problem is that for the moment the prospect of any government adopting this scheme is as remote as the successful popular uprisings of which Blackburn finds few signs.

The Barriers to the Left.

So what is holding the left back from becoming a real political force, let alone taking power? For Harvey the central problem is that,

"in aggregate there is no resolute and sufficiently unified anti-capitalist movement that can adequately challenge the reproduction of the capitalist class and the perpetuation of its power on the world stage. Neither is there any obvious way to attack the bastions of privileged for capitalist elites or to curb their inordinate money power and military might. There is, however a vague sense that not only is another world possible.....but that with the collapse of the Soviet empire another communism might also be possible."(P 226 -7)

It is not just that the alienated and discontented have at best only a 'vague sense' of something better. A stable political way of identifying the problems of those deprived and dispossessed is not obvious either. There is no "political force capable of articulating" the alienated-discontented-deprived-dispossessed groups in an 'alliance' or giving voice to a coherent programme and strategy that would offer a real alternative to capitalism."(Page 227) For Harvey Lenin's question, What is to done? cannot be answered. We are caught in an insoluble dilemma. The "lack of an alternative vision prevents the formation of an oppositional movement, while the absence of such a movement precludes the articulation of an alternative?" (Ibid)

All this reminds me of Ralph Miliband (father of Ed) 's Parliamentary Socialism ((1962)which argued the basic pointlessness of the social democratic approach (The other 1,000 page book which arrived recently is in fact Donald Sassoon's One Hundred Years of Socialism!).

Strange how few books come from political or economic academics offering broad, critical analysis of current political and economic life. David Harvey is a geographer!

And the best stuff on the role of pension funds (and how they might be changed) is by a Marxist intellectual not associated with academia - Robin Blackburn. Both Paul Kingsnorth and Bill McKibben - who write on alternative systems - are campaigning journalists. Will Hutton who casts a periodic eye over the philosophical infrastructure which underpins the Anglo-saxon economic system ([Them and Us](#) is his latest 400 page blockbuster) is also a journalist. The only UK academic I know who has written blunt analyses about the nature of our political system is the political development scientist - [Colin Leys](#) - whose time in Africa has clearly given him an important perspective his British academic colleagues lack. Sociologists are the masturbators par excellence - although Olin Wright is an honourable exception with his recent Envisioning Realistic Utopias from the USA. In America the only challenging stuff comes from speculators like Nassim Taleb and George Soros - although Nobel-winning Joseph Stiglitz is an enfant terrible of the Economics profession and of World Bank and IMF policies there; and Paul Hawkin made us all think a decade or so ago with his Natural Capitalism.

Of course all this reflects the economic structure of the knowledge industry - with rewards going to ever-increasing specialisation (and mystification) - and, more recently, the binding of university funding to industrial needs. When I was in academia in the 1970s, I was shocked at how actively hostile academics were to inter-disciplinary activity. And the only Marxists who have managed to make a career in academia have generally been historians - who posed no threat since they offered only analysis or, like Edward Thompson, action against nuclear weapons. I have a feeling that the

first step in bringing any sense to our political systems is a powerful attack on how social sciences are structured in the modern university - using Stanislaw's *Social Sciences as Sorcery* (very sadly long out of print) as the starting point. Instead of ridiculing Macburger Degrees, we should be honouring them as the logical extension of the contemporary university system.

I wonder if French and German social scientists are any different. Jacques Attali (ex-Head of the EBRD) is a prolific writer - although his latest book *Sept leçons de Vie - survivre aux crises* has absolutely no bibliographical references so it is difficult to know his reading. And has anyone really bettered the dual analysis offered in Robert Michels's 1911 *Political Parties* which gave us his [Iron Law of Oligarchy](#) and Schumpeter's (1942) *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* - and its minimalist concept of democracy as competition between the elites? And does that differ significantly from the emergent Confucian Chinese model set out in Daniel Bell's latest book??? I realise that these last few references are a bit cryptic and will return to the theme shortly.

What I suppose I am trying to say is that change requires (a) description of what's wrong (making the case for change); (b) explaining how we got to this point (an analytical model); (c) a programme which offers a relevant and acceptable way of dealing with the problems; and (d) mechanisms for implementing these programmes in a coherent way.

We have a lot of writing in the first three categories - but I find that most authors think the task is finished when they produce at page 300 the outline of their programme.

Craig's started his blog with a strong assertion -

British democracy has lost its meaning. The political and economic system has come to serve the interests of a tiny elite, vastly wealthier than the run of the population, operating through corporate control. The state itself exists to serve the interests of these corporations, guided by a political class largely devoid of ideological belief and preoccupied with building their own careers and securing their own finances.

A bloated state sector is abused and milked by a new class of massively overpaid public sector managers in every area of public provision - university, school and hospital administration, all executive branches of local government, housing associations and other arms length bodies. All provide high six figure salaries to those at the top of a bloated bureaucratic establishment. The "left", insofar as it exists, represents only these state sector vested interests. These people decide where the cuts fall, and they will not fall where they should - on them. They will fall largely on the services ordinary people need.

The 2 sentences of his with which I began this long piece strike to the heart of the issue which must be addressed -

Conventional politics appears to have become irretrievably part of the malaise rather than offering any hope for a cure. But political activity outwith the mainstream is stifled by a bought media.

The question is how (if at all) do we break out of this impasse? Or do we rather build an explicitly imperfect world on the Michels and Schumpeterian insight?

So thank you, Craig Murray, for sparking off this rant - which I have dignified in the title with a more musical Celtic word - lament!

November 12, 2010

Four basic questions

In my recent (and rather long) lament about political impotence, I mentioned Will Hutton (and his latest book *Them and Us - Changing Britain - why we need a fair society*) as one of the people who has the wide inter-disciplinary reading necessary for anyone to have anything useful to say to us about how we might edge societies away from the abyss we all seem to be heading toward. I've used the verb „edge“ because the calls for revolution which come from the old leftists are unrealistic (if not self-indulgent) but mainly because, historically, significant change has rarely come from deliberate social interventions. It has come from a more chaotic process. More and more disciplines are applying chaos theory in recognition of this - [even management](#) which is less a discipline than a parasite!). So the call these days is for paradigm shift to help us in the direction of the systemic change the world needs to make in its move away from neo-liberalism.

And close readers of the blog may recollect that I suggested that any convincing argument for systemic reform need to tackle four questions -

- Why do we need major change in our systems?
- Who or what is the culprit?
- What programme might start a significant change process?
- What mechanisms (process or institutions) do we need to implement such programmes?

Most books in this field focus more on the first two questions - and are much lighter on the last two questions. The first two questions require pretty demanding analytical skills - of an interdisciplinary sort which, as I've argued, the very structure of universities actively discourages. Hence the limited choice of authors - perhaps the two best known being [Immanuel Wallerstein](#) and [Manuel Castells](#). Both offer complex systemic views and, given the nature of their study, the writing style is not very accessible. [Susan Strange](#) made a great contribution to our practical understanding of Casino Capitalism as she called it - until her very sad death a decade ago.

Sadly, two other well-known names with a much more accessible writing style - Noam Chomsky and Naomi Klein - tend to focus a lot of their energy on rogue states such as the USA. William Hutton's [The World We're In](#) (2002) was as powerful and accessible of the limitations of the anglo-saxon model as you will ever read - and, with his stakeholder concept, carried with it a more optimistic view of the possibilities of reform. [David Korten's various books](#) also offer good analysis - although his focus on the American corporation does not easily carry to Europe (See William Davies' recent [Reinventing the Firm](#) for a recent attempt). You can read Korten's review of a Soros book [here](#). Archdruid offers a contrary view [here](#) - although I'm not quite sure what to make of this particular blog - archdruid indeed!!

Most commentary on the recent global financial crisis has identified banks as the culprit - and those governments who made the move in recent decades to free banks from the regulation to which they have been subject. Marxists such as David Harvey have reminded us that government and banking behaviour is simply a reflection of a deeper issue - of surplus capital.

Hutton's latest book (which I had abandoned a few weeks ago for its rather abstract opening treatment of fairness but dragged from the bookshelf at 04.30 this morning) does give fairly good treatment to the first 3 questions but does not really even begin to answer the final question. And this is particularly pertinent for Hutton since the stakeholder analysis he brought with his 1995

book *The State we're In* chimed with the times; did persuade a lot of people; and seemed at one stage to have got the Prime Minister's ear and commitment. It did not happen, however, and Hutton surely owes us an explanation of why it did not happen.

The Management of Change has developed in the past 2 decades into an intellectual discipline of its own - and Hutton might perhaps use some of it in a future edition of the book to explore this question. He might find [Change the World: How Ordinary People Can Achieve Extraordinary Results](#) particularly stimulating (I certainly did)

I would also have wished him to give us some comment on other takes" on our global problems eg the work of David Korten (above), Bill McKibben's [Deep Economy: Economics as if the World Mattered](#) and David Harvey's *The Enigma of Capital: And the Crises of Capitalism*. Although he is very generous in his attributions of research work, Hutton is perhaps less so in his recognition of the work of others who are trying to answer what I've suggested are the four big questions. There are more and more people trying to understand the mess we are in - and how do get out of it - and more and more books each with its own underlying set of ideological assumption. Will Hutton is one of the few people able to help us make sense of it all.

Finally [a site with superb photographs which capture many aspects of Bucharest and Romania](#).

June 25, 2011

[We're here to serve you](#)

Our worship of progress and the "new" leads us to imagine that "performance management" is a modern discovery - and one that will set things alright in the world. It's therefore marvellous to read this exasperated quotation from none less than the Duke of Wellington in 1812 -

Whilst marching from Portugal to a position which commands the approach to Madrid and the French Forces, my officers have been diligently complying with your requests, which have been sent by H.M Ship from London to Lisbon and thence by dispatch rider to our headquarters.

We have enumerated our saddles, bridles, tents and tent poles, and all manner of sundry items for which His Majesty's Government holds me accountable. I have dispatched reports on the character, wit, and spleen of every officer. Each item and every farthing has been accounted for with two regrettable exceptions for which I beg your indulgence.

Unfortunately the sum of one shilling and ninepence remains unaccounted for in one infantry battalion's petty cash and there has been a hideous confusion as to the number of jars of raspberry jam issued to one cavalry regiment during a sandstorm in western Spain. This reprehensible carelessness may be related to the pressure of circumstances since we are at war with France, a fact which may come as a bit of a surprise to you gentlemen in Whitehall.

This brings me to my present purpose, which is to request elucidation of my instructions from His Majesty's Government, so that I may better understand why I am dragging an army over these barren plains.

I construe that it must be one of two alternative duties, as given below. I shall pursue either one with my best ability, but I cannot do both.

1. To train an army of uniformed British clerks in Spain for the benefit of the accountants and copy-boys in

London, or perchance

2. To see to it that the forces of Napoleon are driven out of Spain.

I owe the quotation to a [brilliant website set up by a senior civil servant](#) (Martin Stanley) which contains the clearest and best analysis I have ever read of British Civil Service Reform.

Most of the stuff written about this subject is by social science academics – who lack the historical perspective and seem to have bought into the rationalistic belief system. This guy first sets the political/sociological context for the breathless British changes of the past 40 years.

It is ironic that many of the problems facing today's politicians stem from the successes of their predecessors. Indeed most of them have their roots in our ever increasing wealth and ever improving health. For a start, UK society is now vastly more wealthy than 50 years ago. A typical post-war household literally had nothing worth stealing:-

No car, no TV, no phone, nothing! No wonder it was safe to leave doors open along most British streets. But GDP has risen four-fold since then. Most homes nowadays have a wide range of marketable goods, and huge amounts of money to spend on non-essentials, including on drink and drugs.

The crime rate has therefore soared, as drug addicts seek to get their hands on others' wealth, and drunks cause various sorts of mayhem. Our wealth causes other problems:

- We can afford to eat much more, and travel everywhere by car, and so get fat and unhealthy, with consequences for the health service.*

- There are now 10 times as many cars on the roads as in the 1950s, with obvious implications for transport and environmental policies.*

- Much the same applies to the growth in cheap air travel.*

Other problems are caused by the fact that the distribution of the new wealth is uneven. And many of us seek to catch up by borrowing as if there is no tomorrow. Credit card debt, for instance, increased from £34m in 1971 to £54,000m in 2005.

The other big success is our health, and not least the fact that we are all living so much longer than before. Life expectancy at birth is currently increasing at an astonishing 0.25 years per year. Healthy life expectancy is also increasing – but only at around 0.1 years per year. In 1981, the expected time that a typical man would live in poor health was 6.5 years. By 2001 this had risen to 8.7 years. Just imagine what pressure this is putting on the health and social services ... not to mention on pension schemes. The average age of men retiring in 1950 was 67. They had by then typically worked for 53 years and would live for another 11 years. By 2004, the average of men retiring was 64. They had by then typically worked for 48 years and would live for a further 20 years. As a result, the work/retired ratio had halved from about 5 to about 2.4. These are huge (and welcome) changes, but with equally huge – and politically unwelcome – implications for tax, pensions and benefits policies.

It is also noticeable that voters nowadays want to spend more and more money on holidays, clothes, durables, etc. whilst few seriously try to promote the benefits that result from the public provision of services. Voters therefore resent paying taxes, and the Government is under constant pressure to spend less, despite the problems summarised above.

In parallel with all this, society has become more complex and less deferential:

- Voters are much more likely to have been to university, to have travelled abroad, and to complain.*
- The family is less important.*

- *Adult children are much more likely to live some distance from their parents*
- *42% of children are now born outside marriage.*
- *The media are much more varied and much more influential, whilst the public are much more inclined to celebrate celebrity.*
- *Voters expect the quality of public services to improve and refuse to accept inadequate provision.*
- *They also turn more readily to litigation.*
- *The Human Rights Act and the Freedom of Information Act add to these pressures.*
- *There have been other more subtle, but perhaps more profound, changes.*
- *The original welfare state was a system of mutual insurance - hence "National Insurance". It has slowly changed into a system of rights and entitlements based on need. This is morally attractive - but it is also open to abuse, which breeds resentment.*
- *The post-war generation believed in self-help. Much post-school education was through unions or organisations such as the Workers Educational Association. We now expect the state to provide, and 50% of our children go to university.*
- *Our increasing wealth and improving health - let alone the absence of major conflict - means that we really do have very little to worry about compared with our predecessors. But of course we still worry, and demand that the Government "does something about" all sorts of lesser risks, from dangerous dogs through to passive smoking.*

Another interesting change has been the introduction of choice into health and education policies. This is in part because modern voters want to be able to choose between different approaches to medicine and education. But choice is also a very effective substitute for regulation in that it forces the vested interests in those sectors to take more notice of what their customers actually want.

There are, however, some unwelcome consequences arising from the introduction of choice into public services:

- *The availability of choice inevitably gives a relative advantage to the sharp elbows of the middle classes. They can, for instance, move into the right catchment areas, and are better at demanding access to the right doctors.*
- *Choice also requires there to be spare capacity, which has to be paid for. Less popular schools and hospital have to be kept open - often at significant cost - so that they can improve and offer choice when their busy competitors become complacent and less attractive.*
- *Ultimately, however, persistently unpopular and/or expensive schools and hospitals have to be allowed to close, or else they have no incentive to improve. But such closures always provoke various forms of protest.*

What sort of people, faced with all this, would aspire to be politicians? No wonder we get "the leaders we deserve" (title of a marvellous book in the 1980s by Alaister Mant). This extended quotation from the website is just setting the scene for the wry descriptions of the numerous initiatives taken by British Governments since 1968 to get a civil service system "fit for purpose". For more read [here](#)

Last night saw torrential rain here in Sofia - and today is like a typical dreich day in Scotland. The fig tree has become enormous - and is bending in the wind. Great after the heat of the past few days. I cycled before 09.00 to the great butcher's shop (diagonally from the Art Nouveau Agriculture Ministry building) and up a short drive which supplies pork, chicken and sausages sublimely marinated in honey and spices. There is a buzz about the place - these people know they are providing heavenly products!!!

July 17

My ever-resourceful journal put me this morning onto another [House of Lords inquiry which has been going on for some time - into "behavioural change"](#) of all things - and onto about [1,000 pages of evidence](#) related mainly to changing eating, drinking and travelling habits. An amazing freebie!

I've long considered that policy advisers and makers (who churn out legislation) did not give enough attention to the numerous factors which make people behave the way they do. Some years back, I developed a table on this - which I keep updating. A fairly [recent version can be accessed at page 73 here](#). I'm just flicking through the evidence - but already a couple of things have caught my attention - a fascinating table on ages of public service development in a paper on [managing the impossibility of expectation - public services in 2020](#) from a new website.

And an interesting submission from the Central Office of Information (COI) - which immediately raised in my mind the question of its relationship with the Statistical Office (which has been downgraded by the Coalition Government and whose chairman-designate has just resigned after a tough grueling from MPs). I discover that the COI is also heading for extinction - after [a review by a State Secretary](#) (Matt Tee) who bears the title Permanent Secretary for Government Communications but who seems to me to embody all that is worst in Orwellian Nuspeak. Instead of analysis, there is scoping and benchmarking. "Partnership" is nuspeak for privatisation. Indeed a new verb is invented "to brigade" as in

Government should agree a direct communication strategy, taking into account its priorities, the audiences it is trying to reach and the channels available to it. The strategy should brigade communication around a small number of themes.

And the axing of the COI is phrased as "its brand should cease to be used" !! These are weasel words - for wankers. Better to say that "government communications" is a synonym for.....lies!

Oct 16 2010 (2011???)

The UK Select Committee on Public Administration continues to do useful work - in identifying important questions to probe about the operation of government; and attracting witnesses from all sectors of society (including academia, Ministers and senior officials) to explore the issues with the Committee's members. A few months it produced a report about government IT projects with the great subtitle - ["recipe for rip-off"](#).

It is currently exploring the capacity of the civil service to deal with the Coalition government's ambitious plans for "turning the model government upside down" - through contracting even more of public services to social enterprises. Its initial report [Change in Government - the agenda for leadership](#) came out last month and is tough not so much on the civil service as the government itself -

The Government has embarked on a course of reform which has fundamental implications for the future of the Civil Service,

.....but the Government's approach lacks leadership. The Minister rejected the need for a central reform plan, preferring "doing stuff" instead. We have no faith in such an approach. All the evidence makes clear that a coordinated change programme, including what a clear set of objectives will look like, is necessary to achieve the Government's objectives for the Civil Service. The Government's change agenda will fail without such a plan. We recommend that, as part of the consultation exercise it has promised about the future role of Whitehall, the Government should produce a comprehensive change programme articulating clearly what it

believes the Civil Service is for, how it must change and with a timetable of clear milestones.

In short, the Government has not got a change programme: Ministers just want change to happen: but without a plan, change will be defeated by inertia.

And this in one of the OECD's "best governed countries" – according to a 2008 World Bank assessment. What chance, then, for the sort of cooperation between policy-makers, senior officials and academics in transition countries called for by the various analysts I quoted yesterday?

The report goes on to set out what it would expect to find in a reform plan –

62. We consider that a number of key factors for success specifically relevant to large-scale Civil Service reform are vital to the success of change programmes in Whitehall:

a) Clear objectives: there must be a clear understanding of both what the Civil Service is being transformed from and to, as well as the nature of the change process itself. This requires both a coherent idea of the ultimate outcome, but also how clarity on how to ensure coordination of the reform programme and how to communicate that throughout the process.

b) Scope: The appropriate scope for the reforms must be established at the outset; with focused terms of reference, but also wide enough to be able to explore all necessary issues.

c) Senior buy-in: A political belief that reform is needed must be matched by the same belief within the Civil Service and ministers, and both should be clear on their roles in delivering it. Sustained political support and engagement from all ministers is crucial.

d) Central coordination: Either the Cabinet Office or reform units such as the Efficiency and Reform Group must drive the change programme. This requires good quality leadership of such units and a method of working which ensures collaboration with departments, and Prime Ministerial commitment.

e) Timescales: There must be a clear timetable with clear milestones to achieve optimal impact and to ensure political support is sustained. The lifespan of the change programme should include the time taken for reforms to become embedded. Two to three years is likely to be the most effective; beyond this period reform bodies may experience mission creep.

63. Measured against the factors for a successful change programme, the Government's approach to Civil Service reform currently falls short. There is no clear or coherent set of objectives, nor have Ministers shown a commitment to a dynamic strategic problem solving approach to change. The Cabinet Office have signalled their commitment to change the culture of Whitehall, but we have not yet found sufficient evidence to imply a coherent change programme. In the absence of leadership from the Cabinet Office, departments are carrying out their individual programmes with limited coordination and mixed levels of success. Without clear leadership or coordination from the centre, setting out, in practical terms, how the reform objectives are to be achieved, the Government's reforms will fail

Useful stuff!

Saturday, October 22, 2011

[In Memoriam; Ion Olteanu 1953-2010](#)

I dedicate this post to the memory of Ion Olteanu - a Romanian friend who died a year ago and whose anniversary was today at the Scoala Centrala in Bucharest. Sadly, being in Sofia, I wasn't able to attend. He was one of a tiny minority in post-Ceausescu Romania with a vision for Romania - and worked tirelessly and with great sacrifice and professional passion with its adolescents to try to realise it. He had a marvellous and unique combination of tough logic and tender care.

I hope he will consider it a suitable memorial comment.



In recent years, some of us consultants in admin reform have found ourselves drafting manuals on policy-making for government units of transition countries. I did it ten years ago for the Slovak Civil Service (it is one of the few papers I haven't yet posted on the website). I'm sorry to say that what is served up is generally pure fiction - suggesting a rationality in EC members which is actually non-existent. I like to think that I know a thing or two about policy-making. I was, after all, at the heart of policy-making in local and regional government at the height of its powers in Scotland until 1990; I also headed up a local government unit which preached the reform of its systems; and, in the mid 1980s I got one of the first Masters Degree in Policy Analysis. So I felt I understood both what the process should be - rational, detached and phased - and what in fact it was - political, partial and messy.

I was duly impressed (and grateful) when the British Cabinet Office started to publish various papers on the process. First in 1999, [Professional policy-making for the 21st Century and then, in 2001](#), a discussion paper - [Better Policy Delivery and Design](#). This latter was actually a thoroughly realistic document which, as was hinted in the title, focused on the key question of why so many policies failed. It was the other (more technical parts) of the british government machine which showed continued attachment to the unrealistic rational (and sequentially staged) model of policy-making - as is [evident in this response from the National Audit Office](#) and in the Treasury model pushed by Gordon Brown.

The [Institute of Government Think Tank](#) has now blown the whistle on all this - with a report earlier in the year entitled [Policy-Making in the Real World - evidence and analysis](#). The report looks at the attempts to improve policy making over the past fourteen years - and also throws in some excellent references to key bits of the academic literature. Based on interviews with 50 senior civil servants and 20 former ministers, along with studying 60 evaluations of government policy, it argues that these reforms all fell short because they did not take account of the crucial role of politics and ministers and, as such, failed to build ways of making policy that were resilient to the real pressures and incentives in the system.

The Institute followed up with [a paper which looks at the future of policy making "in a world of decentralisation and more complex problems"](#) which the UK faces with its new neo-liberal

government The paper argues that policy makers need to see themselves less as sitting on top of a delivery chain, but as stewards of systems with multiple actors and decision makers - whose choices will determine how policy is realised. As it, with presumably unconscious irony states, "We are keen to open up a debate on what this means. There is also a [third paper in the series](#) which I haven't had a chance to read yet.

In this year's paper to the NISPAcee Conference, I raised the question of why the EC is so insistent on accession countries adopting tools (such as policy analysis; impact assessment; professional civil service etc) which patently are no longer attempted in its member states. Is it because it wants the accession countries to feel more deficient and guilty? Or because it wants an opportunity to test tools which no longer fit the cynical West? Or is it a cynical attempt to export redundant skills to a gullible east?

Thirty years ago terms such as "policy failure" and "implementation drift" were all the rage in political science circles - with the implicit assumption that such drift was a bad thing ie that the original policy had been and/or remained relevant and effective. Nowadays we are more sceptical about the capacity of national (and EU) policy-making - and (therefore?) more open to systems thinking and complexity theory and its implications for public management.

Certainly Gordon Brown's fixation with targets was positively Stalinistic - and was progressively softened and finally abolished on his demise. I have blogged several times about the naivety of the belief that national governments (and, logically, companies) could control events by pulling levers - sometimes calling in aid posts from the thoughtful blog [Aid on the edge of chaos](#); [John Seddon and his systems approach](#) and [Jake Chapman](#) who wrote a useful paper some time ago about [the implications of systems thinking for government](#).

I have never, however found it easy to get my head around the subject. I am now reading the [Institute of Government's recent pamphlet on System Stewardship](#) which is exploring the implications for english Civil Service skills of the Coalition government apparent hands-off approach to public services ie inviting a range of more localised organisations to take over their running - within some sort of strategic framework.

The task of senior civil servants then becomes that of designing and learning from (rather than monitoring (?) the new system of procurements. My immediate thought is why so few people are talking about the reinvention of English local government (turned in the last 2 decades into little more than an arm of central government) - ie of inviting/requiring local authorities (rather than central government) to do the commissioning. The logic of complexity theory for collective organisations is presumably to reduce hierarchies and move decision-making as near as possible to individuals in their localities. Neoliberals say this means markets (dominated by large oligopolies); democrats say it means municipalities committed to delegation and/or mutual societies and social enterprises; and many northern Europeans would argue that they have the answer with their mixture of coalition governments, consultation and strong municipalities. But those who write in the English language don't pay much attention to that.

When I googled "stewardship", I realised it has, in the last few years, become [a new bit of jargon](#) - and have to wonder if it is not a new smokescreen for neo-liberalism.

For the moment, I keep an open mind and will be reading three papers I have found as a result of this reading - a rather academic-looking [Complexity theory and Public Administration - what's new?](#); a rather opaque-looking [Governance and complexity - emerging issues for governance theory](#); and a more useful-looking [Governance, Complexity and Democratic participation - how citizens and public officials](#) But I'm not holding my breath for great insights - just seems to be academic reinvention by new labels.

Friday, December 2, 2011

Rediscovery of political economy

I have referred several times to the radical [rethinking of the economics discipline](#) and [also of psychology](#) and regretted that there was little sign of such reassessment of basic principles in the schools of management - let alone in those of public management which continue to regurgitate so many of the [hoary myths of management](#) from [the surreal world of management writing](#).

In fact, I now realise, some people - in and around The World Bank of all places - have been engaged in some basic reappraisals of relevant literature for administrative reform efforts and producing some very readable documents. They are those associated with the World Bank's recent [Governance Reforms under real world conditions](#) written around the central questions for my work as a consultant -

1. How do we build broad coalitions of influentials in favour of change? What do we do about powerful vested interests?
2. How do we help reformers transform indifferent, or even hostile, public opinion into support for reform objectives?
3. How do we instigate citizen demand for good governance and accountability to sustain governance reform?

I realise I keep repeating these questions (and the reference) but the questions are so rarely asked in practice let alone pursued seriously in transition countries - and the book is quite excellent. This morning, the WB drew my attention to [three useful bits of training material to back up that work](#).

Interestingly, the disciplines they draw on are political economy and communications. Both are dear to my heart - the first being the neglected Scottish intellectual tradition which was (just) still alive in my university days - although [this useful paper from the Asian development Bank on the subject](#) credits the first use of the term to a 17th century Frenchman. This [paper from the ODI gives examples of its use](#) to ensure that development interventions are on a firm basis.



For someone who dedicated 22 years of his life to local government - in senior political positions in local government and running, in parallel in academia, a Local Government Unit which ran workshops and published papers about issues about local government management, I write very little now about the subject. True, there are some papers on my website - about [the lessons I drew from social inclusion work](#) which took up a lot of

my time and commitment between 1970 and 1990 ; about the [experience of European local government in transferring functions](#); and a [Roadmap for local government in Kyrgyzstan](#)

I have, however, watched with despair as the British system has become even more centralised in the past 2 decades - the Scottish less than the English. They seem impervious to the lessons that lie on their (European) doorstep - that

decentralised systems are healthier and more able to deal with issues. The British political parties are full of the rhetoric of people power - but when in power continue to centralise. An astonishing 70% of local government spending in the UK is controlled by central government - compared with 19% in Germany and 32% in France.

I therefore stopped watching developments on that front some time ago - but seem, as a result, to have missed an interesting initiative which took place in the Brown years - something called Total Place. This encouraged municipalities and local state bodies to come together; identify how much was being spent on particular problems eg drug treatment; and to rethink the services with a smaller budget. 13 pilots were selected and helped by some universities. The results seemed to be promising and suggest how local government might achieve a new legitimacy - see [this final report](#); and [handbook](#).

The focus on clients - rather than departments - is radical and clearly could be taken seriously only because of economic and budgetary crisis. Part of its thinking can be traced back to the zero-budgeting ideas of the 1960s and 1970s and indeed I came across a comment from an interesting guy, Des McConaghy, I had contact with in those days -

it is intolerably frustrating - almost 40 years later and at 80 years of age! - seeing so many "total approach" initiatives come and go - decade after decade; each inevitably failing for much the same reasons as each new generation "starts from square one". The landscape is strewn with their wreckage. So it's now up to the Cabinet Office to really get to grips with the actual policy implications of localism. They must see that while this does indeed mean massively devolving all that can be safely left to the localities it also means a better grip on Whitehall's own strategic role - plus the management and political validation of that vital constituency dimension!

However, the Handbook is a very rare celebration of systems thinking - it is very well-presented and shows how the concept and its operation draws on different strands of thinking (eg group-grid theory which I referred to recently; styles of learning; dialogue etc). It is very rare for an official document to refer to such theoretical grounding. My only beef is that there are few hard examples of the results in the Handbook. For that you have to go to the individual [Final Report eg from](#)

[Birmingham.](#)

My internet search, however, suggests that the Total Place initiative seems, despite (because of?) its hype, to have disappeared without a trace with the arrival of the Coalition Government - being replaced by another pilot (this time in 2 places only) called [Community Budgets](#). The "Prospectus" (typical business language) about the concept fails to mention the "total place" work even once. Instead, the phrase "whole-place" is used. Why do politicians need to behave so childishly? Just what local government can offer particularly in this part of the world is nicely shown [in this Local Government and Public Services book](#)

Saturday, December 17, 2011

[It's politics, stupid](#)

My mother lived to the grand old age of 101 - and was still pottering around her small flat in the supported accommodation in which she lived for almost a decade in her 90s, doing her own shopping and cooking meals for me on my visits from far-flung places. She had some difficulty understanding what it was I was doing in the countries of central europe and central asia which had, for so much of her lifetime, behind "The Iron Curtain". And it was not easy to explain - she was, after all, of that generation which actually produced things; the more effete characters who provided services in those days such as teachers, accountants, bankers, doctors had status precisely because they were in such a small minority. Since then the number of what Robert Reich called in the 90s "symbolic analysts" who do little more than manipulate words and figures has grown to scandalous proportions. Little wonder that we are all so confused!

But I have just come across a new paper which gives a clear overview of the difficulties people doing my sort of work in transition countries over the past 2 decades face; and which also captures [the critique I have been conducting of it in various papers](#).

It's written by Tom Carrothers for the Carnegie Foundation and is entitled [Aiding governance in developing countries - progress despite uncertainties](#)

He has eight injunctions -

- recognise that governance deficiencies are primarily political
- give attention to the demand for governance, not just the supply
- go local
- strive for best fit - rather than best practice
- take informal institutions into account
- mainstream governance (ie don't just run it as an add-on)
- don't ignore the international dimensions
- reform thyself

Its references pointed me to a useful summary which DfiD did recently of the findings from 10 years of funded research on governance and fragile states 2001-2010 - [The Politics of poverty - elites, citizens and states](#)

A year ago, I was working on [a sceptic's glossary of administrative and political terms](#) which really deserves wider currency, But one of the best manuals on the change process in government is a 500 page World Bank effort - People, Politics and Change - building communications capacity for governance reform

<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTGOVACC/Resources/PPCOnline.pdf>

Monday, June 25, 2012

The Deserts of Transition?

For all the talk of European Commission transparency, it's none too easy to get useful information about the projects on which its various Structural Funds and Operational Programmes spend so many thousands of millions of euros.

Nor, incidentally, have I seen anyone look at the role which such funding has played in the socio-economic development of this Region. A lot of money is spent on consultants evaluating the projects but their availability seems to be very restricted. And those who write these evaluations have no interest in biting the hand that feeds them - so no fundamental critique will emerge from that quarter.

I might expect journalists and academics to tackle such basic questions - except that they too have their reasons for not wanting to upset a gravy-train.

I have lived in central Europe for much of the past 20 years - and don't need to worry about offending the powerful interests in the EC. So let me clearly say what I think about the contribution of Structural Funds

It has helped into place the systemic corruption here - not least by adding to the incentives to pull the wrong sort of people into the political systems.

I doubt that a credible case can be made for its economic contribution.

Bulgaria and Romania have been able to spend less than 10% of the monies allocated to them.

That's a pretty dismal picture - and a poor reflection on European journalism that no journalist seems to have posed, let alone explored, the question of what it has all really achieved for these countries. The opportunity was there in the past 2 years while the whole future of the Structural Funds was being reviewed - I rather belatedly [woke up to this \(rather inward if not incestuous\) discussion at the end of January](#)

All this is by way of a preface to praise for one report which I stumbled across last week -

[Narratives for Europe](#) from the European Cultural Foundation. Don't be put off by the "deconstructionist" verbosity at the beginning - this was an interesting venture using EC funding to link up ordinary people in a lot of peripheral areas of Europe whether at weddings, playing music or in the final stages of their life in remote villages.

We are not looking to collect either official discourses or isolated individual stories. We are trying to identify common ground and shared representations, yes, but it is also about identifying diverging perspectives, conflicting desires, grey zones: the questions and even doubts expressed by people in Europe of all generations and backgrounds, particularly those engaged in arts and culture. Coincidentally, The Economist also published [this picture of life in North East Bulgaria](#) - whose poverty I saw for myself this time last year.

But the media I was reading hadn't told me about [the fascinating and sophisticated protests in Zagreb \(Croatia\) in the first half of the year](#)

In February, March, and April 2011 up to ten thousand people assembled every other evening in Zagreb, and up to a couple thousand assembled in other cities. Besides a rhetorical shift (a strong anti-capitalist discourse unheard of either in independent Croatia or elsewhere in the Balkans), the crucial point was the rejection of leaders, which gave citizens an opportunity to decide on the direction and the form of their protests. The "Indian revolution," previously limited to public squares, soon turned into long marches through Zagreb. It was a clear example of how "invited spaces of citizenship," designed as such by state structures and police for "kettled" expression of discontent, were superseded by "invented spaces of citizenship," in which citizens themselves opened new ways and venues for their subversive actions, and questioned legality in the name of the legitimacy of their demands. This was not a classic, static protest anymore and, unlike the famous Belgrade walks in 1996-97, the Zagreb ones were neither aimed only at the government as such, nor only at the ruling party and its boss(es). They acquired a strong anti-systemic critique, exemplified by the fact that protesters were regularly "visiting" the nodal political, social, and economic points of contemporary Croatia (political parties, banks, government offices, unions, privatization fund, television and media outlets, etc.).

The flags of the ruling conservative Croatian Democratic Union, the Social Democratic Party (seen as not opposing the neo-liberal reforms), and even the European Union (seen as complicit in the elite's wrongdoings) were burned. The protesters even "visited" the residences of the ruling party politicians, which signalled a widespread belief that their newly acquired wealth was nothing more than legalized robbery. And this is precisely the novelty of these protests. It is not yet another "colour revolution" of the kind the Western media and academia are usually so enthusiastic about (but who are otherwise not interested in following how the "waves of democratization" often do little more than replace one autocrat with another, more cooperative one). The U.S.-sponsored colour revolutions never put into question the political or economic system as such, although they did respond to a genuine demand in these societies to get rid of the authoritarian and corrupt elites that had mostly formed in the 1990s. The Croatian example shows that for the first time protests are not driven by anti-government rhetoric per se, but instead are based on true anti-regime sentiment. Not only the state but the whole apparatus on which the current oligarchy is based is put into question by (albeit chaotically) self-organized citizens. No colour is needed to mark this kind of revolution which obviously cannot hope for any external help or international media coverage. It did the only thing the dispossessed can do: marched through their cities. The emergence and nature of these Croatian protests invites us also to rethink the categories used to explain the social, political, and economic situation in the Balkans and elsewhere in post-socialist Eastern Europe.

In the general bemoaning of the small number of people who seem to be aware of (let alone sympathetic to) their European neighbours (now or in the past) let me salute and help shine a light on the writings of [Clive James](#) whose Cultural Amnesia is a unique and amazing set of vignettes of European.

The Emperor has no clothes! - Questioning reform

I spent the first half of my working life encouraging structures which gave voice to people who had previously been ignored in and by local government - and the next half working as an external consultant trying to get central government systems in various parts of central Europe and central Asia to operate more in the interests of "the citizen".

In all cases, the issue was the complacent self-serving nature of those in power - be they professionals or political leaders. Not that the private sector escaped censure since the shortcomings of the large private bureaucracies were well exposed in the 70s and 80s by writers such as JK Galbraith and Rosabeth Kantor.....Untrammelled power was the issue.....



In all my cases, [I wrote the experiences up](#) - aware that I was venturing into unknown territory with "shabby and untested equipment" (as TS Eliot might have put it). As a young but senior politician in a Scottish Region in the 70s and 80s with a commitment to community development and action (and a writing bent), I was then almost unique in Britain; and was subsequently one of the first consultants let loose by the European Commission into "transition land" in the 90s in an effort to have a different type of public agency, with different accountabilities....

Of course Africa and Asia were well-frequented haunts of "development consultants" (and had been for some decades) but they were a different breed - with a different language as well as funding. Certainly I was one of a small minority in the decades until the new millennium - but there *must now be several millions of such "experts" these days* who are paid (good wages) to do (short-term) contract work to get public organisations to operate "more effectively".

And academic institutions throughout the world churn out thousands of papers and books every year about the "development work" which is going on.....critical, well-intentioned and often well-writtentake, for example, [this impressive list](#) from the [Effective States and Inclusive Development Research Centre](#) at the University of Manchester.

Curiously, however, only a tiny number of people seem to have tried to make sense of the efforts at "good governance" in central and east Europe and Asia - Tony Verheijen's [Administrative Capacity in the new EU Member States - the Limits of Innovation](#) (2006) and Nick Manning's [International Public Administration Reform - implications for the Russian Federation](#) (2006) were two - and in 2009 a collection of papers was published about [Democracy's Plight in the European Neighbourhood: Struggling Transitions and Proliferating Dynasties](#)

In 2011 I presented [a detailed overview of these various efforts](#) to a network of Schools of Public Administration in Central and Eastern Europe ([NISPAcee](#)) but have been disappointed by the way the members of the network have simply aped "best practice" nonsense from the west....

Every now and again the size of the programme budgets of government consultancy work makes the headlines - particularly in the UK - but no one feels able to challenge the notion of squeezing increased productivity from what has been seen for the past few decades to have been bloated bureaucracies.....

I sense that these perceptions - both about "reform" and "bureaucracy" - are in for a rude shock shortly.....we are, after all, approaching almost 50 years of reform efforts and some voices are being raised to question what has been achieved....

This weekend, for example, I hit on a couple of videos of academic addresses by 2 big UK names - Chris Pollitt on [40 years of Public Sector Reform](#) - and Rod Rhodes on [political anthropology and political science](#) whose text can be [scanned more quickly here](#) (the papers on which the two addresses are based can be read in [Rethinking policy and politics - reflections on contemporary debates in policy studies](#))

Allowing for the simplicities such deliveries require, the basic message they have about the British experience of reform is quite savage.....

At the same time I was trying to make sense of a new (and rare) book on "institutional reform - [Limits of Institutional Reform in Development - changing rules for realistic solutions](#) - whose early part is devoted to a single and obvious point; that almost all institutional reforms have failed in "developing countries" because they don't fit local circumstances.... Outside experts have been parachuted in with "ready-made solutions" and made little attempt to prepare the locals for the real problems of implementation. The literature on "capacity development" has been strong on how cultural factors impact on organizational performance and, although Andrews doesn't refer to that literature, the first half of his book emphasizes the counter-productivity of the consultancy industry's preaching of "best practice"

A rather dry summary of the book's scope and contents can be found in [this LRB review](#)

His discussion (in chapter 3) of the "multiple logics" present in organisations is useful - as is his recognition of the importance of "building change off some of the alternative logics" always present..... and the second half of the book is more promising in its focus on "problem-solving" and "flexibility" (iterative learning).

He still sees a role for external experts - but mainly as a catalyst to help locals (a) explore what sort of "issues" can be reframed as the sort of "Problem" which will receive political attention and (b) develop feasible "solutions" which will attract consensus and support at the implementation stage...It's not often that the Japanese "5 whys" technique is recognized in this sorts of books - and this was good to see on pages 142-160

But, otherwise, the book reads like something written by a well-read post-graduate in Economics and political science who has been granted open access to all the World Bank files on "developing countries" - ie by someone with limited knowledge both of the real world and of the literature outside his chosen disciplines. And indeed Andrews is an Associate Professor at the Centre for

International Development (part of Harvard's JF Kennedy School of Government) who worked briefly at the World Bank and graduated from a South African University...The book can be [partially read here on google](#)

But the book needs a total rewrite – for two reasons. First he needs to identify the lessons from the [huge literature on Managing Change](#) of the 1990s – let alone the more recent “political economy” approach of (say the UK's ODI) and indeed of the World Bank itself in such recent and major works as its 2008 [Governance Reform under Real-World Conditions – citizens, stakeholders and Voice](#) which, amazingly, is not even referenced (although he contributed a chapter). And then he needs to do something about the way he uses words and phrases (if not logic). This is a very repetitive and badly-written book full of technocratic jargon and implicit and highly questionable assumptions. He would benefit from reading George Orwell's “Politics and the English Language” (1944) and Michael Billig's recent [Learn to Write Badly](#) which savages the way social scientists these days have taken to using opaque invented nouns (rather than simple verbs) leaving the reader utterly confused about who is doing what to whom

4 May

[Enough is Enough](#)

I've been “**doing development**” for so long that I've just begun to realise how odd if not questionable an activity it is.....preying on people's dissatisfactions and hopes.....and yet more and more consultants, academics and development workers get paid good money to keep churning out reports and books which identify organisational failure....and to work on programmes which order people what they should be doing – rather than helping the organisation's staff to flourish.....

It doesn't seem to matter whether the change programmes are those inside the private or public sector – they are all controlled by the same type of person in the Corporate Consultancy or national/international Funding Body..... they make the same sorts of assumptions.....use the same sort of models.....and generally fail...

I'm at last beginning to pick up a sense that something is wrong....although there are huge political and financial interests in keeping a state of amnesia; a sense of bafflement amongst so called experts about the health of our organisations....[The Emperor has no clothes](#) post referred to some recent critical assessments in both the field of public management and development. And this book on [Reinventing Organisations](#) also seems to be making waves – taking us back to management books of the 1980s and echoing the work of maverick Richard Semmler....

Is it too much to suggest that there is a link here with the “slow food” and the “limits to growth” movements? All signalling a wider revolt against the way advertising, marketing and the corporate media has so insidiously, in the post-war period, developed a collective sense of dissatisfaction??

For the first part of my working life I was an “insider” working to improve a very large (public) organisation – with a strategy and structures which tried to use the energies of a range of people which the organisation's “logic” had trained it to ignore....These were its lower-level officials, its more junior politicians and, above all, citizen activists we brought into new structures we established in the early 80s. I'm glad to say that this sort of work was so strongly accepted and “embedded” (to use an important concept in the change literature) that it has continued to this day in the structures and strategies of the Scottish Government....

But my role fundamentally changed after 1990 to that of an "Outsider" - the European Commission (and the small private "consultancies" it sub-contracts) funded me to appear in capitals and to "effect change"... using increasingly detailed prescriptions and tools which I wrote about with increasing frustration.....What I enjoyed was identifying and working flexibly with people who wanted to change their institutions for the better - but the rigidity with which EC programmes are designed made that increasingly impossible....

It was a decade ago I first came across the notion of "[good enough governance](#)" which challenged the push global bodies such as The World Bank were making (at the start of the new millennium) for "good governance" - including the development of indices to measure the extent of progress "developing countries" were making in reaching the standards of public management apparently possessed by "developed" countries.

We need to explore this "good enough" concept in all our thinking but, above all, we need to have an outright ban on externally-imposed organisational change.....and a requirement that anybody proposing change should have to justify it to a panel of self-professed sceptics....

[A Call to Arms!](#)

I have been reading these past 2 days an important tract which appeared last year and which pillories the state of British government - [Stand and Deliver](#). It suggests that the performance of the British government system is so poor as to require a total overhaul and indeed formal "[Treaty](#)". The BBC gives [good coverage to the author in this piece](#)

His more radical ideas are based around bringing in new feedback systems into the working of governments. He likens government at present to a gardener planting seeds, telling people what the garden will look like but then never actually checking whether or not they have grown as planned (instead spending lots of time checking on the sharpness of a spade or the water efficiency of a hose). That is in contrast to the private sector, which checks on the outcomes of spending continually.



A similar discipline needs to come into government, he says. There has been progress with the National Audit Office, the Office for National Statistics and select committees, he says, but he wants them all brought under the umbrella of the second chamber (the House of Lords at the moment) becoming a "Resulture" able to score policies and kill off those ones which are not working.

I call this a "tract" since it is not the normal "run of the mill" academic, political or technocratic treatise. Its author is thoroughly familiar with the political and technocratic worlds (less so the academic) and is very angry with what he has experienced.....

So it is a very individual take on the British system of government - despite his consultancy experience in other countries and his emphasis on the need for "benchmarking", only the Swiss system really seems to rate for him (and the Canadian experience of health reform).

My first reaction as I read the opening pages was to try to remember when I had last read such a diatribe.....

- Simon Jenkins' "Accountable to None - the Tory Nationalisation of Britain" (1996) and [Thatcher and Sons](#) (2006) were both powerful exposes of the excesses of the 1979-2006 governments;
- Christopher Foster's [British Government in Crisis](#) (2005) was more measured and brought his particular rich blend of academia and consultancy.
- It took a search of the latter's book to remind me of the title and author of the famous expose of civil service waste which had first attracted Margaret Thatcher's attention - Leslie Chapman's [Your Disobedient Servant](#) (1979).
- And 2005 saw the launching of the Power Inquiry into the discontents about British government.....

Oddly, however, none of these books appear in Straw's three page and rather idiosyncratic bibliography (nor a clutch of recent books on government "failure").

The book itself promises to give an "organisational" rather than political take on the subject - which suited me perfectly as this has been my perspective since I first went into "government" (local) in 1968 - absorbing the more radical challenge to hierarchies and power.....

Faced in turn with the challenge in 1975 of becoming one of the senior figures on the new Strathclyde Region, I used my position to develop more open and inclusive policy-making processes - extending to junior officials and councillors, community activists.

With a huge Labour majority we could afford to be generous to any opposition! And, even under Thatcher, the Scottish Office Ministers were conciliatory - "partnership" was the name of the game we helped develop and was most evident in the [success of the "Glasgow" revival](#).

Straddling the worlds of academia and politics, I was able to initiate some important networks to try to effect social change

It was this experience of cooperating with a variety of actors in different agencies I took with me when I opted in 1990 to go into consultancy work in central Europe - to help develop the different sort of government capacity they needed there.....then, for 8 years in Central Asia. I was lucky in being allowed to operate there to take advantage of "windows of opportunity" and not be hogbound with the stupid procurement rules...but I became highly critical of the EC development programme as you will see in this 2011 paper [The Long Game - not the Logframe](#)

Throughout this entire 45 year-period, I have been keeping up with the literature on change and public management - so am intrigued by this book of Ed Straw's which promises to bring an organisational perspective to the frustrations we all have with government systems.....

It was published more than a year ago; has a dedicated website but, from my google search, seems to have gone down like a lead balloon.

Tomorrow I hope to present his arguments and explore how well the book fares on the following tests -

- "resonating" with the times?
- a "convincing" argument?
- demonstrated "feasibility"?
- opposition identified?
- sources of support?

Thursday, May 21, 2015

Stand and Deliver - a new design for successful government ??

A week ago I mentioned [a new book](#) with the title "Stand and Deliver". In this - and a future post - I want to examine its analysis and claims.

It is an angry book - which reflects the public's loss of trust in the political system.....

It has attracted surprisingly few reviews so let me start with the BBC coverage which, as you would expect, is simply a summary of the book's blurb they were given -



The thrust of Ed Straw's book is that the current system of government is too adversarial, fails to include any feedback on whether policies have succeeded, gives little choice to voters and suffers from a civil service which hampers politicians' attempts to get things done. "Between elections, the places where power resides are the news media running their various agendas, good and bad, political and business - large companies and industries with expert preferential lobbyists and party funders, dealing with a political and civil service class mostly ignorant of their business," he says.

He says governments "limp on with a mixture of muddle, error, howlers and the occasional success" and politicians "rarely work out before getting power that it's bust". He says he has come to the conclusion that the civil service cannot be reformed on its own, because reform would involve transferring more power to the government, which would "make it worse because they have too much power already".

So his solution is a revamp of the whole system of government.

The better-known reforms that he wants to see include proportional representation and state funding of political parties - with a ban on large donations - to promote competition among parties and make sure that individuals or interests cannot buy influence.

Swiss-style referendums would be held on a more regular basis, while governments would be limited to four-year terms and prime ministers not allowed to serve more than eight years (to stop the "autocracy cap" where a leader with pretty much unchecked power becomes autocratic and "wants to stay for ever because you can't imagine life without that power").

His more radical ideas are based around bringing in new feedback systems into the working of governments. He likens government at present to a gardener planting seeds, telling people what the garden will look like

but then never actually checking whether or not they have grown as planned (instead spending lots of time checking on the sharpness of a spade or the water efficiency of a hose). That is in contrast to the private sector, which checks on the outcomes of spending continually.

A similar discipline needs to come into government, he says. There has been progress with the National Audit Office, the Office for National Statistics and select committees, he says, but he wants them all brought under the umbrella of the second chamber (the House of Lords at the moment) becoming a "Resolute" able to score policies and kill off those ones which are not working.

The civil service would be radically revamped with it retaining a smaller administrative role, but in other areas there would no longer be a permanent civil service. Instead specialists with knowledge of, say, the railways, would be brought in to contract, manage and regulate that industry.

Ed Straw says that his application of organisational theory onto how the UK government works is unique. He has also strong views on the Labour Party's structure. He says a lot of Labour's problems could have been avoided if they had a better process for challenging or replacing a leader, saying the Conservative system is much more efficient. It would have allowed Mr Blair to be removed before the 2005 election, for Gordon Brown to have gone within a year of taking office and John Smith to have led Labour in 1992 rather than Neil Kinnock, he says. But whatever the changes within parties, he says that successive governments have shown that nothing much will change without the wider reforms he is suggesting.

Most Brits will find all of this very acceptable....although I personally am a bit disappointed that his book doesn't make any reference to the voluminous "What's Wrong with British Government" literature.

- Chris Foster (academic, government adviser and fellow PWC consultant) wrote in 2005 an important paper [Why we are so badly governed](#) - an enlarged version of which can be found in his book of the same year [British Government in Crisis](#)
- Kate Jenkins was an active participant in the changes of the 1990s and wrote an important book in 2007 about her work [Politicians and Public Services](#) which is admittedly more descriptive.
- But others - such as [John Seddon](#) - have offered a more systemic approach - and
- most British Think Tanks at one time or another have written critiques containing fairly radical proposals for change in the government system.

So it would have been useful to get from Straw an indication of exactly how his approach differs from others. But all we get is a short sentence saying his approach is "unique"!

Apparently this is because his is an "an organizational perspective" (page 10) But what exactly does he mean by this?

He seems to mean the "contestability" brought by competition between commercial companies (when it is allowed to exist) thereby **raising a couple of critical questions** - the first being the hoary question which occupied some of us in the 1980s - the extent to which it was possible to apply the same management principles in public and commercial organisations. One the Professors on my MSc programme wrote one of the classic articles on this - with a strong warning about the scale of the difference between the two contexts and their measures ("profit" and "public interest")

The second question is - Has the contestability factor not been at the heart of New Public Management (NPM) which the UK has had for the past 20-odd years?

Ed Straw has been a senior partner in the Price Waterhouse Cooper (PWC) Management Consultancy for many years - and [gave evidence](#) to the British Parliament's Select Committee on Public Administration in 2005 which included strong support, for example, for the privatization of the Prison Service...and talked loosely about the need for further "politicization" of the Civil Service. In the name of "accountability".....

His Demos pamphlet of the same year - [The Dead Generalist](#) (2005) - spelled out in more detail what he meant. Apparently he wants more contestability.....but his book is not happy with NPM - on page 36 he says simply that "the developers of NPM omitted some essential components of the original conception".

On the same page he refers to the

"countless diagrams attempting to represent the unified field theory of public sector reform developed in central units like the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit and Delivery Unit from international management consultancies.....some are worth reading and some so limited as to be aberrant".

And that's it! He divulges no more - except to tell us to read Norman Dixon's "[On the Psychology of Military Incompetence](#)" (1976), Peter Drucker, Charles Handy, Michael Porter, Peter Senge and 3 others I have only vaguely heard of....So what are the essential components of the NPM model which the British designers missed? We're not told....

After at least ten years musing and writing on such matters, I would have expected more.....

footnote; the subtlety of the book's main title may be lost on some of my foreign readers - it is the demand that came from the highway robbers of the past when stopping stage-coaches - "deliver your valuables....." But "delivery" (implementation) is also the bit of policy-making which governments (let alone consultants) [have been identifying for decades](#) as the key weakness of the government process

Thursday, May 28, 2015

[Getting Government Reform taken seriously](#)

We are increasingly angry these days with politicians, bureaucrats and government - and have developed an appetite for accounts and explanations of why our democratic systems seem to be failing. [The Blunders of our Governments](#); and [The Triumph of the Political Class](#) are just two examples of books which try to satisfy that appetite.

The trouble is that **the academics** and **journalists** who produce this literature are outsiders - so it is difficult for them to give a real sense of what scope for manoeuvre senior policy-makers realistically have. **Political Memoirs** should help us here but never do since they are either self-congratulatory or defensive - with the Diaries of people such as Chris Mullen, Alan Clark and Tony Benn being exceptional simple because they were outside the magic circle of real power.

Two rare and brave attempts by politicians to pull aside the curtain of power in a systematic and objective way are [How to be an MP](#); by Paul Flynn and [How to be a Minister - a 21st Century Guide](#); by John Hutton

[Various problems](#) make it exceedingly rare for British senior civil servants to publish memoirs.

This leaves the important category of **consultants** and **think-tankers** to turn to - with Michael Barber's [How to Run a Government so that Citizens Benefit and Taxpayers don't go Crazy](#) (2015) and Ed Straw's [Stand and Deliver - a design for successful government](#) (2014) being recent examples. John Seddon's [Systems Thinking in the Public Sector - the failure of the Reform regime and a manifesto for a better way](#) (2008) and Chris Foster's [British Government in Crisis](#) (2005) are older examples.

Barber's should be the most interesting since he has made such a name for himself with his "[deliverology](#)" but I find it difficult to take him seriously when he doesn't include any of the other authors in his index. Straw's is an angry book which fails even to include an index - let alone mention of Seddon's or Foster's books. [The Unspoken Constitution](#) was a short spoof published in 2009 by Democratic Audit which probably tells us as much about the British system of power as anyone....And, however, entertaining "In the Thick of it"; and the British and American versions of "House of Cards", they hardly give a rounded account of policy-making in the 2 countries.

Curiously, those wanting to get a real understanding of how systems of government might actually be changed for the better are best served by going to the theories of change which have been developed in the literature on international development eg the World Bank's 2008 [Governance Reform under Real-World Conditions - citizens, stakeholders and Voice](#) and its [People, Politics and Change - building communications strategy for governance reform](#) (2011) - in particular the fold-out diagram at the [very end of the 2008 book](#)

Further Reading

Canadian examples are [here](#) and [here](#)
[Good Governance criteria](#); also [interesting diagram](#)
["governance" discourse in India](#)

16 June 2017

[You have nothing to lose but your Chain.....-link Fences](#)

The last few posts may have appeared to have had different themes but, I realise, were linked to the basic difficulty we seem these days in establishing common ground about the state of our societies/systems - or agreeing actionable programmes of change.

I mentioned the failure of Ed Straw's book to mention - let alone begin to analyse - the important contributions which have come from other consultants/academics about the sad state of the machinery of British government. Everyone - left/right; Ministers/civil servants; Think Tanks/consultants/ economists/ sociologists/ political scientists - has their own narrative - and all talk past one another.....and the citizen...

Almost no one tries to establish a common denominator about this - let alone alliances.

I appreciate that this is perhaps more of an Anglo-American thing than European - where there is broader acceptance of the need for negotiation and coalition.

But the academic specialisation which Scialabba was talking about - plus the niche marketing which the various experts (their institutions and publishers) are compelled to take part in in order to

make any impact in the modern Tower of Babel we all now inhabit - has also affected the "consensual" aspect of European society....We are confused and cynical.....

A couple of books which were delivered just a few hours ago make the point - [Governing Britain: Power, Politics and the Prime Minister](#) was published in 2013 by a well-known British academic (Patrick Diamond) and is the detailed story of how New Labour tried to modernise the machinery of government over its 13 years. [Who Governs Britain?](#) is a short book published this year by one of the doyens of British political science (Anthony King) and explores the question whether "our system of government is fit for purpose".

Both books have copious indexes and bibliographies which I immediately checked for mention of the books of practical men such as Ed Straw or John Seddon. What do I find?

- No mention of these two - although Chris Foster (with an academic background) does rate 2 entries in Diamond's book.
- Michael Barber (Tony Blair's Education guru and the inventor of "deliverology") is the only significant change-agent to get real space in Diamond's book.
- The important Power Inquiry of 2005-2010 oddly gets no mention in King's book and only 2 references in Diamond's index.
- Democratic Audit's satirical [The Unspoken Constitution](#) (2009) which gives us a very pointed critique of the concentration of irresponsible power of the British system is, of course, totally ignored.

What conclusion do I draw from this? Simply that academics reference only one another (within their own narrow discipline) - and disdain to mention the outputs of mere practitioners (if they even bother to read them).

And practitioners (civil servants/politicians) don't have the temperament or patience to read and distill what the academics write.

Consultants, journalists and Think-Tankers, however, are the sort of intermediaries who should be capable of selection and summary - but have their own interests, disdain most writing (Think-Tankers being an exception) and bring instead their particular brand of snake oil.....

One of the (few) heartening sections of Naughton's book about the Internet is his chapter on the "media eco-system" in which he produces several case-studies of the upstaging of the mainstream media by bloggers who had more specialized knowledge than the journalists.

There are an increasing number of (older) bloggers who have the time and inclination to challenge what the power elites are doing - but they have to network more - and sharpen their message.

Perhaps my contribution is to try to identify those who are working in my field(s)....and try to get more of them working together and developing a higher profile???

Coincidentally, another book in the packet which arrived this afternoon offers an approach which might help pull ourselves out of our confusion - Ben Ramalingham's [Aid on the Edge of Chaos](#) which applies systems theory to a range of complex problems faced in most parts of the world.

Saturday, May 30, 2015

How to Run a Government

Michael Barber's 2015 book [How to Run a Government](#) has what to a Brit is a rather off-putting American sub-title - "so that citizens benefit and taxpayers don't go crazy"

But, for at least 5 years, he was Blair's right-hand man in the Cabinet Office trying to "deliver" better performance of carefully selected targets mainly in the educational and health sectors and has, for the past decade, used this experience to build a global reputation as a "delivery" or "implementation" guru in various parts of the world -

not least Canada and the Punjab. And he is one of a small (if growing) number of people who has been able to both straddle the worlds of government and consultancy and write coherently.....

So I didn't hesitate to buy the book from Bucharest's [Anthony Frost Bookshop](#) - even although it failed my "[standing on the shoulders of giants](#)" test (ie its - short - reading list failed to mention some important texts from other practitioner/academic/consultants such as Christopher Foster and John Seddon let alone such writers as Chris Hood and Pollitt; Robert Quinn and the entire literature of change management)



But I'm at page 170 and thoroughly enjoying it - despite the occasional over-indulgent self-referencing..... Hardly surprising that he's made [a fair number of enemies in his time](#) but his straightforward language and description of the various techniques and working methods he's found useful in the last 20 years of advising political leaders in various parts of the world I find both useful and refreshing.

In 1999 I pulled together my own scribbles about reform efforts - for a new audience I was then facing in central Asia - [In Transit - some notes on good governance](#). This was just as New Labour's Modernising Government effort (which lasted until 2010) was getting underway. I followed these with great interest although the ex-communist context in which I was working was a very different one - see my "[The Long Game - not the logframe](#)" (2012) for its assessment of the chances of Technical Assistance programmes making any sort of dent in what I called (variously) the kleptocracy or "impervious regimes" of most ex-communist countries.

There are surprisingly few reviews for a book which has been out for some 18 months which says a lot to me about academics, consultants and journalists.....

8 November 2016

State Building in "impervious regimes"

In which

Including the second part of "[The Long Game - not the logframe](#)" (2011)

Like Tolstoy.....

Opportunistic theory of change 30 Oct 2010

Three questions -

- what advice would I give anyone looking to undertake real reform of such kleptocracies as Romania or Azerbaijan?
- How can such people be encouraged - what examples can we offer of government reform programmes actually making a difference?
- How can the effort to ensure good government be sustained in such countries - given the strength of financial and commercial systems and the iron law of oligarchy?

We have to face the possibility that technical assistance in these countries does little more than give the younger political elite a different political vocabulary to use in their grab for power.

An interesting book I was able to download recently from the World Bank site [Governance Reforms under real world conditions](#) is written around the sorts of questions we consultants deal with on a daily basis -

1. How do we build broad coalitions of influentials in favour of change? What do we do about powerful vested interests?
2. How do we help reformers transform indifferent, or even hostile, public opinion into support for reform objectives?
3. How do we instigate citizen demand for good governance and accountability to sustain governance reform?

The paper by Matthew Andrews which starts part 2 of the book weaves a very good theory around 3 words - acceptance, authority and ability.

Is there acceptance of the need for change and reform?

- of the specific reform idea?
- of the monetary costs for reform?
- of the social costs for reformers?

within the incentive fabric of the organization (not just with individuals)?

Is there authority:

- does legislation allow people to challenge the status quo and initiate reform?
- do formal organizational structures and rules allow reformers to do what is needed?
- do informal organizational norms allow reformers to do what needs to be done?

Is there ability: are there enough people, with appropriate skills,

- to conceptualize and implement the reform?
- is technology sufficient?
- are there appropriate information sources to help conceptualize, plan, implement, and institutionalize the reform?

A diagram shows that each of these plays a different role at the 4 stages of conceptualisation, initiation, transition and institutionalisation and that it is the space of overlapping circles that the opportunity for change occurs. "Reform space", at the intersection of acceptance, authority, and

ability, determines how much can be achieved. However the short para headed - Individual champions matter less than networks - was the one that hit nerves.

The individual who connects nodes is the key to the network but is often not the one who has the technical idea or who is called the reform champion. His or her skill lies in the ability to bridge relational boundaries and to bring people together. Development is fostered in the presence of robust networks with skilled connectors acting at their heart.

My mind was taken back almost 30 years when, as the guy in charge of Strathclyde Region's strategy to combat deprivation but using my academic role, I established what we called the "urban change network" and brought together once a month a diverse collection of officials and councillors of different councils in the West of Scotland, academics and NGO people to explore how we could extend our understanding of what we were dealing with - and how our policies might make more impact.

It was, I think, the single most effective thing I ever did. I still have the tapes of some of the discussions - one, for example, led by Professor Lewis Gunn on issues of implementation!

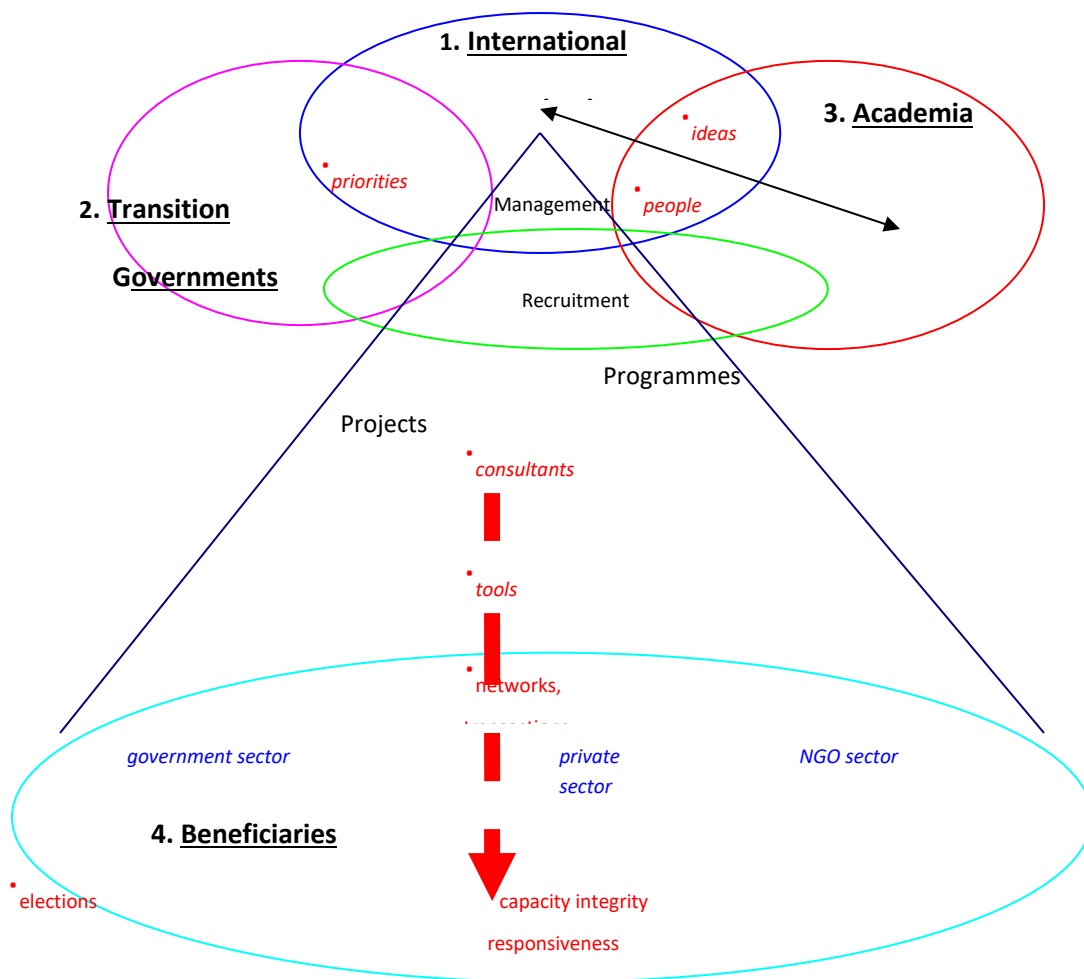
A few years back, I developed for the lectures I gave to middle managers in these "kleptomaniac states" what I called an "opportunistic" theory of change -

- "Windows of opportunity present themselves - from outside the organization, in crises, pressure from below
- reformers have to be technically prepared, inspire confidence - and able to seize and direct the opportunity
- Others have to have a reason to follow
- the new ways of behaving have to be formalized in new structures

Laws, regulations and other policy tools will work if there are enough people who want them to succeed. And such people do exist. They can be found in Parliaments (even in tame and fixed parliaments, there are individual respected MPs impatient for reform); Ministries of Finance; have an interest in policy coherence; NGOs; Younger generation - particularly in academia, policy shops and the media

The question is how they can become a catalytic force for change - and what is the legitimate role in this of donors?"

I have the weekend to see if I have anything to offer the next NISPAcee Conference which takes place in may just down the road - at Varna on the Black Sea. Since delivering the critical paper on TA in 2006, they have actually set up a working group on this issue and I really should do a follow up paper. But what?



In 2011, I presented the paper [The Long Game - not the log-frame](#) to the NISPAcee Annual Conference (in Varna) which tried to identify all the papers which have assessed the impact of the many efforts to put government processes in transition countries on a more open and effective basis.

In particular I was interested to find those which actually looked critically at the various tools used by Technical Assistance eg rule of law; civil service reform; training; impact assessment etc. One of my arguments is that that it is only recently that such a critical assessment has started - eg of civil service reform.

The one common thread in those assessments which have faced honestly the crumbling of reform in the region (Cardona; Ionitsa; Manning; Verheijen) is the need to force the politicians to grow up and stop behaving like petulant schoolboys and girls. Manning and Ionitsa both emphasise the need for transparency and external pressures. Cardona and Verheijen talk of the establishment of structures bringing politicians, officials, academics etc together to develop a consensus. As Ionita puts it succinctly -

If a strong requirement is present - and the first openings must be made at the political level - the supply can be generated fairly rapidly, especially in ex-communist countries, with their well-educated manpower. But if the demand is lacking, then the supply will be irrelevant.

The initial 15 pages or so of this section are jottings as I struggled with the task of setting out my thoughts for that (and an earlier) paper - the core section of the 2011 paper then follows which deals with the issue I christened "impervious regimes" ie those which simply ignore its citizens.....Most of the newest members of the EU fall into that category.....

Here's what one policy analyst (rather rarely) said about his country's system some 16 years after it won its freedom -

- *political parties focus on winning and retaining power - to the exclusion of any interest in policy or implementation political figures fail to recognise and build on the programmes of previous regimes - "What little memory exists regarding past policy experiences is never made explicit (in the form of books, working papers, public lectures, university courses, etc): it survives as a tacit knowledge had by public servants who happened to be involved in the process at some point or other. And as central government agencies are notably numerous and unstable - i.e. appearing, changing their structure and falling into oblivion every few years - institutional memory is not something that can be perpetuated"*
- *they don't understand the need for "trade-offs" in government;*
- *the technocrats/academics believe that perfect solutions exist; and that failure to achieve them is due to incompetence or bad intent.*
- *Everyone imagines that policymaking is something to do with the drafting and passing of legislation. "A policy is good or legitimate when it follows the letter of the law - and vice versa. Judgments in terms of social costs and benefits are very rare. This legalistic view leaves little room for feasibility assessments in terms of social outcomes, collecting feedback or making a study of implementation mechanisms."*
- *unwillingness to share information and experiences across various organisational boundaries.*
- *a "dual system" of poorly paid lower and middle level people in frustrating jobs headed by younger, Western-educated elite which talks the language of reform but treats its position as a temporary placement on the way to better things*

He also adds a useful historical perspective.

"Entrenched bureaucracies have learned from experience that they can always prevail in the long run by paying lip service to reforms while resisting them in a tacit way.

They do not like coherent strategies, transparent regulations and written laws - they prefer the status quo, and daily instructions received by phone from above. This was how the communist regime worked; and after its collapse the old chain of command fell apart, though a deep contempt for law and transparency of action remained a 'constant' in involved persons' daily activities.

Such an institutional culture is self-perpetuating in the civil service, the political class and in society at large.

A change of generations is not going to alter the rules of the game as long as recruitment and socialization follow the same old pattern: graduates from universities with low standards are hired through clientelistic mechanisms; performance when on the job is not measured; tenure and promotion are gained via power struggles.

In general, the average minister has little understanding of the difficulty and complexity of the tasks he or she faces, or he/she simply judges them impossible to accomplish.

Thus they focus less on getting things done, and more on developing supportive networks, because having collaborators one can trust with absolute loyalty is the obsession of all politicians - and this is the reason why they avoid formal institutional cooperation or independent expertise.

I had missed Tony Verheijen's 2007 World bank paper [Administrative Capacity in the New Member States - the limits of innovation?](#)

I mentioned recently an excellent panel discussion of central european developments of the past 20 years [Is Europe's democratic Revolution Over?](#) Reference was made during that discussion to Ralf Dahrendorf's prescient comment (in an extended public letter he wrote in 1990 and published under the title [Reflections on the Revolution in Europe](#)) that it would take one or two years to create new institutions of political democracy in these recently liberated countries, maybe five to 10 years to reform the economy and make a market economy, and 15 to 20 years to create the rule of law. And it will take maybe two generations to create a functioning civil society.

A Czech panellist (who had been an adviser to Vaclav Havel) suggested that

what we see now is that we have completed the first two stages, the transformation of the institutions, of the framework of political democracy on the institutional level, there is a functioning market economy, which of course has certain problems, but when you take a look at the third area, the rule of the law, there is still a long way to go, and civil society is still weak and in many ways not very efficient.

He then went on to make the useful distinction

between democracy understood as institutions and democracy understood as culture. It's been much easier to create a democratic regime, a democratic system as a set of institutions and procedures and mechanism, than to create democracy as a kind of culture - that is, an environment in which people are actually democrats

Saturday, October 16, 2010

Romania's stark realities - and what is to be done?

British insularity is such that, over the past century, there have been only a handful of academics with an interest in Romania. In the first two decades of the 20th century it was [Robert Seton-Watson](#) - whose contribution to the very existence of Czechoslovakia (as it then became) overshadowed the role he played in Romania's development. Twenty years or so ago, [Dennis Deletant](#) and his wife were important for their contributions to our understanding of the Romanian language and of its infamous security systems. Since then [Tom Gallagher](#) has taken up the baton - although with a more aggressive stance toward his subject matter (which he has also adopted to his more recent focus on Scotland)

On a visit last week to [Bucharest's English bookshop](#), I noticed that Gallagher produced last year a new book about [Romania and its access to the EU](#). Amazon can generally offer cheaper versions - but my visit to its website gave me the astonishing price of 57 pounds. There was however a [very extensive review](#) by a former British Council Lecturer (Christopher Lawson) in Romania during the Communist era (1976-1978) who returned to Iasi at the end of 2003 and now works as a writer-editor. With his kind permission, I take the following excerpt from his review since it gives a good overview of the country's recent development.

And what impression of the country might a tourist take away in 2010? Western sales engineers descend from planes and gather for breakfast in Romania's international hotels. Shiny high-rise buildings rise in city centres. Well-fed Romanian businessmen attend backslapping Rotary meetings and travel from the provinces by train to the capital in comfortable sleeping compartments, or in sleek new cars which clog the overcrowded roads. The wares on sale in the supermarkets compare with those they are used to in the West. Fresh fish from the Atlantic and the Mediterranean is delivered daily to the French hypermarket chain Carrefour. Young people clad in the latest fashions patronize chic restaurants and cafes, leaving in glossy cars or on Kawasaki motorbikes. Top names come to give concerts in the capital. The nouveaux riches flock to the stadiums and concert halls. Ambitious students seeking their fortunes opt for business or law, and graduate with a good knowledge of English and the Internet. A ruthless win-lose attitude prevails in business.

Meanwhile tens of thousands of peasants live in grinding poverty, with no electricity or running water, while employees of the State, notably teachers and doctors, struggle from month to month. The same kleptocrats, generally Securitate officers who once informed on their fellow-citizens, inheritors of the Stalinist system which once prevailed, sabotage numerous projects to improve the villages. I live on the university hill in Romania's second city. Nearly every time I visit my rubbish dump, I meet poorer residents picking through plastic bottles and discarded clothes. Corruption holds sway, especially in justice, education, medicine and tenders for road construction. Whatever a "normal" post-Communist country may be, Romania does not count as one, despite appearances to the contrary. Tom Gallagher tells us why.

His new book analyzes those 20 years, especially the more recent ones. Meticulously researched, written with the pace of a thriller, and in the final analysis endlessly depressing, Romania and the European Union confirms Gallagher's position in the front rank of historians of, and commentators on, post-Communist Romania.

The book, Gallagher's third on Romania, documents how old-guard, predatory kleptocrats have continued to enrich themselves, trousering millions, much of it cash from EU funds, while consistently blocking substantial reforms in key ministries. Meanwhile EU officials at all levels, alternatively complacent,

deluded, indecisive or just plain feckless and lacking willpower, have, with a few praiseworthy exceptions, allowed Romania into the world's most successful economic and political grouping without having made these vitally necessary reforms. Brussels was deceived.

So-called European Social Democrat leaders share the blame. Many praised Romanian leaders whose corrupt behaviour shrieked to the skies. In particular, it is clear that the acceptance of the PSD, the former Communists, into the international centre-left family of the Socialist International was a catastrophic error.

The Romanian ex-Communist elite deployed the full panoply of Balkan wiles to outwit the European negotiators. They bestowed honorary doctorates on visiting or resident Eurocrats. Following ancient Phanariot tradition, they even provided bedmates for high-level EU representatives. They prevaricated, protected their own and pretended to implement reforms while preventing them from biting.

From the pages heroes, heroines and villains arise. The villains, all of whom are well-known, outnumber the heroes and heroines. Not a single corrupt politician has been successfully prosecuted or served a full custodial sentence. The EU's wish to have a number of heads on a plate, dripping with blood, has not been granted. Experts say the real progress in the fight against corruption and organized crime is measured not by the number of arrests, but by simple indicators: convictions by a court in a fair trial, the amount of dirty money confiscated, or the number of illegally acquired properties taken away. And such efforts have not yet been seen.



To all of which I can only - but very sadly - say "hear! Hear!" And it is particularly good to see the role of western agencies being properly emphasised. It does indeed take two to tango.

The question, however, to which I constantly return is what might a relevant reform strategy look like for kleptocracies such as this?

For the past decade, in various papers available on [my website](#) (number 1 gathers it all together), I have been bemoaning the failure of Western agencies and programmes of Technical Assistance to recognise that the fashionable mantra about „good governance“ their experts were peddling was sheer snake-oil in these conditions and countries. Grindle's "[Good Enough Governance Revisited](#)" was one of the few papers which gave my stance any

backing then.

For some time I have been consumed by two simple questions a what and a where.

First - what approach should I advise genuine reformers in the machinery of government in countries such as Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Kazakhstan or Romania (let alone middle eastern countries such as Jordan) to take? The public sector of course of each of these countries is at a particular stage - and each faces its own unique configuration of constraints and opportunities - so the approach has to start from that unique combination of forces. But what would the generic elements of the approach contain? Various papers on my website paper contain some elements - not only the one I have already mentioned but also a couple of papers on Azerbaijan. But these were

drafted some years ago (for very particular audiences) and do need some considerable revision to provide something more generalisable.

The second question is where do you find the reformers who are likely to have some staying power - both in positions of influence and as reformers? Sadly there does seem to be an "iron law of oligarchy" (as [Robert Michels](#) put it 100 years ago) - which quickly sucks the originality and commitment out of reformers. This then leads onto a third question. I was very struck in a thread of discussion about Tom Gallagher's latest critique of Scottish national politics by someone's comment that such criticism is unfair since all governments quickly succumb to global capitalism. This stance is a real challenge - Margaret Thatcher put it very simply - TINA - there is no alternative. So why should we bother voting or engaging in activism of any sort? Why not take Voltaire's advice - and just cultivate our gardens? To answer that question, people like me have to identify - and properly disseminate - the examples of sustained, positive, social change.

I've just started to dip into two books which I hope will help me with this - Will Hutton's latest book [Them and Us](#) - and David Dorlings [Injustice](#). Clearly these authors are very good on critiques and explaining the mechanisms which sustain inequity and injustice. But do they address the third question? Nous y verrons!

Sadly the window in the photo is not mine - it is of one of many wooden churches here (Surdesti actually). Daniela and I do our best to retain the old features of the house but, for once, I opted for something more simple than the ornate.

October 30, 2010

[Opportunistic theory of change](#)

I left the mid-October discussion about [public sector reform in transition countries](#) rather hanging in the air. It was triggered by a review of Tom Gallagher's recent [book about Romania and its accession to the EU](#) - reminding us all how skilfully, for 20 years, the political class has been able to resist external reform exhortations, drawing on the collective skills the country's elites have developed over the generations in minimising external efforts at control or influence - whether from Moscow or Constantinople. And, of the other countries I know well, a [recent report on Azerbaijan](#) and [article on Uzbekistan](#) remind us how many traditional power structures have been able to maintain themselves.

I left the discussion with three draft questions -

- what advice would I give anyone looking to undertake real reform of such kleptocracies as Romania or Azerbaijan?
- How can such people be encouraged - what examples can we offer of government reform programmes actually making a difference?
- How can the effort to ensure good government be sustained in such countries - given the strength of financial and commercial systems and the iron law of oligarchy?

We have to face the possibility that technical assistance in these countries does little more than give the younger political elite a different political vocabulary to use in their grab for power. An interesting book I was able to download recently from the World Bank site [Governance Reforms under real world conditions](#) is written around the sorts of questions we consultants deal with on a

daily basis -

1. How do we build broad coalitions of influentials in favour of change? What do we do about powerful vested interests?
2. How do we help reformers transform indifferent, or even hostile, public opinion into support for reform objectives?
3. How do we instigate citizen demand for good governance and accountability to sustain governance reform?

The paper by Matthew Andrews which starts part 2 of the book weaves a very good theory around 3 words - acceptance, authority and ability.

Is there acceptance of the need for change and reform?

- of the specific reform idea?
- of the monetary costs for reform?
- of the social costs for reformers?

within the incentive fabric of the organization (not just with individuals)?

Is there authority:

- does legislation allow people to challenge the status quo and initiate reform?
- do formal organizational structures and rules allow reformers to do what is needed?
- do informal organizational norms allow reformers to do what needs to be done?

Is there ability: are there enough people, with appropriate skills,

- to conceptualize and implement the reform?
- is technology sufficient?
- are there appropriate information sources to help conceptualize, plan, implement, and institutionalize the reform?

A diagram shows that each of these plays a different role at the 4 stages of conceptualisation, initiation, transition and institutionalisation and that it is the space of overlapping circles that the opportunity for change occurs. "Reform space", at the intersection of acceptance, authority, and ability, determines how much can be achieved. However the short para headed - Individual champions matter less than networks - was the one that hit nerves.

The individual who connects nodes is the key to the network but is often not the one who has the technical idea or who is called the reform champion. His or her skill lies in the ability to bridge relational boundaries and to bring people together. Development is fostered in the presence of robust networks with skilled connectors acting at their heart.

My mind was taken back almost 30 years when, as the guy in charge of Strathclyde Region's strategy to combat deprivation but using my academic role, I established what we called the "urban change network" and brought together once a month a diverse collection of officials and councillors of different councils in the West of Scotland, academics and NGO people to explore how we could extend our understanding of what we were dealing with - and how our policies might make more impact.

It was, I think, the single most effective thing I ever did. I still have the tapes of some of the discussions – one, for example, led by Professor Lewis Gunn on issues of implementation!

A few years back, I developed for the lectures I gave to middle managers in these “kleptomaniac states” what I called an “opportunistic” theory of change –

- “Windows of opportunity present themselves – from outside the organization, in crises, pressure from below
- reformers have to be technically prepared, inspire confidence – and able to seize and direct the opportunity
- Others have to have a reason to follow
- the new ways of behaving have to be formalized in new structures

Laws, regulations and other policy tools will work if there are enough people who want them to succeed. And such people do exist. They can be found in Parliaments (even in tame and fixed parliaments, there are individual respected MPs impatient for reform); Ministries of Finance; have an interest in policy coherence; NGOs; Younger generation – particularly in academia, policy shops and the media

The question is how they can become a catalytic force for change – and what is the legitimate role in this of donors?”

I have the weekend to see if I have anything to offer the next NISPAcee Conference which takes place in may just down the road – at Varna on the Black Sea. Since delivering the critical paper on TA in 2006, they have actually set up a working group on this issue and I really should do a follow up paper. But what?

Monday, June 20, 2011

[The Blind leading the blind?](#)



Regular readers of my blog will be aware that I view specialization as a virus which has contaminated universities and the professional community and condemns us all to a constant reinvention of the wheel. Hard-won insights in one field of endeavour have to be rediscovered in another – often in a different language. I drew attention to this in the closing section of my paper to this year's NISPAcee Conference – quoting from the OECD's Network on Governance's Anti-corruption Task Team report on Integrity and State Building that As a result of interviews with senior members of ten

donor agencies, it became apparent that those engaged in anti-corruption activities and those involved in the issues of statebuilding and fragile states had little knowledge of each other's approaches and strategies

“Fragile states” and “Statebuilding” are two new phrases which have grown up only in the last few years – and “capacity building” has now become a more high-profile activity. Each has its own

literature and experts. Those who have been in the game of organisational change for several decades draw on an eclectic range of disciplines and experience - are we to believe that these new subjects represent a crystallisation of insights and experience??

All I know is that few of those in the intellectual world I have inhabited for the past 20 years - the consultants and writers about institution-building in post-communist countries - seem aware of the development literature and the various critiques which have been developed of aid over the past few decades - and which has helped give the recent stuff about capacity development the edge it has. Those who work in my field seem to be a different breed from those who work in "aid". I say "seem" since I have seen no study of who gets into this field - with what sort of backgrounds (let alone motivation). Whereas there are several studies of the demand side eg a 2007 report from the European Centre for Development Policy Management - [Provision of Technical Assistance Personnel: What can we learn from promising experiences](#) whose remit was to gain a better understanding of the future demand for technical assistance, to relate that to past experience and to recommend how TA personnel can best be mobilised, used and managed in the future to strengthen national capacity.

Those who work in my field seem to be more pragmatic, more confident, more "missionary" in the modernist (rather than post-modernist) approach taken to institution building - and, dare I say it - more "mercenary" in motivation than those who have traditionally taken to "development work".

These musings were prompted by [Owen Barder's development blog](#) (one of about three blogs about development which is always worth reading ([Duncan Green](#), [Simon Maxwell](#) and [Aid on the Edge of Chaos](#) are three others).

Not only does Barder have a blog - but, I have discovered, a series of podcasts ([Development Drumbeats](#)) in which he talks with various characters about development issues. Such a nice initiative - some of the podcasts come with a paper and some even with a transcription! Barder's latest discussion was with Tony Blair. Now Blair is hardly my favourite person. As UK PM for a decade, he not only carried on but deepened the Thatcher agenda of marketisation - concealing a lot of it in a shallow rhetoric about "modernisation". He has always talked the good talk - and he is on good form in this discussion when he reveals some of the lessons he has learned from the work he has been doing on Governance in three African States - Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Liberia.

Criticism of the supply-driven approach (eg training of civil servants) is the new mantra of the TA industry - and Blair duly echoes that mantra, suggesting that his approach is different in four respects.

- First that he personally works with the political leaders to ensure that the process of change is demand-driven (interesting that the EC's Backbone Strategy didn't mention such an approach);
- secondly the ruthless approach to priorities (focus on a few manageable things), working to deliver prioritised programmes - learning from doing.
- He mentions a third factor - his technical team being resident and coaching - but this for me is not all that different from a lot of TA does.

- The final factor is different - getting "quality" private sector investment (a good Bliar flourish that - who wants "rubbish"?!)

Coincidentally it was precisely this point about the [need for political demand](#) which I was trying to build earlier in the month into the final version of my NISPACE paper. And the issue of ruthless prioritising - and learning from doing are close to my heart - as can be seen in the final Discussion paper I left in 2008 to my Bulgarian colleagues (entitled "Learning from Experience" which will be on my website by the end of the month).

But relying on a Bliar approach would involve cutting back dramatically on interventions. And, by definition, his work is not transparent - is not subject to monitoring or evaluation. The write-ups which will doubtless come will be laudatory - and not, I bet you, governed by the normal canons of analysis!

Note to myself - this entry has meandered a bit - I should return to the theme of the profile of the IB expert.

Note to reader - In January I had a short post about [some reports on the use of consultants](#) To that list should be added this interesting paper which gives [a typology of external advice](#)

And, having momentarily worried about competitors for our new Bulgarian bid taking unfair advantage of my intellectual openness, I have now put the [Discussion Paper I left behind](#) here in 2008 back online.

My blog of the week is this long post on [the death of the corporation](#).
And my new painting is above

Friday, July 8, 2011

[Balkan mistrust](#)

Summer seems to have dawned at last - with 40 expected in the plains of Bucharest and 31 here in Sofia rising to 33 Monday. I should then be in the rarely explored North-Western mountain area - first of Varshets then, from Tuesday evening, in the old fortress area of Belogradchik. In the meantime, I have my spreading fig tree to protect me from the sun in the garden.

[Amos Oz](#) has been keeping me company these last few days - first with *Black Box* mapping ruthlessly the relations a woman has with her present (faithful and loving if rather eccentric) husband; her tight-arsed and rich ex; and their delinquent boy. Great stuff - with the powerful outpourings of emotion I have now come to expect of this writer who should have got the Nobel prize a decade ago. Now I've started on his story of the strained relations between a 60 year old nomadic planning/engineering consultant back home and living with a younger woman with a mission - *Don't Call it Night*. Oz seems to have a happy 40 year old marriage



himself but he really gets into the painful crevices of relationships!

During the night I was reminded what an insightful writer Michael Lewis (of Vanity fair) is on current financial matters - the best things I have ever read on [the Irish meltdown \(his story reads like a modern version of The Emperor's New Clothes\)](#) and [the Greek crisis](#).

In the classic journalistic (if not Detective Colombo) tradition, he approaches the issues from a common-sense point of view.

And here is [an interesting article which was inspired by Lewis's exposure of Greek corruption to dig deeper](#) and to try to explain why the Greeks have the political and ethical problems they do.

He reminds us that, until the late 19th century, Greece was part of the Ottoman system (as were Bulgaria and Romania) - with all this means about clientilism and antipathy to authority. "Greeks are naturally distrustful of their leaders, and extremely quarrelsome among themselves" - as one can certainly say also about the Romanians. Here it's worth going back to the [Ionitsa article I excerpted from on June 13](#). There is little doubt that officials have major difficulties talking and cooperating with one another (let alone with citizens!) in this part of the world (an ex-Deputy Minister here who is one of the trainers on our programme was talking to me recently about this).

And yet this is never really picked up in the needs assessment which supposedly precedes all the training which EC programmes fund here. All the emphasis is on transferring knowledge - not altering attitudes and behaviour.

Finally an excerpt from a longer piece -

The present financial conundrum is a result and not a cause. It is the result of decades of rule by incompetent politicians, certainly in the case of Greece. (It doesn't need a Marshall plan it needs a regime change. Count on the evil undemocratic EU to take over much of the decision making behind the scenes, and a good thing too.)

The problem with present-day politicians in general is that they aspire to power and once they have it they don't know what to do with it. Consequently they're easily influenced by lobbyists and public opinion. The result is - predictably - indecision and procrastination or hysteria and panic. Being so unfocused our dear leaders get lost in petty detail, always a sign of people not getting the big picture. The founding fathers of the EU had a clear concept: no more war in Europe. The present lot just looks after the shop, and not very well

The aquarelle is a Stamatov

Saturday, July 9, 2011

culture matters

I changed the title of yesterday's post after inserting some of the argument of the 2nd article on Greece (which tried to explain what might be called the "[amoral familism](#)" of the country - and its neighbours such as Romania and Bulgaria (to a lesser extent I feel)

I also added the link to the brilliant paper about Romania written by Ionitsa in 2005 which had used that term -

Leaders are supposed to be promoters of their protégés; and clan-based loyalties take precedence over public duties for salaried public officials. Such behavior can be found not only in the central government but also in local administration, the political opposition, academia and social life in general, i.e. so it permeates most of the country's elites. Classic studies of Mezzogiorno in Italy call this complex of attitudes "amoral familism": when extended kin-based associations form close networks of interests and develop a particularistic ethics centered solely upon the group's survival⁷. This central objective of perpetuity and enrichment of the in-group supersedes any other general value or norm the society may have, which then become non-applicable to such a group's members. At best, they may be only used temporarily, as instruments for advancing the family's goals - as happens sometimes with the anti-corruption measures.

Since Romanian society, like others in the Balkans, still holds onto such pre-modern traits, its members are neither very keen to compete openly nor are they accustomed to the pro-growth dynamics of modernity. Social transactions are regarded as a zero-sum game; a group's gain must have been brought about at the expense of others. This may be a rational attitude for traditional, static societies, where resources are limited and the only questions of public interest have to do with redistribution.

And I was reminded of a recent discussion I had with an ex-Deputy Minister who was bemoaning the lack in public life here of the soft skills of communications and cooperation operating for the public good. And of my realisation of how rare was the enthusiasm of the lady from Pernik. It takes me back to the early days of my work in Romania when the Head of the European Delegation handed us summaries of Robert Putnam's [Making Democracy work; civic traditions in modern Italy](#) which had recently appeared (I already had a copy of the book). She had quickly sussed out what Putnam called the "lack of social capital" in the country - ie the lack of trust and associations. Thanks to the World Bank, academic writing about Social capital then became a cottage industry. I'm not sure if we are any the wiser as a result!

As I've noticed before, "path dependency" is the phrase used by those who feel that it is impossible for a country to shake off its history. And that takes us into the murky areas of cultural studies - and of Samuel Huntington whose views are considered so offensive here since he suggests that the line dividing civilised from non-civilised countries puts Balkan countries on the wrong side (mainly for their Orthodoxy). But his stuff is worth reading - particularly [Culture Matters](#) which is a marvellous coverage of the proceedings of a conference on the subject which brought together in argument a lot of scholars.

And an example of the problems of moving around in this part of the world. Next week I will be up on the Bulgarian side of the Danube just south west of the city of Craiova - as the crow flies it is little more than 90 kilometres from there to Vidin where there is a ferry from Calafin. I thought it

would be a good idea if Daniela came down from Bucharest and met up at Vidin - so that we could explore the fascinating mountain area which is the north-west. In fact it will take her about 4 hours to make that 90 kms (much longer if she were to take the train) on the Romanian side. Two hours by bus; waiting time 2 hours; and 15 minutes the ferry which deposits you apparently 5 kilometres from the town of Vidin- with no onward public transport! A bridge is half built (with European money) - but the Bulgarian side is bogged down in commercial arguments - and it could be another 18 months before it is ready (watch this space). I remember a woman from the cabinet Office here telling me that it took her a similar time and 3 changes of transport to move a similar distance within southern Bulgaria.

UK PS white paper <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/open-public-services-white-paper>
We will also demonstrate that it is only by publishing data on how public services do their jobs that we can wrest power out of the hands of highly paid officials and give it back to the people. And our reforms will mean that the poorest will be at the front of the queue.

Although there are few references to the frenetic reform agenda of New Labour - starting from the [1997 Modernisation Government Programme](#) and culminating in a self-congratulatory overview by the Strategy Unit of its work in 2009 - there is little with which Labour (at least in its later phases) could disagree.

But what is most annoying is that the opportunity is missed for a really serious consideration of why - despite the apparent political commitment since 1997 to equal opportunity and a range of reasonably funded programmes - no real progress has been made on that front.

What are the lessons for any new strategy?

That's the whole point about strategies - identifying the factors and forces which have undermined good intentions in the past and developing a "theory of action" and programme which gives us confidence that things might actually change for the better

[One comment makes the point well](#)

The white paper places much emphasis on consultation and facilitating change rather than directing. A weakness is that many proposals are projects or programmes and should be subject to the established public sector controls such as "[starting gate](#)" and "gateway". These are not bureaucratic, help identify what should not go ahead, whether the necessary success factors are in place at each stage of the project and whether there need to be changes. These robust approaches save time and money and greatly increase chances of success. The white paper should have provided assurance about applying these disciplines.

A couple of other useful commentaries - first on [the realism of the document's reliance on "choice" and "community"](#); and, second, on the encouragement of social enterprise and "mutualities" [are here](#)

September 2 2011

Today a [blog about some jargon](#) caught my attention. The blog and a couple of generous responses showed blogging at its best - with [an interesting new development blog](#) and a couple of papers being offered up.

I got to thinking a bit more about the distinction between the field of democratization studies and the field of good governance studies. With respect to the former, there is a longstanding and well-referenced theoretical literature pertaining to political transitions, and a good number of competing "theories of change," each with its own backers, detractors, and robust line of argumentation.

But the concept of "good governance" is a bit fuzzier when you look at it from an academic point of view. What exactly do we mean by the term? Is it democratization "lite?" Is it some combination of voice, accountability, service delivery and state responsiveness without explicit political competition? If so, what is the particular value that this construct brings to the conversation? And, as is often brought up in conversations within the Bank and elsewhere, what exactly is the "theory of change" (or multiple theories of change) underpinning this work? As far as I can tell, the bulk of the literature relating to good governance is either drawn from subsets of the democratization literature, or is made up largely of donor-conducted or donor-funded research - that is, case studies and other applied research designed explicitly to extract lessons learned and best practices to improve implementation in the field. Perhaps the field of "good governance" is significant then mainly as an applied rather than a theoretical construct - in which case it is no wonder that we often come up against the thorny "theory of change" issue.

All this was buzzing somewhat chaotically through my head when I stumbled across a ten year old IDS paper on citizen voice, [Bringing citizen voice and client focus into service delivery](#), by Anne Marie Goetz and John Gaventa. Despite its age, the paper reads like a fresh attempt to clarify the issue of citizen voice by: a) focusing explicitly on citizen voice in service delivery; b) categorizing "voice and responsiveness" initiatives by type; and c) drawing some preliminary conclusions as to the type of political environment in which such "voice and responsiveness" issues may be likely or unlikely to succeed.

The paper contains a wealth of information (albeit now somewhat dated) on various types of service delivery-citizen voice initiatives, and for the categorization exercise alone is of value to anyone seeking to better understand how such issues may be usefully broken down and analyzed. For me, though, the most interesting section is the conclusion, in which the paper frames questions for further research that hinge directly on explicitly addressing the idea of political competition and its implications for citizen voice initiatives -

"Many participation and responsiveness initiatives are launched with scant consideration of their , relationship to other institutions and processes for articulating voice or engineering state response - namely, political parties and political competition," the report notes. "The research in this report indicates that political competition strongly influences the way citizen concerns are articulated and the way public agencies respond." However, it goes on to say, the relationship between political competition, voice initiatives and responsiveness initiatives is poorly understood. It is a shame that, ten years on, these statements still seem accurate within the context of applied research on "good governance." Setting aside academic theory, if we are serious about achieving results in this field, it seems we would all do well at the very least to acknowledge these issues head-on rather than hide behind fuzzily articulated concepts.

A VIEW FROM CENTRAL ASIA

In which -

it is argued that the variety of terms used to try to describe the nature of the regimes which control both the countries targeted by the EC's Neighbourhood Policy and wider afield indicate both the analytical problems in understanding the structure of power; and, therefore, in developing appropriate tools of intervention

the term "impervious" regime is suggested to describe an all-too common system which can ride rough-shod over its subjects' concerns in the pursuit of its own selfish goals

the question is posed of what we expect administrative reform to deliver in such systems

some questions are also posed about the tools which international bodies favour for administrative reform in such contexts

the (scanty) literature reflecting on the outcome of these interventions is briefly surveyed

the concept of „windows of opportunity" is explored

it is suggested that technical assistance is built on shaky foundations

not least in relation to the knowledge base of westerners

2. Unknown Regions

2.1 The notion of impervious power

This section argues how much of an unknown for western experts the context is which they are supposed to be analysing let alone working in Neighbourhood countries. I have some problems with the terminology.

Initially I used the term "kleptocracy" (since the basic feature of the states in most of these countries is legitimised theft) but feedback suggested that this was too general and emotional a term.

"Autocracy" was too much of a cliché. "Sultanistic" had been suggested by Linz and Stepan in their definitive overview of transitions in 1995⁴¹ as one of the systems into which totalitarian regimes could transmogrify - but had never caught on as a term.

"Neo-patrimonialism" is used in some of the literature on corruption⁴²; "neo-feudalism" popped up recently to describe the current Russian system - and "proliferating dynasties" was Richard Youngs' recent striking phrase (see 9.4 below).

Suddenly I found myself typing the phrase "impervious power" and feel that this is a useful phrase which captures the essence of all of these regimes - impervious to and careless of the penetration of any idea or person from the hoi poloi - stemming from the confidence with which it holds power and abuses it for its own ends.

The imperviousness of power leads to arrogance, mistakes on a gigantic scale and systemic corruption. How does one change such systems? Can it happen incrementally Where are there examples of „impervious power" morphing into more open systems? Germany and Japan in the aftermath of war - and Greece, Portugal and Spain in the 1970s under the attraction of EU accession. But what happens when neither is present???

2.2 "Neo-feudalism" in Russia?

<https://www.the-american-interest.com/2011/03/01/neo-feudalism-explained/>

Corruption in Russia is a form of transactional grease in the absence of any generally accepted and legally codified alternative. Built under Vladimir Putin, Russia's "power vertical" provides a mechanism for the relatively simple conversion of power into money, and vice versa. At every level of the hierarchy a certain degree of bribery and clientalist parochialism is not only tolerated but presupposed in exchange for unconditional loyalty and a part of the take for one's superiors. The system is based on the economic freedom of its citizens, but cautious political restrictions on these freedoms generate the wealth of the biggest beneficiaries. There is a cascade of floors and ceilings to the restrictions on freedom, so it is a feudalism with more levels than the old kind. But it works fundamentally the same way: The weak pay tribute "up", and the strong provide protection "down."

The Putin phenomenon reflects the fact that Russian leaders of the 1990s preferred a mediocre officer with no noteworthy achievements to become the new President instead of, for example, experienced if imperfect men like Yevgeny Primakov and Yuri Luzhkov, both of whom were quite popular at that time. The rise of Putin, who barely progressed to the rank of lieutenant colonel in Soviet times and who later became

⁴¹ Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation – southern europe, south america and post-communist europe ; by Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan

⁴² see, for example, the useful Anti-corruption Approaches: a literature review (Norad 2009)

famous only for his corrupt businesses in the St. Petersburg city hall, became typical of personnel choices in the 2000s. Inefficient bureaucrats by the hundreds recruited even less able people to occupy crucial positions in their ministries and committees, content in the knowledge that such mediocrities could not compete with or displace them. As a result, Russian governance suffers today less from a "power oligarchy" than from a dictatorship of incompetence.

On the one hand, Russia has built a system in which the execution of state powers has become a monopolistic business. It is controlled mainly by friends and colleagues of the system's creator, Vladimir Putin, and faithfully operated by the most dutiful and least talented newcomers. All big national business is associated with the federal authorities or controlled by them; local entrepreneurs still try to bargain with regional bureaucracy. All of the new fortunes made in the 2000s belong to Putin's friends and people who helped him build this "negative vertical." Therefore, in the coming years, competition inside the elite will diminish, the quality of governance will deteriorate further, and what is left of effective management will collapse. Yet to change these trends would nevertheless be a totally illogical step for the political class.

At the same time, a huge social group wants to join this system, not oppose it (in contrast to the final years of the Soviet Union). In a way, this is like wanting to join a Ponzi scheme at the bottom in hopes that one may not stay at the bottom, and that in any event one will be better off than those left outside the scheme altogether. As the de-professionalization of government advances (along with the "commercialization" of state services) competition among non-professionals will grow, since these have never been in short supply. Therefore, in the future a less internally competitive ruling elite will be able to co-opt any number of adherents.

The Russian elite has essentially "piratized" and privatized one of the world's richest countries. It is so grateful for this privilege that it may insist on Mr. Putin's return to the Kremlin in 2012 for 12 more dismal years. By then the young liberal cohorts on whom so many Western analysts pinned their hopes for change will have grown up. The mediocre among them will be part of the system. Most of the best of them, no doubt, will no longer reside in Russia.

Russia seemed to be undergoing some serious reform efforts [in the early 2000s](#) - but it is now revealed as donor-deep only. Granted, the EC is no longer working in Russia - but a similar analysis could be conducted of most of the countries in the EC Neighbourhood Programme.

2.3 Central Asian governance - centralised, closed and corrupt

After 7 years of my life living and working in Central Asian and Caucasian countries, I found myself describing them as "centralized, closed and corrupt"

Box 1: Centralised, Closed and Corrupt

centralised in -

- policy-making style; new policy directions are signalled in Presidential Decrees developed in secret - with parliament and state bodies playing no real role in developing policies
- management style and systems in state bodies; where old Soviet one-man management still prevails, with crisis-management modes evident and no managerial delegation
- the absence of conditions for the new local government system to flourish properly

closed in that -

- There is little acceptance of pluralist methods of thinking; for example about the need for separation of power; and challenge to ideas and conventional wisdom
- Recruitment to civil service is done on the basis of (extended) family links

- Bright graduates now go either to the private or international sector (including TA)
- Elections are often fixed; It is difficult for independent-minded reformers to stand for election
- Censorship is widespread - whether formal or informal through media being owned and controlled by government and administration figures

corrupt in that significant numbers of -

- Key government and administrative positions are bought
- public officials (are expected to) accept informal payments for special favours
- senior administrative figures have substantial and active economic interests"
- students can and do buy educational qualifications

2.4 proliferating dynasties and struggling transitions- the Neighbourhood countries

An important book appeared in 2009 which matches the concern I voice in this paper - about the failure of the EU to understand properly the context of neighbourhood countries and to adjust TA accordingly. The book has the marvellous title of "[Democracy's Plight in the European Neighbourhood - Struggling transitions and proliferating dynasties](#)" with chapters on Armenia, [Azerbaijan](#), Bulgaria, Romania, Moldova, Serbia, Turkey, Georgia, , Ukraine, Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Egypt, Algeria, Morocco.

Hopefully its lessons have been absorbed by EC managers responsible for project design in these countries. But it will be sheer accident if more than a handful of experts actually working in these countries will be aware of the book. How do we put up with a system which allows such negligence? It is utterly unprofessional!

2.5 A case-study of a Member country

Easily the most useful paper for those trying to understand lack of governance capacity in many countries we deal with is [Poor policy-making and how to improve it in states with weak institutions](#) (CEU 2006) by Sorin Ionita. His focus is on Romania but the explanations he offers for the poor governance in that country has resonance for many other countries -

The focus of the political parties in that country on winning and retaining power to the exclusion of any interest in policy - or implementation process

The failure of political figures to recognise and build on the programmes of previous regimes

Lack of understanding of the need for „trade-offs" in government; the (technocratic/academic) belief that perfect solutions exist; and that failure to achieve them is due to incompetence or bad intent.

The belief that policymaking is something being centered mainly in the drafting and passing of legislation.

„A policy is good or legitimate when it follows the letter of the law - and vice versa. Judgments in terms of social costs and benefits are very rare. This legalistic view leaves little room for feasibility assessments in terms of social outcomes, collecting feedback or making a study of implementation mechanisms. What little memory exists regarding past policy experiences is never made explicit (in the form of books, working papers, public lectures, university courses, etc): it survives as a tacit knowledge had by public servants who happened to be involved in the process at some point or other. And as central government agencies are notably numerous and unstable - i.e. appearing, changing their structure and falling into oblivion every few years - institutional memory is not something that can be perpetuated"

Ionita adds other „pre-modern" aspects of the civil service - such as unwillingness to share information and experiences across various organisational boundaries. And the existence of a „dual system" of poorly paid lower and middle level people in frustrating jobs headed by younger, Western-educated elite which talks

the language of reform but treats its position as a temporary placement on the way to better things⁴³. He also adds a useful historical perspective. „Entrenched bureaucracies have learned from experience that they can always prevail in the long run by paying lip service to reforms while resisting them in a tacit way. They do not like coherent strategies, transparent regulations and written laws – they prefer the status quo, and daily instructions received by phone from above. This was how the communist regime worked; and after its collapse the old chain of command fell apart, though a deep contempt for law and transparency of action remained a 'constant' in involved persons' daily activities. Such an institutional culture is self-perpetuating in the civil service, the political class and in society at large.

A change of generations is not going to alter the rules of the game as long as recruitment and socialization follow the same old pattern: graduates from universities with low standards are hired through clientelistic mechanisms; performance when on the job is not measured; tenure and promotion are gained via power struggles.

In general, the average Romanian minister has little understanding of the difficulty and complexity of the tasks he or she faces, or he/she simply judges them impossible to accomplish. Thus they focus less on getting things done, and more on developing supportive networks, because having collaborators one can trust with absolute loyalty is the obsession of all local politicians – and this is the reason why they avoid formal institutional cooperation or independent expertise. In other words, policymaking is reduced to nothing more than politics by other means. And when politics becomes very personalized or personality-based, fragmented and pre-modern, turf wars becomes the rule all across the public sector.”

In January 2011 Transition Online started a series giving some rare detail on the sources of finance of political parties in central Europe. They quoted an example of the benefit one contributor received in Romania from a 40,000 payment. I suspect the figures are considerable underestimates – the benefits of political favour in Romania (and Bulgaria) are so great that I doubt whether a 40,000 euros contribution is going to get you very much! The next box is the result of my own, brief research –

Box 2 Case study in anti-corruption and transparency

A recent Minister of Finance came under strong attack for his dishonesty and hypocrisy in concealing eleven sources of income he had. As Minister, he was on the Board of several state companies – and apparently received 96,000 euros a year for attending their Board meetings which he forgot to declare.

The financial asset declaration forms are now compulsory – and available on the internet. A few weeks after the story hit the headlines, the form of a 30 year-old State Secretary in the same Ministry who had been working in the Ministry for more than a year, his form (dated 10 June 2009) told us that he was working in the municipality of Bucharest! However his brief CV (on the EIB website since he was appointed in Feb 2009 to its Board) tells us that he finished the municipal job exactly one year earlier than he completed and signed his declaration – in June 2008!

His declaration form also tells us that his net annual earnings were 50,000 rons (about 1250 euros – perhaps he made a mistake and this is actually monthly?) – although he also admits to owning 25,000 sq metres of land in Bucharest and another 25,000 sq metres of land in Calarasi). Of course he is now a State Secretary – actually earning 9,600 euros a month! He obviously hasn't been using his Rolex, Breitweiler and other 2 watches (which he values in total at 14,000 euros) and does not therefore realise that it is now mid-September 2010. Rip van Winkle rather than Midas!

⁴³ I have strong doubts about the wisdom of the British „fast-track” system which has alienated public servants in Romania (Young Professional scheme) and was (in 2011) about to be wished upon Bulgaria.

Just imagine yourself in such a situation - your boss has been sacked and is being publicly pilloried for having failed to declare external earnings. The first question of a normal person would be "Is my own declaration form in order?" But no, people like this young State Secretary enjoy such patronage (with no experience - he became a State Secretary at the age of 26 after an extended education!) and protection and seem so contemptuous of these forms that he doesn't even bother to update his form which understates his income by a factor of 40!⁴⁴ His out-of-date form does, however, declare some of the additional revenues he earned as a committee member of various state funds

These assets, earnings and concealments reveal systemic immorality which, in Romania's case, seems to be shaped and sustained by the role of its political parties which grabbed significant amounts of property in 1990 and which now determine the career path of young characters such as this State Secretary (nationally and internationally) and take in return a significant part of his earnings. [Tom Gallagher is a useful source](#) for more information.

Government proposals to cut pensions caused serious public protests and demonstrations in Romania - and led to the Constitutional Court ruling that this was unconstitutional - perhaps not surprising given the [incredible pensions and other benefits which the judges and other members of the political class enjoy](#)⁴⁵. In one case an ex-judge is known to have a monthly pension of 8,000 euros and generals (of which Romania has an extraordinary number) can expect about 5,000 euros a month. This in a country whose average monthly wage is 150 euros. And a 25% cut in public service wages has gone through - making life even harder for teachers and others. If this is not kleptocracy, what is?

3. What do we know about the process of changing impervious power?

3.1 Incentives for administrative reform

The international community had it lucky for the first 15 years after the fall of the wall - EU accession was a powerful incentive to central European governments and societies to introduce systemic change in their judicial and administrative systems. In non-accession countries the possibilities for user-friendly and effective state bodies are less rosy. So what does one do? Limit oneself in countries with a context hostile to reform to funding NGOs and giving the odd scholarship? Keep one's powder dry and put one's hope in the future generation?

In places where the EU incentive does not realistically exist, competition of two sorts seems to offer some footing for PAR

- to be investment-friendly regimes; and
- to have the image of making most progress within the particular Region (particularly to attract TA and develop the EU's Neighbourhood mechanism in eg Caucasus).

But such competition is rather a blunt incentive compared with that of accession. The imperviousness of power leads to arrogance, mistakes on a gigantic scale and systemic corruption. How does one change such systems? Can it happen incrementally Where are there examples of „impervious power“ morphing into more open systems? Japan is one obvious example - famous now

⁴⁴ It could be useful for civil society and the media to take more interest in these forms

⁴⁵ a recent scandal has shown that Romanian trade union leaders' noses are also in the trough

for the way management engage staff in a continuous dialogue about how to improve what their services and products offer the customer. But this is a relatively recent phenomenon - brought on by the combination of the shock of Second World War defeat and the import under General MacArthur's regime of a little-known American management guru, Edward Deming whose statistically based approach to "quality management" so transformed Japanese - and, ultimately and ironically, - American industry.

Before then, organisational structures had the same features of subservience as CIS countries. And, in the immediate post-war years, Germany too developed its system of industrial co-determination and strong local government.

But, apart from such post-war scenarios, there are few examples of countries emerging from impervious power to create and operate service-oriented (and as distinct from self-serving) system of public administration. Greece, Spain and Portugal were all quoted in the early 1990s as the models for the transition countries⁴⁶ - but

- (a) they too had the huge pressure of EU accession and
- (b) their reputations are now somewhat tarnished.

3.2 What can the international community offer?

It was a great tragedy that the neo-liberal agenda of the 1990s discouraged any serious thoughts then about the process of „state-building“ - and that this phrase became contaminated in the following decade by its use by occupying forces in Afghanistan and Iraq.

[Fukiyama put the matter very succinctly in 2007](#) - "The post-Cold War era began under the intellectual dominance of economists, who pushed strongly for liberalization and a minimal state. Ten years later, many economists have concluded that

some of the most important variables affecting development are not economic but institutional and political in nature. There was an entire missing dimension of stateness—that of state-building—and hence of development studies that had been ignored amid all the talk about state scope. Many economists found themselves blowing the dust off half-century-old books on public administration, or else reinventing the wheel with regard to anticorruption strategies. Michael Woolcock and Lant Pritchett talk about the problem of "**getting to Denmark**," where "Denmark" stands generically for a developed country with well-functioning state institutions. We know what "Denmark" looks like, and something about how the actual Denmark came to be historically. But to what extent is that knowledge transferable to countries as far away historically and culturally from Denmark as Moldova?

Unfortunately, the problem of how to get to Denmark is one that probably cannot be solved for quite a few countries. The obstacle is not a cognitive one: We know by and large how they differ from Denmark, and what a Denmark-like solution would be; the problem is that we do not have the political means of arriving there because there is insufficient local demand for reform. Well-meaning developed countries have tried a variety of strategies for stimulating such local demand, from loan conditionality to outright military occupation. The record, however, if we look at it honestly, is not an impressive one, and in many cases our interventions have actually made things worse."

International bodies may have changed their tune about the role of the state since the simplistic thinking of the Washington Consensus - but their arrogance remains. Physical and financial tsunamis have demonstrated the need for an effective - if not strong - states. Typically, experts have swung from one

⁴⁶ Linz and Stepan

extreme to the other. Having expected little of the state - they now expect too much. Their anti-poverty strategies read like Soviet 10 year plans. **Merilee Grindle** has been one of the few to challenge this.

"Getting good governance calls for improvements that touch virtually all aspects of the public sector—from institutions that set the rules of the game for economic and political interaction, to decision-making structures that determine priorities among public problems and allocate resources to respond to them, to organizations that manage administrative systems and deliver goods and services to citizens, to human resources that staff government bureaucracies, to the interface of officials and citizens in political and bureaucratic arenas...

Not surprisingly, advocating good governance raises a host of questions about what needs to be done, when it needs to be done, and how it needs to be done.

Recently, the idea of "good enough governance" questioned the length of the good governance agenda. This concept suggested that not all governance deficits need to be (or can be) tackled at once and that institution and capacity building are products of time; governance achievements can also be reversed.

Box 3: Good enough governance

Good enough governance means that interventions thought to contribute to the ends of economic and political development need to be questioned, prioritized, and made relevant to the conditions of individual countries. They need to be assessed in light of historical evidence, sequence, and timing, and they should be selected carefully in terms of their contributions to particular ends such as poverty reduction and democracy. Good enough governance directs attention to considerations of the minimal conditions of governance necessary to allow political and economic development to occur"

3.3 The toolkit of change

The following basic mechanisms have been used to try to create in transition countries a system of public administration which is responsive to public need⁴⁷ -

- Judicial reform; to embed properly [the principle of the rule of law](#)
- Budgetary reform; to ensure the integrity and transparency of public resources
- Civil service laws, structures and training institutions - to encourage professionalism and less politicization of staff of state bodies
- [Impact assessment](#) - to try to move the transition systems away from a legalistic approach and force policy-makers to carry out consultations and assess the financial and other effects of draft legislation
- [Functional Review](#) - to try to remove those functions of state bodies which are no longer necessary or are best handled by another sector or body.
- Institutional twinning - to help build the capacity of those state bodies whose performance is crucial to the implementation of the Acquis Communautaire⁴⁸
- Development of local government and NGOs - to try to ensure that a redistribution of power takes place
- Anti-corruption strategies - which incorporate elements of the first three of the above
- Performance measurement and management eg EFQM
- report-cards⁴⁹ -

⁴⁷ The Governance and Social Development Resource Centre has recently published an interesting overview of „Current trends in governance support“- at <http://www.gsdrc.org/docs/open/HD755.pdf>

⁴⁸ for a rare insight into the origin of twinning see Tulmets paper quoted at reference 17

The problem with many of these tools - particularly the 3rd, 4th and 5th - is that their rationalistic basis brings them into immediate conflict with local realities which subverts therefore all too easily their good intentions even if the project had

- beneficiaries with both clout and commitment and
- experts with the relevant skills
- the necessary flexibility.

Fair and transparent recruitment procedures strike at the heart of a Minister's patronage power. Asking questions about the necessity of Ministry functions is like asking turkeys to vote for an early Christmas! It is part of the toolkit of a politician not to reveal or commit too much - not least because most politicians are flying by the seats of their pants

Too many of the tools of those involved in administrative reform are anti-political (and therefore anti-democratic) in their "rationalism". What many technocrats attribute to politics or parties is simply human behaviour! Human behaviour needs to be factored into change efforts!

The contrast between the two ways of thinking is nicely caught in the following diagram.

Diagram 1; rational and political approaches to change

	Functional- rational dimension	Political dimension
Main unit of analysis	The organisation as an entity with certain functional requirements; focus on task-and-work system	Subgroups with self-interest, in shifting coalitions; focus on power-and-loyalty systems
What driving forces are emphasised?	A sense of norms and coherence, intrinsic motivation	Sanctions & rewards, extrinsic incentives
Which image of man is assumed?	Employees concerned with the organisation's interests	Individuals concerned with self-interests
How does change happen?	Through participative reasoning and joint learning, finding the best technical solution	Through internal conflict and external pressure, coalition building, finding the powerful agents who can force positive and negative capacity change
What will change efforts focus on?	Internal systems, structures, skills, technology, communication	Change incentives, fire foes and hire friends, build client and performance pressure.
"Emotional tone" of the analysis	Naïve	Cynical

from Teskey (DFiD 2005)

Impact assessment, for example, is a resurrected form of cost-benefit analysis which was memorably castigated by Peter Self in the 1970s as "Nonsense on stilts"⁵⁰. The research on Impact Assessment by Renda and others shows what an uphill battle it has had in member states and the European Commission - suggesting that it is somewhat naive to expect it to work in transition countries!

3.4 How much research - or reflection?

⁴⁹ consumer feedback on public services - one of the tools summarised in a useful menu published by the World Bank in 2005 <http://www1.worldbank.org/publicsector/civilservice/ACSRCourse2007/Session%208/IncreasingGovEffectiveness.pdf>

⁵⁰ <http://john-adams.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2007/11/londons-third-airport.pdf>

The Court of Auditors' 2007 Report (which provoked the Backbone strategy) was concerned with procurement procedures. It is questions about the substance which are overdue – not so much the „how“ as the „what“. This section therefore tries to identify relevant critical writing.

With one major exception, there seems to have little reflection over the past 20 years about the nature of and results from the various tools being used in TA programmes – although The World Bank's published a major evaluation in 2008 – <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/EXTOED/EXTPUBSECTREF/0,,menuPK:4664077~pagePK:64829575~piPK:64829612~theSitePK:4663904,00.html>. That exception is anti-corruption work – where there has been a huge amount of writing and a fair amount of breast-beating.

Of course lots of case-studies of administrative reform have been published (not least from the NISPACEe Annual Conferences). Most, however, are descriptions of isolated initiatives – unrelated to larger issue of how the capacity of state institutions and local government can realistically be developed in neighbourhood countries.

Administrative Capacity

In 2004 SIGMA published a [critical overview of PAR in the Balkans](#). "Too often", it says "PAR strategies in the region are designed by (external) technocrats with a limited mandate. Public Administration reforms are not sufficiently considered as political interventions which need to be sustained by a coalition of interests which includes business, civil society and public sector workers". The paper then went on to make the following very useful injunctions –

- Get the administrative basics right – before getting into the complexity of NPM-type measures
- Focus on establishing regularity
- Tackle systems – not agencies
- Develop the young; constrain the old⁵¹
- Be serious about local ownership
- Avoid having a project focus force governments into unrealistic expectations
- Address the governance system as a whole – eg parliament and admin justice

It is a pity this paper did not receive wider circulation and discussion. They are all too rare! It would be useful to have an update commissioned in true consultative fashion – drawing on the experience this time on more people on the ground. For example, Craciun's useful assessments of the [cumulative impact \(or lack of it\) of EC Technical Assistance on Romania](#). Ionitsa is one of several who has gone so far as to suggest that the resources involved in Technical Assistance actually strengthens the forces of pre-modernity in the country.⁵²

Pat Grey's 2004 paper "Hard cases and improving governance; Putin and civil service reform"

<http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/nispacee/unpan009023.pdf>

⁵¹ although I have reservations about the "ageism" of this. Young people from the region educated in Western Europe have a shocking arrogance (perhaps because they have no local role models – perhaps because of the nature of the social science they have been taught) which means they are doomed to repeat the mistakes of the past. And their instant elevation to promoted posts on their return from Western Europe creates problems since they have no work experience.

⁵² The new, post '89 elites, who speak the language of modernity when put in an official setting, can still be discretionary and clannish in private. Indeed, such a disconnection between official, Westernized discourse abroad and actual behavior at home in all things that really matter has a long history in Romania. 19th century boyars sent their sons to French and German universities and adopted Western customs in order to be able to preserve their power of patronage in new circumstances – anticipating the idea of the Sicilian writer di Lampedusa that "everything has to change in order to stay the same" (page 15 of http://pdc.ceu.hu/archive/00002838/01/ionita_f3.pdf).

on the Russian experience of civil service reform is one of the few to try to offer an explanation of how the combination of specific internal and external factors has constrained the reform process in that particular country eg variable political leadership and support; variable administrative leadership and capacity; political and social instability; minimal civil society; the preponderance of old apparatchniks; cultural factors; and 'windows of opportunity' (see section 11.1 below).

In 2006 Manning and others, knowing that context, and after an analysis of the lessons of global reforms – in [International Public Administration Reform – implications for the Russian Federation](http://books.google.com/books?id=iyH3MA48kQAC&printsec=frontcover&hl=ro&source=gbp_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false) (World Bank 2004) http://books.google.com/books?id=iyH3MA48kQAC&printsec=frontcover&hl=ro&source=gbp_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false, gave the following advice to the Russian Federation –

- Bear in mind the need for realism and managed expectations
- Start with the basics; focus on fundamental civil service reform
- Create traction (?); through developing the capacity of central agencies
- Seize opportunities by forging partnerships with regional governments, cities etc and encourage pilot reform schemes and experiments at agency or sub-national level
- Create opportunities through judicial use of functional reviews – and stimulate external pressure on the Executive (eg through freedom of information legislation and Ombudsman bodies)

But note that, although these analyses are trying to understand the dynamics of change, they give little attention to the tools being used – rather look at context and stratagems.

In 2006 the World Bank produced a report – [Administrative capacity in the New Member States – the limits of innovation?](#) by Tony Verheijen which did look at both – although somewhat superficially. The conclusions were sobering – with many of the early reforms failing to stick – and the report noting the need for

"the development of a common understanding among politicians that a well functioning civil service is a public good rather than an extension party politics, and the development of a set of principles politicians commit to abide by when addressing civil service staffing issues. Without a commitment by politicians to accept the notion of the civil service as a public good, little progress can be made on this issue. If a common direction does not emerge organically as it did in the Baltic States, a formal process in which politicians and senior officials engage with the academic and business communities on the design of a common vision for the development of the public management system should be put in place".

The reports tried to identify the features which allow the Baltic states to make more progress.

"The Latvian and Lithuanian reforms were built around a relatively small group of reform-minded officials who managed to gain and retain the trust of politicians regardless of their political orientation. This type of professional, non-partisan elite appears to have been missing in most other states, where expertise was and is politicized (and thus deemed insufficiently trustworthy by opposing political factions), is not available or is not available to government. Technical capacity and consensus thus appear to be strongly intertwined in most of the states concerned, and Latvia and Lithuania have been an exception to this rule, although there is no clear explanation for this".

Civil Service reform

A World Bank/SIGMA paper of 2009 on [The Sustainability of Civil Service Reforms in ECE](#) by Meyer-Sayling took me back to a couple of papers published almost a decade ago Polidano's 2001 "Why Civil Service Reforms Fail" and Geoffrey Shepherd's 2003 "Why is Civil Service Reform going so badly?".

And Francis Cardona's "Can Civil Service Reforms Last?" The European Union's 5th Enlargement and Future Policy Orientation (March 2010) squarely faces up to the problems - making various suggestions, two of which are useful to excerpt -

https://circabc.europa.eu/webdav/CircaBC/empl/ESF%20Evaluation%20discussion%20group/Library/evaluation_partnership/2009/1718_november/working_capacity/Sigma%20sust%20civil%20service%202009.pdf

.5 The internalisation of European principles of public administration should be promoted
The link between professionalism and effective membership of the European Union was not fully internalised by candidate countries. The organisation of international and national networks of politicians and practitioners, international organisations, and non-governmental actors is increasingly needed. These networks should aim to develop operational frameworks fostering reflection, exchanges and proposals on ways and means of creating state institutions that are resilient and reliable enough to implement EU policies and legislation serving European citizens. The internalisation of European principles of public administration should primarily aim to better institutionalise co-operation between current and future EU Member States. Advantage should be taken of the possibilities provided by article 197 of the consolidated text of the Lisbon Treaty. The new approach made possible by article 197 should also be reflected in the design of technical assistance projects.

6 Technical assistance projects should promote realistic expectations

The EC should more resolutely take into account the political dimension of reform and foster realistic expectations with regard to the time required to develop and implement highly politically loaded reforms and to develop adequate political instruments to support them. In this context and in the interest of the sustainability of reforms, more attention should be paid to the joint use by the Commission and countries of diagnosis instruments, and in particular of well structured policy dialogues that help foster local political willingness for, and ownership of reform and allow for reform implications to be sufficiently understood, internalised and managed by the countries themselves. Technical assistance designers should be aware of the limited absorption capacity of many of the small-sized current applicants and candidate countries. Furthermore, changing mentalities requires both considerable time and the implementation in acquiescent enforcement bodies of interim solutions such as the promotion of rule-driven behaviour as a democratic value over efficiency as a managerial value.

Decentralisation

A [2001 paper by Patrick Heller](#) which looked at the frequently quoted examples of decentralisation in Kerala (India), South Africa and Porto Alegre emphasised how unique and strong were the pressures for reform there.

Decentralisation which comes without that pressure (for example from the recommendations of international bodies and their officials) will be skin deep only - and capable of easy reversal.

Rule of Law

Tom Carothers (US Aid) is a rare voice of logic, clarity, experience and balance in the world of international aid. In 2007, the Journal of Democracy [carried an excellent paper by him on The Sequencing Fallacy](#) which looked at some of the global thinking about the institutional development

process which affects the Technical Cooperation field. He took exception with the argument that democracy should take second place to the establishment of the rule of law.

In 2009 Carothers produced another paper which looked at the experience and discussion of the past decade [with rule-of-law projects](#). His paper points out the ambiguity of that term - which finds support from a variety of ideological and professional positions and therefore leads to confused implementation if not state capture. Fukiyama also had a good paper on the subject in 2010

Anti Corruption

There is so a huge literature on the Anti-Corruption work of the past 2 decades - most of it despairing. And quite a few literature reviews of which the most recent is the 2009 Norad one which said that "the literature notes that Parliament, in its capacity as lawmaker but also as a political oversight watchdog and accountability mechanism, has been largely neglected in Rule of Law and anti-corruption efforts"⁵³. The title of another Corruption and Anti-corruption - do donors have the right approach? ⁵⁴ reflects the despair many feel about these efforts⁵⁵.

http://soc.kuleuven.be/io/egpa/org/2010Toul/Papers/Agnes_Batory_EGPA%202010.pdf

a big-bang theory http://www.pol.gu.se/digitalAssets/1350/1350652_2007_3_rothstein.pdf

Training

Tens of millions of euros have been spent in the EC on the development of national and local training capacities for public officials in transition countries - accession, neighbourhood and others. Thousands of trainers have supposedly been trained - and almost as many training modules developed. Hundreds of millions of euros have been spent by the EC to underwrite the actual training.

In which transition countries, after all this effort, can we actually point to a robust Institute of Public Administration which is actually helping the state system perform? Lithuania and Poland are often quoted as such bodies - but where else are there financially viable training centres able to draw on experienced trainers whose courses offer the trainees and the state bodies from which they come interactive skills which actually makes a measurable impact on the performance both of the official and of their state bodies?

A combination of factors has made this a distant prospect in too many countries -

- Trained trainers escaping to the private sector
- Traditional lectures rather than interactive learning being offered
- Bosses being cynical about the contribution of training
- State bodies lacking the strategic dimension to allow them to develop change strategies with training as an integral element of that change
- Lack of funding for state training centres
- Confusion about the role of state funding; unrealistic expectation about financial viability
- Confusion about how to carry out needs assessment

⁵³ [Anti-corruption Approaches: a literature review](#) (Norad 2009)

⁵⁴ http://www.humansecuritygateway.com/documents/CMI_corruptionanticorruptioneffortsaid.pdf

⁵⁵ "Anti-corruption - what do we know? Research on preventing corruption in the ex-communist world" by Diane Schmidt in *Political Studies* 2007 <http://www.esri.salford.ac.uk/esri/resources/uploads/File/Conferences/CorruptionMarch07/schmidt%20-%20Paper.pdf>

- Unrealistic expectations about E-learning
- Lack of an appropriate model for a training system which unites supply and demand elements in a way which ensures relevance.

How these problems might be overcome is an issue I have developed in a separate paper⁵⁶.

4. Implications for the Institution-building agenda

4.1 Play the long game - not the logframe

In an extended public letter he wrote in 1990 and published under the title *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe*⁵⁷, Ralf Dahrendorf made the prescient comment that it would take one or two years to create new institutions of political democracy in the recently liberated countries of CEEC, maybe five to 10 years to reform the economy and make a market economy, and 15 to 20 years to create the rule of law. And it would take maybe two generations to create a functioning civil society there.

A former adviser to Václav Havel, Jiri Pehe, referred recently to that prediction and suggested that "what we see now is that we have completed the first two stages, the transformation of the institutions, of the framework of political democracy on the institutional level, there is a functioning market economy, which of course has certain problems, but when you take a look at the third area, the rule of the law, there is still a long way to go, and civil society is still weak and in many ways not very efficient." ⁵⁸

He then went on to make the useful distinction between "democracy understood as institutions and democracy understood as culture. It's been much easier to create a democratic regime, a democratic system as a set of institutions and procedures and mechanism, than to create democracy as a kind of culture - that is, an environment in which people are actually democrats".

These are salutary comments for those with too mechanistic an approach to institution-building. Notwithstanding the tons of books on organisational cultures and cultural change, political cultures cannot be engineered. Above all, they will not be reformed from a project approach based on using bodyshops, cowboy companies and the logframe. My 2006 paper referred to the classic critique of the logframe⁵⁹ - and I will return to this point in the conclusion to this paper.

4.2 Take a capacity development perspective

I found it interesting that the Court of Auditors latched on to capacity development (giving appropriate references) in its critical 2007 review of Technical Assistance whereas the EC response was a bit sniffy about that perspective. Those who work as consultants in institution building are trained in other subjects and often find themselves reinventing the wheel of capacity development (I certainly did) - so this is an example of where the contractors and EC could be doing more to ensure their consultants are actually up to scratch.

Surprisingly, it has been the OECD and the World Bank which (momentarily) talked the most sense.

⁵⁶ available on my website - <http://www.freewebs.com/publicadminreform/>

⁵⁷ http://books.google.com/books?id=obx2BX91FQUC&printsec=frontcover&source=gb_s_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false

⁵⁸ Is Europe's democratic Revolution Over? <http://www.tol.org/client/article/22386-is-europes-democratic-revolution-over.html>

⁵⁹ Lucy Earle's 2002 „Lost in the Matrix; the logframe and the local picture“

<http://publicadminreform.webs.com/key%20papers/Lost%20in%20the%20matrix%20-%20Earle%20and%20logframe.pdf>

The OECD in 1999 when it commissioned a whole set of studies to explore the HOW of administrative reform and change; and [Nick Manning and others a year or so later when, in their work for the Russian Federation](#), they actually used the language of "windows of opportunity". And perhaps the most useful recent assessment is the World Bank's [Governance Reforms under real world conditions](#) which is written around the sorts of questions we consultants deal with on a daily basis -

- How do we build broad coalitions of influentials in favour of change? What do we do about powerful vested interests?
- How do we help reformers transform indifferent, or even hostile, public opinion into support for reform objectives?
- How do we instigate citizen demand for good governance and accountability to sustain governance reform?

The paper by Matthew Andrews which starts part 2 of the book weaves an interesting theory around 3 words - „acceptance“, „authority“ and „ability“⁶⁰.

4; Some Box preconditions

Is there acceptance of the need for change and reform?
of the specific reform idea?
of the monetary costs for reform?
of the social costs for reformers?
within the incentive fabric of the organization (not just with individuals)?

Is there authority:
does legislation allow people to challenge the status quo and initiate reform?
do formal organizational structures and rules allow reformers to do what is needed?
do informal organizational norms allow reformers to do what needs to be done?

Is there ability: are there enough people, with appropriate skills,
to conceptualize and implement the reform?
is technology sufficient?
are there appropriate information sources to help conceptualize, plan, implement, and institutionalize the reform?

It is Ionita's view that "constraints on improving of policy management are to be found firstly in terms of low acceptance (of the legitimacy of new, objective criteria and transparency); secondly, in terms of low authority (meaning that nobody knows who exactly is in charge of prioritization across sectors, for example) and only thirdly in terms of low technical ability in institutions"

A diagram in that World Bank paper shows that each of these three elements plays a different role at the 4 stages of conceptualisation, initiation, transition and institutionalisation and that it is the space of overlapping circles that the opportunity for change occurs. However the short para headed „Individual champions matter less than networks“ - was the one that hit nerves. „The individual who

⁶⁰ In the 1980s, we British reformers talked about "generating understanding and commitment" and of the three basic tests for new proposals - Feasibility, legitimacy and support. "Does it work?" "Does it fall within our powers? And "will it be accepted?" Twenty years later the discourse had returned to the problems of implementation.

connects nodes is the key to the network but is often not the one who has the technical idea or who is called the reform champion. His or her skill lies in the ability to bridge relational boundaries and to bring people together. Development is fostered in the presence of robust networks with skilled connectors acting at their heart." My mind was taken back almost 30 years when, as the guy in charge of Strathclyde Region's strategy to combat deprivation but using my academic role, I established what I called the urban change network and brought together once a month a diverse collection of officials and councillors of different municipalities in the West of Scotland, academics and NGO people to explore how we could extend our understanding of what we were dealing with - and how our policies might make more impact. It was, I think, the single most effective thing I ever did.

Box 5: Is it people who change systems? Or systems which change people?

Answers tend to run on ideological grounds - individualists tend to say the former; social democrats the latter. And both are right!

Change begins with a single step, an inspiring story, a champion. But, unless the actions "resonate" with society, they will be dismissed as mavericks, "ahead of their time".

A significant number of people have to be discontent - and persuaded that there is an alternative. The wider system has to be ready for change - and, in the meantime, the narrow and upward accountabilities of the administrative system can be - and is so often - malevolent, encouraging people to behave in perverse ways. Formal and informal systems are a well-recognised fact of organizational life⁶¹. Whatever new formal systems say, powerful informal systems tend to ensure the maintenance of unreformed systems - until, that is, and unless there is a determined move to change.

What do I mean by "determined move"? -

- Ensuring, by communications, leadership and training, that people understand what the reform is trying to achieve - and why it is needed and in their interests
- Development and enforce detailed instruments
- Networking in order to mobilise support for the relevant changes
- building and empowering relevant institutions to be responsible for the reform - and help drive it forward

Administrative reform is an intervention in a social system - or rather set of interlocking systems. Like an organism, it will quickly be rejected or absorbed unless it can relate to elements in these larger systems. We are these days advised always to carry out "stakeholder analyses" - to track who will be affected by the changes and how the indifferent or potentially hostile can be brought on side or neutralised⁶².

4.3 The elephant in the room - the rotten political class

The abstract of this paper was entitled „The Two Elephants in the room" when it was first submitted to NISPACE since I wanted to focus on two groups who are rarely mentioned in the literature of institution building and yet play important roles - politicians and consultants.

⁶¹ In 1970, Donald Schon coined the phrase "dynamic conservatism" in Beyond the Stable State to describe the strength of these forces in an organisation.

⁶² Roger Lovell has a useful paper on "Gaining Support" which uses the dimensions of "agreement to change" and "trust" to distinguish allies, adversaries, bedfellows, opponents and fence sitters

It is a truism in the training world that it is almost impossible to get senior executives on training courses since they think they have nothing to learn – and this is particularly true of the political class. Not only do politicians (generally) think they have nothing to learn but they have managed very successfully to ensure that no one ever carries out critical assessments of their world. They commission or preside over countless inquiries into all the other systems of society – but rarely does their world come under proper scrutiny⁶³. Elections are assumed to give legitimacy to anything. Media exposure is assumed to keep politicians on their toes – but a combination of economics, patterns of media ownership and journalistic laziness has meant an end to investigative journalism and its replacement with cheap attacks on politicians which simply breeds public cynicism and indifference. And public cynicism and indifference is the oxygen in which „impervious power“ thrives!

The one common thread in those assessments which have faced honestly the crumbling of reform in the region (Cardona; Ionitsa; Manning; Verheijen) is the need to force the politicians to grow up and stop behaving like petulant schoolboys and girls. Manning and Ionitsa both emphasise the need for transparency and external pressures. Cardona and Verheijen talk of the establishment of structures bringing politicians, officials, academics etc together to develop a consensus. As Ionitsa puts it succinctly – „If a strong requirement is present – and the first openings must be made at the political level – the supply can be generated fairly rapidly, especially in ex-communist countries, with their well-educated manpower. But if the demand is lacking, then the supply will be irrelevant“.

4.4 Need to break down the intellectual silos

I have made several references in this paper to the absence of dialogue between groups and I was therefore pleased to see a comment in the recent paper from the OECD's Network on Governance's Anti-corruption Task Team report on Integrity and State Building that „As a result of interviews with senior members of ten donor agencies, it became apparent that those engaged in anti-corruption activities and those involved in the issues of statebuilding and fragile states had little knowledge of each other's approaches and strategies“.

Departmental silos are one of the recurring themes in the literature of public administration and reform – but it is often academia which lies behind this problem with its overspecialisation. For example, „Fragile states“ and „Statebuilding“ are two new phrases which have grown up only in the last few years – and „capacity development“ has now become a more high-profile activity. There are too many specialised groups working on building effective institutions in the difficult contexts I focussed on in section 9 – and too few actually sharing their experiences. We need a road map – and more dialogue!

⁶³ Britain's Chris Mullin was a very rare example of someone prepared in the two sets of diaries he has published about his life as a parliamentarian and junior Minister to reveal how pointless these roles had been.

5. Inconclusion

"I have long given up on the quest to find the one universal tool kit that will unite us all under a perfect methodology... as they will only ever be as good as the users that rely on them. What is sorely missing in the development machine is a solid grounding in ethics, empathy, integrity and humility"⁶⁴.

5.1 The need for some humility

This paper has tried to explore two basic questions - how the EC's procurement system might be improved to get a better match of needs and consultants for its institution-building efforts where power is impervious or broken; and (more profoundly) the nature of the knowledge and skill base which a consultant operating in the very specific context of Neighbourhood Countries needs to be effective. This, in turn, requires us to face up to the following sorts of questions -

What were the forces which helped reform the state system of the various EU member countries? what do we actually know about the results of institution-building (IB) in regimes characterised by Impervious Power?

Does it not simply give a new arrogant and kleptocratic elite a better vocabulary?

Does the "windows of opportunity" theory not suggest a totally different approach to IB?

But in what sense can we actually say the British or French state systems, for example, have actually reformed in the past 40 years - let alone in a "better" direction?? Of course the rhetoric of reform is in place - which it certainly wasn't 40 years ago.

I vividly remember the writing of organisational analysts such as Charles Lindblom in the 1970s who invented phrases such as "disjointed incrementalism" to demonstrate the impossibility of modern public organisations being able to change radically. Suddenly in the late 1980s, the language changed and everything seemed possible - "Total Quality Management" was a typical phrase. Thatcher has a lot to answer for - in creating the illusion that private management (concepts and people) had the answer.

But, after several waves of major public sector reforms in the last two decades, a lot of British people, for example, would certainly say that things have gone backward - or, with more nuancing, that any improvements are down to technological and financial rather than managerial developments. And "managerial" covers elements of both macro structures (like Agencies) and management hierarchy and behaviour - which has certainly got worse as the ethic of public service has disappeared.

But who is best placed to make such judgements? Using what criteria? Do we rely on public surveys? But survey work is so profoundly influenced by the sorts of questions asked - and interpretations. Politicians, managers and professionals all have their vested interest in the stance they take - although the older "coalface" professional is perhaps in the best position to judge.

We have a lot of comparative indicators these days about both individual public services (France regularly tops the league tables for health; Finland for education) and governance systems. But they don't seem to have much link with the experiences of ordinary people. A combination of education and media exposure has made the European public lose its traditional deference to those with authority. And increasingly those in public positions are exposed for lacking the basic

⁶⁴ Blog comment on <http://aidontheedge.info/2011/02/10/whose-paradigm-counts>

character (let alone competence) for the job. And managerialism (and the salaries which go to the top echelons) seems to be at the root of the problem.

I therefore return to the questions I posed in my 2006 paper to the NISPAcee Conference (see box 1 of this paper) and specifically how can those of us who come from such countries dare to give advice to those struggling in "transition" countries? And perhaps some of these countries have themselves reached the position to which older member of the EUs are still in transition? Many of these countries, after all, bought in the mid 1990s a strong version of neo-liberalism (everything for sale) when their taxation systems collapsed and their elites realised what a great legitimisation for their corruption the new Western Weltanschauung gave them! The greed of the financial system has now brought the welfare systems of the older EU member states close to collapse.

5.2 Shaky foundations of TA

I have suggested that Technical Assistance based on project management and competitive tendering is fatally flawed – assuming that a series of "products" procured randomly by competitive company bidding can develop the sort of trust, networking and knowledge on which lasting change depends. I have also raised the question of why we seem to expect tools which we have not found easy to implement to work in more difficult circumstances.

At this point I want to suggest that part of the problem has to do with the unwillingness and/or inability of those involved in the game to admit how much of a power game it is. The very language of Technical Assistance assumes certainty of knowledge (inputs-outputs) and relationships of power – of superiority ("experts") and inferiority ("beneficiaries"). What happens when we start from different assumptions? For example that –

Technical Assistance built on projects (and the project management philosophy which enshrines that) may be OK for constructing buildings but is not appropriate for assisting in the development of public institutions⁶⁵

Institutions grow – and no one really understands that process

Administrative reform has little basis in scientific evidence⁶⁶. The discipline of public administration from which it springs is promiscuous in its multi-disciplinary borrowing.

Such criticism has been made of Technical Assistance in the development field – but has not yet made the crossing to those who work in the (bureaucratically separate) world of institution-building in post-communist countries. Once one accepts the world of uncertainty in which we are working, it is not enough to talk about more flexibility in the first few months to adjust project details. This is just the old machine metaphor⁶⁷ at work again – one last twist of the spanner and hey presto, it's working!

The table below is taken from one of the most interesting writers in the development field one of whose early books was titled, memorably, "Putting the Last First". As you would expect from such a title, his approach is highly critical of external technical experts and of the way even participatory efforts are dominated by them.

⁶⁵ Essentially the argument in the classic critique against the logframe Lucy Earle's 2002 „Lost in the Matrix; the logframe and the local picture” <http://publicadminreform.webs.com/key%20papers/Lost%20in%20the%20matrix%20-%20Earle%20and%20logframe.pdf>

⁶⁶ See the 99 contradictory proverbs underlying it which Hood and Jackson identified in their (out of print) 1999 book

⁶⁷ see Gareth Morgan's *Images of Organisation* for more

Table ; Four approaches to development

Approach	1. Benevolent	2. Participatory	3. Rights-based	4. Obligation-based
Core concept	Doing good	Effectiveness	Rights of "have-nots"	Obligations of "haves"
Dominant mode	Technical	Social	political	Ethical
Relationships of donors to recipients	Blueprinted	Consultative	transformative	Reflective
Stakeholders seen as	Beneficiaries	Implementers	Citizens	Guides, teachers
accountability	Upward to aid agency	Upward with some downward	multiple	Personal
Procedures	Bureaucratic conformity	More acceptance of diversity	Negotiated, evolutionary	Learning
Organizational drivers	Pressure to disburse	Balance between disbursement and results	Pressure for results	Expectations of responsible use of discretion

Source; Ideas for Development: R. Chambers (2005) p 208)

Sadly, few younger consultants⁶⁸ in the field of admin reform (particularly NPM ones) are familiar with the development literature . The unease some of us have been increasingly feeling about PAR in transition countries is well explained in that table. The practice of technical assistance in reshaping state structures in transition countries is stuck at the first stage - although the rhetoric of "local ownership" of the past 5 years or so has moved the thinking to the second column.

The challenge is now two-fold, to make that rhetoric more of a reality and then to move to try to ensure that citizens actually benefit from all the activity!

5.3 A false model of change?

The Washington consensus was an ideological offensive which was offensively simplistic - and was fairly quickly buried but the arrogance behind it is alive and well. It is time for the soi-disants „experts" to develop some humility. And this humility is doubly due - in the light of work done in the management field by the likes of Russell Ackoff and Margaret Wheatley⁶⁹ and in the development community on the implications of complexity theory reflected in UK's Overseas Development Institute.⁷⁰

They could do worse than study Robert Quinn's book *Changing the World*⁷¹ which is an excellent antidote for those who are still fixated on the expert model of change - those who imagine it can be achieved by "telling", "forcing" or by participation. Quinn exposes the last for what it normally is (despite the best intentions of those in power) - a form of manipulation - and effectively encourages us, through examples, to have more faith in people. As the blurb says - "the idea that

⁶⁸ The older ones, of course, have considerable experience of Africa - which has a dual problem. They come with jaundiced eyes; and beneficiaries in transition countries do not take kindly to being compared with Africa.

⁶⁹ See Ackoff's *Little Book of F Laws* (2006); and Wheatley's *Management Science and Complexity Theory* (2001)

⁷⁰ <http://aidontheedge.info/2011/06/06/new-odi-working-paper-on-taking-responsibility-for-complexity/> and *Exploring the Science of complexity - ideas and implications for development* (2008) <http://www.odi.org.uk/resources/download/583.pdf>

⁷¹ <http://business.unr.edu/faculty/simmons/badm720/actchange.pdf>

inner change makes outer change possible has always been part of spiritual and psychological teachings. But not an idea that's generally addressed in leadership and management training". Quinn looks at how leaders such as Gandhi and Luther King have mobilised people for major change - and suggests that, by using certain principles, "change agents" are capable of helping ordinary people to achieve transformative change. These principles include; „Look within - be aware of your hypocrisy"; "Embody a vision of the common good"; "Disturb the system"; "Don't try to micro-manage - be aware of systems"; „Entice through moral power".

House of Cards - building the rule of law in ECE (2009)

http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1686644 Alina Mungiu Pippidi

the history, experience and problems of this are well set out by Andrea Renda in various publications such as Impact Assessment in the EU - state of the art and the art of the state (2006)

<http://www.ceps.eu/files/book/1291.pdf>; and <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/8/35/45447552.pdf>.

See also Radaelli

<http://centres.exeter.ac.uk/ceg/research/riacp/documents/RadaelliEvidenceandpoliticalcontrol.pdf>

FR a rare set of guidelines was given in 2001 by Manning et al http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSPContentServer/WDSP/IB/2005/06/22/000090341_20050622142938/Rendered/PDF/32699.pdf

the sociologists and anthropologists have given us a useful critique of the role of anti-corruption work - see, for example,

<http://www.kus.uu.se/pdf/activities/20040329-30/integritywarriors.pdf>

<http://www1.worldbank.org/publicsector/civilservice/ACSRCourse2007/Session%208/IncreasingGovEffectiveness.pdf>

BACK TO THE BALKANS

Training for Change -

As I awaited the result of a bid for a new project in a backward EU member country. I decided to do this rather provocative series of posts on my blog -

Training of public officials in ex-communist countries – Part I

The European Union has spent many hundreds – if not thousands – of millions of euros on training of public servants in the accession states; in Eastern Europe and central Asia (and continues to do so in the Operational Programmes of its Structural Funds with which I am currently involved here in Bulgaria). Despite the European Commission emphasis on evaluation, I am not aware of any critical evaluation it has commissioned of that spending – nor of any guidelines it has issued to try to encourage good practice in this field of training public officials (It has issued, in recent years, guidelines on “good governance”, internal project monitoring, project cycle management, institutional assessment and capacity development, ex-ante evaluation). And, in particular, there is nothing available for those in transition countries who want to go beyond the task of managing one specific programme of training and actually build a system of training which has the key features of –

- Continuity
- Commitment to learning and improvement

A transition country is lucky if its officials and state bodies actually benefit from a training programme – with training needs being properly assessed; relevant and inspiring courses constructed; and delivered (by skilled trainers) in workshops which engage its participants and encourage them to do things differently in their workplace. Too often, many of these ingredients are missing. But, even if they are present, the programme is usually an ad-hoc one which fails to assist the wider system. The trainers disappear – often to the private sector; their training materials with them. No improvement takes place in the wider system of training public officials. For 20 years now I have led public administration reform projects in a variety of “transition” countries in central Europe and central Asia – in which training and training the trainer activities have always been important elements. Initially I did what most western consultants tend to do – shared our “good practice” from western Europe.

But slowly – and mainly because I was no longer living in western Europe – I began to see how little impact all of this work was having. I summarised my assessment recently in the following way

- Most workshops are held without sufficient preparation or follow-up. Workshops without these features are not worth holding.
- Training is too ad-hoc – and not properly related to the performance of the individual (through the development of core competences) or of the organization
- Training, indeed, is often a cop-out – reflecting a failure to think properly about organisational failings and needs. Training should never stand alone – but always be part of a coherent package of development – whether individual or organisational.
- It is critical that any training intervention is based on “learning outcomes” developed in a proper dialogue between the 4 separate groups involved in any training system – the organisational leader, the training supplier, the trainer and the trainee. Too often it is the training supplier who sets the agenda.
- Too many programmes operate on the supply side – by running training of trainer courses, developing manuals and running courses. Standards will rise and training make a contribution to administrative capacity only if there is a stronger demand for more relevant training which makes a measurable impact on individual and organisational performance.
- In the first instance, this will require Human Resource Directors to be more demanding of training

managers - to insist on better designed courses and materials; on proper evaluation of courses and trainers; and on the use of better trainers. More realistic guidelines and manuals need to be available for them

- Workshops should not really be used if the purpose is simply knowledge transfer. The very term "workshop" indicates that exercises should be used to ensure that the participant is challenged in his/her thinking. This helps deepen self-awareness and is generally the approach used to develop managerial skills and to create champions of change.
- Workshops have costs - both direct (trainers and materials) and indirect (staff time). There are a range of other learning tools available to help staff understand new legal obligations.
- HR Directors need to help ensure that senior management of state bodies looks properly at the impact of new legislation on systems, procedures, tasks and skills. Too many people seem to think that better implementation and compliance will be achieved simply by telling local officials what that new legislation says.
- A subject specialist is not a trainer. Too few of the people who deliver courses actually think about what the people in front of them actually already know.
- The training materials, standards and systems developed by previous projects are hard to find. Those trained as trainers - and companies bidding for projects - treat them, understandably as precious assets in the competitive environment in which they operate and are not keen to share them!



And this last point perhaps identifies one of the reasons why transition countries have found it so difficult to establish public training systems to match those in the older member states. From the beginning they were encouraged to base their systems on the competitive principle which older member states were beginning to adopt. Note the verb - "were beginning". And, of course, there is no greater zealot than a recent convert. So experts who had themselves learned and worked in systems subsidised by the state appeared in the east to preach the new magic of competition. And states with little money for even basic services were only too pleased to buy into that principle. The result is a black hole into which EU money has disappeared.

I will, in the next post, try to set out some principles for capacity development of public training systems in transition countries.

making training effective - Part II

Part I suggested that the billions spent by the EC on training public officials over the past decade or so in ex-communist countries have not created sustainable training systems there - ie centres for training public officials whose full-time staff contain both trainers and specialists in the field of public management - and who actually play a role in helping state bodies operate effectively.

Most of the new member and Accession states have a central training Institute - but its staff are small and (in all but a few cases) administrators who bring in public officials and academics for a few hours to deliver lectures. Little "needs assessment" can be carried out (an annual schedule is negotiated between the Institute and the Council of Ministers); Ministries have a training budget and pay for the attendance of those officials it allows to attend selected courses (whether at the Institute or other centres).

It is virtually impossible for such a system to carry out serious evaluation of course content and of trainers - its staff lack the specialist knowledge (and status) to question, challenge and encourage.

Such a system also focuses on individual needs - and is unable to input to discussions about the development of state capacity or help state bodies tackle their organisational problems.

In the older member States, such Institutes have played an important role in setting a vision for the improvement of public services; in monitoring developments and assisting the exchange of experience. At the time, however, such bodies were being established in the ex-communist countries, the new fashion amongst western consultants was for slimline, competitive training; the academic community in the east simply had no relevant experience to offer; and governments were offloading rather than building functions. The result was underfunded training centres.

With budget cuts of the past few years, the EC Structural Funds are being increasingly used to substitute for mainline funding. Given the competitive basis of the procurement, what this means is that private companies (rather than the Institute) are being paid to act as the administrators - undermining the possibility of the national Institute developing its capacity. One other result is an endless repetition of training the trainers programmes and Manual drafting. Whatever happened to the previous trained trainers and drafted manuals?

Of course, the picture is slightly more nuanced. Some countries have Institutes on the French model - which combine undergraduate teaching with short courses and have therefore a core of academic staff. Poland is the prime example (that academic bias can, of course, bring its own problems!) And Ministries of Finance and Justice tend to have their own training centres, staffed by experts in the relevant field. But the general picture stands.

Is there a different model - in these times of crisis? Only on three conditions -

1. if the development of state capacity is taken seriously - by officials, politicians and academics
2. if there is greater clarity about the role of training in individual learning and organisational development
3. if some academic sacred cows are sacrificed

I assume all new member states have the sort of EC-funded Operational Programmes which Bulgaria

and Romania have - with themes such as [Administrative Capacity](#) and Human resource management (to mention two). Hundreds of millions of euros are allocated to private consultancies to carry out projects of training and capacity building with state bodies as the clients.

In highly politicised countries such as Romania, however, building capacity is not taken seriously. As [Tom Gallagher's most recent and powerful book on the country](#) vividly shows, there are more private agendas at work eg loyalty to the figure who put you in your position. And those academic social scientists who have resisted the temptation to go into consultancy are, understandably, more



interested in achieving status with their western colleagues than in making forays into the real world of public administration.

Again I speak generally - and from my knowledge more of southern than northern new member states.

As far as training is concerned, it is remarkable (given how much money is spent on it) how little discussion there is of its role and practices in new member states. Training can be effective only under certain circumstances. The very language trainers use - "training needs assessment" - begs the question of whether training is in fact the appropriate intervention. It is the easy option - it assumes that it is the lower levels who are deficient whereas the real issue may be organisational systems or the performance of higher management.

I was recently in charge of a project designed to give such an institute the capacity to assist public officials at regional and local levels in the effective implementation of the complex EC Acquis (eg the various legal requirements of safety, consumer rights, equal opportunities, environment). The project was designed as a training project when, for me, the issue was totally different. I tried to develop my argument in several discussion papers but could not, for various reasons, reach the right people for a discussion. Amongst the points I was trying to make were -

- Organisations (state bodies) perform only when they are given clear (and limited) goals - and the commensurate resources and management support. This requires the systems and skills of strategic management.
- This can be developed only through senior management being properly encouraged to prioritise and draft realistic action plans - based on project management principles.
- The core mission of Institutes of Public Administration should be to encourage and help senior management acquire these skills
- But they cannot do this as long as they are trapped in an administrative role - and traditional teaching philosophies

What I remember is the anger I aroused at our final conference from a Professor of Law when I dared to say that state bodies should recognise they cannot implement the acquis in its totality (even with the few opt-outs negotiated) and should prioritise.

I will continue the argument in a future post.

Saturday, October 29, 2011

Evidence, dear boy? Training - Part III

I have made a lot of assertions in my two recent posts on EC-funded training - based solely on my (limited) experience in 10 countries over the past 2 decades . Before posting the final part of my commentary on EC training programmes for public officials in ex-communist countries, I wanted to check what was available on the internet about the recent experience with, and evaluation of, the EC-funded programmes for developing the effectiveness (capacity) of state bodies which Structural Funds have been encouraging in these countries for the past few years.

The EC, after all, treasures transparency and it is currently spending hundreds of millions (under its Structural Funds) in projects to develop the capacity of state bodies and their human resource management. In Bulgaria alone, 180 million euros was set aside for the 6 year period for the Admin Capacity theme (significantly this theme doesn't interest the Romanians who have set aside only 1% of their Structural Fund allocation for it). But there are few documents online which give any sense of what is happening.

Those few demonstrate the scale of the mountain we have to scale to ensure effective spend of EC Funds. In most cases, of course, the documents are written in a foreign language (English) - for bureaucratic or academic approval - three factors which tend to knock any sense from the text! Key bureaucratic phrases such as cohesion, transparency and inclusion litter the sentences in meaningless ways. There is no experience or critical analysis behind the words - just obedient regurgitation of the required phrases. This [academic paper from a Bulgarian in 2007 tries to extract the lessons of pre-accession instruments for future accession states](#) is written clearly but simply presents global figures, organisational charts and some gossip. A 2009 German (GTZ) [consultancy report on one of the instruments is more typical of the obtuse reporting style](#)

A document prepared for [a small network trying to share their experiences of using EC money for the development of admin capacity](#) gives a useful insight into their world and issues. Finally a [more critical 2011 paper from a young Bulgarian academic](#)

Everyone - on all sides(beneficiaries, donors, consultants, academics, evaluators) - plays the same game - everything has to be fitted to the Procrustean bed of EC funding. The [European Policy Research Centre at the University of Strathclyde](#), for example, has received hundreds of millions of euros from the EC to explain, evaluate and proselytise the EC's regional policies since they were a gleam in Bruce Millan's eye from 1988 when, as EC Commissioner for Regional Policy, he started (under the Delors regime) the incredible expansion of the programmes whose munificence created the real attraction of EC membership for ex-communist elites. Of course it is the last organisation which would dare to blow the whistle on the dubious nature of the ventures. Take, for example, [this Greek academic paper](#) it published recently.

One longs for a young boy to shout out that the Emperor has no clothes - and dare to tell it as it is.

Sunday, October 30, 2011

Can training make a difference? Part IV

Having suggested that few new Member States in central and eastern Europe seem to have managed yet to establish a proper training system for its public officials - and that the European Commission's type of Technical Assistance has to take part of the blame for this - the following questions seem to be in order -



- Are there any examples of a relevant and sustainable training system in the new member states?
- If so, how did they manage to achieve this position?
- What is the status of such training systems in the older member states?
- Through what process have they gone to achieve their various present positions?
- What lessons would all this suggest for those countries which are still stuck at the drip-feed stage of development?

These are actually very difficult questions to answer - since so little is available - and I have spent the morning wrestling with them. In 1997 SIGMA published a couple of relevant papers - one [setting out the various choices and issues involved in setting up a modern training structure](#); the [second giving vignettes of each of the training centres for civil servants in OECD countries](#). Since then, nothing.

With all the support given over the decades by the European Commission to networks of practitioners, you would have thought that someone by now (eg [Christopher Demmke of EIPA](#)) would have recognised the value of a paper on the subject. And NISPAcee is, after all, the [Network of Institutes and Schools of Public Administration in central and Eastern Europe](#) but has not undertaken such a comparative (and sensitive) analysis - although its journal does contain the odd profile.

There is also the rather elusive Directors of Institutes and Schools of Public Administration (DISPA) whose latest gathering this month in Warsaw was captured on the [site of the Hungarian Institute](#) but which, equally, has never risen to the challenge of commissioning a comparative analysis. So I have to venture into this field with all my imperfect knowledge.

The situation of the central PA training institutions in the EU Member States in terms of their role, tasks, funding and other characteristics varies from one country to another. And there have been considerable changes in the legal structure of central bodies for civil service training -

- A Civil Service College in Britain (for senior civil servants) was first part of the Cabinet Office; then became the Centre for Management and Policy Studies; then the National School of Government which was a free-standing Department; was then slated for abolition in March 2011 but was instead transferred back to the Cabinet office.
- The Dutch, Finnish and Swedish Institutes have all been privatized over the past decade.
- Romania's Institute for National Administration was moved to the Civil Service Agency a couple of years ago after a period of some tension with that body.

- The Bulgarian IPA now finds itself back with the Council of Ministers - having over the past 5 years been part of the (now abolished Ministry for Administrative Reform) and then of the Ministry of Education.
- The Hungarian structure has been subject to [major changes recently](#) - with first a university unit being merged with a national training centre and now the integration of national and local government training systems
- The Czech structure was also changed the last year. There were two institutes before: one under the Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, Department of the Institute of the State Administration and an independent Institute for Local Administration in Prague. They merged the last year and now there is only one institute under the Ministry of the Interior - Institute for Public Administration Prague.
- The Estonian IPA seems to have been absorbed into the Prime Minister's Office

Given that most managerial theorists are a bit cynical about organizational changes, it is perhaps ironic that the training centres which are supposed to be helping state bodies become more effective have themselves been subject to so much structural change.

My recent personal experience of central european training systems is limited to 3-4 countries - otherwise I rely on anecdotal impressions from colleagues. I therefore hesitate to identify success stories. I hear good things about the Lithuanian and Slovenian systems but can say nothing about their trajectories - or the lessons they might have for others. In the next post, I will try, however, to present a "provocation" for those countries stuck at the drip-feed stage of development.

In the meantime I really would welcome comment from those readers who have experience and views in this field. I know you're there! I'm pleased to say that my readership has doubled in the past few weeks - but the blog does need (and appreciates) feedback

[The future of public service training - Part V](#)

Imagine yourself the Director of one of the Institutes I have been talking about.... There were periods last year when you didn't have the cash to pay your staff. You're not sure how long you'll have in your position since both it and that of the Institute can be (and has been) affected by political vicissitudes.

The only source of money is the European Union - but the bureaucracy is onerous and time-consuming; and the benefits not as obvious as might seem at first sight. None of the cash actually reaches the Institute - most of it goes to private companies and their contracted experts. What do you do in such a situation to try to ensure that the Institute's activities actually help improve public services and are sustainable?

Most EC consultants would advise the Director to develop a strategic plan. That is to set up a process of identifying and consulting "stakeholders" to develop over several months a new "vision" and "action plan" which would carry with it a new "commitment" from those stakeholders to "make it happen".

I don't mean to be cynical by the insertion of inverted commas - but I do have some questions about the belief that several months of such an exercise will magically produce an answer that no-one previously thought of or produce a new spirit of cooperation.

The first thing I would actually recommend is some strong brainstorming for the Director with some experienced and trustworthy people - to try to identify some realistic options whose feasibility (s)he could then explore in a variety of ways - including a strategic exercise.

And if I were one of those with whom (s)he brainstormed, I would want to explore a central question -

What is the point of having a budget-supported national training centre for public officials?

Running courses is a means - not an end. The end is surely the improvement of state bodies. But this is not achieved by a series of ad-hoc workshops run by trainers who do not communicate with one another and who have no subsequent link with the participants. Of course, despite the claims of management consultants and management gurus, no one really understands the process of improving the performance of state bodies. To some it's a question of leadership; to others teamwork; to others again, it's competitive and/or citizen pressures; and to many politicians it's a matter of targets, transparency and a mix of sticks and stones.

Several things, however, are clear for me -

- each country has its own cultures and needs to find its own way in its own language
- this requires a few experienced people to blaze a trail, providing ways of thinking about issues, presenting and interpreting relevant experience
- sometimes this can be an academic - but they generally have other agendas and an inaccessible language
- A training centre is ideally placed to bring senior managers together to share their experiences, encourage one another and formulate an agenda for strategic change
- A few suitable academics could be encouraged to participate in such sessions (good for their research) and co-produce Discussion papers

Of course this doesn't immediately bring cash - and does demand time. But it's time well spent - in building a reputation.

It's not easy to talk about cooperation between education and training institutes (not least because the terminological distinction is not as often made in central Europe as in the UK). The academics worry about a lowering of standards - and the trainers worry about opaque verbosity. But particularly in the field of public management, the distinction is a crazy one. I am not a fan of undergraduate courses in public management - they are shallow pot-pourris; they demonstrate little of value to subsequent employees (save perhaps that those who opted for the course have little ambition); and few who graduate actually go into public service. I think those who find themselves in academic positions teaching and (hopefully) researching public management would be better located in national training institutes - particularly if those institutes had a focus on senior management. I warned in part II that some academic cows would need to be sacrificed!

Monday, October 31, 2011

[Update - the British School of Government axed! \(part VI\)](#)

The UK's National School of Government - which I indicated (in my recent table about such national Institutes) had been reprieved from closure last year - will now be closed next March. According to a Ministerial statement in Parliament in June, it delivered 809 events to a domestic audience for the 12 month period from 1 June 2010 to 31 May 2011. These events were attended by 33,254 UK government officials. But last week its closure was announced (again) with a bland statement that "The new "Civil Service Learning" will focus on work-based approaches, including e-learning, and will directly involve managers in the training process" says the official statement. Previously called the Civil Service College, the facility runs training, development and consultancy courses for Whitehall mandarins. It employs 232 staff and is based at Sunningdale Park in Berkshire, with an annual budget of £31 million.

Quoted on the school's website earlier in the year, the Head of the Civil Service said: "It is clear that the public sector will be confronted with some serious challenges in the future. The National School of Government is a vital tool to help us meet them. The learning and development it provides must be part of our solution." But the Minister (Mr Maude) has claimed a shake-up of training will "improve the quality and impact of training". In his recent Parliamentary statement, he added: "It will also create greater flexibility by sourcing much of the training from external providers, including small and medium-sized enterprises."

I would have to say that the School was always vulnerable to such treatment. For example, it never produced anything that was available publicly. My source of inspiration when I was a young reforming politician in local government was the [Institute of Local Government Studies \(INLOGOV\)](#) at Birmingham University which was built entirely around the passion of one man John Stewart; which produced a bi-monthly journal; Discussion papers; and books. And to whose seminars one could easily access as a local government person. The revenue came from its local government pmarket - which is politically diverse.

Warwick University has also been home to another such Institute - [the Local Government Centre](#) built around one man John Bennington.

The School of Government was more elitist - and political. And therefore vulnerable. So one lesson is not to be too dependent on one market. The recent trend for amalgamating training of local and central government has a lot to be said for it - not least that people from these 2 sectors get to rub shoulders with one another.

There are lessons there - that a sustainable centre needs independence!

[Leadership central europe - part VII](#)

Reflecting further on the 5 posts, my concerns about the effectiveness of training programmes in transition countries can perhaps best be summarised in 4 words - "wrong focus" and "wrong theory"! And the way ahead can be summarised in two words - "context" and "leadership".

Wrong Focus

- The EC has funded (in Technical Assistance) and continues to fund (under Structural Funds) too many training projects in transition countries with insufficient focus on building a training capacity. Indeed it undermines national training institutes by the resources its projects gives to private trainers and companies under its procurement rules.

- these programmes have, in addition, concentrated on the supply side (training individual trainers; drafting course material; and funding course) to the almost total exclusion of the demand side (helping organisational managers define their real needs and building stronger understanding of and pressure for quality training)
- they focus on lower rather than higher levels of organisations. (It's the easy option - senior management will rarely admit its deficiencies and need to learn).
- And the programmes assume knowledge rather than skill needs. (It's easier to provide - through traditional rote learning).

Wrong theory

Most of the training programmes I've seen implicitly assume that the performance of state bodies (insofar as it measured in transition countries) can be improved by better knowledge of junior staff. This may be true of the sort of training project I'm currently involved with - aimed at those municipal staff who handle bids for EC funds and manage such projects - but is not true of the general management course which National Training Institutes run. And the mission of such Institutes is surely to help improve the performance of state bodies.

Poor organisational performance is generally due to a mix of poor management systems, lack of strategic leadership and political interference. And Improving them is more a matter of skills and attitude than knowledge!

I am not alone in questioning the effectiveness of the programmes to train public officials.. I was very encouraged a few months back by the publication of a paper - [Training and Beyond; seeking better practices for capacity development](#) by Jenny Pearson - which, in a much more referenced (but sometimes turgid) way, expresses the same concerns and indicates the number of people who now seem to share them in what, in the last decade has become [the up-and-coming field of capacity development](#).

Context, context, context

All interventions should therefore start from proper contextual analysis of existing administrative capacity - and constraints. The focus then should be on organisational change - not training - to ensure that proper consideration is given to the full range of possible interventions, of which training is only a small part (see pages 33-37 of the Pearson paper for a good overview). Of course this is not easy - but, if this is not the starting point, then people will fail to pose the correct questions; to learn the required skills; and therefore to waste a lot of money.

Official documents have begun to recognise this in recent years. The EC's [Backbone Strategy](#) admits that its projects need to be better grounded in the context; in its "[drivers of change](#)" work, the UK's ODI has pioneered ways of identifying power constraints; and the World Bank's recent [Governance Reforms under real world conditions](#) is written around the sorts of questions which have given my work as a consultant its real edge-

1. How do we build broad coalitions of influentials in favour of change? What do we do about powerful vested interests?
2. How do we help reformers transform indifferent, or even hostile, public opinion into support for reform objectives?
3. How do we instigate citizen demand for good governance and accountability to sustain governance reform?

The paper I wrote earlier in the year for the Varna Conference ([Time for the long game - not the logframe](#)) drew attention to the crumbling of key building blocks of administrative reform in many of the EC's new member states in the last few years.

Francis Cardona's [Can Civil Service Reforms Last? The European Union's 5th Enlargement and Future Policy Orientation](#) - published in early 2010 - is just the latest evidence. It shows how appointments are becoming politicised again.

In 2007 Tony Verheijen had published a paper for the World Bank entitled [Administrative capacity in the new member states - the limits of innovation](#) which painted a fairly bleak picture. So in 2009, did Meyer-Sahling's paper for SIGMA - [Sustainability of civil service reforms in central and eastern Europe five years after accession](#).

[Sorin Ionitsa](#) and [Tom Gallagher](#) have painted a vivid picture of the fate of administrative reform in one of these countries - Romania - and offered different levels of explanation for it.

If that is the context, how does one get around it? Clearly politicians in these countries need to grow up and stop behaving like petulant and thieving magpies. But how does that happen? [Manning](#) and Ionitsa emphasise the need for transparency and external pressures (civil society) to try to get politicians to act more seriously.

Verheijen and Cardona talk more idealistically of the need to establish structures which bringing politicians, officials, academics etc together to develop a consensus. It happened, certainly, in the Baltic states - but there are always dangers in holding up one country as an example. When things go wrong, as they generally do, the corrupt and incompetent use this to damn reform. And one of the difficulties so many transition countries have is the inability of its elites to work cooperatively.

I have to wonder whether there is not a place now for the sort of initiative which impressed me when I visited Pittsburgh more than 20 years ago. As an old industrial city, it was experiencing social and economic dislocation - and someone started a quiet movement which brought the potential leaders of tomorrow in its various sectors (commerce, political, administrative, trade union, religious etc) into a regular academic setting to confront the city's problems. [Leadership Pittsburgh](#) has been replicated across other cities and has had 2 profound effects - it forged crucial personal links of respect and understanding; and it made most of those who attended think about their wider responsibilities and the needs of the city.

Going back to the Director of the Training Institute - my advice to him would therefore be - Think Big! Reach out! Have passion!

Part VIII - All you need to know about capacity development and administrative reform in 5 easy stages



My initial feeling after yesterday's attempt to summarise the previous week's thoughts about training in this part of the world was one of quiet satisfaction. I felt I had made a coherent and reasonable summary - all the better for having started, I felt, with the short (and memorable?) statement about "wrong focus and theory"; "context"; and "leadership". I had made the link not only with the capacity development literature but also with the (very different and more academic) literature which has been following administrative

reform in ex-communist countries. I had given a practical example which had come to me as I was wrestling with the question of how one was supposed to make any progress in regimes I had designated, [in my paper at this year's NISPAcee Conference](#), "impervious regimes" (impervious, that is, to public opinion). And I ended with a word of advice to those who head the various Training Institutes for public servants in the Region - effectively "courage, mon vieux, think big and reach out" - but had also recognised how difficult such cooperation is in the Region. My next step, I felt, was to look at examples of how individuals have achieved in the face of such difficulties and write an inspiring piece around that - drawing on the burgeoning literature of social innovation.

But I hadn't quite finished with capacity development - after all this was the basic framework which, I had argued, all interventions to improve public services in the Region should have. True, Bulgaria and Romania are exceptional in having Administrative capacity as one of the strands for their Structural Funds - but most new member states would readily agree they have a long way to go before their state bodies are operating as well as they might wish.

What, I wondered, does the capacity development literature say about the process of building administrative capacity? Is it different from what the literature of public management (with which I am more familiar) has been saying?

It is at this point that alarm bells started to ring in my head. One of the important points in my NISPAcee paper was that we have a lot of different disciplines looking at the same issues from different perspectives (which is fine), with different names (eg state-building; fragile states; administrative reform; anti-corruption; capacity development; democracy assistance) and each apparently oblivious to and/or careless about the other disciplines (which is not fine). Was this perhaps simply an example of different people coming to the same conclusion using different words?

Was it all verbal gymnastics? I began to think so when I stumbled across a free download [Deconstructing Development Discourse - buzzwords and fuzzwords](#) which was published in 2010 by Oxfam and which makes a nice complement to my [Just Words - a sceptic's glossary](#). But, as I puzzled over the two approaches, I began to see some interesting differences. Bear with me as I try to explore some of them.

Those who have been writing about capacity development for the past 2 decades (but particularly in the last 5 years since OECD got into the act) seem to be in the development field and working in NGOs, International bodies or development think tanks.

They draw from (and try to contribute to) field experiences. I discovered [a good history about capacity development](#) only this morning - written as far back as 1997. Its concerns and focus seem to have been social - rather than institutional - development. Peter Morgan is the most coherent writer on the subject and has [an excellent paper here on it](#). There is an excellent [learning network for capacity development](#) which published in January a very useful paper which spells out in details [what the approach means in practice](#). I get the sense that it is change management for social development people. That is to say, they emphasise context and process - the HOW but say little about the WHAT.

Those who write about administrative reform focus, on the other hand and by definition, on state bodies rather than social groups (although the anti-corruption literature considers social groups critical); are usually from academia; draw on the classic literature of public administration, management and (to a lesser extent) public choice theory. They are (with the exception of the latter school) more voyeurs than actors. One of the top names is Chris Pollitt whose recent paper [Thirty Years of Public Management reform - has there been a pattern?](#) gives an excellent flavour of the topic.

An obvious question then is - If the key writers are voyeurs, who has been behind the explosion of administrative reform of the past 30 years which Pollitt is writing about? The answer would seem to be practitioners, government units and consultancy companies - some of whom have subsequently written up good experiences as models of good practice.

The key books are generally American eg the one which started it all off in 1992 - [Reinventing Government](#) (see also here [for update on its influence in UK](#)) - but also Mark Moore's [Public value](#). However the main proselytiser of change over the past 20 years has been the OECD Secretariat based in Paris - as [Professor Leslie Pal has well described in this paper](#); a sequel he presented to this year's NISPAcee Conference; and [chapter three of this book](#). The significance of this is that there is, perhaps, underneath the technical words, an ideological agenda - shrinking the state. Certainly one [writer suggests today there is](#).

At a practical level, the European Institute of Public Administration published an interesting overview of reform efforts recently - [Taking the pulse of European Public Administration](#)

So far, so good.....Give me time to look at these various references in more detail and come back to you on the question of the relationship between the two bodies of work. Clearly the latter body of work focuses more on the WHAT than the HOW - and is indeed as guilty as management generally of fads and fashions. At the moment the capacity development stream seems to be the more thoughtful.....

From October 28, I devoted a series of posts to the issue of the role of training in improving the performance of state bodies in ex-communist countries. I was pretty critical - particularly of the EC funding strategy.

The second post in the series summarised my critique and suggested [three paths which those in charge of such training in these countries needed to take to make an impact](#) -

1. to signal that the development of state capacity needs to be taken more seriously - by officials, politicians and academics - and to give practical examples of what this means
2. to try to shine some light on the role of training in individual learning and organisational development - to show both the potential of and limits on training and to have the courage to spell out the preconditions for training which actually helps improve the performance of state bodies
3. to encourage training institutes to cooperate more with change agents in the system - and with academia

[Part V tried to put us in the shoes of a Director of the National Institute of training of public servants in these countries](#) - facing incredible constraints - and to expand on these three points. Part VII switched the focus back to the funders and tried to reduce the critique to a few bullet points - "[Wrong focus; wrong theory](#)"; "[context](#)" and "[leadership](#)" and then went on to give an illustration of the sort of cooperation which might pay dividends for a Director of a Training Institute.

A final post backtracked a bit to ask [what we actually know about the process of developing the administrative capacity](#) which I had made the core of my argument.

It also noted that I should now explore why on earth anyone facing the sort of political and budgetary constraints which exist in the Balkan countries (widely defined) should ever wish to put her head over the parapet and "think big and reach out" as I had earlier suggested . So here goes.....

I did make the point very strongly in the posts that each country has to make its own way - each context is very different and requires something which resonates with its key actors. Locals who bring foreign experience (like most think-tankers) are generally just trying to make a name for themselves as [can be seen in this \(otherwise interesting\) book](#) of case studies from the countries which were in the more direct influence of the Soviet Union.

But I am who I am; my context (at least for the first 25 years of my working life) was the strong bureaucratic system of Scottish local government - which owned the vast proportion of the housing and transport system. I challenged this system - before Margaret Thatcher appeared on the scene - but from a new left and participative rather than privatising perspective.

And I had a lot of allies - first in men and women (more the latter) who worked in impossible circumstances of low income and insecurity - but who had the guts and energy to try to make a better lives for those around them. And, secondly, in a few officials who realised that if they did not use their position, skills and knowledge to try to make things better, then we would soon hit rock bottom. Mark Moore tried to legitimise the work of such committed officials in his 1995 [Public Value](#) book.

It is extraordinary people who make things change - sometimes, of course, for the worse. We have been brainwashed in the past 2 decades to believe that change was always for the better - the

default option in the dreadful language. I linked yesterday to a Monbiot article which quoted from an important recent book [identifying the psychotic element in so many corporate leaders](#) - which has been a theme since Alastair Mant's *Leaders We Deserve*. Malcolm Gladwell shows that [even the recently deceased and highly regarded Steve Jobs had many elements of dysfunctionality](#) in his pursuit of perfection.

And psychotic management seems to be in an even healthier state in ex-communist countries - although at least one book has tried to [celebrate local heroes willing and able to make a difference](#).

In 2000, Malcolm Gladwell's famous book [The Tipping Point](#) argued that the attainment of the "tipping point" (that [transforms a phenomenon into an influential trend](#)) usually requires the intervention of a number of influential types of people - not just a single "leader".

On the path toward the tipping point, many trends are ushered into popularity by small groups of individuals that can be classified as Connectors, Mavens, and Salesmen.

- Connectors are individuals who have ties in many different realms and act as conduits between them, helping to engender connections, relationships, and "cross-fertilization" that otherwise might not have ever occurred.
- Mavens are people who have a strong compulsion to help other consumers by helping them make informed decisions.
- Salesmen are people whose unusual charisma allows them to be extremely persuasive in inducing others to take decisions and change their behaviour.

DIAGRAM

Structural Funds - What Use?

These are some dangerous thoughts I posted as I began to see the reality of the use of the billions of millions of euros of funding being used under the Structural Funds by one new member country.....

Friday, December 23, 2011

Fear the Greeks

Many of us wondered how on earth Greece managed to gain entry to the EU - let alone the euro. And many of us missed a blistering report issued by the OECD in August which blasted the Greek bureaucracy. Going by the rather bland title [Greece: Review of the Central Administration](#), the 127-page report can be quickly summed up: The government apparatus in Athens is virtually unable to implement reform. *"It is not clear how existing and new entities of (the government) will work together in order to secure the leadership needed for reform, including the necessary strategic vision, accountability, strategic planning, policy coherence and collective commitment, and communication,"* reads the damning report to which my attention was drawn only today by the marvellous Der Spiegel when it reported on [the initial phase of the work of the European technocrats](#) headed by a German who descended recently on the capital.

"For the first time, we wanted to show -- systematically and with proof -- what isn't working at the administration level and what is preventing Greece from making progress on structural reforms," Caroline Varley, OECD senior policy analyst and co-author of the report, told the German daily Die Welt. *"So far, Greece's central governmental apparatus has neither the capacity nor the ability to undertake large reforms."*

The report was commissioned by the Greek Ministry of Administrative Reform and E-Governance and provides a detailed examination of the state of central administration in the government. It focuses on efficiency and effectiveness as Athens struggles to introduce necessary reforms. It found that communication among the country's 14 ministries was appallingly paltry. Furthermore, the huge number of departments within ministries -- many of them consisting solely of a department head and others with just one or two subordinates -- results in widespread inefficiency and lack of oversight.

"Administrative work is fragmented and compartmentalized within ministries," the report writes. *"Ministries are not able to prioritize ... and are handicapped by coordination problems. In cases where coordination does happen, it is ad hoc, based on personal initiative and knowledge, and not supported by structures."* Were such coordination even to take place, the report indicates that administrators do not have access to the necessary data, nor does such data exist in many cases. *"The administration does not have the habit of keeping records or the ability to extract information from data (where available), nor generally of managing organizational knowledge,"* the report found. The problems found in Greece's central administration, says the OECD, are the result of decades of clientelism and the sheer volume of the laws and regulations that govern competencies within the ministries. The report found 17,000 such laws, decrees and edicts.

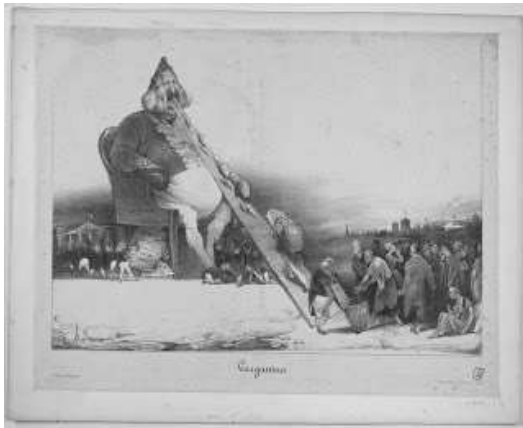
How, then, should Greece solve the problem? The OECD proposes a "big bang approach" -- meaning a massive administrative restructuring. And, co-author Varley says, it needs to happen quickly. *"Greece has only a small window of time to change and reform itself,"* she told Die Welt. *"And it is getting smaller."*

A year ago, I was lamenting [the lack of social democratic vision](#).

Thursday, January 26, 2012

[EC Structural Funds - Cui Bono?](#)

I'm cocooned at the moment in a cosy flat in a wind-swept and snow-bound concrete block in downtown Bucharest.



The ever-watchful [Open Europe operation](#) has targeted two big elements of EC spending in reports just out - on Structural Funds and its Development (or "external" assistance). Its [report on the latter subject](#) has been drafted for the UK House of Commons Select Committee on International Development which has started an investigation of the EC's Development Assistance budget. In combination with Member States' own aid budgets the EU as a whole provides 60% of global Official Development Assistance (ODA) making it the largest donor. "Despite some improvements", the Committee says, "concerns have been expressed about the effectiveness of EC development

assistance, the slow disbursement of aid, the geographical distribution of EC aid and poor coordination between Member States".

This blog (and [papers on my website](#)) have also made a more detailed critique in relation to its state-building programmes in transition countries. The committee points out that Total EC external assistance in 2010 was €11.1 billion. The UK share of this was approximately €1.66. A new Commission policy paper, "[An Agenda for Change](#)" was published in October 2011 for approval by the Council in May 2012. At the same time, negotiations are proceeding for the Multi-Annual Financial Framework, and the replenishment of the European Development Fund. Together these will set the parameters for EC development aid from 2014-2020. The Committee invites evidence on:

- The comparative advantage of the EU as a channel for UK development and humanitarian assistance and the UK's ability to influence EU development policy;
- The proposals set out in the "Agenda for Change";
- The proposals for future funding of EC development cooperation;
- Progress towards policy coherence for development in climate change, global food security, migration, intellectual property rights and security.

The Open Europe paper is a fairly political briefing on the issues of geographical distribution, administration (costs and waste), EC "value-added" and policy issues (eg questionable reliance on budgetary support) - but seems to have been written by people with little familiarity with the field of development work.

Its other paper - on [EC Structural Funds](#) - is a rather better one which actually looks at what the research has actually tells us about the success over the years of this funding in dealing with its basic objective - namely reducing regional differentials within countries. The answer is "difficult to prove". Of course, the 60 billion euros a year programme is now more about building up the missing technical and social infrastructures of new member States and the paper argues that this should be

properly recognised by the richer member states being taken out of the programme's benefits. The paper reminds that

the previous UK Labour Government proposed limiting the funds to EU member states with income levels below 90% of the EU average and suggests that this could create a win-win situation. Such a move would instantly make the funds easier to manage and tailor around the needs of the poorest regions in the EU. The paper estimates that 22 or 23 out of 27 member states would also either pay less or get more out of the EU budget, as the funds are no longer transferred between richer member states.

Structural Funds are, however, an important political tool for those committed to "the European project" in developing and sustaining clienteles. This should never be forgotten!

I have never been a fan of the EC Structural Funds which I have seen expand from almost nothing in the 1970s to 350 billion euros in the 2007-2013 period (60 billion a year - eg 5 billion annual contribution for UK). As a senior politician with Strathclyde Region which was the first British local authority to forge strong relations with the European Commission in the 1980s (when we had no friends at Margaret Thatcher's court), you might imagine that I was positive about the European funding which we then received. In fact, I was highly critical - mainly for the dishonesty of the claims made about its net benefits. The British Treasury simply deducted whatever we gained from our European funding from our UK funding.

The programme really expanded in the Delors era on the watch of Scottish politician Bruce Millan as Regional Commissioner (1989-1994). In those days, we believed in regional development. In my own case, it was my whole intellectual *raison d'etre*! The subject was coming into its own academically - and it was indeed the subject I first focussed on in my own academic career (before I moved into public management). It spawned thousands of university departments and degrees many of which seem still - despite public spending cuts - frozen in institutional landscapes. And I have never seen an intellectual questioning of what it has brought us - although I did recently come across this [short critical article on the related field of urban development](#).

This [Open Letter](#) by some prominent Hungarians has just been published about the situation in that country - and is a useful briefing on the issues - as is [this EuroTribune one](#). When I worked in that country, I vividly remember one of my older Hungarian colleagues telling me that she hoped that, this time, the country might actually succeed in something - since the history of her country to that point seemed to have consisted of a series of failures. She must be crying herself to sleep these nights!

The cartoon is one of Honore Daumier's - "The Gargantuan". At times like these, we are in desperate need of the caustic insights of the likes of Daumier, Goya, Kollwitz et al - and those influenced by them such as the Bulgarian caricaturists of the early and mid- part of the last century.

Sunday, January 29, 2012

Briefings on the new Cohesion Policy

A summary of [the new Cohesion Fund which the EC is proposing to replace the present Structural Funds](#) is available [here](#).

The University of Strathclyde's [European Policies Research Centre](#) can generally be counted on for clear summaries of the issues involved in EC regional policies and duly produced two years ago a paper "[Challenges, Consultations and Concepts - preparing for the Cohesion Policy Debate](#)"

Last August the Centre presented an updated 150 pages briefing on the issues to the European Parliament - [Comparative study on the vision and options for Coherence Policy after 2013](#) - although its Executive Summary does not seem quite up to its normal standards of clarity. Judge for yourself -



The Commission proposes to reinforce the urban agenda, encourage functional geographies, support areas facing specific geographical or demographic problems and enhance the strategic alignment between transnational cooperation and macro-regional strategies.

Unsurprisingly, there is resistance to some of the more prescriptive elements. Yet, the territorial dimension could benefit from a greater strategic steer at EU level, potentially drawing on the recently agreed Territorial Agenda for 2020 to clarify and reinforce future territorial priorities for Cohesion Policy. A more strategically focused approach to the territorial dimension of cooperation must also be a priority, including a greater focus on priorities and projects of real transnational and cross border relevance, seeking greater coherence with mainstream, external cross-border cooperation and macro-regional strategies and the simplification of administrative requirements.

And what, exactly, does this mean???

The 2009 Barca Report was a bit long (250 pages plus 10 annexes) but did at least give a good summary of what we know about the impact of Structural Funds -

20. The state of the empirical evidence on the performance of cohesion policy is very unsatisfactory. The review of existing research, studies, and policy documents undertaken in the process of preparing the Report suggests, first, that econometric studies based on macro-data on growth and transfers, while providing specific suggestions, do not offer any conclusive general answer on the effectiveness of policy. This is due partly to the serious problems faced by any attempt to isolate at macro-level the effects of cohesion policy from those of several confounding factors, and partly to the fact that existing studies have largely analysed the effect on convergence, which is not a good proxy of the policy objectives. The review also shows both the lack of any systematic attempt at EU and national/regional levels to assess whether specific interventions "work" through the use of advanced methods of impact evaluation, and a very poor use of the system of outcome indicators and targets formally built by the policy.

21. Despite these severe limitations, the available quantitative evidence and a large body of qualitative evidence lead to two conclusions on the current architecture of cohesion policy. First, cohesion policy represents the appropriate basis for implementing the place-based development approach needed by the

Union. Second, cohesion policy must undergo a comprehensive reform for it to meet the challenges facing the Union.

22. The strengths of cohesion policy, which indicate that it represents the appropriate basis, include, in particular:

- the development of several features of what has come to be called the "new paradigm of regional policy", namely the establishment of a system of multi-level governance and contractual commitments that represents a valuable asset for Europe in any policy effort requiring a distribution of responsibilities.*
- A good track record of achieving targets, both when cohesion policy has been implemented as a coherent part of a national development strategy and when local-scale projects have been designed with an active role of the Commission and the input of its expertise.*
- A contribution to institution-building, social capital formation and a partnership approach in many, though not all, regions, producing a lasting effect.*
- The creation of an EU-wide network for disseminating experience, for cooperation and, for sharing methodological tools in respect of evaluation and capacity building.*

23. The most evident weaknesses which indicate the need for reform of cohesion policy are:

- A deficit in strategic planning and in developing the policy concept through the coherent adoption of a place-based, territorial perspective.*
- A lack of focus on priorities and a failure to distinguish between the pursuit of efficiency and social inclusion objectives.*
- A failure of the contractual arrangements to focus on results and to provide enough leverage for the Commission and Member States to design and promote institutional changes tailored to the features and needs of places.*
- Methodological and operational problems that have prevented both the appropriate use of indicators and targets - for which no comparable information is available - and a satisfactory analysis of "what works" in terms of policy impact.*
- A remarkable lack of political and policy debate on results in terms of the well-being of people, at both local and EU level, most of the attention being focused on financial absorption and irregularities.*

The new Cohesion Policy as a case-study in Orwellian language?

Having made a casual reference a few days ago to a rather superficial paper on EC Structural Funds (with which I have a tangential link in my current Bulgarian project), I was understandably attracted by the title of one of [the LSE lecture series](#) - [Redesigning the World's Largest Development Programme: EU cohesion policy](#) - by the Special Adviser to the current EC Regional Commissioner (Austrian Johannes Hahn) - one Phil McCann, a Professor of Economic Geography. Particularly because it also offered a 91 slide presentation.

Before I started to listen to it, I checked on Google Scholar to see whether McCann had perhaps not written an article on the subject - which I could read in a fifth of the time necessary to stick with the lecture. Unfortunately McCann's papers are highly academic and almost impossible to read - [eg here](#).

The guy seems very chatty in person but the more he gets into his subject, the more naïve he (and his type) seems. The academic discipline of geography has always seemed, for me, one of the best of the social sciences with its strong multidisciplinary bias. So (and from the title) I had hoped to get an insight into the intellectual and political aspects of the European-wide discussions of the past 2 years about the future shape of this central piece of the "European venture" (now almost

level pegging spending with the wasteful CAP).

What I got was a frightening Orwellian presentation of the latest fashionable EC phrases. I have still to read all the relevant documentation which has poured from the EC presses in the past 2 years (and to which I do brief justice in the sections below). All I know is that the key adviser to the Regional Commissioner seems to know nothing about policy analysis; seems completely taken in by words and phrases; and seems blissfully ignorant about the various reasons for implementation failure. I do concede that he was speaking to a student and graduate academic audience - and that this may be one reason why he focused on words rather than realities.



Discussions on the future of EU Cohesion Policy - €347 billion between 2007 and 2013 - were launched almost 3 years ago.

Two key documents which appeared almost simultaneously in April 2009 have served as a basis for discussions on regional policy reform: first [a reflection paper by Danuta Hübner](#), who had just demitted office as commissioner in charge of regional policy (from Nov 2004) and almost immediately became chair of the European

Parliament's Committee on Regional Development (!!)

The other document was a report she had commissioned - and which was drafted by Fabrizio Barca, director-general at the Italian Ministry of Economy and Finance.

Both papers categorically rejected any attempt to renationalise Cohesion Policy - which was the thrust of the Open Europe Report I had mentioned earlier in the week.

[Barca's report](#), in particular, pays homage to the legitimacy of a policy, which he considers essential to pursuing European goals. The policy, says the report, must serve two objectives: development of territories based on local/regional possibilities; and improvements in social welfare (combating social exclusion). Like Hübner, Barca suggests placing territories at the centre of EU strategy. Both papers considered that EU intervention must be refocused on a few key objectives.

The report's recommendations for reform seem typical in their language of such documents. They are [based on ten "pillars"](#) and I would ask the reader - as a mind-game - to try reversing the phrases to check for how much meaning they contain -

1: Concentration on core priorities (how many of us would suggest focussing on inessentials??)

Dr Barca says the EU should concentrate around 65% of its funding on three or four core priorities, with the share varying between Member States and regions according to needs and strategies. Criteria for the allocation of funding would remain much as now (i.e. based on GDP per capita). One or two core priorities should address social inclusion to allow for the development of a "territorialised social agenda".

2: A new strategic framework

The strategic dialogue between the Commission and Member States (or Regions in some cases) should be enhanced and based on a European Strategic Development Framework, setting out clear-cut principles, indicators and targets for assessing performance.

3: A new contractual relationship, implementation and reporting

The Commission and Member States should develop a new type of contractual agreement (a National Strategic Development Contract), focused on performance and verifiable commitments.

4: Strengthened governance for core priorities

The Commission should establish a set of "conditionalities" for national institutions as a requirement for allocating funding to specific priorities and should assess progress in meeting targets.

5: Promoting additional, innovative and flexible spending (how many of us would suggest inflexible spending????)

The Commission should strengthen the principle of "additionality", which ensures that Member States do not substitute national with EU expenditure, by establishing a direct link with the Stability and Growth Pact. A contractual commitment is needed to ensure that measures are innovative and add value.

6: Promoting experimentation and mobilising local actors (ditto)

The Commission and Member States should encourage experimentation, and a better balance between creating an incentive for local involvement in policies and preventing the policy from being "hijacked" by interest groups.

7: Promoting the learning process: a move towards prospective impact evaluation

Better design and implementation of methods for estimating what outcomes would have been had intervention not taken place would improve understanding of what works where, and exert a disciplinary effect when actions are designed.

8: Strengthening the role of the Commission as a centre of competence (as distinct from a centre of incompetence?)

Develop more specialised expertise in the Commission with greater coordination between Directorate-Generals to match the enhanced role and discretion of the Commission in the policy. This would imply significant investment in human resources and organisational changes.

9: Addressing financial management and control (as distinct from ignoring them???)

Achieve greater efficiency in administering the Structural Funds by pursuing the ongoing simplification agenda and considering other means of reducing costs and the burden imposed on the Commission, the Member States and beneficiaries.

10: Reinforcing the high-level political system of checks and balances

A stronger system of checks and balances between the Commission, the European Parliament and the Council, through the creation of a formal Council for Cohesion Policy. Encourage an ongoing debate on the content, results and impact of the Cohesion Policy.

Such an approach argues for a Cohesion Policy which continues to address all EU regions, both Barca and Hübner say. [Pawel Samecki](#), who succeeded Hübner as commissioner (but for one year only until replaced by an Austrian who is contesting accusations of plagiarism in his doctorate)), follows the same logic. Since both (or all three) defend the need to concentrate the greatest share of funds on less developed regions, where GDP per inhabitant would remain the reference indicator for prioritising funding, we are no longer talking about a 'Sapir-style' scenario. This was named after the Belgian economist André Sapir who, in 2003, drew up a highly controversial report for the Commission, which recommended a Cohesion Policy almost exclusively for regions in the new member states. For the Commission, a regional policy addressed to all is especially necessary since challenges, such as globalisation and climate change, affect the whole of the European Union - the

EU15 as much as more recent members - at a time when national exchequers are stretched. There is no doubt, however, that some member states will call on the Sapir scenario in discussions on the new Cohesion Policy

During her mandate, Hübner frequently insisted on the need to strengthen the Commission's strategic role in defining the policy to be implemented. The same idea is taken up in the Barca report. This envisages a seamless process starting with a real political debate and leading to adoption of a European framework and signature of "strategic development contracts" between the Commission, member states and, possibly, regions. In the Barca scenario, regional and local authorities would be more widely involved than today, which the Commission is also said to support. These contracts would formally commit signatories to a strategy, results and follow-up reports.

A genuine assessment for monitoring the performance of programmes and results would also need to be established - something Barca considers is lacking today. In her reflection paper, Hübner talks of setting up a "culture of monitoring and evaluation". Commissioner Samecki also highlighted the need to concentrate further on results and performance. In this, they are slavishly following the fashion of today - and that part of McCann's presentation which dealt with this issue was positively embarrassing in its naivety and failure to relate to the wider and highly critical literature about performance management.

One of the problems about EC policy-making is that, despite (perhaps because of??) the emphasis on transparency and consultation, the processes are conducted by insiders - many of them paid by the EC itself (academics and not a few journalists). Outsiders like myself are discouraged by the language, complexity and sheer volume of paper. It would be interesting to spend some time reading the relevant stuff on Structural Funds (regional policy, social funds, coherence et al) and explore some basic questions about Value Added!!!

Monday, January 30, 2012

Cohesion Policy - part IV



The last few posts have been about the apparent lack of public knowledge (including mine - let alone discussion) about an issue which has been absorbing the energies of thousands of specialists throughout Europe in the last 2-3 years - namely the future shape and management of the huge amounts of money which Europe disburses to Regions

and which take up the energies and time of so many officials in countries such as Bulgaria and Romania - with so much acrimony (confusion, corruption and penalties) and so few apparent results. My concerns are not populist - since I have always accepted the existence of „market failure“ and the case for government intervention and spending programmes.

My recent experience in the field in Bulgaria raises the following sorts of questions -



- What was actually achieved in the period since 2007 by the 50 billion a year spent on what most of us know as EC Structural Funds (although technically it comes from 6-7 differently-named programmes)?
- Where is the country by country analysis?
- Can one programme do justice to the needs of 27 countries - even granted its management is in the hands of each country?
- Particularly a programme of which almost half is in new member states (still in transit from centralised political cultures) and which yet makes no mention of the specifics of these countries?
- Has it not been a mistake to run the programme as a regional development one when the needs are more institutional and developmental?
- In what precise ways is the new proposed policy from 2014 different from that which has ruled for the 2007-2013 period?
- And what weaknesses of the previous policy explains the changes?
- What exactly is the "place-based approach" which is trumpeted in the new policy ??
- Where are debates which deal clearly and honestly with these questions?

I am encouraged by one semi-official report (of 250 pages) which appeared in 2009 - [the Barca Report](#) - which seems very well written, draws on a wide range of discussions and openly admits (a) the conceptual and political confusion; (b) the difficulties in measuring impact; and (c), in the very first page, the lack of public debate -

What is lacking is a political debate about whether that particular way of spending public funds adds value compared to sectoral or national approaches. And when and where it is effective. The same failure is visible in the academic debate, where very often a line separates the "cohesion policy experts" and the rest of academia.

I've a long way to go in reading this report - so please be patient. And, in the meantime, I stick with my main accusation - that there don't seem to be any journalists writing about this issue!

Today Romanian media have been celebrating the birthday of their most famous dramatist - Caragiale - who was born 160 years ago. The Romanians are very fond of him and his mocking of the political process. Mitica was a character who cropped up in his plays and whom the Transylvanians particularly associated with the slippery southerners. Wikipedia have [a very detailed entry on his life and works](#).

The painting is a Levitan

EC's Cohesion Funds (part V) A Tale of Sound and Fury?

There's something to be said for ignoring a policy field for several years and then trying to catch up with it in one go - it makes you focus on the essentials and certainly saves a lot of time! So it's been in the last few days as I have downloaded and skimmed a lot of material on the (rather incestuous) debate which has been taking place over the past 2-3 years about the EC Structural (or Cohesion) Funds whose programme for 2014-2020 will have to be decided this year.

As the Commission's views eventually surfaced at the end of 2011, it seems, frankly, to be have been a case of "sound and fury...signifying...nothing"! When I read [the leaflet which set out the Commission's proposals of 6 October](#), they don't seem to contain anything significantly new - more ex-ante evaluation; better monitoring; and a new category of "transitional regions". And the much-discussed idea of more local flexibility seems to have died without trace. So perhaps the journalists I accused of neglect in an earlier post have been correct to leave the subject well alone. As we say, it "doesn't appear to amount to a row of beans!"

In 2010, [a slide presentation caught the terms of the then current debate](#) rather well. For those masochists who want to follow the details of the debate, an archived site [allows you to access both the key papers](#) and also [the various components of the 2009 Barca report](#) including its ten 10 commissioned studies and a summary of some hearings.

Despite a caustic comment recently about language, the [papers from Strathclyde University's European Policies Centre](#) are the only clear updates you get on Structural Funds. The [latest is appropriately subtitled "let the negotiations begin"](#).

In November 2011 one of the leading members of the Centre produced a paper [EC Cohesion Policy and Europe 2020 - between place-based and people-based prosperity](#) which subjected the debate on the EC's Cohesion Policy to the dreadful Discourse Analysis -

Ideas are increasingly recognized as playing an important causal role in policy development. Instead of seeing change as the product of strategic contestation among actors with clear and fixed interests, an ideational perspective emphasises the struggle for power among actors motivated by different ideas.

The last half of the paper, however is actually interesting - it traces the history of cohesion policy and then explores the various policy positions about the nature and shape of the future programme (which now accounts for 40% of the EU budget). The paper suggests 2 central dimensions - focus and management - to construct a matrix. The focus can be geographical place or sector (eg transport, energy, IT, environment); the management central (EC led) or local (national) - which gives four options -

- Territorial contractualism (top-down); supported by two key players - the European Parliament and the European Commission's Regional Policy Department (DG Regio)
- Territorial experimentalism (with more local flexibility); supported by the Committee of Regions
- Sectoral functionalism (top-down); supported by the other relevant Commission Directorates
- Sectoral coordination

Ideas in these arguments become tools which rationalise the interests of the various actors. As I thought about the process, I was suddenly reminded of one of the seminal texts in the literature of political science - Graham Allison's *The Essence of Decision* (1971) - which applied three different explanatory models to the Cuban Crisis - the rational (what is in the interests of the government);

the organisational process (organisations do what they are used to doing); and bureaucratic (court) politics ("various overlapping bargaining games among players arranged hierarchically in the national government"). This is [a paper of his from 1968](#) which presents the basic proposition; and this [a critique from 1992](#).

A dig at the Aid business

I'm not a cynical person - it is rather [scepticism I celebrate](#). But satire is a useful weapon against the pomposity and hubris of large organisations - and I did enjoy a [piece on the genesis of the aid](#) business of which this is an excerpt

In the beginning, the Donors said, "Let us make development in our image, and in our likeness, so that we may bring about changes in developing countries". And other Government Departments replied, "Yes, but not too much change, and not all at once, who knows What might Happen." And the Donors did reflect upon this, and after a time they did say, "Let there be Aid Programmes".

And lo, having completed the appropriate paperwork and then randomly recruited staff members on the basis of spurious social connections, the Aid Workers did create a great many Aid Programmes upon the land, with rather fewer in the sea.

Now at first many Aid Programmes were formless and empty, there was darkness over any possible engagement with intended beneficiaries, and attribution of impact was absolutely nowhere to be seen. With naught else to look at, the Donors did peck at the financials like bureaucratic vultures.

And the Donors did say, "Let there be light on this programme", but there was no light, merely quarterly reports cut and pasted from other endeavours. But the Aid Workers saw that the reports were sufficient to get the donors off their backs. They called the reports "evidence-based" and they did construct programme narratives, after a fashion. And there were visits and some more reports.

But upon reading the reviews, the Donors said, "Let all the programmes under this sky be gathered to one place, and let duplication and waste disappear." But it was not so. Instead the Aid Workers did gather in the bar and Grumble about it over numerous beers. The next day, the Aid Workers said those programmes whose representatives had gathered in that bar formed 'a new Coordinated Operational Network System, or CONS'. And the Donors did scratch their heads, and then said, "Well, Okay".

Then the Donors said, "Let the programmes produce results: monitoring systems and impact-bearing evidence, both qualitative and quantitative, according to their various kinds." But again, it was not so. The programmes produced reports bearing more narratives and nice photos on the front. But the content was heavily skewed according to pre-defined objectives and indicators that could have been copied off a cereal box.

And the Aid Workers saw that it was rather woolly and vague, and were satisfied. And the Donors saw that it was not Actually very good, but would at least keep the Right Wing Press off their backs for a little longer.

And then one Aid Worker did Stand up and Say, "Let our Programmes be shaped by those we seek to serve, and Let them tell us what is good and right, and let us shine a true light into these programmes of ours, so that a light may then shine forth from them. And let that Light be Truly called 'Development'."

But the other Aid Workers did say, "Shut up and sit down, What are you playing at, Dost thou wish to get us all into the Deep Excrement?"

Thankfully the Donors were too busy creating new Declarations of Aid Effectiveness, within which all new and existing efforts should be fixed, according to their kind, and so did not notice.

And so this Aid Worker did leave that place, and became a Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist. The other Aid Workers blessed her departure and said "Come back when our next mid-term review is due, and verily your rates will be good." And they were.

6. Coda

Except that, for me, it's not 20 years - rather 40 years since the mid 1960s when I was trying to make sense of the optimistic messages coming from writing⁷² in the United States - whose governments then were engaged in interesting new endeavours on issues as far apart as poverty⁷³ and zero-based budgeting⁷⁴. But better people have indeed been here before - "whom one cannot hope to emulate". I've mentioned most of those who have inspired me on what I have called elsewhere my "search for the holy grail"⁷⁵. And Rosabeth Kanter is one of them - researching in the early 1980s the organisational changes which America's giant companies were making to try to deal with the challenge then coming from the more flexible smaller companies, she was moved to draft her satirical **10 rules for stifling innovation**

Box 12: Kanter's 10 Rules for Stifling Innovation

1. regard any new idea from below with suspicion - because it's new, and it's from below
2. insist that people who need your approval to act first go through several other layers of management to get their signatures
3. Ask departments or individuals to challenge and criticise each other's proposals (That saves you the job of deciding : you just pick the survivor)
4. Express your criticisms freely - and withhold your praise (that keeps people on their toes). Let them know they can be fired at any time
5. Treat identification of problems as signs of failure, to discourage people from letting you know when something in their area is not working
6. Control everything carefully. Make sure people count anything that can be counted, frequently.
7. Make decisions to reorganise or change policies in secret, and spring them on people unexpectedly (that also keeps them on their toes)
8. Make sure that requests for information are fully justified, and make sure that it is not given to managers freely
9. Assign to lower-level managers, in the name of delegation and participation, responsibility for figuring out how to cut back, lay off, move around, or otherwise implement threatening decisions you have made. And get them to do it quickly.
10. And above all, never forget that you, the higher-ups, already know everything important about this business.

In other words she found lots of changes in organisational structure, job titles and language eg about decentralisation, empowerment etc - but power was still centralised; behaviour at the top was still the same; people were still treated the same patronising way!

⁷² people as varied as Donald Schon and Marlyn Fergusson

⁷³ *The Dilemmas of Social Reform*; Marris and Rein (1968)

⁷⁴ Wildavsky's was the clearest voice

⁷⁵ <http://www.freewebs.com/publicadminreform/key%20papers/search%20for%20the%20holy%20grail.pdf>

The real tragedy was that this was not a cunning plot - those at the top actually thought they had made significant changes. Our national poet, Rabbie Burns⁷⁶, who wrote in the 18th century and worked first as a farm labourer then public official, had some good insights into this sort of thing - "*O would some power the giftie gie us tae see oursel's as ithers see us*". (O would some power give us the gift to see ourselves as others see us - from his poem "*To a Louse*").

Those with power don't like bad news - and the more powerful the system which they control, the more they are injured by criticism ("People don't realise how hard we're working!). I know because I had this power! But bad news - and complaints - do make for useful feedback. The danger is when you interpret it as mistakes made by underlings - rather than signalling bad policy, structures or systems.

Conclusion

⁷⁶ http://www.poemhunter.com/i/ebooks/pdf/robert_burns_2004_9.pdf

House of Cards - building the rule of law in ECE (2009)

http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1686644 Alica Mungiu Pippidi

Fukuyama

http://iis-db.stanford.edu/docs/623/What_Is_Governance_v3.pdf

goodbye to good governance

<http://www.worlddialogue.org/content.php?id=499>

http://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/1426292_file_Andrews_Pritchett_Woolcock_traps_FIN_AL_0.pdf

Some building is easy. Development projects have, by and large, been successful at building physical stuff: schools, highways, irrigation canals, hospitals and even building the buildings that house government ministries, courts and agencies. But some building is hard. As anyone with experience in development knows, building the capabilities of the human systems is hard. That applies to the human system called “the state.” Getting the human beings in the state to use the physical stuff available to produce the flows of improved services (learning in schools, water to farmers, cures for patients) that lead to desirable outcomes for citizens has proven much more difficult.

There is no shortage of small and large scale examples. One of us was recently asked to review the design of an education project in an African country; it was the *sixth* in a string of large projects supporting education in this country. The project documents described the deplorable state of the capability of the ministry of education to even implement the project—much less to autonomously define problems, gather and analyse information, make decisions based on analysis, and implement their own decisions. Therefore the project proposed funding to build more schools but also significant funding to build the capability of the ministry. But of course all of the five previous projects over a span of twenty years had also sought to build both schools and ministry capability, and had succeeded at only one of those objectives.

This dynamic also often characterizes “policy reform”: a government succeeds in passing laws or creating new boxes in organizational charts or declaring new administrative processes, but these “reforms” are frequently not implemented or used. Andrews (2011), for example, documents the case of the adoption of public financial management reforms in Africa, showing how the higher level and surface processes changed (e.g., how budgets were written and new accounting techniques were adopted) but how the core processes determining how money was actually spent remained impervious to reform. Perhaps the most spectacular large-scale contemporary example is that the richest and most powerful nation in the history of humankind has just spent a decade—and enormous amounts of blood (almost 2000 dead) and treasure (over half a *trillion* dollars)—attempting to (re)build state capability in a very small and poor South Asian country. The United States is now committed to leaving by 2014, almost certainly leaving behind a state less capable than what Afghanistan had in the 1970s.

Why has building state capability been so hard? In past work we argued that development interventions—projects, policies, programs—create incentives for developing country organizations to adopt ‘best

practices' in laws, policies and organizational practices which look impressive (because they appear to comply with professional standards or have been endorsed by international experts) but are unlikely to fit into particular developing country contexts.¹ Adapting from the new institutionalism literature in sociology², we suggested that reform dynamics are often characterized by 'isomorphic mimicry'—the tendency to introduce reforms that enhance an entity's external legitimacy and support, even when they do not demonstrably improve performance. These strategies of isomorphic mimicry in individual projects, policies and programs add up to 'capability traps': a dynamic in which governments constantly adopt "reforms" to ensure ongoing flows of external financing and legitimacy yet never actually improve. The fact that the "development community" is five decades into supporting the building of state capability and that there has been so little progress in so many places (obvious spectacular successes like South Korea notwithstanding) suggests the generic "theory of change" on which development initiatives for building state capability are based is deeply flawed.

How might countries escape from capability traps? This is the question we begin answering in the current article. We first revisit the argument about how and why countries and development partners get trapped in a cycle of reforms that fail to enhance capability (indeed, may exacerbate pre-existing constraints). We posit that capability traps emerge under specific conditions which yield interventions that (a) aim to reproduce particular external solutions considered 'best practice' in dominant agendas, (b) through pre-determined linear processes, (c) that inform tight monitoring of inputs and compliance to 'the plan', and (d) are driven from the top down, assuming that implementation largely happens by edict.³

A second section suggests that capability traps can be avoided and overcome by fostering different types of interventions. In direct counterpoint to the four conditions above, we propose that efforts to build state capability should (i) aim to solve particular problems in local contexts, (ii) through the creation of an 'authorizing environment' for decisionmaking that allows 'positive deviation' and experimentation, (iii) involving active, ongoing and experiential learning and the iterative feedback of lessons into new solutions, doing so by (iv) engaging broad sets of agents to ensure that reforms are viable, legitimate and relevant—i.e., politically supportable and practically implementable. We propose this kind of intervention as an alternative approach to enhancing state capability, one we call Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA). We emphasize that PDIA is not so much 'new' thinking as an attempt at a pragmatic and operational synthesis of related

when the solution is the problem

http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1106236

Capability traps

http://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/1424651_file_Pritchett_Capability_FINAL.pdf

<http://devpolicy.org/isomorphic-mimicry20110810/>

<http://www.owen.org/blog/7221>

One of the first things we all learn as development rookies is that you cannot simply transplant institutions, systems or ideas from elsewhere. We are told that solutions have to be organic, locally-developed, country-owned and relevant to the context. But why and when is this true? Part of the answer is suggested in the writings of [Matt Andrews](#), [Michael Woolcock](#), [Lant Pritchett](#), [Justin Sandefur](#), [me](#), and others (see the reading list at the bottom of this blog post). For at least some problems, there is something useful about the 'the struggle' - that is, the need for a community to identify its challenges and grapple iteratively with the solutions. If the

process of adaptation and iteration is necessary, then solutions parachuted in from outside will not succeed. Furthermore, efforts to bypass the struggle might actually be unhelpful.

Yet successful institutions in different countries often look similar to each other. For example, a good postal service looks pretty much the same everywhere. Good finance ministries resemble each other. So why should each country have to reinvent the wheel? Can they not bypass the costly and time-consuming process of struggling to create these institutions, and simply import good practice from beacons of success at home, or from good examples abroad, so taking success to scale?

This issue came under the spotlight at a recent meeting at CGD's Washington Office to discuss the planned role of [Global Development Innovation Ventures \(GDIV\)](#), a joint venture of USAID, DFID and Omidyar Network which aims "to spark innovation and scale successes". Is there something inconsistent between GDIV's mandate to help countries take proven success to scale and the need - in at least some cases - for countries to grapple with their own challenges themselves?

Perhaps if we understand why the struggle might be important, we can describe better whether and how progress can be achieved more quickly and with less pain, or at least understand which kinds of development success could plausibly be taken to scale.

With the help of big thinkers Lant Pritchett and Michael Woolcock the CGD meeting was able to explore this. We discussed four reasons why the struggle might be important:

The struggle shapes solutions to the context. Solutions might look similar but actually include subtle, perhaps barely discernible, differences which adapt those solutions to their environment and without which they cannot function properly. (This is the 'external validity' problem). Perhaps these subtle differences which are vital to the success of the solution are brought about by the process of local problem-solving.

People take time to learn. If Roger Federer showed you how to serve a tennis ball that would not mean you could immediately serve like a professional. Just because you have an MBA doesn't mean you can run a company. Other than for simple tasks, most of us have to learn by doing. Establishing habits may require repetition and practice, both for individuals and for organisations.

The struggle confers legitimacy. Michael Woolcock points out that a careful lawyer could have drafted the Good Friday Agreement (which brought peace to Northern Ireland) in a few hours: so why did there have to be so much bloodshed and anguish? Why were all-night negotiations needed to get an agreement? Perhaps the process of compromising - of give and take, of testing limits and building trust - is a pre-requisite for all parties to accept the compromise as the best available. Systems co-evolve. Individual institutions do not operate in a vacuum. Each organisation is in a process of evolution, shaped by an external environment which includes other institutions which are themselves evolving. This process of co-evolution brings about the self-organising complexity typical of a complex adaptive system. Particular organisations cannot jump ahead of this if the environment they need to authorise and support them is not also evolving.

These four reasons why the struggle could be important raise an obvious question about the role of development cooperation. Typically aid aims in some way to diminish the struggle, or ideally to bypass it altogether. But if the struggle is necessary, at least some of the time, then we should think twice about whether and when it makes sense to try to minimize it.

For what kinds of problem are such struggles likely to be necessary? Lant Pritchett and Michael Woolcock suggest a spectrum of complexity and implementation-intensiveness. Simple, purely logistical interventions might perhaps be replicable. But more complex problems, such as those which depend on the emergence of legitimate systems and institutions, or which require continuing compliance and behaviour change, probably cannot be replicated without some sort of struggle.

There might be disagreement about whether a particular intervention can be replicated without a struggle. For example, distributing bednets appears to be a logistical challenge which, though complicated, can be solved by sharing best practice and good logistical management. Does that mean a successful model in one country can be rolled out elsewhere? If so, this will at minimum require some effort to build support, finance and legitimacy for the programme in each country (this may not be strictly speaking a struggle, but it may not be straightforward). Beyond that, a bednet programme will succeed if people understand why they might want to sleep under bednets, and adapt their behaviour and habits; if the power relations are such that men allow women and children to use the nets; if systems are put in place to distribute new bednets, perhaps through some combination of state provision and private markets; and if old bednets are regularly retreated with insecticide. Now we have moved from a logistical exercise to the realm of developing legitimate and effective institutions to provide continuing services, and the need for sustained changes in behaviour, power and trust. Can these changes be brought about without some kind of struggle?

The need for a struggle, at least sometimes, may have four implications for development cooperation, including for the GDIV programme.

First, the goal of 'taking proven interventions to scale' or 'replicating success', bypassing or minimising the struggle, may be appropriate to a relatively small set of interventions.

Second, it is possible that some of what donors do to try to accelerate development may instead slow it down by crowding out the necessary struggle. For example, aid could pay for basic services in the short term, while in the long run undermining the social contract that would emerge from the struggle for control of domestic revenues. Donor financing of civil society may lead to challenge to authority in the short run, but it may also crowd out a more legitimate dialogue rooted in local concerns. Donor support for businesses – for example creating jobs by backing firms – may crowd out the innovative, hungry firms on which the long term success of the economy depends.

Third, where it is not possible to replicate success directly, it may be possible to support systems to enable them evolve more rapidly and more surely towards the desired goals. For example, providing circumstances in which people can 'fail safe' may encourage more innovation. Better use of data and rigorous evaluation, and greater transparency and accountability, can encourage more effective selection. Donor funding which encourages and rewards local problem-solving, without imposing solutions from outside, may accelerate the struggle and make it less painful. This is part of the rationale for CGD's proposals for [Development Impact Bonds](#) and [Cash on Delivery Aid](#). The [Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation](#) approach suggested by Andrews, Pritchett and Woolcock is an effort to describe how aid can support countries' own efforts to solve problems. Can some kind of technical assistance accelerate the struggle without replacing it? (Even professional tennis players have a coach.)

Fourth, aid can help people while they are struggling. This support may not directly accelerate development – perhaps other than by giving people more space to fail safe – but it could help them live more comfortably while development is taking place. (Of course, it follows from the above that it is important to provide this help in ways that do not crowd out the struggle.)

We would welcome views and comments on this. Is there a significant set of development policies which whose demonstrated success elsewhere suggests that they could be replicated and scaled up elsewhere with little or no struggle? And for the others, where the struggle cannot be bypassed, what are the smart ways that donors can support countries to make progress without crowding out? CGD is involved with a number of suggestions along these lines, including [Cash on Delivery Aid](#), [Development Impact Bonds](#), and [Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation](#): are these good answers to this problem and how else might donors go about supporting countries engaged in the struggle?

[Please comment on this blog post on Views from the Center](#)

Some further reading (compiled for the meeting by Molly Kinder):

Lant Pritchett & Justin Sandefur, ["Context Matters: Why External Validity Claims and Development Practice Don't Mix"](#) (+ [blog post](#))

Tessa Bold, Mwangi Kimenyi, Germano Mwabu, Alice Ng'ang'a, and Justin Sandefur, ["Scaling Up What Works: Experimental Evidence on External Validity in Kenyan Education"](#) (+ [blog post](#))

Michael Woolcock, ["Using case studies to explore the external validity of 'complex' development interventions"](#) (pdf)

Lant Pritchett, Jeffrey Hammer and Salimah Samji, ["It's All About MeE: Using Structured Experimental Learning to Crawl the Design Space."](#) (+ [blog post](#))

Owen Barder, ["The Implications of Complexity for Development"](#) (narrated presentation) or ["Complexity, Adaptation and Results"](#) (blog post)

Lant Pritchett, ["Impact Evaluation as a Learning Tool for Development Effectiveness"](#) - [presentation](#) and [video](#)

Rodrik (2008) on ["second-best institutions"](#),

Adler, Sage and Woolcock (2009) on the importance of ["good struggles"](#) for political and legal reform, and Levy and Fukuyama (2010) on ["just enough governance"](#).

<http://www.gsdr.org/docs/open/reading-packs/PublicServiceReformRP.pdf>

<http://technologygovernance.eu/files/main/2013050112501515.pdf>

SNAPSHOT TWO-

MAKING GOVERNMENT DECISIONS MORE COHERENT

For these countries the transition requires a massive change in organisational culture and behaviour which would task the highest leadership skills anywhere in the world.

It demands the courage to use your position of power to dismantle the very structure of power around you - at the same time as you have to use that system to manage the process of change!

It requires a virtually impossible combination of vision and tough skills.

Westerners also underestimate the difficulties created by the adversarial system now embedded in the new government structures of Central Europe. How can leaders develop when they are having to learn not only about the new systems - but are pushed by (new) party competition into short-term and divisive tactical manoeuvring?

The combination of shifting coalitions and strong parliaments is a common feature of most of the Region and causes a policy gridlock which has dangerous implications - witness, for example, the inertia caused in Romania by powers of legislative initiative being shared between the executive and two parliaments.

In the winter of 1998 one of Romania's leading Senators invited me to write a paper to help his thinking about how to get some order and coherence into what was a confused and angry legislative process. Like many other Central European countries, Romania had, over the previous two years, been having its first ever experience of real coalition government. At the best of times, coalition is fraught with difficulties - but the difficulties of the Romanian situation are compounded by having to work with an administrative machinery of government that also needs major.

*It is important to distinguish these **two different issues** - the first, the challenges arising from the coalition situation, requires the creation of a more informal process of communication; the second requires formal changes in the structure of the government machine. But **both raise critical questions about the detailed stages of drafting new proposals and laws**; and about the **precise role played at these various stages** by public servants, by Ministers, by parliamentarians, by the Cabinet, by social partners.*

I include the piece here because I believe that some simple administrative mechanisms - if properly enforced - can quickly make a difference to the Central European policy process.

Advice Note to Romanian Senators on Improving the policy process

Executive Summary

1. New proposals from Ministries should be required to **demonstrate at least 4 things before proposals are submitted to Cabinet** viz

- **various options** of dealing with the problem/issue have been seriously examined
- the particular proposal is **feasible** ie its implementation has been explored, operational difficulties examined (including with social partners) and that it is therefore likely to achieve the desired objective
- Coalition partners and parliamentarians have been consulted and seem likely to **support** it
- the detailed **consequences** are clear (not just financial)

2. This should be set out in a brief standard format (executive summary) - for both coalition consultation and the Gen-Sec clearance - before submission to Cabinet

3. Two of these questions are particularly important - "Will it work?" and "Will it get support?". The first is a **technical** question and should be dealt with essentially within the formal machinery of Government - although on the basis of a stricter appraisal system and of much broader external consultations with social partners.

The second is the **political** question and is more properly the focus of the informal coalition forum discussions.

4. Ministers should therefore have three new procedural responsibilities -

- ensuring that draft proposals are subjected to stricter internal appraisal - using **common criteria**,
- carrying out informal consultations
- submitting a summary (**on common format**) of the proposal

5. The **role of - and supporting structures for - parliamentarians should be critically assessed and used for strategic development.**

If they have **responsible tasks** and feel **properly consulted**, they will feel less frustrated and will be less prone to "opposition-itis". This involves political recognition of the need for specialisation - both by subject and by time-scale.

At the moment the individual parliamentarian is forced to be an expert on everything.

But it is the parliamentary system as a whole - not the individual - which has to cover all subjects; and both crises and long-term strategies.

This needs to be recognised in the development of parliamentary structures to allow the production of well-researched medium-term strategies. These should use external experts and NGOs for their work - as well as drawing on public servants.

1. THE PROBLEM

Government leaders who **wish to secure continued support from the broad coalition of their supporters in parliament (let alone in the country at large)** have to develop processes to ensure that

- its declared priorities and policies are **sensitive** to both national needs and to key interests
- policy initiatives have been properly tested for **feasibility** (rather than emerge haphazardly from the bowels of Ministries)

The question most leaders find themselves asking is how well they are served in these respects by the administrative machinery at their disposal. Ministries still work in traditional styles -

- **hierarchic** (no real questioning or encouragement of creative/lateral thinking)
- **closed** (reluctant to work with other Ministries - or consult with social partners)
- **over-legalistic** (too much attention to legal detail and insufficient attention to policy aims and options - and to the practical realities of project management and implementation) As a result discussions often get lost in detail.
- **non-existent personnel management** (poor recruitment procedures ; lack of guidance and encouragement for staff etc)

2. DIFFERENT PROBLEMS CALL FOR DIFFERENT SOLUTIONS -

There are three classic functions of effective "government" -

- Managing the **immediate agenda** - (eg the weekly legislative business) which is driven by crises and short deadlines. *In one-party Government, this function can be performed by the Whip's Office - in a coalition it requires a more independent support unit for the ongoing coalition dialogue.*
- Ensuring that more **medium-term policies** are being shaped (developed in para 3 and notes). *In EU countries, strategic development is now recognised as an important element in the government machinery - with Ministries issuing "green papers" seeking public views on options before they move on to enshrine one option in legal detail. It is unrealistic, however, to expect this of the Central European administrative machinery at the moment - which is overwhelmed by the immediate agenda and under pressure for reform. More ad-*

hoc solutions should be sought - led probably in the first instance by those outside the administrative machinery but certainly involving some of the key people in that machine.

- Developing an effective **machinery of implementation**

3. KEEPING IT SIMPLE

It is all too tempting to engage in major and apparently radical organisational changes - when simple **procedural changes** can be more effective, more immediate and lead to less distraction and cynicism.

Four such mechanisms seem to me to be useful for countries in transition -

3.1 clarifying the initial instruction

When Central European Ministers currently tell their civil servants to do some work on an issue, it is not done in a sufficiently detailed manner. The officials are left confused about what exactly is wanted - and will try to give the Minister what they think he wants (they may or may not get that right!). The Minister may feel he already knows what is needed - and just wants the legal detail (he may or may not be correct in this!).

Because there is no open or systematic discussion at the beginning about the ultimate purpose - and the different ways of achieving this - and no guidance given on consulting to check, for example, on feasibility, considerable amounts of time may be wasted by pursuing the wrong option.

It would save considerable time and confusion if, **right at the beginning**, time was taken for a disciplined discussion on what exactly the changes should produce - the different ways in which this could be achieved - who should be consulted; and if this was then drafted by the civil servant in the form of a brief **quasi-contract** (certainly for the more important issues). See para 5 for draft.

3.2 Interdisciplinary working groups

3.3 testing the initial results - devil's advocacy

When such work is finished, it should be subjected to a tough cross-examination. This should be done on the basis of the presentation of a standard 1-2 page format ("summary proforma") - clearly specifying such things as-

- what the measure is supposed to achieve (and how that links to the Coalition's priorities)
- exactly what options were examined
- what tests were applied to these ; and how they each fared
- who was consulted
- which option is being recommended
- what its consequences will be

This cross-examination could be done internally - but consideration should be given by the General Secretary's office to establishing, at least for an initial period, a pool of independent experts specially trained for this purpose. They would be given the summary proforma the evening before the meeting (more notice than most Cabinet Ministers!) and would be - as generalists - in the same position as the Cabinet Ministers, having to use common sense to probe for problems.

Only the Ministerial staff could realistically be expected to make any changes as a result of such a "devil's advocate" process. But **only if** such a summary proforma had been produced - and such a process undertaken - would key proposals be allowed to proceed to the next stage (whether Cabinet or informal Coalition consultation).

4. THE THREE DIFFERENT ROLES OF A POLITICAL SYSTEM - how to achieve them - and diminish negative political conflict

Organising a focussed and realistic political agenda - which reflects general concerns - and which has been coherently prepared for (implementation) is the real test of leadership. But it will not, in itself, avoid political trouble.

All elected politicians feel important; yet few are given the position which gives real satisfaction. **Leadership involves not only effective agenda-management - but also managing the politicians.**

Leaders tend to be so caught up with crisis management that they don't realise how frustrated (if not jealous) their colleagues are.

This is a powerful factor in explaining the unacceptable levels of conflict in political life - which cause the policy incoherence and drift. Yet there is more than enough to keep all politicians positively active. One of the early things we did in Strathclyde was to recognise that an effective political system required **support for three very distinct political roles but that this was not reflected in support structures -**

- Leadership ; at most 10 of the ruling group of 70 in my region actually exercised significant leadership positions in the sense of selecting agendas and managing the business. The formal administrative machinery which engages the time of the leaders had been created to satisfy legal requirements - not to ensure democratic purpose.

- Local representation ; all of the politicians had, however, been elected to represent the interests of a geographical area - although they received no technical help in performing this role (and indeed, when they raised local issues in the committees, were seen as acting parochially). We created official local structures formed by local officials, representatives of local NGOs, chaired by the local politician ; and gave them the formal responsibility for drawing up local strategies to improve the services in the area. These were popular (they gave local politicians real visibility) and effective - and also helped keep the Departments on their toes. In this context I was interested to read at the weekend that, although the British public currently have a poor view of politicians as a whole this

does not extend to their local MP - who is always in the local press and seen as working hard for their interests!

- Policy development ; as indicated above, we knew that we had inherited large Ministries which were centralised and complacent. Simply adding a small Unit at the top to try to get them to work together more - and in a different way - we knew was not enough. We needed to ensure they felt under pressure from other sources. Most of our political colleagues spent their time sitting in Committees overseeing the work of each of these Ministries - having to support the lead of the Minister who, whatever his individual initiatives, rarely fundamentally challenged the Ministry's fundamental direction. Despite the appearance of democracy, these structures just sustained prevailing professional systems and practices - and made inter-agency work impossible. Child-care, for example, was the focus of important programmes and policies in at least three Ministries and several NGOs - yet there was no co-operation. So we set up task-forces of 12 individuals - half politicians, the other half middle-level officials - around such themes and invited them to carry out a critical review of present policies and practices - and to bring forward proposals for change. Again, these were highly successful; those taking part found the work very satisfying (and working closely with experts from the Departments made the politicians much more realistic about the constraints of government!). Some 30 such groups were established on key issues facing the region and their recommendations largely implemented.

The volume of the work involved in dealing with present legal drafts and crises seems to leave no time for a longer time perspective. At the moment everyone (politicians, officials and advisers) is trying to do everything. Some specialisation is needed!

Some individuals need to be released (or release themselves) to work on medium-term issues - and in structures which bridge the unhealthy divisions between officials, politicians, advisers, social partners, Departments etc (link with para 2.2)

5. A STEP-BY-STEP approach to change

This paper is sensitive to the very real difficulties and pressures on the key people here - in government, parliament and Ministries. Big **reorganisations** (changing administrative structures) **can so often** (not always!) **just waste time and de-motivate people**.

Effective change is most often the result of leadership having the courage to adopt - and insist on the continued observation of - some simple **procedures** which send clear signals about the need for a more open and rigorous style of work.

But, clearly, this does not happen overnight - the most immediate requirement is that those at the top understand and agree on the urgency of getting the machinery more coherent - and go out of their way to support the changes needed. The argument of this paper is that some fairly simple improvements can then begin to transform the present frustrating situation - viz

5.1 The Prime Minister should, with the assistance of the General Sec of the Government, set up some simple mechanisms to ensure that the policy work of senior civil servants is carried out in a more disciplined, rigorous but open manner; and that, before **key** proposals are submitted to Cabinet for approval, they will have been -

- summarised on a proforma to demonstrate the options explored - and the detailed consequences which can be realistically anticipated from the change (see par 5 below)
- subjected to critical scrutiny by a special panel (see 2.2 above)
- discussed and cleared by the counterparts in the three other parties of the Coalition (2.3)
- amended by the Department and Minister if they are persuaded as a result of that experience that the proposal has weaknesses which must and can be rectified
- circulated **in summary form** to the coalition support unit for comment from the Coalition Forum

5.2 Ministers should consult with their counterparts in the Coalition parties on draft legislative proposals

5.3 Regular **meetings of coalition leaders should now be established** - for the detailed work of policy identification, options scrutiny and negotiation - but **only on two conditions** (a) that the need for these simple but profound administrative procedures at the heart of the Government process are accepted - and (b) a technical unit is established to support its work.

5.4 a **small technical unit** should **immediately** be set up to **service these meetings** - in order to

- produce **thorough but brief policy papers and recommendations** for regular meetings of coalition leaders (in the Senate?)
- ensure the detailed recommendations are properly **documented**
- **disseminate** the conclusions (and justifications)
- Such a technical support unit would do the rigorous policy papers - with managerially feasible options (but presumably **not** a single recommendation)

5.5 coalition parties should also ensure that some relatively independent analysis is being carried out which can be of assistance in the development of more medium- term strategies.

6. THE PROFORMA - a device for creative thinking!

This is a crucial device in these proposals - and needs to be handled with great care. Its purpose needs to be clearly explained - and the precise questions need to be phrased in a way that minimises the cynical response which can be anticipated amongst those used to detailed hierarchic control.

It cannot be emphasised too much that this is not the purpose of this device; it is rather to encourage creative/lateral thinking - a self-discipline (anticipate the problems - put yourself in the shoes of the opposition)

6.1 What will the new proposal/law **actually achieve**?

List the key expected results -

-

6.2 What are the **different ways** in which this could be achieved?

List the different options -

-

6.3 Which **approach is presently favoured** ?

Describe its **key features** -

-

6.4 What are its **distinctive advantages** (compared with the other options)?

-

6.5 What **consequences** can be anticipated -

- Financial
- political (from parliament - from public)
- on other policies (eg environment)

6.6 Which groups have been **consulted** - how and with what results and comments?

Annex on Results-based Management

Performance management and measurement was all the rage a few years ago but a series of academic critiques (of which [Paradoxes of Modernity - unintended consequences of public policy reform](#) (2012) is one of the latest examples) seemed set to dampen enthusiasms. But the benefits which the mantra of performance (if not "name and shame" regimes) seem to offer to governments desperately looking for quick fixes look irresistible...and the peddlars of performance movement medicines continue to do well.

<http://bigpushforward.net/archives/2270#more-2270>

Bernward Causemann

In my experience, the results agenda is not only [emotional in the sense of controversial](#), but also confusing to many people, NGO staff I work with in Africa, Asia and Germany have difficulties with the concept of results, and much goes wrong. Arguably a lot of the trouble stems from a strong utilitarian influence on the results agenda that does not fit well with other cultural traditions involved in development aid.

[Utilitarianism](#) is a philosophical tradition that started in Britain in the 18th century. It deals with the question of how to act morally, and what government action is morally best. Put simply, in a utilitarian view, human behaviour is the more moral, the more it creates happiness. In the words of Bentham, "it is the greatest happiness of the greatest number that is the measure of right and wrong". The utilitarian idea has been very influential in Britain, and more widely in the Anglo-Saxon world. The push for effectiveness builds on this tradition. "Happiness" is now made to be understood as "results". Governments are "effective" (read: moral) if they produce lots of "results" (read: happiness). To make effectiveness measurable, results should be pre-defined. I am not sure if the architects of the results agenda are aware of their utilitarian background, but we are all heavily influenced by our traditions, and the forerunners of the results agenda (New Public Management, micro-economics and the logical framework concept) are dominated by North American thinking building on utilitarianism. People from other traditions just do not understand the underlying assumptions and are confused. Being German myself, I have observed that German development agencies found it rather difficult to introduce results frameworks. They experienced a lot of resistance from staff, and people were confused for a long time. They disliked the added bureaucracy that comes with the current results concepts. But, I believe, underlying is that the Anglo-Saxon results concept does not fit into German culture.

Different Paradigms

Many Germans, particularly in the social and cultural sciences, are brought up in very different philosophical traditions than Anglo-Saxons. Two philosophies of German origin are particularly relevant to the effectiveness debate.

1. Dialectics as developed by Hegel. The idea is that history develops in leaps and bounces because it is based on contradictions. There are always opposing forces, developments, strands in society, and over time they come to a resolution on a higher level. Nothing is predictable. There are no linear

pathways in history - or, in today's terminology, in social and political development. Power matters, and so do hidden potentials that come into force at crucial moments of development. Anyone thinking in these terms will find it difficult to fill in a logical framework in a meaningful way. The form gives no space for the surprise that we expect. So meeting the result agenda requirements becomes a tedious or cynical exercise. The results approach intuitively feels wrong.

2. Hermeneutics. Wilhelm Dilthey introduced the idea that there are two traditions of science: the natural sciences (like physics, chemistry, biology, etc.) and the human or cultural sciences (German: *Geisteswissenschaften*, like history, philosophy, arts, etc.). The core of natural sciences is that they look at their object from the outside ("objectively") and "explain" what happens. In cultural sciences, we are part of the subject that we look at. There is no "objectivity", no natural laws. All understanding depends on us, and on context. Subjectivity is a necessary source of insight, and a limitation at the same time. Hermeneutics in cultural sciences is about understanding the meaning, and the hidden meaning, of phenomena.

For someone brought up in the hermeneutic tradition, the current results agenda tries to capture development in the field of culture with an approach appropriate to natural sciences. What we identify with the results agenda (linear causal models, deified indicators and a reduction of social change to what can easily be quantified) just do not fit with the understanding of social change that many people have developed during their academic training in Germany. Dialectics and hermeneutics all play out in the fact that out of the four purposes of impact assessment that German NGOs define (see "[Quality before Proof](#)"), learning from experience comes first and empowerment of target groups comes before accountability. They also experience that it is difficult to implement such a concept under the current results framework.

Traditions and Results

I am not trying to juxtapose German and Anglo-Saxon philosophy. There is more to both of them. Anywhere, our traditions influence how we interpret the results agenda, and often in a way that defeats the agenda's purpose.

Someone who has been brought up in a tradition of strictly following authority will interpret the results framework as an instrument of control

- no wonder people cook up figures.

If I grew up in a society where social relations matter most because they give security and meaning, I will have difficulties to focus on material results in my plans

- no wonder people often focus on immediate needs of those they work with.

In a cultural tradition that believes in circular processes, linear explanations have little meaning for the development efforts

- no wonder people are not guided by the plans sent to donors but use them just for reporting, if at all.

Similarly, if I believe that everything is connected, I will find it challenging to focus on just a few results

- no wonder that systemic thinking is so much more easily accepted by many African consultants than by Northern consultants.

In societies where people have learned that there is one way to do things, and tend to follow rules, they will focus on what is written

- no wonder many people mistake indicators (that are meant to show progress for a larger goal) for objectives (that are to be achieved exactly).

If we want to enhance a positive impact of development interventions, that is: if we want to increase the impact of development efforts, we need to overcome the cultural dominance of one tradition and find culturally appropriate forms of focus on change.

People from different traditions need to reflect on their beliefs and bring their views into the discussion. That has been true for a long time. The results agenda has shown that we still have a long way to go.

[More](#)

Rosalind Eyben [PERMALINK](#)

April 20, 2013

A good question from Benedict about whether there is something inherent in the tool that makes it prone to misuse and abuse. But also to be taken into account is the changed politico-managerial environment in which such planning and performance measurement tools have become mandatory requirements.

Like Richard I used to be a fan of log frames and was one of its early advocates in DFID in the late 1980s. I found it useful in encouraging colleagues to ask themselves why they wanted to undertake certain activities.

A log frame, I argued, requires you to state a purpose - for example, increased incomes of landless families - and then work out what you could do to achieve that purpose.

British projects at the time did the opposite: an available technology or resource was identified and then a half-hearted effort was made to justify its use by trying to show how it would improve the world. I also appreciated the Log Frame's assumptions column, which in the early days has been used to identify the dynamic social and political environment of aid projects, thus introducing uncertainty and requiring iterative planning. For example, did other routes to improving landless people's incomes become apparent during project implementation? Has an unforeseen event occurred which requires a quite different kind of response?

Today, tools like log-frames serve as props in support of an almost pathological desire to be in control (or to be seen as if the donor were in control) in complex and unpredictable circumstances. Consequently, they function as instruments of power that demand obedience rather than independent and above all, critical thought.

Benedict Wauters [PERMALINK](#)

April 19, 2013

I would like to draw attention to a chapter in a book on Results Based Management I just completed. This draws out the reasons why alternative approaches have been developed (or revived) to logframes.

It also list all the arguments "pro" that you list but then also list the very real "cons". A key question is whether if the reasons for logframe not function is improper use, and we have known this for decades, but still people (ab/mis)use them, then surely, we must ask whether there is anything in the tool that makes it so prone to (ab/mi)use. You can find it on <http://www.coprblm.eu/?q=node/630> . Look at p 132 -190.

Richard Holloway [PERMALINK](#)

April 19, 2013

I want to speak up for log frames while realising that this is a distinctly unpopular position to take amongst the readers of this blog. It seems to me that many of those who oppose log frames are not using them as they were intended - and Bernard Causemann comment towards the end of his piece - encourages me in this view. He says "no wonder many people mistake indicators (that are meant to show progress for a larger goal) for objectives (that are to be achieved exactly)".Duh! The problem is surely that people use log frames in a much more draconian way than is useful.

In my experience Log frames are best constructed as part of the process called GOPP (Goal Oriented Project Planning) which should actually be OOPP (Objectives Oriented project Planning) since Goals are only one of four levels of Objectives - and this is a process that leads from Stakeholder Identification and participation in the process of designing the Logframe , through problem identification, problem trees, objectives trees, choice of alternative strategies, brain storming on activities, brain storming on assumptions, and then creating indicators and means of verification - the whole to be facilitated by someone familiar with the practice

It seems to me that Logrames are usually constructed by aid administrators who are usually not stakeholders in the field of work that the Logframe describes, and who delight in the over precise and pedantic structures that so many readers of these blogs understandably rail against.

The usual practice of log frame creation and use ignores two important parts of the log frame system - the attention to the "Assumptions" column, which allow you to consider what others might be doing that impinges on the work that you want to do, and the importance of reviewing the log frame every six months to see whether the world has changed, and your planning needs to change as well.

A last aspect of using log frames is that it is a guideline which illustrates your best guess at what you need to do in order to reach a result that you desire. If you find that because of other factors (which should have been thought about in the assumptions column) this is not the situation, then you think about it - you do not twist or obscure reality to fit the log frame. But this of course requires those who are holding you accountable for results to have the same generous approach to log framing as yourself - and this seems to be rare.

Anyone else like to defend log frames ?

Richard Holloway

Bernward Causemann [PERMALINK](#)

April 22, 2013

Interesting, that the discussion of this blog should be around the defence of tools. Shouldn't we debate in what context what tool is most appropriate? I agree that logframes can be used in a meaningful way, and so can all the other artefacts of the results approach. But often there are better alternatives.

The logframe can be particularly good for reporting, but often makes a very poor description of the theory of change. A generic theory of change - no prescribed format - is often much more useful those implementing. I have made good experiences with Causal Diagrams. They help people to understand what they are doing, but not in every context. No wonder GIZ (formerly GTZ, the inventors of GOOP) does not require the logframe anymore. The German Ministry for Development still requires them from GIZ (it is said that the head of GIZ was called in by the Minister to make that clear), but other German Ministries explicitly do not want logframes because they need more down-to-earth plans.

We need to give implementing organisations more of a choice what tools they want to use, and create an empowering environment in which they can test and select the most suitable tools. These would be more likely to reflect the diversity of traditions and cultures. That, in my experience, increases the impact of development efforts.

https://www.wiso.uni-hamburg.de/fileadmin/sowi/politik/governance/ConWeb_Papers/conweb3-2009.pdf

This paper offers a critical exploration of the term 'governance', its rise to prominence within EU political discourse, and the new forms of authority and expertise it has come to be associated with within the EU's evolving political regime. It argues that a critical understanding of EU governance might be advanced if scholars look beyond the conventional political science literature and interpret it instead in terms of recent debates about neoliberal governmentality.

I ask, what does the Commission's appropriation of this ambiguous concept reveal about the way EU politicians, experts and policy makers are re-conceptualising Europe and the problem of European government?

Drawing on insights from critical discourse analysis, sociology and anthropology (including my own ethnographic fieldwork among EU officials in Brussels), I examine the different meanings and uses of the term 'European governance' and the normative assumptions that underpin its use in the EU context.

These arguments are subsequently developed through a critical examination of the Commission's Green Paper on the Future of Parliamentary Democracy and the Commission's advocacy for the Open Method of Coordination, which, I suggest, is not as open, inclusive or democratic as its rhetoric suggests.

I conclude that European governance should be interpreted as an ideological keyword and form of advanced liberal governmentality, one that simultaneously promotes a technocratic style of steering and managing while concealing the way power and decision-making are increasingly being exercised in nontransparent ways by networks of European elites based around the EU's institutions

<http://www.amazon.co.uk/Building-Europe-Cultural-Politics-Integration-ebook/dp/B006HJK1O8>

<http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=Ffv9AQAQBAJ&pg=PA247&lpg=PA247&dq=chris+shore,+european+union&source=bl&ots=mg1k0XC32r&sig=hUw-XfjpvFOWEM9Y5zK6SrpRHZc&hl=en&sa=X&ei=jBIIVOizAc6rafnUgLgJ&ved=OCCoQ6AEwAzgU#v=onepage&q=chris%20shore%2C%20european%20union&f=false>

House of Cards - building the rule of law in ECE

http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1686644 Alica Mungiu Pippidi

<http://www.iss.europa.eu/publications/detail/article/the-european-future-of-the-western-balkans-thessaloniki10/>

<http://www.scribd.com/collections/3579754/Alina-Mungiu-Subjective-Transylvania>

see complete books

case study in political clientism http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1686617

<http://www.scribd.com/collections/3579754/Alina-Mungiu-Subjective-Transylvania>

<http://sar.org.ro/our-revolution-isnt-finished-yet/?lang=en>

In the last 20 years I have helped develop strategies affecting countries such as Latvia, Slovakia, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Kyrgyzstan. In 2002 I drafted a Manual on "good policy analysis" for Slovak civil servants; in 2005 I accepted World Bank and UNDP largesse to write papers on Public Administration Reform (PAR) in Azerbaijan

I have probably learned most in the past decade - for example from the 18 months I spent drafting a [Road Map for local government in Kyrgyzstan](#) as I participated in about 20 workshops in that country.....and from writing a paper about developing the capacity of Bulgarian state administration in 2008.

The central question in both places seemed to be how we might best get from point A to point Z - but the more I explored that, the more the question became

- "how do we actually know where "we" actually are at this point in time"!!
- And who are "we"?

About the author

Ronald Young lived the first 48 years of his life in the West of Scotland - 22 of them as an aspiring academic and innovative politician in local, then Regional, Government.

The last 25 years have been spent as a consultant in central Europe and central Asia - generally leading small teams in institutional development or training projects.

He first came to live in Bulgaria in the summer of 2007 - and has since then divided his time between a flat in Sofia, a flat in Bucharest and a house in the Carpathian mountains.

In 2008 he started a website which contains the major papers he has written over the years about his attempts to reform various public organisations in the various roles he has had - politician; academic/trainer; consultant.

"Most of the writing in my field is done by academics - and gives little help to individuals who are struggling to survive in or change public bureaucracies. Or else it is propaganda drafted by consultants and officials trying to talk up their reforms. And most of it covers work at a national level - whereas most of the worthwhile effort is at a more local level.

The restless search for the new dishonours the work we have done in the past. As Zeldin once said - "To have a new vision of the future it is first necessary to have new vision of the past"

In 2009 he started a blog - called [Balkan and Carpathian Musings](#) - to try to make sense of the organisational endeavours he has been involved in - to see if there are any lessons which can be passed on. To restore a bit of institutional memory and social history - particularly in the endeavour of what used to be known as "social justice".

"My generation believed that political activity could improve things - that belief is now dead and that cynicism threatens civilisation. I also read a lot and wanted to pass on the results of this to those who have neither the time nor inclination - as well as my love of painting, particularly the realist 20th century schools of Bulgaria and Belgium".

He now has a new website - [Mapping the Common Ground](#) - which is a library for articles and books he considers useful for those who - like Brecht - feel that "So ist die Welt - und muss nicht so sein"!

I've always had great difficulty answering the simple question "What do you do?" "Student" was easy but, after graduation, I had a quick succession of jobs in what could be called generally the "planning" field - and "planner" is as vague a term as "manager" and enjoyed a rather limited vogue. In 1968 I joined a polytechnic and was also elected to a town council - so "lecturer" was as good a description as what I did as any. Using my voice was what I was paid for - whether to transmit information or opinions. I read widely - so "reader" was also a pertinent word. I became heavily involved in community development - managing to straddle the worlds of community action and political bureaucracy (for 20 years I was the Secretary of ruling Labour groups in municipal and regional Councils and also a sponsor of community action) and figured in a book about "reticulists" (networkers) - but imagine putting that word in a passport application!

For a few years I was Director of a so-called "Research Unit" which was more like a Think Tank in its proselytising workshops and publications celebrating the new rationalism of corporate management and community development.

At age 43 my default activity became full-time (regional) politics - with a leader role but of a rather maverick nature who never aspired to the top job but was content to be at the interstices of bureaucracy, politics and academia. I remember my reception at an OECD function in central Sweden as someone with a proclivity to challenge.

All this paved the way for the "consultancy" which I have apparently practised for the past 20 years in Central Europe and Central Asia. But "consultant" is not only a vague but a (rightly) increasingly insulting term - so I was tempted for a period to enter the word "writer" on my Visa application forms since this was as good a description of what I actually did as any. At one stage indeed, my despairing Secretary in the Region had actually given me the nickname "Paperback writer". Except that this was seen by many border guards in central Asia as a threatening activity! Robert Reich's "symbolic analyst" briefly tempted - but was perhaps too close to the term "spy"!

When I did the [Belbin test on team roles](#) to which I was subjecting my teams, I had expected to come out as a leader - but was not altogether surprised to discover that my stronger role was a "resource person" - someone who surfed information and knowledge widely and shared it. What some people saw as the utopian streak in my writing gave me the idea of using the term "poet" at the airport guiches - but I have a poor memory for verse.

This morning, as I looked around at the various artefacts in the house, a new label came to me - "collector"! I collect beautiful objects - not only books and paintings but pottery, pens, pencils, laquered cases, miniatures, carpets, Uzbek wall-hangings, Kyrgyz and Iranian table coverings, glassware, terrace cotta figurines, plates, Chinese screens, wooden carvings et al. Of very little - except sentimental - value I hasten to add! But, of course, I have these things simply because I have been an "explorer" - first of ideas (desperately searching for the holy grail) and then of countries - in the 1980s Western Europe, the 1990s central Europe - finally central Asia and beyond.

Some 25 years ago, when I was going through some difficult times, my sister-in-law tried to help me by encouraging me to explore the various roles I had - father, son, husband, politician, writer, activist etc. I didn't understand what she was driving at. Now I do! Lecturer, reticulist, politician, maverick, leader, writer, explorer, consultant, resource person, collector - I have indeed played all these roles (and more too intimate for this blog!). Makes me wonder what tombstone I should have carved for myself in the marvellous [Sapanta cemetery in Maramures](#) where people are remembered humourously in verse and pictures for their work or way they died!!

And it was TS Eliot who wrote that

old men ought to be explorers

[This flickr account](#) gives with more examples of art.....[also this one](#)

Michael Barber

video

<http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/events/how-run-government-so-citizens-benefit-and-taxpayers-dont-go-crazy>

<http://followersoftheapocalyp.se/any-data-will-do-a-review-of-michael-barbers-how-to-run-a-government/>

The opening of the final chapter, which essentially retells the Old Testament story of Joseph in Egypt using the language of modern public policy, was perhaps the moment where the absurdity of the edifice won out and tears of laughter ran down my face.

Pharaoh's dream as interpreted by Joseph - what we would now call a Treasury Forecast - suggested that [...] boom and bust had not yet ended.

[...] draw a trajectory for gathered corn, which will result in a store of at least 140% of the baseline. Then strengthen the delivery chain.

[...] He built a data system and started counting the grain (or had someone like [Tony O'Connor](#) count it for him). Barber, chapter 7.

You get the idea.

Barber's conception of "delivery" describes the frictionless movement of an idea between the head of a politician and the headache of a junior public servant - but the book spends as much, if not more time in ensuring that information - of a sort - is returned and aggregated to keep said politician engaged in their project. For an avowed attempt to define a science, Barber's standards of data are low - he argues that even poor quality data is better than no data. A scientist would proceed with more care.

Structured as a manual, and cutely decorated with 57 key "rules" (largely kept under 140 characters), the text itself has a self-conscious and self-effacing wit that the TED-style "appeals to anecdote" largely undermine. Neither realpolitik nor history has the clarity required to illustrate the clean lines of deliverology - many of the stories and asides undermine themselves in their completion.

I've written a lot about Barber and deliverology. I was scathing about the many flaws in "[Avalanche is Coming](#)", oddly moved by the honesty of "[Instruction to Deliver](#)". "How to run a government" sits in between the two: some of the content of the latter presented in the style of the former (though much [better referenced](#)).

As a system of government, deliverology has on the surface an apolitical appeal. It comes across as the art of getting stuff done in the public sector - perhaps a way for a latter-day Jim Hacker to best Sir Humphrey. However, like Sir Michael's own career, (from the CBfT delivery of his much-vaunted literacy hour onwards) much of this entails going outside the public sector entirely.

It is an expression of our current political consensus to the extent that this is hardly worthy of remark. It is a description of the big data, small government, permanent austerity neo-liberal consensus. As a myth, it defined and shaped the reality of public service long before it was expressed in this form.

It is a world-view that contains no possibility of genuine dissent. Even the idea of the "red team" - taken from military planning techniques (and Barber's obvious delight with efficient military delivery is deeply disquieting given his Quaker upbringing.) is as a licensed cynic - a court jester improving rather than vetting an unstoppable plan.

So what can we learn about the myth and the flawed reality of public service delivery-as-a-"science"? Three select quotes give us a path in to the darker side of the deliverology mindset:

"More for less trumps investment for reform" (rule 50)

"Trust and Altruism is popular but doesn't work (other than in unusual circumstances)" (rule 15)

"I am not recommending the content here to blatant autocracies or "extractive regimes" interested purely in enriching themselves, though of course I can't be sure that some of them won't read the words."

(Introduction)

Efficiency, as I am sure Sir Michael would agree, is not the same as efficacy. And "more with less" does not mean the current offer plus more, it means a shift in spending and a shift in delivery. [Writing today in the FT](#) (£), he repeats his contrast between the Blairite "investment for reform", and the austerer coalition demand for better results at least cost". Not only is this economically illiterate (currently the national deficit is roughly the same as it was in '97, growth in GDP quarter by quarter is slightly higher...), it also betrays a presumption towards smaller government and privatisation that reveal his Blairite, or indeed Thatcherite, roots.

Trust and Altruism refers to any governance regime with a preference for professional expertise over managerial oversight, and it is telling that despite a clear argument to the contrary (presented around schools in Finland) such methods are presumed never to work. Mere expertise has no answer to measurement and prescription - and again for reforming purposes we are directed to other agenda based around market narratives, making Barber possibly the only writer in history to marry the biblical story of the patriarch Joseph with the ideas of the patriarchal Sir Michael Joseph.

Finally, the point about autocracies seems like a disclaimer but hides something more problematic - delivery by control and measurement is (historically) the management methodology of the autocrat.

Barber's career and ideas illustrate the gradual drift of the centre-ground of British politics to the authoritarian right. You should read this book, but you should read it as a cautionary tale of how far down the road of managerial public service we have come, and as a spur to consider how and where we can turn in another direction.

<http://www.cpsrenewal.ca/2016/02/impossible-conversations-how-to-run.html>

As with any author there's noticeable cherry-picking and rose-coloured glasses. However, I must say that I really enjoyed Barber's book and I find the idea of refocusing government culture around delivery refreshing. That said, the reason that I think the book is a must-read isn't necessarily about its contents but rather its context. Barber recently briefed cabinet and all of Ottawa is abuzz with talk of deliverology (see: [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)). If you want to understand the shift in culture/mindset that may be about to make its way through the bureaucracy you need only look to the table on page 154 of the book which describes the difference between 'Government by spasm' and 'Government by routine'. If you are a public servant, you'd probably do well to pick yourself up a copy.

[Francis Nolan-Poupert](#)

I have mixed feelings about this book. On the one hand, it's genuinely useful. As much as we might like to, most of us public servants don't spend our days up in the theory clouds; we have deliverables, deadlines, and performance expectations. Once in a blue moon, we might have a few days to grapple with and devise solutions for a complicated issue that wasn't even on the radar a few weeks before. Barber's book is practical in that way: it deals with the nitty gritty of policy and program delivery, and provides simple, road-tested conceptual tools that can help you think through those tough situations. I've already found myself referring to his approach in meetings and referring to some of his charts while writing up some documents - the same can't be said of, say, [the Evgeny Morozov book](#), much as I appreciated it.

Another reason I enjoyed the book is that it serves as an effective wake-up call for the public service to get its own house in order. Barber humorously describes the silly things us bureaucrats do all the time, from the point of view of a politician or staffer - think of our attachment to the status quo, our tendency to claim that something can't be done, our proclivity to engage in ridiculous turf wars, our stalling tactics, etc. If we agree that these kinds of behaviours are pervasive and counter-productive, we won't be able to rely on 'deliverology' to save us, given that there wouldn't be delivery units for most of the things the government does. So if the Government of Canada as a whole is going to become the kind of modern, high-performing, data-literate organization that Barber is envisioning, then bureaucrats will have to deal with some of our own purely internal performance issues in a more ambitious fashion (all within the framework of our delegated authorities, yada yada yada). Better diagnosing the nature of the silliness, and the possible solutions the bureaucracy could reasonably implement on an internal basis, is a topic for another day.

There's also a lot I didn't like about this book. My main irritant is that Barber is a poor social scientist. He usually conforms to a 'logic model' vision of government, where, for any given policy problem (e.g., low literacy rates) you just need to find the one right lever to pull (i.e., forcing teachers to teach one new literacy class a week in elementary school). Um.. hold on a minute. For most policy issues, there's a lot more going on under the hood - I dunno, maybe persistent social exclusion driven by economic inequality, systemic discrimination, or uncontrollable economic forces over which governments have little to no control? (Pick your poison.) So yes, I was somewhat disturbed by Barber's tendency to make sweeping statements about complicated situations, without much in the way of caveats. So you might want to listen to Barber to decide on how to 'run a government', but take his opinions on what the actual policy responses should be with a massive grain of salt. (Don't get even me started on his frequent claims that 'the markets vs. governments debate is over' - the guy's a pro-market social liberal with light redistributive tendencies. Which is fine; just don't try to make a drive-by 'end of history' argument which passes that off as being the only viable political/policy approach out there.)

Argh, there's a ton of other things that annoyed me about this book, but I want to keep this review 'lengthy', as opposed to 'unreasonably lengthy', so I will leave it at that - I won't even address Barber's constant humble-bragging and lack of critical self-reflection, or the unsatisfactory way in which Barber discussed the risks of over-relying on metrics (I'll leave Prez to [do the explaining](#), from way back in 2004). Another topic I would have liked to explore is that ultimately, Barber really only addresses a small sliver of what policy implementation actually involves (a lot of the times it seems to come down to tracking bureaucrats in order to scare them into coming up with new solutions, but he doesn't often tell you what the actual solutions were), but I'm a slow writer, and a man has to have evening hobbies that go beyond reviewing books.

[John Kenney](#)

I liked the book and agree with Nick that Barber's focus on delivery is refreshing. Here are a few things on my mind in relation to how it might be applied, particularly at the federal level:

One of the things that makes the "science of delivery" different than, say, federal public administration via the Management, Resources and Results Structure (MRRS) and the Management Accountability Framework, is that deliverology focuses government on strategy and priorities. The point is not to "deliverology" everything. In theory at least, it requires a government to make deliberate choices, understand where it's going and how it'll know if it's making progress getting there, and if not, learning and adapting as needed. It's hardcore when it comes to assessing whether or not the government has the capacity to deliver on what it sets out to do. While some of that may sound like the good intentions of the MRRS or "integrated planning", deliverology takes it to a new, concentrated level with political engagement and leadership.

Deliverology strikes me as a convergent practice. It picks up at a point where a government has identified its priorities and what it intends to do to achieve them. In the context of complex public problems (aka "wicked problems"), new and emerging policy approaches are attempting to embed divergent and integrative thinking,

user research and experimentation into the policy design process in advance of converging on solutions. If well-executed, deliverology could expose the (non)effectiveness of intended policy solutions earlier in the policy cycle and open up opportunities for creative problem-solving and experimentation. I like how it builds in (some) stakeholder engagement, rigorous (enough) performance measurement and monitoring, learning and iteration to rapidly improve and address delivery problems as they arise. It's an action-oriented and continuous learning approach. Arguably, governments need more of that assuming they're open to learning, acknowledging when things aren't going well and adapting their approach to hit the mark.

I'm intrigued by the application of deliverology at the federal level. The UK and Ontario are oft-cited examples of deliverology in action, and in both cases, they are arguably closer to where the rubber hits the road as far as delivering policy interventions directly to citizens go. I'm writing generally here and it will depend on the policy priorities and strategies in question. The government and implicated jurisdictions are open to challenge conventional assumptions of how stakeholder arrangements may work to deliver the public goods, at least in theory (possibly in practice?).

Deliverology is not a magic bullet. Barber doesn't present it as one so let's not get cult-ish about it. There's a lot of good stuff to learn and apply, but note that the same federal government that appears eager to apply its principles and practices has also been clear on the need to create the time and space for (super)forecasting, designing citizen-centred digital services, and experimenting with new policy instruments and approaches, including behavioural and data-driven insights, and engaging Canadians via crowdsourcing and open data initiatives. It remains to be seen how consistent and compatible those approaches are with deliverology, which, as Barber writes, "...is still in its infancy". He concludes the book with three rules on the future of delivery:

- Big data and transparency are coming (prepare to make the most of them);
- Successful markets and effective government go together (avoid the false dichotomy); and,
- Public and social entrepreneurship will become increasingly important to delivering outcomes (encourage it).

Deliverology is not a linear approach although it can sometimes come across as one. While Barber's focus is intentionally on delivery here, there's a continuous learning loop built into it that, if executed effectively, could yield insights that inform ongoing and future policy design and delivery approaches.

I've added "in theory", "if executed effectively" and "assuming that..." in a number of places above. I agree with Francis that Barber oversimplifies things a lot to demonstrate the lessons (or "rules") for government. I like many of them in principle (there I go again), but if and how deliverology is applied to influence complex systems and human behaviours both within the public service and beyond may depend on its openness to adapt where necessary to the policy contexts and needs of numerous implicated users and stakeholders at different times and scales.

Kent Aitken

Er... well done, gentlemen. I'm getting to this joint review late, and Nick, Francis, and John have covered a lot of ground in spectacular fashion. I only have a handful of points to add.

One is to re-emphasize Nick's angle, which is that part of the reason this book was so interesting was the possibility that it's about to influence public administration in Canada - possibly in tangible, day-to-day ways for some public servants. That said, during the discussion I also cautioned that one bureaucrat's environmental scanning or forecasting may be another bureaucrat's tea-leaf-reading. I'm trying to resist reading too far into things until deliverology rears its head for real.

The second is to sum up what the core of the book, and the idea of deliverology, was for me: it's government knowing what it wants to do, and knowing for sure that those things are getting done. Which sounds pretty reasonable. Barber highlights in the book that holding administrators to account for results isn't about a blame game, it's actually about helping and clearing obstacles for initiatives that are challenging to implement. (Which, I suspect, is an ideal that some past "implementers" may not have felt at the time.)

Which leads into a related third point: I'm curious as to how bureaucratic writing and deliverology will mesh. Government officials can tend towards non-specific language like "commit to," "enhance," "support," "enable," and "facilitate" in their planning and reporting - which I don't think would cut it to a delivery unit: "Okay, but what did you really do?"

Lastly, which contrasts a little with the above reviews: as a public servant, I spend my time in the weeds of public administration. I think about the details, the working level, and the implementation. Barber's ideas are those of someone who has to take the 10,000 foot-high view, working with heads of state or their close circles. So where Francis and John (rightly) express concern with how these ideas work in complex, day-to-day realities, the book gave me some perspective on what delivery might look like to a country's senior officials - who are forced to look for the best ways to condense their information intake while making things happen.

<http://www.standpointmag.co.uk/node/6017/full>

Michael Barber served as the head of Tony Blair's delivery unit. He is the doyen of what is now called "deliverology". His book is a very useful compendium of all that he learnt in his time. He distils 57 lessons, perhaps too many to absorb easily. But there is a lot of common sense and practical wisdom. He believes in ministers setting a clear strategy with specific indicators or targets which you then monitor to see how you are doing against your key objectives. This may seem radical in politics but is how many organisations are run nowadays. It is why he was a breath of fresh air in Whitehall.

His approach is far better than just seeing Whitehall and the civil service as plotting to stop ministers doing things. From *Yes Minister* to the Chris Mullin diaries this picture of Whitehall has been mined for its comic potential. But it is largely nonsense. It has painted a picture of ministers as by and large hapless, hopeless, and powerless. This is bad for politics and is not even true. Politicians may not be able to change things in the short run as much as they or the media hope. But in the long run — and that may be only a few years — ministerial decisions make a very big difference indeed. And these need not even be the obvious big decisions taken at the top by the Prime Minister and the Chancellor. You have to know what to do and if as a minister you can get over three high but not insuperable hurdles you can get a lot done. First, you need to get the Treasury on side or, failing that, Number 10 has to be massively supportive. Second, your colleagues have to be broadly willing to trust your judgment. Third, you have to stay out of too many media scrapes. Then the truth is that ministers in a British government can actually get a lot done. Blaming the civil service is usually an alibi for a badly thought through policy which had little chance of success anyway.

Of course, that does not mean that ministers will necessarily get things right and nor may their advisers. There is a lack of real policy expertise in Whitehall. Too many officials move around too quickly which means they are susceptible to the institution's conventional wisdom because they have not really had the time to master the evidence and become truly expert. So the same mistakes are repeated. And ministers face trade-offs which have been around for decades without really any idea of how these dilemmas had presented themselves in the past and what decisions were taken then and why.

There is a repertoire of options for managing and improving public services which have been developed over the past few decades. You can always improvise and innovate but there are some classic types of response. Barber has a particularly strong discussion of different key strategic approaches — trust and altruism, hierarchy and targets, choice and competition, devolution and transparency, privatisation and vouchers. With so much political heat around these options it is quite a contrast to have such a low-key, almost managerial

assessment. Trust and altruism score particularly badly in his assessment.

Once the policy or the strategy is formulated you then have to deliver it. This is where Michael Barber really gets going. Implementation is what truly interests him. I worked in the Number 10 Policy Unit 30 years ago and if I had my time again I would do more to follow up on implementation. We did try to spend a day a week out of London just seeing how things were going in the hospital or the business or the benefit office. Often Margaret Thatcher appreciated the notes we wrote for her afterwards with a bit of the salty reality to them. But instead it is easy to be seduced by the sweet smell of freshly baked policy and not focus on the tricky job of what happened afterwards. The final product is not the ministerial speech or the policy statement or even the legislation; the final outcome is when services and people's lives are better.

But there are gaps in Barber's account. A lot of politics is missing. His examples are mainly from the Blair government and he could surely tell us more about how things really happened. He tells a story of Blair gradually building up the experience to reform. He completely fails to acknowledge the deliberate decisions taken early on by that government to abolish grant-maintained schools and GP fund-holding. For me, sitting on the Opposition benches in the late Nineties and watching Blairite ministers destroy these initiatives was desperately frustrating when they could so easily have kept them and improved them. He could have been more frank about why the Blairites did that and how they came to realise their mistake and ended up with a policy agenda not that different from John Major's.

That would open up the question of where the strategy comes from and the costs of sticking to it as against adjusting it. Another frustration when one observed the Blairites from the Opposition benches was that problems were easily dismissed as mere implementation issues when sometimes it was that the strategy was fundamentally flawed. Was Gallipoli a failure of implementation? In the real world there is an endless interplay between the strategy and the evidence about what is working. It was clearly tempting for Blair's advisers at the centre to assume that the strategy must be right and the only problems were implementation — but that is the behaviour of First World War generals in their chateaux. How do you get important messages about the real world to them?

Then there are also questions of how you set up and monitor performance indicators. Two incidents when the Treasury brought in performance measurement and pay for its officials revealed this challenge. I was working in the monetary policy division and had to set out measures of my performance. In a way the objective was very simple then — low inflation. But holding me personally responsible for that did seem a trifle presumptuous. So you then look at what you can control and instead suggest prompt and accurate briefing for the Chancellor's monetary policy discussions. But that is a retreat into the minutiae of process. The life of public sector bodies is so complex and so constrained that it is very difficult to pitch the performance measures at the right level.

Then what do you do? One person in each Treasury division was to receive a performance-related bonus. In our division it went to Bill. We were all rather surprised by this and as a young Turk I was bold enough to challenge the senior officials on this peculiar decision. The reply — from the Treasury's senior management, who were always hauling the rest of the public sector over the coals for their performance — was that Bill was a decent chap, but he was never going to be promoted, so giving him a performance bonus was a suitable consolation prize. That is what happens when central initiatives collide with Whitehall culture.

Politics and public policy are complex and difficult and worthwhile because there are so many different measures of success and there are trade-offs between them. You cannot simply suspend the trade-offs just to focus on one thing called the strategy. Michael Barber comes close to recognising this in an excellent discussion of what he calls the responsibility of stewardship. This is not the same as inertia or refusal to change. To me it seems like a Burkean respect for the wisdom that lies within an organisation and a recognition that we are custodians who want to pass it on better than we found it. Sometimes the very people working

away in the middle of an organisation in the less glamorous jobs far removed from strategy are the ones who understand this responsibility best.

Role of delivery units

https://www2.gwu.edu/~ibi/minerva/Spring2015/Joelson_Vellozo.pdf

http://www.opml.co.uk/sites/default/files/The_role_of_the_centre_in_driving_government_priorities.pdf

<http://www.cpsrenewal.ca/>

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/s75fb2d3m7x5sps/schemingvirtuously.pdf?dl=0#>

<http://scholarship.richmond.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1142&context=jepson-faculty-publications>

<http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/inside-out%20adapting%20the%20pmdo%20model.pdf>

<https://cpd.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/More-than-luck-2010.pdf>

government performance management

<http://www.tgpg-isb.net/sites/default/files/site-files/Proceedings%20of%20GR.pdf>

<https://publications.iadb.org/bitstream/handle/11319/6674/Governing-to-Deliver-Reinventing-the-Center-of-Government-in-Latin-America-and-the-Caribbean.pdf?sequence=1>

<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTGOVANTICORR/Resources/3035863-1285601351606/NovemberGetNote.pdf>

<http://mckinseyonsociety.com/downloads/reports/Voices/ArtofDelivery-web.pdf>

PA in the Balkans 2011

[http://aei.pitt.edu/15831/1/ASsee_No.1_2011_cu_coperta\[1\].pdf](http://aei.pitt.edu/15831/1/ASsee_No.1_2011_cu_coperta[1].pdf)

<http://www.sigmaweb.org/publications/Final%20conference%20report%20-%20PAR%20conference%2012%20Nov%202014.pdf>

<http://nicep.nottingham.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/2016-12-Meyer-Sahling.pdf>

Bardach book on policy analysis

<https://www.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/international-relations-dam/Teaching/cornerstone/Bardach.pdf>

PA after NPM http://www.keepeek.com/Digital-Asset-Management/oecd/governance/public-administration-after-new-public-management_9789264086449-en#.WW7nHoiGPIU#page14
(OECD 2010)

Manual

http://www.cabinet.gov.jm/files/MANUAL-Policy%20Analysts_Martin%20Abrams.pdf

<http://www.ubcpres.ca/books/pdf/chapters/2008/OECDandTransnationalGovernance.pdf>

debate on sequencing...

http://carnegieendowment.org/files/Sequencing_Exchange.pdf

video

<http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/events/how-run-government-so-citizens-benefit-and-taxpayers-dont-go-crazy>

<http://followersoftheapocalyp.se/any-data-will-do-a-review-of-michael-barbers-how-to-run-a-government/>

The opening of the final chapter, which essentially retells the Old Testament story of Joseph in Egypt using the language of modern public policy, was perhaps the moment where the absurdity of the edifice won out and tears of laughter ran down my face.

Pharaoh's dream as interpreted by Joseph - what we would now call a Treasury Forecast - suggested that [...] boom and bust had not yet ended.

[...] draw a trajectory for gathered corn, which will result in a store of at least 140% of the baseline. Then strengthen the delivery chain.

[...] He built a data system and started counting the grain (or had someone like [Tony O'Connor](#) count it for him).

Barber, chapter 7.

You get the idea.

Barber's conception of "delivery" describes the frictionless movement of an idea between the head of a politician and the headache of a junior public servant - but the book spends as much, if not more time in ensuring that information - of a sort - is returned and aggregated to keep said politician engaged in their project. For an avowed attempt to define a science, Barber's standards of data are low - he argues that even poor quality data is better than no data. A scientist would proceed with more care.

Structured as a manual, and cutely decorated with 57 key "rules" (largely kept under 140 characters), the text itself has a self-conscious and self-effacing wit that the TED-style "appeals to anecdote" largely undermine. Neither realpolitik nor history has the clarity required to illustrate the clean lines of deliverology - many of the stories and asides undermine themselves in their completion.

I've written a lot about Barber and deliverology. I was scathing about the many flaws in "[Avalanche is Coming](#)", oddly moved by the honesty of "[Instruction to Deliver](#)". "How to run a government" sits in between the two: some of the content of the latter presented in the style of the former (though much [better referenced](#)).

As a system of government, deliverology has on the surface an apolitical appeal. It comes across as the art of getting stuff done in the public sector - perhaps a way for a latter-day Jim Hacker to best Sir Humphrey. However, like Sir Michael's own career, (from the CBfT delivery of his much-vaunted literacy hour onwards) much of this entails going outside the public sector entirely.

It is an expression of our current political consensus to the extent that this is hardly worthy of remark. It is a description of the big data, small government, permanent austerity neo-liberal consensus. As a myth, it defined and shaped the reality of public service long before it was expressed in this form.

It is a world-view that contains no possibility of genuine dissent. Even the idea of the "red team" - taken from military planning techniques (and Barber's obvious delight with efficient military delivery is deeply disquieting given his Quaker upbringing.) is as a licensed cynic - a court jester improving rather than vetting an unstoppable plan.

So what can we learn about the myth and the flawed reality of public service delivery-as-a-"science"? Three select quotes give us a path in to the darker side of the deliverology mindset:

"More for less trumps investment for reform" (rule 50)

"Trust and Altruism is popular but doesn't work (other than in unusual circumstances)" (rule 15)

"I am not recommending the content here to blatant autocracies or "extractive regimes" interested purely in enriching themselves, though of course I can't be sure that some of them won't read the words." (Introduction)

Efficiency, as I am sure Sir Michael would agree, is not the same as efficacy. And "more with less" does not mean the current offer plus more, it means a shift in spending and a shift in delivery. [Writing today in the FT](#) (£), he repeats his contrast between the Blairite "investment for reform", and the austerer coalition demand for better results at least cost". Not only is this economically illiterate (currently the national deficit is roughly the same as it was in '97, growth in GDP quarter by quarter is slightly higher...), it also betrays a presumption towards smaller government and privatisation that reveal his Blairite, or indeed Thatcherite, roots.

Trust and Altruism refers to any governance regime with a preference for professional expertise over managerial oversight, and it is telling that despite a clear argument to the contrary (presented around schools in Finland) such methods are presumed never to work. Mere expertise has no answer to measurement and prescription – and again for reforming purposes we are directed to other agenda based around market narratives, making Barber possibly the only writer in history to marry the biblical story of the patriarch Joseph with the ideas of the patriarchal Sir Michael Joseph.

Finally, the point about autocracies seems like a disclaimer but hides something more problematic – delivery by control and measurement is (historically) the management methodology of the autocrat.

Barber's career and ideas illustrate the gradual drift of the centre-ground of British politics to the authoritarian right. You should read this book, but you should read it as a cautionary tale of how far down the road of managerial public service we have come, and as a spur to consider how and where we can turn in another direction.

<http://www.cpsrenewal.ca/2016/02/impossible-conversations-how-to-run.html>

I have mixed feelings about this book. On the one hand, it's genuinely useful. As much as we might like to, most of us public servants don't spend our days up in the theory clouds; we have deliverables, deadlines, and performance expectations. Once in a blue moon, we might have a few days to grapple with and devise solutions for a complicated issue that wasn't even on the radar a few weeks before. Barber's book is practical in that way: it deals with the nitty gritty of policy and program delivery, and provides simple, road-tested conceptual tools that can help you think through those tough situations. I've already found myself referring to his approach in meetings and referring to some of his charts while writing up some documents – the same can't be said of, say, [the Evgeny Morozov book](#), much as I appreciated it.

Another reason I enjoyed the book is that it serves as an effective wake-up call for the public service to get its own house in order. Barber humorously describes the silly things us bureaucrats do all the time, from the point of view of a politician or staffer – think of our attachment to the status quo, our tendency to claim that something can't be done, our proclivity to engage in ridiculous turf wars, our stalling tactics, etc. If we agree that these kinds of behaviours are pervasive and counter-productive, we won't be able to rely on 'deliverology' to save us, given that there wouldn't be delivery units for most of the things the government does. So if the Government of Canada as a whole is going to become the kind of modern, high-performing, data-literate organization that Barber is envisioning, then bureaucrats will have to deal with some of our own purely internal performance issues in a more ambitious fashion (all within the framework of our delegated authorities, yada yada yada). Better diagnosing the nature of the silliness, and the possible solutions the bureaucracy could reasonably implement on an internal basis, is a topic for another day.

There's also a lot I didn't like about this book. My main irritant is that Barber is a poor social scientist. He usually conforms to a 'logic model' vision of government, where, for any given policy problem (e.g., low literacy rates) you just need to find the one right lever to pull (i.e., forcing teachers to teach one new literacy class a week in elementary school). Um.. hold on a minute. For most policy issues, there's a lot more going on under the hood – I dunno, maybe persistent social exclusion driven by economic inequality, systemic discrimination, or uncontrollable economic forces over which governments have little to no control? (Pick your poison.) So yes, I was somewhat disturbed by Barber's tendency to make sweeping statements about complicated situations, without much in the way of caveats. So you might want to listen to Barber to decide on how to 'run a government', but take his opinions on what the actual policy responses should be with a massive grain of salt. (Don't get even me started on his frequent claims that 'the markets vs. governments debate is over' – the guy's a pro-market social liberal

with light redistributive tendencies. Which is fine: just don't try to make a drive-by 'end of history' argument which passes that off as being the only viable political/policy approach out there.)

Argh, there's a ton of other things that annoyed me about this book, but I want to keep this review 'lengthy', as opposed to 'unreasonably lengthy', so I will leave it at that - I won't even address Barber's constant humble-bragging and lack of critical self-reflection, or the unsatisfactory way in which Barber discussed the risks of over-relying on metrics (I'll leave Prez to [do the explaining](#), from way back in 2004). Another topic I would have liked to explore is that ultimately, Barber really only addresses a small sliver of what policy implementation actually involves (a lot of the times it seems to come down to tracking bureaucrats in order to scare them into coming up with new solutions, but he doesn't often tell you what the actual solutions were), but I'm a slow writer, and a man has to have evening hobbies that go beyond reviewing books.

[John Kenney](#)

I liked the book and agree with Nick that Barber's focus on delivery is refreshing. Here are a few things on my mind in relation to how it might be applied, particularly at the federal level:

One of the things that makes the "science of delivery" different than, say, federal public administration via the Management, Resources and Results Structure (MRRS) and the Management Accountability Framework, is that deliverology focuses government on strategy and priorities. The point is not to "deliverology" everything. In theory at least, it requires a government to make deliberate choices, understand where it's going and how it'll know if it's making progress getting there, and if not, learning and adapting as needed. It's hardcore when it comes to assessing whether or not the government has the capacity to deliver on what it sets out to do. While some of that may sound like the good intentions of the MRRS or "integrated planning", deliverology takes it to a new, concentrated level with political engagement and leadership.

Deliverology strikes me as a convergent practice. It picks up at a point where a government has identified its priorities and what it intends to do to achieve them. In the context of complex public problems (aka "wicked problems"), new and emerging policy approaches are attempting to embed divergent and integrative thinking, user research and experimentation into the policy design process in advance of converging on solutions. If well-executed, deliverology could expose the (non)effectiveness of intended policy solutions earlier in the policy cycle and open up opportunities for creative problem-solving and experimentation. I like how it builds in (some) stakeholder engagement, rigorous (enough) performance measurement and monitoring, learning and iteration to rapidly improve and address delivery problems as they arise. It's an action-oriented and continuous learning approach. Arguably, governments need more of that assuming they're open to learning, acknowledging when things aren't going well and adapting their approach to hit the mark.

I'm intrigued by the application of deliverology at the federal level. The UK and Ontario are oft-cited examples of deliverology in action, and in both cases, they are arguably closer to where the rubber hits the road as far as delivering policy interventions directly to citizens go. I'm writing generally here and it will depend on the policy priorities and strategies in question. The government and implicated jurisdictions are open to challenge conventional assumptions of how stakeholder arrangements may work to deliver the public goods, at least in theory (possibly in practice?).

Deliverology is not a magic bullet. Barber doesn't present it as one so let's not get cult-ish about it. There's a lot of good stuff to learn and apply, but note that the same federal government that appears eager to apply its principles and practices has also been clear on the need to create the time and space for (super)forecasting, designing citizen-centred digital services, and experimenting with new policy instruments and approaches, including behavioural and data-driven insights, and engaging Canadians via crowdsourcing and open data initiatives. It remains to be seen how consistent and compatible those approaches are with deliverology, which, as Barber writes, "...is still in its infancy". He concludes the book with three rules on the future of delivery:

- Big data and transparency are coming (prepare to make the most of them);
- Successful markets and effective government go together (avoid the false dichotomy); and,
- Public and social entrepreneurship will become increasingly important to delivering outcomes (encourage it).

Deliverology is not a linear approach although it can sometimes come across as one. While Barber's focus is intentionally on delivery here, there's a continuous learning loop built into it that, if executed effectively, could yield insights that inform ongoing and future policy design and delivery approaches.

I've added "in theory", "if executed effectively" and "assuming that..." in a number of places above. I agree with Francis that Barber oversimplifies things a lot to demonstrate the lessons (or "rules") for government. I like many of them in principle (there I go again), but if and how deliverology is applied to influence complex systems and human behaviours both within the

public service and beyond may depend on its openness to adapt where necessary to the policy contexts and needs of numerous implicated users and stakeholders at different times and scales.

Kent Aitken

Er... well done, gentlemen. I'm getting to this joint review late, and Nick, Francis, and John have covered a lot of ground in spectacular fashion. I only have a handful of points to add.

One is to re-emphasize Nick's angle, which is that part of the reason this book was so interesting was the possibility that it's about to influence public administration in Canada - possibly in tangible, day-to-day ways for some public servants. That said, during the discussion I also cautioned that one bureaucrat's environmental scanning or forecasting may be another bureaucrat's tea-leaf-reading. I'm trying to resist reading too far into things until deliverology rears its head for real.

The second is to sum up what the core of the book, and the idea of deliverology, was for me: it's government knowing what it wants to do, and knowing for sure that those things are getting done. Which sounds pretty reasonable. Barber highlights in the book that holding administrators to account for results isn't about a blame game, it's actually about helping and clearing obstacles for initiatives that are challenging to implement. (Which, I suspect, is an ideal that some past "implementers" may not have felt at the time.)

Which leads into a related third point: I'm curious as to how bureaucratic writing and deliverology will mesh. Government officials can tend towards non-specific language like "commit to," "enhance," "support," "enable," and "facilitate" in their planning and reporting - which I don't think would cut it to a delivery unit: "Okay, but what did you really do?"

Lastly, which contrasts a little with the above reviews: as a public servant, I spend my time in the weeds of public administration. I think about the details, the working level, and the implementation. Barber's ideas are those of someone who has to take the 10,000 foot-high view, working with heads of state or their close circles. So where Francis and John (rightly) express concern with how these ideas work in complex, day-to-day realities, the book gave me some perspective on what delivery might look like to a country's senior officials - who are forced to look for the best ways to condense their information intake while making things happen.

<http://www.standpointmag.co.uk/node/6017/full>

Michael Barber served as the head of Tony Blair's delivery unit. He is the doyen of what is now called "deliverology". His book is a very useful compendium of all that he learnt in his time. He distils 57 lessons, perhaps too many to absorb easily. But there is a lot of common sense and practical wisdom. He believes in ministers setting a clear strategy with specific indicators or targets which you then monitor to see how you are doing against your key objectives. This may seem radical in politics but is how many organisations are run nowadays. It is why he was a breath of fresh air in Whitehall.

His approach is far better than just seeing Whitehall and the civil service as plotting to stop ministers doing things. From *Yes Minister* to the Chris Mullin diaries this picture of Whitehall has been mined for its comic potential. But it is largely nonsense. It has painted a picture of ministers as by and large hapless, hopeless, and powerless. This is bad for politics and is not even true. Politicians may not be able to change things in the short run as much as they or the media hope. But in the long run — and that may be only a few years — ministerial decisions make a very big difference indeed. And these need not even be the obvious big decisions taken at the top by the Prime Minister and the Chancellor. You have to know what to do and if as a minister you can get over three high but not insuperable hurdles you can get a lot done. First, you need to get the Treasury on side or, failing that, Number 10 has to be massively supportive. Second, your colleagues have to be broadly willing to trust your judgment. Third, you have to stay out of too many media scrapes. Then the truth is that ministers in a British government can actually get a lot done. Blaming the civil service is usually an alibi for a badly thought through policy which had little chance of success anyway.

Of course, that does not mean that ministers will necessarily get things right and nor may their advisers. There is a lack of real policy expertise in Whitehall. Too many officials move around too quickly which means they are susceptible to the institution's conventional wisdom because they have not really had the time to master the evidence and become truly expert. So the same mistakes are repeated. And ministers face trade-offs which have been around for decades without really any idea of how these dilemmas had presented themselves in the past and what decisions were taken then and why.

There is a repertoire of options for managing and improving public services which have been developed over the past few

decades. You can always improvise and innovate but there are some classic types of response. Barber has a particularly strong discussion of different key strategic approaches — trust and altruism, hierarchy and targets, choice and competition, devolution and transparency, privatisation and vouchers. With so much political heat around these options it is quite a contrast to have such a low-key, almost managerial assessment. Trust and altruism score particularly badly in his assessment.

Once the policy or the strategy is formulated you then have to deliver it. This is where Michael Barber really gets going. Implementation is what truly interests him. I worked in the Number 10 Policy Unit 30 years ago and if I had my time again I would do more to follow up on implementation. We did try to spend a day a week out of London just seeing how things were going in the hospital or the business or the benefit office. Often Margaret Thatcher appreciated the notes we wrote for her afterwards with a bit of the salty reality to them. But instead it is easy to be seduced by the sweet smell of freshly baked policy and not focus on the tricky job of what happened afterwards. The final product is not the ministerial speech or the policy statement or even the legislation; the final outcome is when services and people's lives are better.

But there are gaps in Barber's account. A lot of politics is missing. His examples are mainly from the Blair government and he could surely tell us more about how things really happened. He tells a story of Blair gradually building up the experience to reform. He completely fails to acknowledge the deliberate decisions taken early on by that government to abolish grant-maintained schools and GP fund-holding. For me, sitting on the Opposition benches in the late Nineties and watching Blairite ministers destroy these initiatives was desperately frustrating when they could so easily have kept them and improved them. He could have been more frank about why the Blairites did that and how they came to realise their mistake and ended up with a policy agenda not that different from John Major's.

That would open up the question of where the strategy comes from and the costs of sticking to it as against adjusting it. Another frustration when one observed the Blairites from the Opposition benches was that problems were easily dismissed as mere implementation issues when sometimes it was that the strategy was fundamentally flawed. Was Gallipoli a failure of implementation? In the real world there is an endless interplay between the strategy and the evidence about what is working. It was clearly tempting for Blair's advisers at the centre to assume that the strategy must be right and the only problems were implementation — but that is the behaviour of First World War generals in their chateaux. How do you get important messages about the real world to them?

Then there are also questions of how you set up and monitor performance indicators. Two incidents when the Treasury brought in performance measurement and pay for its officials revealed this challenge. I was working in the monetary policy division and had to set out measures of my performance. In a way the objective was very simple then — low inflation. But holding me personally responsible for that did seem a trifle presumptuous. So you then look at what you can control and instead suggest prompt and accurate briefing for the Chancellor's monetary policy discussions. But that is a retreat into the minutiae of process. The life of public sector bodies is so complex and so constrained that it is very difficult to pitch the performance measures at the right level.

Then what do you do? One person in each Treasury division was to receive a performance-related bonus. In our division it went to Bill. We were all rather surprised by this and as a young Turk I was bold enough to challenge the senior officials on this peculiar decision. The reply — from the Treasury's senior management, who were always hauling the rest of the public sector over the coals for their performance — was that Bill was a decent chap, but he was never going to be promoted, so giving him a performance bonus was a suitable consolation prize. That is what happens when central initiatives collide with Whitehall culture.

Politics and public policy are complex and difficult and worthwhile because there are so many different measures of success and there are trade-offs between them. You cannot simply suspend the trade-offs just to focus on one thing called the strategy. Michael Barber comes close to recognising this in an excellent discussion of what he calls the responsibility of stewardship. This is not the same as inertia or refusal to change. To me it seems like a Burkean respect for the wisdom that lies within an organisation and a recognition that we are custodians who want to pass it on better than we found it. Sometimes the very people working away in the middle of an organisation in the less glamorous jobs far removed from strategy are the ones who understand this responsibility best.

Role of delivery units

https://www2.gwu.edu/~ibi/minerva/Spring2015/Joelson_Vellozo.pdf

http://www.opml.co.uk/sites/default/files/The_role_of_the_centre_in_driving_government_priorities.pdf

<http://www.cpsrenewal.ca/>

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/s75fb2d3m7x5sps/schemingvirtuously.pdf?dl=0#>

<http://scholarship.richmond.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1142&context=jepson-faculty-publications>

<http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/inside-out%20adapting%20the%20pmdo%20model.pdf>

<https://cpd.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/More-than-luck-2010.pdf>

government performance management

<http://www.tgpg-isb.net/sites/default/files/site-files/Proceedings%20of%20GR.pdf>

<https://publications.iadb.org/bitstream/handle/11319/6674/Governing-to-Deliver-Reinventing-the-Center-of-Government-in-Latin-America-and-the-Caribbean.pdf?sequence=1>

<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTGOVANTICORR/Resources/3035863-1285601351606/NovemberGetNote.pdf>

<http://mckinseysociety.com/downloads/reports/Voices/ArtofDelivery-web.pdf>

Concept of admin capacity

http://personal.lse.ac.uk/addisonh/Papers/AC_Concept.pdf

http://www.minv.sk/swift_data/source/mvsr_a_eu/opevs/dokumenty/Quality%20of%20Public%20Administration%20-%20A%20Toolbox%20for%20Practitioners.pdf

democracy and authoritarianism in the post-communist world; V Bunce and M McFall (2010)

Corruption - anthropological perspectives; C Shore ed (2005)

http://www.untag-smd.ac.id/files/Perpustakaan_Digital_1/CORRUPTION%20Haller_Corruption-Anthropological%20Perspectives.pdf

LIST OF Author's PUBLICATIONS

[Mapping the common ground \(2016\)](#)

[In Praise of Doubt – a blogger's year \(2016\)](#)

[Crafting Effective Public Management \(2015\)](#)

[Mapping Romania - notes on an unfinished journey \(2014\)](#)

[Introducing the Bulgarian Realists - how to get to know the Bulgarians through their paintings \(2012\)](#)

[The Search for the Holy Grail - some reflections on 40 years of trying to make government and its systems work for people](#) 2012

[Just Words](#) - a glossary and bibliography for the fight against the pretensions and perversities of power (2012)

[A Draft Guide for the Perplexed \(2011\)](#)

[The Long Game - not the log-frame](#); (2011)

[Administrative Reform with Chinese Characteristics](#) (2010)

[Training that works! How do we build training systems which actually improve the performance of state bodies?](#) (2010) Even altho I say it myself - it is one of the best papers on the subject

[Learning from Experience - a Bulgarian](#) project (2009)

[Building Municipal Capacity](#) (2007) an interesting account of an intellectual journey

[Roadmap for Local Government in Kyrgyzstan](#) (2007) this is a long doc (117 pages. I enjoyed pulling out this metaphor - and developing using (in workshops) the diagram at pages 76-77

[Building Local Government in a Hostile Climate \(2006\)](#)

[Overview of PAR in transition countries](#) (2006) This is the paper I drafted for the European Agency for Reconstruction after the staff retreat the EAR Director invited me to speak at in June 2006 in Skopje, Macedonia. The best papers are always written after the event!

[Transfer of Functions - European experiences 1970-2000](#) I learned a lot as I drafted this paper for my Uzbek colleagues. I haven't seen this sort of typology before.

[Case Study in Organisational Development and Political Amnesia \(1999\)](#)

[In Transit - Part One](#) (1999) The first section of the book I wrote for young Central European reformers. I find it stands up pretty well to the test of time

[Annotated Bibliography for change agents](#) - For quite a few years I had the habit of keeping notes the books I was reading. Perhaps they will be useful to others?
