# Crafting Effective Public Management – a master class

Preface

Purpose

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- where has it got us?

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# Preface

"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 American 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?"

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 be writers such as JK Galbraith and Rosabeth Kantor…….Untramelled power was the issue……
[I wrote all of 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-

written ….take. 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……

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

The notes should be read alongside two long papers which I produced a few years ago -
- "administrative reform with Chinese and European characters" (2010)  starts with an outline of the 12 features of Chinese public service which impacted on me when I lived in Beijing for a couple of months, preparing for a longer project. The rest of the paper is a summary of the sort of lessons I felt I had learned up to 1999 about public administration reform

- "[The Long Game – not the logframe](#)" was a caustic paper I presented to the 2011 NISPAcee Conference ( building on an earlier paper to the 2007 Conference) in which I took apart the superficiality of the assumptions EC bureaucrats seemed to be making about the prospects of its Technical Assistance programmes  making any sort of dent in what I called (variously) the kleptocracy  or "impervious regimes" of most ex-communist countries.

With the exception of some 20 pages, they are, in effect, chatty notes on my everyday reading and thinking in a period – after 2009 - when I could be fairly relaxed. I had basically "hung up my boots". Although I was nominally Team Leader of an (EU Structural Fund) project in Bulgaria in 2010-12 and also involved in a bid for another (unsuccessful) project in the same country – my role was not a demanding one and gave me the time and opportunity to reflect.

# 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 I 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 simple 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, thanks to Daniela, 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 uncertainties ……after all "we have nothing to lose but our chains"……………………….the chains on our mind that is….

I have tried to structure the book clearly –
- Part I represents my attempt to make sense of what was happening in the first phase of the intellectual revolution – when everything we had taken for granted about the organisation of government was being turned on its head
- Part II 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 III 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……………..

# Public Administration Reform gets underway

In which …………………………….

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

# Why did the nut suddenly crack? The ideology of Western administrative reform of 1975-2000

*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.

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 changes which EU countries started to make to the machinery and processes of government post 1970 -

**Box 1; Some examples of administrative reform**

- reforming and restructuring local government
- "regionalising" certain central government functions
- merging Ministries to get better coordination
- strengthening the "policy analysis" capacity of government (making it more aware of options)
- developing the managerial skills of the civil service
- strengthening the supervision ("watchdog") powers of Parliament over the Executive
- "zero budgeting" and other types of budgetary reform
- 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[1]. In transition countries the situation has been very different - with the (communist) 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<br>• Over-hierarchical structures<br>• Inadequate skills | • Delay<br>• Lack of creativity | • Management information systems<br>• Training<br>• Delegation<br>• MBO | • Limited-term contracts for senior officials |

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[1] The Power report

| 2. Problems in POLITICAL Process • Adversary process • Internal structures • Rewards/support | • Low polls • Crisis management • Petty arguments • Recruitment problems | • Training for politicians • Office support • Performance review committees | • Mixed policy task-forces • Investigative Parliamentary Committees |
|---|---|---|---|
| 3, POOR COORDINATION • **Political/official** • **Interdepartmental** • **Political/community** | • Passing the buck • Inter-organisational disputes • Foul-ups • Public distrust | • Corporate planning • Departmental mergers • Liaison structure and posts • Working parties • Public consultation • Public relations | • Political executives • All-purpose municipal councils • Neighbourhood committees |

*Political impotence*

The UK has been the trailblazer on administrative reform over the last 40 years[2]. But, despite the confident note struck by the hundreds of documents which have poured over the period 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 so[3] -  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"[4]: and in the growth of a new literature on the problems of "Implementation" which

[2]  a useful short paper by a civil servant which takes the story to 2000 is at
http://www1.worldbank.org/publicsector/civilservice/rsUK.pdf
[3] and in 2002 the New Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair famously talked "the scars on his back from dealing with the civil service"
[4] in the language of Charles Lindblom

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

### 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. 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."

### 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.

# 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 populisers 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
 Posted by publicadminreform on September 11, 2009 at 2:46 AM
"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 curiousity 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 proselytse 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 beasr 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

## 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 pubic 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, unitl 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 pretentions 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 Peri6 (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 onits 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 to 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

## 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 backs 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 acaemic 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

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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.

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 postingsRoy 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 movment, 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 lhad 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 KamarckShe 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.

## 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 acroess 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 point 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 Picket 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 enployment 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 Trotskysm) 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, Caucusus 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 consenual 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 succesful 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 Leopald 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 lateste 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 tinkerings from the Finance bunker allowing a vestige of social engineering in the field of social policy.
Of course Tony Bliar'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 ([Vodaphone](#) 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 end 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 coaliton 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 pf 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 familar 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 analyis 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 - altough Olin Wright is an honourable exception with his recent Envisioning Realistic Utopias from the USA. In America the only challenging stuff comes form 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 acadamia 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 lecons de Vie – survivre aux crises has abolutely no bibliographical refereces so it is difficult to know his reading. And has anyone really bettered the dual analysis offered in Robert Michel'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 Bells'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 Immanual 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 gives 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 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 everwhere 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 initiaives 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 gruelling 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 Permament 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 (<mark>2011???</mark>)
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 ratonal (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 thoughful 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.

# State Building in "impervious regimes"

In which ………………………………….

Including the second part of "The Long Game – not the logframe" (2011)

Like Tolstoy…………

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!
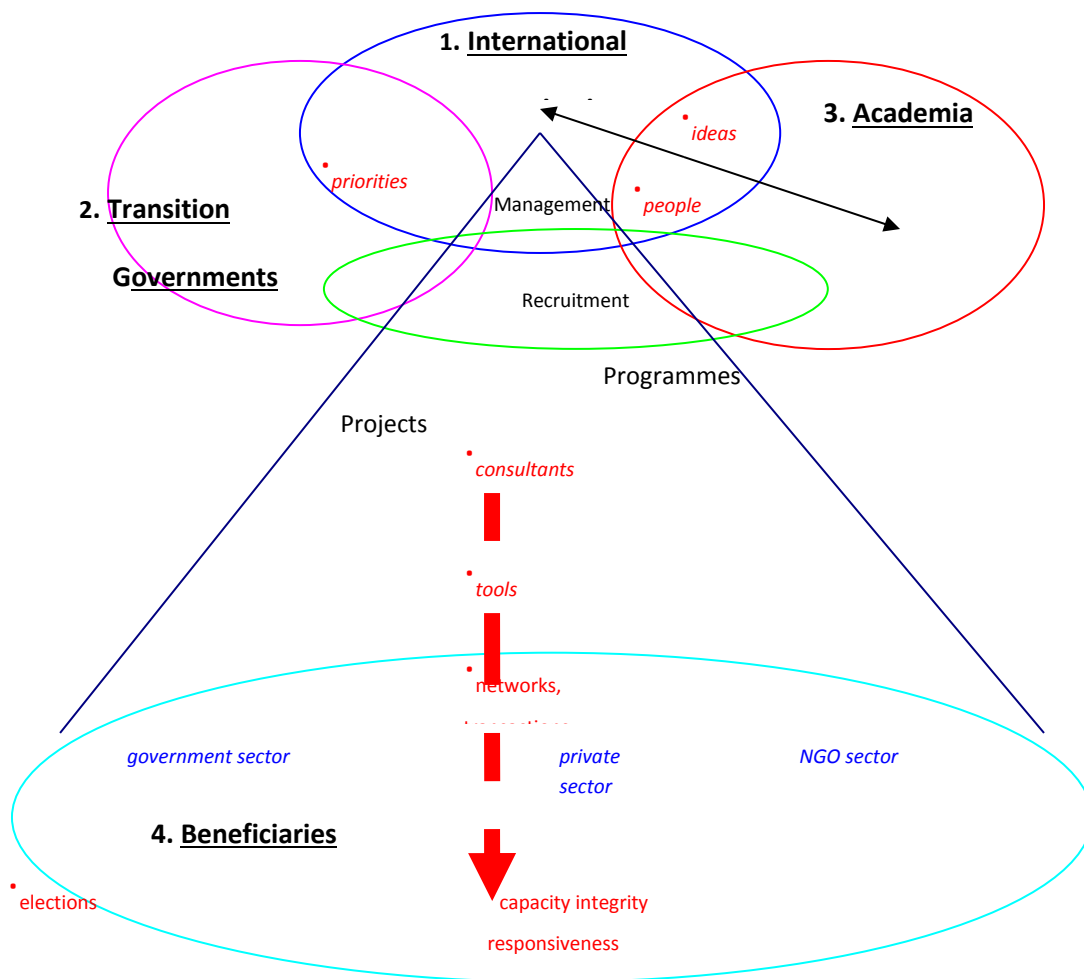
A few years back, I developed for the lectures I gave to middle managers in these "kleptomaniac states" what I called an "opportunistic" theory of change –

• "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?

**1. International**

*ideas*

**3. Academia**

*priorities*

**2. Transition**

**Governments**

Management

*people*

Recruitment

Programmes

Projects

*consultants*

*tools*

*networks,*

government sector

private sector

NGO sector

**4. Beneficiaries**

*elections*

capacity integrity

responsiveness

In 2011, I presented the paper <u>The Long Game – not the log-frame</u> 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 lpoliticians - 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? Varous 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 Azerbaizan?
- 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 Bliar 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 Bliar 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 NISPAcee 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

Thursday, June 23, 2011

# implosion and addiction

It's difficult these days to focus – with the Greek economy imploding and apparently taking the euro and some banks with it. Der Spiegel has an incisive essay today on how the young generation feel betrayed by Europe Since my short time in proximity to the eurocrats (when I worked in Brussels in 1997 for the TAIEX team) I have been horrified by the privileges of the European Class – and ashamed of the leftists such as Neil Kinnock who have profited so much from the system. Riccardo Petrella is one of the very few to emerge from that system with any credit. And the Open Europe website seems one of the few to have the capacity to focus on what matters – and write it as it needs to be said - see, for example, their post on the Greek crisis.

My problem is on the other end of the spectrum of the new generation. Silly boy that I am, I still have many euros in banks "too big to fail". All money hard and fairly earned from my nomadic consultancy. I had a Russian friend a decade ago who bought gold whenever she could. Very bright! But I bury my head in the sand; refuse to believe we could ever have another Weimar (hyperinflation); keep my money in the banks (which earns no interest); and indulge my addictions of wine and paintings.

Victoria Gallery had one of its quarterly auctions this evening. I had scanned the paintings and saw nothing of interest but – fatally – decided to view the offer at the Sheraton Hotel this afternoon. Fairly quickly several paintings were seducing me – a Moutafov with Rubev colouring in the waves; a

large Stoyan Vasilev of Veliko Trnovo and the river - with hues which made the effect totally different from those which have become rather cliched for him. So I returned at 18.00 – just „for the experience"! About 60 people eventually assembled – but there were few bidders – 15% of the lots offered were sold. I resisted the Moutafov ( as did everyone else) – but my hand was out of control for the Vassilev (65;82) which I got for basement price. The question is where will I put it?????

I have now uploaded the final version of my NISPAcee paper which has the new title – The Long Game ;not the logframe – to challenge the rationalistic basis of the EC thinking about institutional change.

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

## 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 outporings 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*

Two musical bonuses – first, from Romania (but only for the next few days), the pianist and composer Dinu Lapatti (1917-1950) and from the English mining community

*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 kilomtres 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 monthe 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](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.*

Sept 10

Faithful readers of the blog will know that I am no friend of the model of management which underpins the European Commission system of procuring Technical Assistance; and that, indeed, I have suggested it has many similarities with the Stalinist model which preceded it in the countries in which I work.

Target setting; requirements to stick to activities decided hierarchically a couple of years earlier; tight monitoring - all betraying the confidence that their planned interventions can and should conquer the complexity of the world.

And that failure to do so is the fault of those (lowly) individuals trying to implement the ordered change rather than the systems in which the intervention is located (or of the leaders who maintain those systems)

Aid on the Edge- Exploring complexity & evolutionary sciences in foreign aid - is a thoughtful blog which often explores these issues and had a [good post this week on the debate which is apparently going on in the development field about a "results' based" approach](#)

On one side of the results tug of war are those calling for more and better results, more rigour in analysis and more discipline in reporting. The failure of development, they argue, is basically about the failure to focus on results. 'Modern management techniques', especially those that are embodied by 'results-based management' are seen as the answer.

On the other side are those who argue for a 'push back' against this approach. Such reductionist approaches are seen as only suitable for certain kinds of development interventions, and that at their worst, these approaches inhibit the creativity and innovation needed to achieve results in the first place. The danger here is that we throw out the results baby with the reductionist bathwater (see [here](#) for a previous Aid on the Edge post on this).

Appropriate strategic approaches (and by extension, results approaches) need to be based on:
(a) the nature of the intervention we are looking at, and
(b) the context in which it is being delivered.
Reading across these approaches we can suggest a preliminary framework which may prove useful in bringing together different results approaches in a productive and mutually beneficial way.

First, imagine an agencies projects and programmes being distributed across a spectrum of the 'nature of interventions', placing relatively simple interventions on one end, and more complex issues, at the other.
Then let's add in a vertical axes on context. Again, think of a spectrum, this time from stable/identical to dynamic/diverse.

This gives us a 2 by 2 framework for analysing and mapping different development interventions. Where exactly an intervention is positioned on this framework has implications for the kinds of results orientation we can take.

In the top left corner of simple interventions in identical stable settings, is the Plan and Control zone – here 'traditional' results-based management approach, conventional value for money analyses and randomised control trials work well.
The bottom right corner of complex interventions in diverse, dynamic settings is what I have termed Managing Turbulence. Here we need to learn from the work of professional crisis managers, the military and others working in dynamic and fluid contexts.

In between is what I have called Adaptive Management, where either because of the nature of the intervention or the nature of the context, multiple parallel experiments need to be undertaken, with real-time learning to check their relative effectiveness, scaling up those that work and scaling down those that don't.

Sadly, I can't reproduce the matrix - but it is the sort of "balanced", "appropriate" or "contingent" approach I admire. I know it's fashionable to attack a "one size fits all" approach - but I find that political and managerial leaders generally find it difficult to resist the latest managerial fashion. If only more of them could develop and use such matrices!!
"Balance" is a word I have noticed this year pops up quite a lot in my writing. It was one of the central points of my Revista 22 article which appeared this week; and the importance of getting the appropriate balance between demand and supply factors is a central part of my approach to the development of effective training systems. As I thought about this, the word "requisite" also came into my mind - and I remembered the work of the sadly neglected organisational theorist Elliot Jaques

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

# 9. Unknown Regions

9.1 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 19955 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 corruption6; "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???

## 9.2 "Neo-feudalism" in Russia7?
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 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.

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5 Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation – southern europe, south america and post-communist europe ; byJuan Linz and Alfred Stepan
6 see, for example, the useful  Anti-corruption Approaches; a literature review (Norad 2009)
7 http://www.the-american-interest.com/article.cfm?piece=939

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 2000s8 - 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.

### 9.3 Central Asian governance – centralised, closed and corrupt
After 7 years of my life living and working in Central Asian and Caucasian countries, this is how I found myself describing their essence -

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"

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8 „From Clientism to a „client-centred orientation"; the challenge of public administration reform in Russia" by William Tomson (OECD 2007) is a tough analysis  http://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/505/1/ECO-WKP(2006)64.pdf

- students can and do buy educational qualifications

## 9.4 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 dynasties9 with chapters on Bulgaria, Romania, Moldova, Serbia, Turkey, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan10, 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!

## 9.5 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 one written by Sorin Ionita11. 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 things12. 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

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http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1513213&http://scholar.google.ro/scholar?q=Democracies+Plight+in+the+European+Neighbourhood+%E2%80%93+Struggling&hl=ro&btnG=C%C4%83uta%C5%A3i
10 Azeri and kazakh systems http://www.forschungsstelle.uni-bremen.de/images/stories/pdf/ap/fsoap107.pdf
11 Poor policy-making and how to improve it in states with weak institutions (CEU 2006) http://pdc.ceu.hu/archive/00002838/01/ionita_f3.pdf
12 I have strong doubts about the wisdom of the British „fast-track" system which has alienated pub,ic servants in Romania (Young Professional scheme) and was (in 2011) about to be wished upon Bulgaria.

*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 9 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 amonth! 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!

Just imagine yourself in such a situation - your boss has been sacked and is being p-ublicly 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!13 His out-of-date form does, however, declare some of the additional revenues he earned as a committee member of various state funds

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13 It could be useful for civil society and the media to take more interest in these forms

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 Gallagher14 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](#)15. 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?

## 10. What do we know about the process of changing impervious power?

10.1 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 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 Denning 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 sytem 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

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14 [http://www.opendemocracy.net/tom-gallagher/romania-and-europe-entrapped-decade](http://www.opendemocracy.net/tom-gallagher/romania-and-europe-entrapped-decade)
15 a recent scandal has shown that  Romanian trade union leaders' noses are also in the trough

of public administration. Greece, Spain and Portugal were all quoted in the early 1990s as the models for the transition countries16 – but

(a) they too had the huge pressure of EU accession and
(b) their reputatations are now somewhat tarnished.


**10.2 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"17 – and that this phrase became contaminated in the following decade by its use by occupying forces in Afghanistan and Iraq. Fukiyama has 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 halfcentury-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."18
International bodies may changed their tune about the role of the state since the simplistic thinking of the – 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 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 challenge19 this.


Box 10; Good enough governance
"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.

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[16] Linz and Stepan
[17] a good overview is http://publishing.eur.nl/ir/darenet/asset/17084/GSDRC_paper.pdf

[18] http://www.internationalbudget.org/pdf/Civil_Society_and_Improved_Governance_in_Developing_Countries.pdf
[19] full article at http://relooney.fatcow.com/00_New_1805.pdf

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.

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"

## 10.3 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 need20 –

- Judicial reform; to embed properly the principle of the rule of law21
- 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 legislation22
- Functional Review – to try to remove those functions of state bodies which are no longer necessary or are best handled by another sector or body23.
- Institutional twinning – to help build the capacity of those state bodies whose performance is crucial to the implementation of the Acquis Communautaire24
- Development of local government and NGOs – to try to ensure that a redistribution of power takes place
- Anti-corruption strategies25 – which incorporate elements of the first three of the above
- Performance measurement and management eg EFQM
- report-cards26 -

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[20] 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
[21] see http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/Rule_of_Law_Temptations.pdf

[22] the history, experience and problems of this are well set out by Andrea Renda in vaious publications such as IA 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
[23] a rare set of guidelines was given in 2001 by Manning et al http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2005/06/22/000090341_20050622142938/Rendered/PDF/32699.pdf
[24] for a rare insight into the origin of twinning see Tulmets paper quoted at reference 17
[25] 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
[26] consumer feedback on public services - one of the tools summarised in a useful meniu published by the World Bank in 2005 http://www1.worldbank.org/publicsector/civilservice/ACSRCourse2007/Session%208/IncreasingGovEffectiveness.pdf

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"27. 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!

**10.4 How much research – or reflection?**
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.

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27 http://john-adams.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2007/11/londons-third-airport.pdf

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 programmes28. 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 Balkans29. "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 old30
- 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 gave us recently a useful assessments of the cumulative impact (or lack of it) of EC Technical Assistance on Romania31. Ionitsa is one of several who has gone so far as to suggest that the resources involved in Technical Assistance actually strenghtens the forces of pre-modernity in the country.32

A paper33 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

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28 although The World Bank's published a major evaluation in 2008 – <u>Public Sector Reform; What works and why?</u>
http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/EXTOED/EXTPUBSECREF/0,,menuPK:4664077~pagePK:64829575~piPK:64829612~theSitePK:4663904,00.html

29 http://www.sigmaweb.org/dataoecd/45/2/34862245.pdf

30 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.

31 http://pdc.ceu.hu/archive/00002856/01/craciun_f2j.pdf

32 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.

33 "Hard cases and improving governance; Putin and civil service reform" by Pat Grey (2004)

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 reforms34, 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 tring 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?35 – 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 allowes 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 a clear explanation for this".

**Civil Service reform**
The recent SIGMA paper on the undermining of civil service agences in some of the new EU member states36 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 -

34 International Public Administration  Reform – implications for the Russian Federation (World Bank  2004) http://books.google.com/books?id=iyH3MA48kQAC&printsec=frontcover&hl=ro&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false
35 http://books.google.com/books?id=ZiHCCR1JxogC&printsec=frontcover&hl=ro&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false
36 http://www.rcpar.org/mediaupload/publications/2009/20100311_SIGMA_sustainability_of_CSR_in_CEE.pdf

4.5 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 enugh 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.

4.6 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 acquis enforcement bodies of interim solutions such as the promotion of rule-driven behaviour as a democratic value over efficiency as a managerial value37.

**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 38. 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 him39 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

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[37] http://www.rcpar.org/mediaupload/publications/2010/20100311_SIGMA_can_reforms_last.pdf
[38] http://abahlali.org/files/Heller%202001%20Moving%20the%20State%20The%20Politics%20of%20Democratic%20Decentralization%20in%20Kerala%20South%20Africa%20and%20Porto%20Alegre.pdf
[39] http://yimd.org/documents/T/the_sequencing_fallacy-_how_democracies_emerge.pdf

which looked at the experience and discussion of the past decade with rule-of-law projects40. 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 201041

**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"42. The title of another Corruption and Anti-corruption – do donors have the right approach? 43 reflects the despair many feel about these efforts44.

**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 chance
- 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
- 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.

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40 http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/Rule_of_Law_Temptations.pdf
41 http://apps.americanbar.org/rol/perspectives_10/transitions_to_the_rule_of_law_by_francis_fukuyama.pdf
42 Anti-corruption Approaches; a literature review (Norad 2009)
43 http://www.humansecuritygateway.com/documents/CMI_corruptionanticorruptioneffortsaid.pdf
44 2 recent useful papers on the situation in ex-communist countries are  "Anti-corruption – what do we know? Research ion 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
and The politics of scandal: Political time horizons, organisational life cycles, and anti-corruption agencies in the 'new' EU member states by Agnes Batory (CEU 2010)
 http://soc.kuleuven.be/io/egpa/org/2010Toul/Papers/Agnes_Batory_EGPA%202010.pdf

How these problems might be overcome is an issue I have developed in a separate paper45.


# 11. Implications for the Institution-building agenda

11.1 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 Europe46, 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 Vaslev 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." 47
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 salutory 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 logframe48 – and I will return to this point in the conclusion to this paper.

## 11.2 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 –although it has published one Guidance note on the subject49 – as did the newly-established OECD committee on the subject in 2006. 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. The OECD in 1999 when it commissioned a whole set of studies to explore the HOW of

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45 available on my website - http://www.freewebs.com/publicadminreform/
46 http://books.google.com/books?id=obx2BX91FQUC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false
47 Is Europe's democratic Revolution Over? http://www.tol.org/client/article/22386-is-europes-democratic-revolution-over.html
48 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
49 http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/multimedia/publications/publications/manuals-tools/t106_en.htm

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".50 And perhaps the most useful recent assessment is the World Bank's Governance Reforms under real world conditions 51 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"52.

**Box 11; Some 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

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50 http://books.google.com/books?id=iyH3MA48kQAC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false
51 http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTGOVACC/Resources/GovReform_ebook.pdf
52 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 12; 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 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 life53.

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 neutralised54.

**11.3 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 NISPAcee 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.

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 noone ever carries out critical assessments of their world. They

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53 In 1970, Donald Schon coined the phrase "dynamic conservatism" in <u>Beyond the Stable State</u> to describe the strength of these forces in an organisation.
54 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

commission or preside over countless inquiries into all the other systems of society – but rarely does their world come under proper scrutiny55. 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".

## 11.4 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 focused on in section 9  - and too few actually sharing their experiences. We need a road map – and more dialogue!

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55 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 junuir Minister to reveal how pointless these roles had been.

# 12. 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"56.

12.1 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 oganisations 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

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56 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 advise 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 Weltanschaung gave them! The greed of the financial system has now brought the welfare systems of the older EU member states close to collapse.

### 12.2 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 institutions57
Institutions grow – and noone really understands that process
Administrative reform has little basis in scientific evidence58. 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 metaphor59 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.

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57 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
58 See the 99 contradictory proverbs underlying it which Hood and Jackson identified in their (out of print) 1999 book
59 see Gareth Morgan's Images of Organisation for more

Table 4; 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 consultants60 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!


**12.3 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 Wheatley61 and in the development community on the implications of complexity theory reflected in  UK's Overseas Development Institute.62
They could do worse than study Robert Quinn's book Changing the World63 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

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60 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.
61 See Ackoff's Little Book of  F Laws (2006); and Wheatley's Management Science and Complexity Theory (2001)
62 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
63 http://business.unr.edu/faculty/simmonsb/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 trening".  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".

# 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 Procustean 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, noone 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 inderstanding 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 Alaister 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.

Hopefully my next post will be able to make proper use of all of these references!!

# 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…….

## 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.
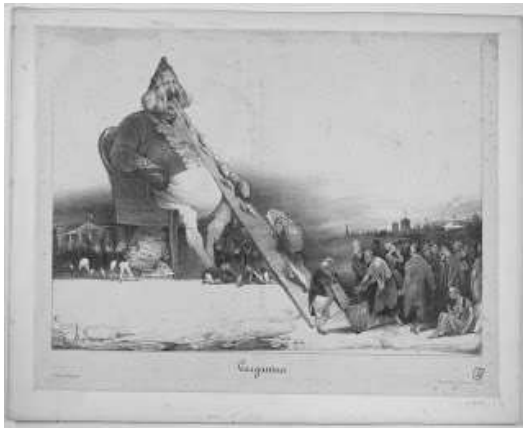How, then, should Greece solve the problem? The OECD proposes a "big bang approach" -- meaning a massive administrative restructuring. And, co-author Varley says, it needs to happen quickly. "*Greece has only a small window of time to change and reform itself*," she told Die Welt. "*And it is getting 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 down-town 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 disbursal 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 epople 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 2007-2113 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, for the Cohesion Consultations and Concepts – preparing 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 indictors 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 Googlescholar 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 amost immediately became chair of the European Parliament's Committee on Regional Development (!!)
The other document was a report she had commissed - 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 amost 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.*

# Conclusion

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 mabuals 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.

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_FINAL_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 sociology[2], 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 bycrowding 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 andvideo

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.gsdrc.org/docs/open/reading-packs/PublicServiceReformRP.pdf
http://technologygovernance.eu/files/main/2013050112501515.pdf

# 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.coprbm.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
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. Its 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/B00GHJK1O8

http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=Ffv9AQAAQBAJ&pg=PA247&lpg=PA247&dq=chris+shore,+european+union&source=bl&ots=mg1k0XC32r&sig=hUw-XfjpvF0WEM9Y5zK6SrpRHZc&hl=en&sa=X&ei=jBllVOizAc6rafnUgLgJ&ved=0CCoQ6AEwAzgU#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

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

There are, he writes, serious "limitations on the ability to transfer existing knowledge about institutional construction and reform to developing countries…. But the problem is in fact even worse: The international community is not simply limited in the amount of capacity it can build; it is actually complicit in the destruction of institutional capacity in many developing countries." African "development" since decolonization is a case in point.

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).
For most of the first 25 years of my working life I developed a strategy for a Regional government system which was responsible for half of Scotland's population – a strategy which was then taken up by the new Scottish government in 1999 and which is now still operational.

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

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"?