

MISSIONARIES, MERCENARIES OR (WITCH)DOCTORS? Is administrative reform in transition countries a religion, a business or a medicine?

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This paper was initially produced as a result of discussions with David Coombes while we were both working (on different projects) in Bishkek in 2005. It was concerned to share with a wider audience the deep concerns about the shape and results of admin reform work in transition countries I had been feeling for the previous decade - and to encourage some discussions about remedies. I am grateful to David for the stimulus and encouragement -although he bears no responsibility for its poetic excesses. Although some people may consider that the deficiencies of TA are well known, my extensive reading over the past decade has not unearthed more than a handful of papers on this topic - all of which tend to argue that the problem is predominantly one of the wrong sorts of advisers using the wrong products. This paper argues that this does not go far enough and that a better strategy needs more than just more appropriate advisers and products.

1. Introduction

1.1 The system in which we work

Diagram one is a crude attempt to map the various factors which have a bearing on the issue of administrative reform in countries in which we work in Technical Assistance programmes.

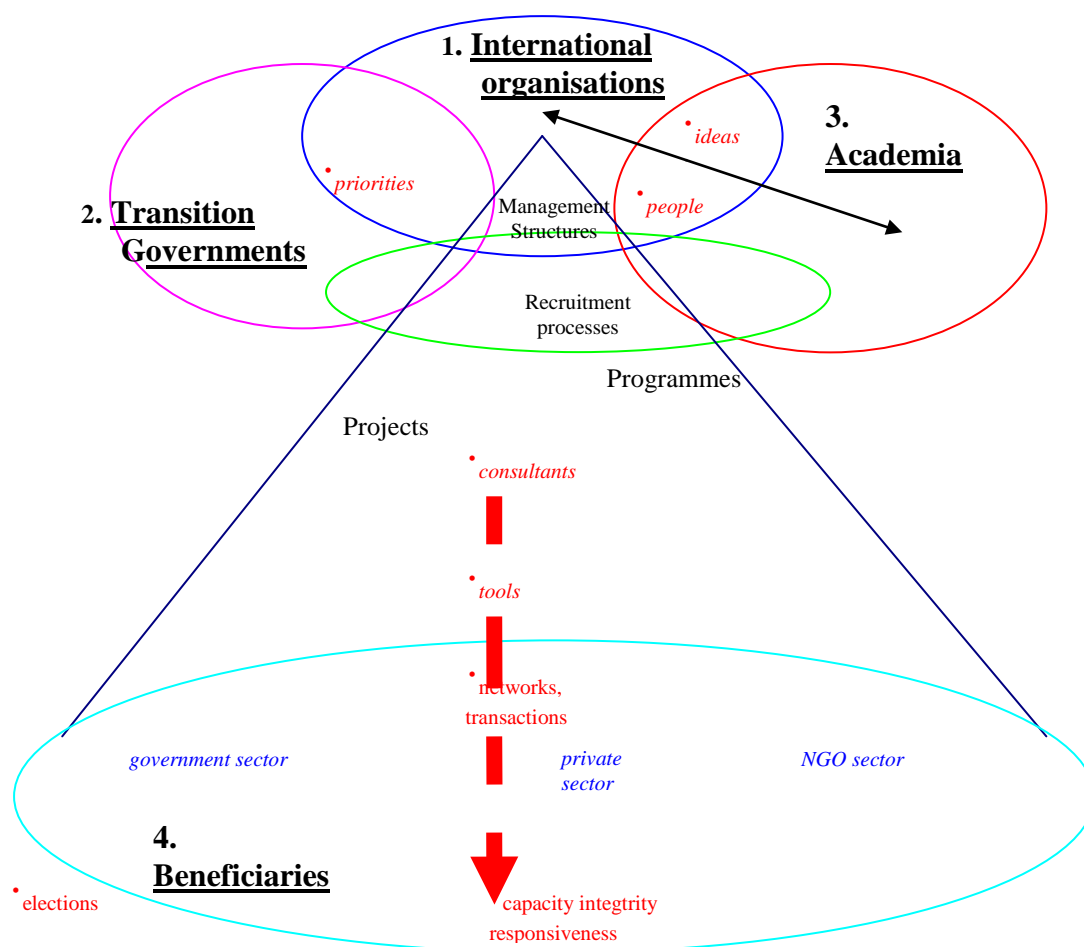
The structure chosen by EU for its TA is understandable for a system which tries to minimise its personnel costs - projects defined by logframe and procured by competitive tendering. But the results are problematic-

- Inflexibility
- Mismatch between needs and what is supplied
- Little organisational learning (despite - or perhaps because of - a complex monitoring and evaluation system)

On the other hand, those with experience can make the system more flexible than it appears¹. And the lack of hierarchical control does give more scope for unorthodox approaches and thinking than is apparent in the international bureaucracies. As a mercenary - rather than a World Bank or UNDP missionary - I welcome this opportunity to report that not only are the generals and politicians supplying us with dud weapons but that we are fighting the wrong war.

¹ Here I would like to pay tribute to the various EU desk officers I have had all of whom have been very supportive. In particular I would like to mention Gordon Purvis and Taru Kernisalu

Diagram 1; map



1.2 The context in which we work

Of course, Central Asia is different from Central Europe - and each country indeed has its specificities. In some places, the carrot of EU accession has been sufficient to motivate reform - in others it has not. In many of the countries I have worked in recently, there has been no strong incentive for administrative reform - survival and ethnic struggle has been more of a reality. The concept of "failed states" has now made an entrance - spawning its own literature, acronyms and experts². During one of my assignments I wrote the following (confidential) assessment of the context in which I was working - "country x falls into the "slow and reluctant" category for political, administrative and economic reform. Its system can be defined as

- Centralised/feudal
- Closed
- corrupt

It is 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

² See Carment for overview.

- the **absence of conditions for the new local government system** make it no more than a paper exercise
- it has, however, **feudal** elements inasmuch as Ministers - although without policy-making powers - have a very strong position

It is 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
- Elections are fixed; It is **difficult for independent-minded reformers to stand for election**
- **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)
- **Censorship** is widespread - whether formal or informal through media being owned and controlled by government and administration figures

It is corrupt in that significant numbers of -

- Key government and administrative **positions** are bought
- students can and do buy educational **qualifications**
- public officials (are expected to) accept informal payments for **special favours**
- senior administrative figures have substantial and active economic interests"

The table below puts it more crisply -

Table 1;

Institution	Comment	Extent of reform effort
Political executive	Centralised and opaque. Baronial system.	Non-existent
Parliament	Low - elections controlled; and not permitted to change draft laws from President	Minimal
Judiciary	Still not independent	Good TA - but Ministry of Justice a laggard
Media	Strong state control (formal and informal)	Non-existent
Civil service	Positions bought and appointments made on grace and favour basis	Civil Service Agency established on paper
State bodies	Corrupt and insensitive to public need	Ministry of Taxation and Min of Foreign Affairs making efforts
Local government	elections controlled; No real powers	Non-existent
Civil society	Major registration problems	
University	Examinations and Degrees are bought by more than half of the students	Minimal

2. The Tools

Nobody had ever lived through this triple transformation (Markets, nations, democracy) ever before. People had been writing profusely about the transition from capitalism to communism - but not the other way around. The collapse of communism was a great shock. Few - except the Poles and Hungarians³ - were at all prepared for it. And understanding such systems change requires a vast array of different intellectual disciplines - and sub-disciplines - and who is trained to make sense of them all⁴? The apparently irreversible trend toward greater and greater specialisation of the social sciences places more power in the hands of technocrats⁵ and disables politicians from serious involvement in the discourse of the international bodies who therefore engage in the reconstruction of other country's state systems with no effective challenge - from any source. Strange that these are the very people who preach about accountability and corruption!!!

2.1 inhabited by 3 different species

David and I have spotted at least three very different schools of operation amongst our colleagues -

The "**liberal**" perspective can be found in constitutional literature and mainstream political science writing about the workings of liberal democracy - where the "public good" is achieved by free peoples voting in and out politicians who form governments (national and local) - advised by neutral and honest civil servants. Government policies (and reputations) are subject to constant and detailed scrutiny by a large community of pressure groups, researchers and media.

The "**neo-liberal**" perspective is economic - talks about "state capture" and "rent-seeking" - and advises that the public good is best achieved by the role of the state being minimised and the role of the market and contracts maximised.

The "**functionalist**" lens is more anthropological - and starts with an attempt to understand who is actually doing what - regardless of whether they are "legitimate" or "effective" players according to the constitutional and economic models which dominate donor thinking. Its interventions are pragmatic - using change management perspectives (Carnall).

An army of economic experts from the second battalion had the bit between the teeth from the privatisation which had swept the world in the 1990s - and was looking for a new challenge! So no humility was on display. They knew what had to be done! And the bodies which employed them (such as the IMF and World Bank) were international and therefore protected from effective challenge - although for those who cared to read the numerous critiques of their work⁶, their record and structure of ways of managing programmes and personnel was highly questionable. In Central Europe, of course, such bodies had to share the place at the table with the European Union - whose fiefdom this was - and with EBRD. As has been well documented by Santos, however, the EU, however, despite all the vacuous rhetoric of common administrative space⁷,

³ who, with other countries admitted in 2004, had experienced these systems earlier in the 20th century!

⁴ Elster and Offe

⁵ JR Saul is one of the few who have tried to expose this

⁶ the critiques are too numerous to mention - starting from Susan George and Fabrizio Sabelli Faith and Credit - the World Bank's Secular Empire (Penguin 1994) through to Reinventing the World Bank (Ithaca 2002). See also article "Our poverty is a world full of dreams; reforming the World Bank" by Catherine Weaver and Ralf Leiteritz in Global Governance; a review of multilateralism and international organisations

⁷ see paper in SIGMA series

has no intellectual line⁸ of its own and simply follows the "intellectual" lead of international bodies such as the World Bank. So even the EU was slow to wake up the significance of a strong and effective machinery of state.

When it did, accession was the name of the game and legitimised a rather "imperial" approach to public administration reform - with accession countries required to learn the *Acquis Commaunitaire*⁹ and annual report cards. EU "experts" (of varying background and levels of expertise) found themselves working on programmes restructuring Ministries and helping introduce and implement civil service laws. Others in civil service training. But far too quickly the EU decided to make accession (rather than development) the driving force of its technical assistance. At that stage it was patently obvious to those who knew countries such as Romania and Slovakia that the culture of patronage and corruption was so deeply embedded in these systems that Ministry twinning¹⁰ was no answer. But we were only experts in the field - employed by companies on contract to the EU - mercenaries. And who listens to mercenaries? And yet the management theory of the time was preaching the importance of the bosses listening to the views of their workers in the field. But such a view is and remains anathema to the elite culture of the Commission¹¹.

Further afield in Russia and Central Asia, the Washington consensus had full rein. And what a disaster it has been¹²! Initially, of course, there was no talk of administrative reform. The language was functional transfer or, more euphemistically, review. The central state was to be stripped - and its assets transferred ideally to something called the private sector. This line went down well with the apparachtniks who were well placed to benefit - so "local ownership" was clearly in place! As it slowly dawned on these zealots that market transactions did require some element of regularity and legality - otherwise society reverted to banditry - the academics discovered the writings of people like North¹³ and Schick and started to allow some experts in to help construct some of the machinery of government which is required to ensure the minimum level of social trust required for economic transactions.

2.2 Some results

State bodies (at all levels) in many transition countries have been regarded by the international community as so contaminated with soviet centralist thinking and corrupt informal coping practices as to be beyond hope. The strategy of international donors during the 1990s to avoid working with or through them. Instead they channelled assistance to building up the private and NGO sectors¹⁴.

- The privatisation process has been very extensively documented. Different models were followed in different countries - and worked more or less satisfactorily depending on the local context. In much of Central Europe, the process and outcomes were, given the

⁸ It is quite scandalous, given the scale of money spent by the EU on the topic, that the EU has no lead experts exercising any leadership or quality control over, for example, the ToR drafted in this field.

⁹ basic subjects were access to regional funds, project management. For the advanced there were recondite subjects such as comitology

¹⁰ Giving accession countries a civil servant from a matching Ministry in a member country. To such people, giving advice was a novel experience, let alone to countries so different from their own.

¹¹ Although I was very impressed in the 1980s with the openness of the Delors regime to the views and role of local government

¹² for a definition and history see Gore. For the definitive critique, see Stiglitz.

¹³ for a summary see "The Theoretical Core of the new institutionalism" by Ellen Immergut *Politics and Society* vol 26 no 1 March 1998 (available via google scholar)

¹⁴ The various Annual World Bank Reports charted this process of thinking.

novelty of the process, not excessively contentious¹⁵. But the selected methods and context in Russia combined to create a criminal class able to buy anything - including elections¹⁶.

- And most NGOs in transition countries - funded as they are by the international community - are not NGOs as we know them. They have, rather, been a combination of entrep bodies or fronts to disburse money to causes acceptable to donors.
- In the accession countries, serious efforts at administrative reform only really started in the late 1990s - and still receive very little serious attention in Central Asia. And it is only in the last few years that a real effort has started in Russia to try to build up a civil service system which serves the state rather than its own interests¹⁷.

2.3 intellectual signposts

The website set up by the World Bank, UNDP and others¹⁸, although useful, as an introductory tour of some tools for admin reform, tantalises rather than instructs. And the voluminous Manual on PAR produced in 2004 by the Asian Development Bank¹⁹ - which one would imagine to offer some perspectives on the Asian context - disappoints. A lot of the World Bank papers take a statistical approach to problems and try to identify correlations - presumably because it employs so many people with econometric qualifications and because its mission does not (technically) allow it to get into political matters²⁰. However staff such as Shephard have bravely asked critical questions. Nick Manning has been an indefatigable writer prepared to write in an accessible way about his work - and Tony Verheijen's papers have also been very helpful to those of us in the field as we struggled to make sense of our work.

2.4 A-historical approaches

One would have thought that before rushing into transition countries, donors and experts might have asked themselves the basic question about the process by which their own economic and political institutions were constructed. But the economist thinking which was then so rampant has no place for history - only the latest nostra and equations. Joon Chang has been one of a few prepared to challenge with proper analysis the facile assumptions of the various economic and political prescriptions which lay inside the advice offered by World Bank advisers²¹.

David's paper, for example, makes the very correct point that elections themselves are not the defining feature of democracy. The Government system in a democracy is made up of several structures or systems each of which has a distinctive role. It is this **sharing of responsibilities** - in a context of free and open dialogue - which ideally gives democratic systems their strength - particularly in

- Producing and testing ideas
- Checking the abuses of power
- Ensuring public acceptance of the political system - and the decisions which come from it.

¹⁵ this is, of course, a very sweeping statement - with exception in certain countries and sectors. In Bulgaria and Romania the process was highly contentious - and Gatzweiler and Hagedorn, amongst others, argue that land privatisation was highly deficient (in "People, Institutions and Agroecosystems in Transition").

¹⁶ The most accessible account is Freeland. See also Black and Tarassova

¹⁷ "Hard cases and improving governance; Putin and civil service reform" by Pat Grey (2004)

¹⁸ www.worldbank.org/publicsector/civilservice

¹⁹ Available on their website

²⁰ Clearly it does in fact engage in very high politics - but has had to invent a new technical jargon and literature to conceal this.

²¹ But I have also recently come across the excellent collection of essays on rule of law programmes by Carothers.

The key institutions for a democratic system are -

- A **political executive** - whose members are elected and whose role is to set the policy agenda- that is develop a strategy (and make available the laws and resources) to deal with those issues which it feels need to be addressed.
- A freely elected **legislative Assembly** - whose role is to ensure (i) that the merits of new legislation and policies of the political Executive are critically and openly assessed; (ii) that the performance of government and civil servants is held to account; and (iii) that, by the way these roles are performed, the public develop confidence in the workings of the political system.
- An independent **Judiciary** - which ensures that the rule of Law prevails, that is to say that no-one is able to feel above the law.
- A free **media**; where journalists and people can express their opinions freely and without fear.
- A professional impartial **Civil Service** - whose members have been appointed and promoted by virtue of their technical ability to ensure (i) that the political Executive receives the most competent policy advice; (ii) that the decisions of the executive (approved as necessary by Parliament) are effectively implemented ; and that (iii) public services are well-managed
- The major institutions of Government - **Ministries, Regional structures (Governor and regional offices of Ministries) and various types of Agencies**. These bodies should be structured, staffed and managed in a purposeful manner
- An independent **system of local self-government** - whose leaders are accountable through direct elections to the local population²². The staff may or may not be civil servants.
- An active **civil society** - with a rich structure of voluntary associations - able to establish and operate without restriction. Politicians can ignore the general public for some time but, as the last ten years has shown, only for so long! The vitality of civil society - and of the media - creates (and withdraws) the legitimacy of political systems.
- An independent **university** system - which encourages tolerance and diversity

Such a democratic model is, of course, an "ideal-type" - a model which few (if any) countries actually match in all respects. A lot of what the global community preaches as "good practice" in government structures is actually of very recent vintage in their own countries and is still often more rhetoric than actual practice.

Of course public appointments, for example, should be taken on merit - and not on the basis of ethnic or religious networks. But Belgium and Netherlands, to name but two European examples, have a formal structure of government based, until very recently, on religious and ethnic divisions²³. In those cases a system which is otherwise rule-based and transparent has had minor adjustments made to take account of strong social realities and ensure consensus.

But in the case of countries such as Northern Ireland (until very recently), the form and rhetoric of objective administration in the public good has been completely undermined by

²² Encouraging a strong and free system of local self-government is perhaps the most difficult part of the transition process - since it means allowing forces of opposition to have a power base. But it is the way to develop public confidence in government!

²³ Ie each of Belgium's 3 Regions has a both an executive and a "community" structure - with the latter reflecting ethnic issues. Netherlands has long had its "Pillars" which ensured that the main religious forces had their say in nominations and decisions. This has now weakened.

religious divisions. All public goods (eg housing and appointments) were made in favour of Protestants.

The Italian system has for decades been notorious for the systemic abuse of the machinery of the state by various powerful groups - with eventually the Mafia itself clearly controlling some key parts of it²⁴. American influence played a powerful part in this in the post-war period - but the collapse of communism removed that influence and allowed the Italians to have a serious attempt at reforming the system - until Berlusconi intervened.

These are well-known cases - but the more we look, the more we find that countries which have long boasted of their fair and objective public administration systems have in fact suffered serious intrusions by sectional interests. The British and French indeed have invented words to describe the informal systems which has perverted the apparent neutrality of their public administration - "the old boy network"²⁵ and "pantouflage" of "ENArques"²⁶. Too much of the commentary on Central Europe and Central Asia seems oblivious to this history and these realities - and imagines that a mixture of persuasive rhetoric and arm-twisting will lead to significant changes here. The result is inappropriate mechanisms and an alienated and offended beneficiary.

3. The People - Experts and their relationships with beneficiaries

3.1 experts - not consultants

The world of consultants in administrative reform has no real identity and professional loyalties. We are either staff members of the big international donors and lenders - governed by strict rules of confidentiality and peer review - or mercenaries employed by small edgy contractors. And we generally come to the work from long practical experience in one sector in Western country - with at least four huge deficiencies -

- lacking the anthropological skills needed to understand the totally different context in which we are working;
- little comparative knowledge about how our professional field (eg local government) is dealt with in other European countries;
- absolutely no experience of consultancy!
- No sense of historical processes of development

And no attempt is made to help us recognise these deficiencies - let alone deal with them. I reckon it has taken me 10 years to reinvent myself from an academic (in urban management) and a Regional politician in Scotland to a reasonably effective midwife in transition countries for the birth of new civil service and local government systems. To perform that new role, I've had to do a lot of reading and learning about different systems of public administration and local government than the British - but know a lot of advisers who are trapped in their own national systems.

²⁴ There is a voluminous literature on this - the most lively is Peter Robb's *Midnight in Sicily* (Harvill Press 1996). For an update, read *Berlusconi's Shadow - crime, justice and the pursuit of power* by David Lane (Penguin 2005)

²⁵ published critiques of the narrow circles from which business and political leaders were drawn started in the early 1960s - but only Margaret Thatcher's rule of the 1980s really broke the power of this elite and created a meritocracy

²⁶ business, political and Civil service leaders have overwhelmingly passed through the Ecole Nationale d'Administration (ENA) and have moved easily from a top position in the Civil Service to political leadership to business leadership.

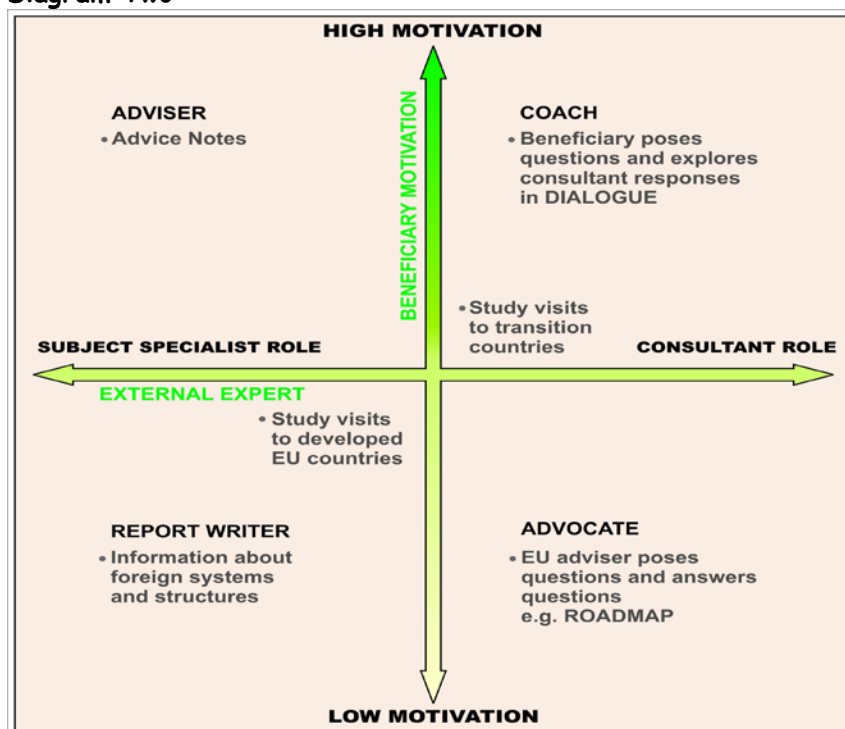
3.2 technocracy is rife

Most consultants I know are subject specialists - and university specialisation and labour markets in W Europe mean that young graduates don't get the chance to practice. The disrespect for politics and the damage passion and commitment do to career structures also filters out unorthodox thinking from those who enter the profession. In taking stock of the new skills and tools I use in my new role, some of my previous political skills have been useful (rapid analysis of new fields; political "feel"; and communications). But others have had to be unlearned very thoroughly (eg arrogant claims to legitimacy)

3.3 How can demand drive when so little is known?

Russia, it seems, has been able to develop the discipline of PA. In most other CIS countries there are few young specialists in the field - the salaries and programmes are absent which might such that young people have an incentive to get into these fields. How can one conduct administrative reform when there is not even a language for it - or when the language is only foreign?

Diagram Two



3.4 The beneficiary-expert relationship - a typology

There is now thankfully more talk of demand-driven technical assistance. But can the system deliver?

In Diagram Two I have tried to develop a typology of relationships, drawing on my recent experience.

The vertical axis indicates the attitude of the beneficiary to reform (and also the input of the foreigner) - positive at the top, negative at the bottom. The horizontal axis indicates the expertise of the "expert", on the left a subject specialist (with little experience of real consultancy which requires one to understand the needs of the customer and the local context);

on the right the rarer consultant type. This gives four types of relationships - starting with what I call the report-writer, then advocate, adviser and, finally, coach. How often, I have to ask, do you see the coach role?

4. Logic of Intervention - a confused and unaccountable system

4.1 Following fashions

The diagram in the Annex²⁷ details the various ingredients of the government reform stew - ten elements, each with about 20 categories. And each category (whether election systems, local government structures or consultative procedures) handled differently in each of the European countries. It indicates the scope for working at cross purpose - and for the problems of sequencing which Beblavy and Verheijen have discussed. Somehow, donors have had to cut through that and come to some decisions about -

- Priorities
- Specific mechanisms
- beneficiaries

Who takes these decisions - using what processes? Highly educated people no doubt - but certainly without much practical experience, it seems, of managing real change! Clearly judicial reform is a *sine qua non*. Without rule-of-law, none of the other programmes of technical assistance will work. And the introduction of new financial and economic systems - banking, stock-exchanges, bankruptcy and financial management and control systems, customs and taxation - have been clearly the priorities for institutional development. This paper is not concerned with those fundamental aspects - but rather with the more classic issues for public administration or "governance" of coordination, effectiveness and public interest.

In the EU, the drafting of project terms of reference (ToR) is a notoriously random process leading often to poorly designed projects whose ToR have to be significantly amended. This has happened in both of my most recent projects. I am not so familiar with the processes of other donors. Bilateral work does seem to be more focussed (and long-term) but the frustrations in field offices of international donors with their bureaucratic planning systems indicate problems at the opposite end of the spectrum from those of EU TA.

But both seem to create the same sorts of problems. Take one recent example - in one country where local government exists in name only - such is the emphasis the donors now place on the mantra of accountability and governance that their "assistance" to local government takes the form of -

- "Monitoring and evaluation" - of policies which actually don't exist
- "municipal budget transparency" projects with local community groups when no municipal budgets exist
- "report cards" on local public services which simply don't exist.

Gajduschek and Hajnal gave us one of the very few comprehensive and public assessments of TA in PHARE countries; and a recent report from International Crisis Group has also given a good overview²⁸ of the problems in Tacis countries.

²⁷ Borrowed with thanks from Guy Hollis of Nicolaas Witsen Foundation

²⁸ Although its suggestion that local companies should be used more (which is actually EU policy) fails to appreciate that these (like NGOs) simply ape the defective thinking criticised in this paper.

4.2 Lack of checks on the logic of interventions

One assignment required me to help a country implement the Civil Service Law which had been passed 2 years earlier²⁹. The Law had been drafted by international experts but was not being implemented simply because very few people knew what it was for - it had been passed simply to keep the international community happy. The ultimate purpose of a Civil Service Law is to develop public confidence in government service. But there are various ways in which this might be done - and a particular law will emphasise one of these approaches more than others. Poorly-drafted laws will embody contradictory theories about how to achieve the ultimate goal. The various arguments are summarised in the table -

Table 2;

Injunction	Reasoning
Make recruitment open and competitive	A more representative system will be trusted more
Pay well	Minimise temptation
Give good training	It is performance which inspires trust
Check the performance - and promote the performers	Ditto
Have a code of ethics - and enforce it	Moral persuasion Public standards which will shame officials into changing behaviour
Have strong leader cadre	Behaviour of senior executives services as an example - "walk the talk"

This table shows the different types of reasoning involved and reminds us that people have various reasons for behaving the way they do - obedience to the law is only one of the reasons.

If we wish to change people's behaviour, we should look at all options - and, where behaviour patterns are strong, we often need to use a battery of mechanisms. The next table illustrates some of these -

Table 3

Motivating Factor	Example of tool	Particular mechanism
Understanding	Training Campaigns Functional review	Rational persuasion Factual analysis
Commitment	Leadership Communications Training	Legitimisation
Personal Benefit	Pay increases Bonus Winning an award	Monetary calculation Psychological Status
Personal Cost	Named as poor performer Demotion Report cards	Psychological (Shame) Monetary

²⁹ Our project was supposed, of course, to have arrived much earlier!

Obligation	Law Action plan Family ties	Courts Managerial authority Social pressure
Peer influence	Bribery Quality circles	Pressure Support
Social influence	Opinion surveys	Feedback from public about service quality

Clearly some of these approaches work in some countries – but not in others. Performance bonuses, for example, just don't work in societies whose values stress the group and community. And styles of leadership (and follower-ship!) vary enormously in countries.

I have to question how carefully such issues are explored when ToR are drafted! Of course donors will have their country profiles – and often their manuals on what they consider (at that moment) "works" in various sectors. But this does not mean that these are read and understood. And I know this is an issue not just for the EU – not so long ago I sat at a meeting in Central Asia with a (visiting) World Bank expert who announced one of their initiatives in the country with reference to it having worked well in Pakistan.

4.3 An Alice in Wonderland awards system

The procurement methods used by donors are not exactly calculated to obtain consultants who will "make a difference". A points system is used to evaluate bids for projects which marks for –

- Project methodology
- Staff experience
- Financial bid

The first is often written by junior personnel back in Western Europe specially trained in this arcane skill in a contracting company³⁰ – the first the Team Leader sees it is when he arrives in the country to start the project. And, in any event, it can be thrown into the bin since the Team Leader has to write an inception report which takes proper account of the situation.

Nonetheless this methodology accounts for more than 50% of the points awarded by evaluation panels to the competitive bids.

"Key experts" are then assessed – but only in relation to the particular qualities which have been specified. And these are about the location and length of the experts' experience – never for the quality of their team management, initiative, commitment or professional outputs. To seek references indeed is off-limits! And yet these, surely, are precisely the features of a potential team we need to know about in the selection of personnel for a project. The private sector would never allow itself to be hamstrung by such nonsense. But such a system prevails when the interests of the beneficiary are given no consideration.

4.4 Control and performance management

It is highly ironic that we use an instrument of such Soviet pseudo-rationality as the logframe³¹ in the transition countries!! It is doubly ironic for those of us who are supposed to be bringing a more flexible approach to public administration. Do the designers of such instruments not realise that its use sends such a powerful message about administrative methods as

³⁰ Although I readily admit that the more established companies take this more seriously. It is the smaller "cowboys" who should be ejected from the system.

³¹ See Lucy Earle's paper "Lost in the matrix; the Logframe and the local picture" –given at INTRAC's 5th Conference on Evaluation in 2003 for an interesting comparison of the rational and anthropological approaches to consultancy

threatens to undermine all the training done in our projects? But part of the problem is that no one can really take such responsibility.....

Why are the subjects of the "risks" in the logframe of our projects always on the beneficiary side? Why is there never any reference to badly-designed projects, of too short a duration - with inappropriate foreign experts? After all, it is these latter factors as much as local conditions which make technical assistance projects that much less effective than they might have been. And do we realise how much of the limited time of top-level advisers TA takes. I work closely at the moment with the Head of one national municipal association and he seems to spend half his day meeting such people.

5. Breaking the hubris of social science

The title of this paper asks a question - a rather rhetorical, if not ironic, one perhaps. My argument has been that the TA system in this field of administrative reform cannot be conducted like a business, religion³² or surgery. Too many programmes and projects are designed out of context in a high-handed manner (counter to basic principles of organisational consultancy) by highly trained people in highly bureaucratic organisations who have little direct experience of the messy nature of real change. What they produce are the typical products of rationalist mentality - which no amount of tinkering can make more effective.

I suggest that this presents those of us who have got involved in these programmes of advising governments in these countries with a real moral challenge. After all, we are daring to advise these countries construct effective organisations - we are employed by organisations supposed to have the expertise in how to put systems together to ensure that appropriate intervention strategies emerge to deal with the organisational and social problems of these countries. We are supposed to have the knowledge and skills to help develop appropriate knowledge and skills in others! But how many of us can give positive answers to the following 5 questions? -

- Do the organisations which pay us practice what they and we preach on the ground about good organisational principles?
- Does the knowledge and experience we have as individual consultants actually help us identify and implement interventions which fit the context in which we are working?
- Do we have the skills to make that happen?
- What are the bodies which employ consultants doing to explore such questions - and to deal with the deficiencies which I dare to suggest would be revealed?
- Do any of us have a clue about how to turn kleptocratic regimes into systems that recognise the meaning of public service?³³

Innumerable initiatives in innumerable countries over decades have shown a far more powerful and effective way of building capacity - based less on technocratic approaches and more on working pragmatically at different levels on appropriate developments defined by the beneficiaries.

During the 1990s, when new economic, electoral, financial and parliamentary systems were being constructed from scratch, it was reasonable to insist that foreign experts with the knowledge of those systems were needed to take the lead in transition countries. And as accession countries neared the point of accession, it was reasonable to insist that civil servants from the

³² At least not in the dogmatic sense - although, as Harrison argues, consultants do perhaps need to have more "love"

³³ Anti-corruption strategies have, of course, become very fashionable in the international community - but seem to me a good example of a mechanism which serves the interests of donors (jobs) and beneficiary countries who have such strategies wished upon them. For the latter it gives the pretence of action and also fits with the traditional culture of rhetorical exhortation.

matching EU Ministries should come and tell the transition Ministries how to work the *Acquis Commaunitaire*. But the task of making these systems actually work and achieve public benefit in the conditions which operate in CIS countries requires a very different approach.

As I was thinking about how to draw an end to this paper, two things caught my attention. First was the table below – taken from the latest book of 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. Sadly, few younger consultants³⁴ in the field of admin reform (particularly NPM ones!) are familiar with the development literature (Tribe and Summer). The table maps out four different philosophies of development.

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)

The unease some of us (Coombes) 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! I have a dreadful feeling, for example, that the whole process of Accession means that too much time has been spent on incestuous activities in and between state bodies – and that the citizen is forgotten except when the dangerous language of subsidiarity and transparency are used. George Orwell would have had a field day in the way such words are used as a substitute for thought!

³⁴ 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.

And certainly the project basis of the Technical Assistance of the European Commission (EC) dooms much of the work described in this paper to failure (Coombes; Morgan; Young). Some parts of the EC do understand these issues - but the compartmentalisation which followed the restructuring of the recent Commission has meant that the thinking of the Development side of the EC stops at the door of RELEX which handles the short-term contracts which govern this work in transition countries. This is a topic which figures strongly in the second paper which fortuitously came to my attention - the 2004 SIGMA overview of PA in the Balkans - written ironically precisely at the time the procurement (rather than development) philosophy won the day in Brussels³⁵.

The conclusions of that 2004 paper offer an excellent way of ending this one. "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 goes 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 old³⁶
- 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

6. Changing people or systems?

Crisis management - and financial and moral corruption - are some of the presenting features of all centralised systems. How does one change such cultures? This is the fundamental issue³⁷ which has to be tackled before administrative reform will readily take hold. Where are there examples of highly centralised societies developing systems of staff involvement in the improvement of services. 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 Deming whose statistically based approach to "quality management" so transformed Japanese - and, ultimately and ironically, - American industry. Before then, organisational structures had the same features of subservience as CIS countries.

This raises the conundrum - is it people who change systems? Or systems which change people? Answers tend to run on ideological grounds - individualists tend to say the former; social democrats the latter. And both are right! Change begins with a single step, an inspiring story, a champion. But, unless the actions "resonate" with society, they will be dismissed as mavericks, "ahead of their time".

³⁵ see also Santiso (2004)

³⁶ 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.

³⁷ The other, related, one is that of the lack of management systems in state bodies.

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.

Some preconditions of change?

Formal and informal systems are a well-recognised fact of organizational life³⁸. 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
- 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 neutralised³⁹. This is sound advice - and such an exercise may sometimes suggest that certain aspects of reform should be delayed. A paper⁴⁰ on the Russian experience of civil service reform is one of the few to try to offer an explanation of how the combination of specific internal and external factors has constrained the reform process in that particular country eg variable political leadership and support; variable administrative leadership and capacity; political and social instability; minimal civil society; the preponderance of old apparatchniks; cultural factors; and 'windows of opportunity'

"Cultural factors" is a general term which includes the role of the extended family⁴¹ which undercuts competitive hiring practices. And it is well known that in such societies, public positions which give access to lucrative revenue flows are bought at huge sums of money⁴². Such practices hardly give promising preconditions⁴³ for introducing a competitive system of meritocratic recruitment to the civil service! Civil Service Reform in CIS countries needs

- widespread acceptance that change is needed
- spurred on by an event
- some workable propositions

³⁸ In 1970, Donald Schon coined the phrase "dynamic conservatism" in Beyond the Stable State to describe the strength of these forces in an organisation.

³⁹ see the useful discussion in Lovell's paper on "Gaining Support" by which uses the dimensions of "agreement to change" and "trust" to distinguish allies, adversaries, bedfellows, opponents and fence sitters

⁴⁰ "Hard cases and improving governance; Putin and civil service reform" by Pat Grey (2004)

⁴¹ see the paper "The role of Clans in post-independence state-building in Central Asia" by Janna Khagai (2004 ECPR conference paper available at www.essex.ac.uk/ECPR/events/jointsessions/)

⁴² an extended article on the Uzbek system by Dmitry Pashkun of the National University of Uzbekistan quotes prices of \$2 million for the position of regional governor is published in the spring 2004 issue of NISPAcee News - at www.nispa.sk

⁴³ The "strategies and sequencing" section of the very useful World Bank website on Administrative and Civil Service reform contains a fuller discussion of this, developing a typology with the twin axes of capability and motivation. This can be found in - www.worldbank.org/publicsector/civilservice

- an action plan
- a lead structure
- with skilled change agents

Windows of opportunity

The point about such windows is that they have to be prepared for – and recognised when they arrive!! The public administration reforms of Poland and Hungary were, arguably, as effective they were because of the extent of preparation by reformers⁴⁴ during the 1980s – in isolation from the power structure. Why such reforms were not effective in Kyrgyzstan in the last period of President Akaev's rule despite the scale of foreign assistance is still an open question. But perhaps one explanation is the failure to establish a local analytical capacity in universities and consultancies. Without a vocabulary and conceptual framework for reform, efforts to create a purposeful administrative system will stumble from crisis to crisis.

7. In-conclusion

"I don't care what you know. I want to know how much you care!" A Romanian colleague in 1992

In a sadly out of print and much neglected book, Hood and Jackson suggested more striking metaphors we use in our thinking about organisations –

Table 5;

	1. Military Stereotype⁴⁵	2. Business Stereotype	3. Religious Stereotype⁴⁶
Slogan	Run it like the army	Run it like a business	Run it like a monastic order
Work force	Limited career	Hired and fired	Service for life
Motivation	Fear of punishment Hope of honours	Fear of dismissal Hope for money	Fear of damnation Hope for salvation
Control	Audit of war	Impersonal	Faith; social acceptance
Objective setting	Orders of day	Profit	Worked out at length in discussion and reflection
Belief	Obedience to leadership brings efficiency	Incentives to reduce waste and search for innovations	Lifetime internal commitment limits rash selfish ideas

Earlier I posed the question of how the various voices for genuine reform in these countries can become a catalytic force for change – and what is the legitimate role in this of donors? These are huge questions which this paper cannot deal with. But they are critical questions which are at last beginning to be raised. I would ask that those of you who have read this far and are interested in pursuing such questions – and the others raised in this paper – to contact me – at bakuron2003@yahoo.co.uk .

⁴⁴ See unique account written in the book by insider Regulski of the almost 20 years of preparation and change which went into the construction of the Polish local government system (available on the LGI Budapest website).

⁴⁵ which is as good a summary of the legalistic culture of CIS systems as we will find!

⁴⁶ A good summary of the classic civil service!

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Government Administrative Reform Agenda - a Conceptual Framework

