

**Play the long game – not the  
logframe – why the EC’s Backbone  
strategy does not measure up**

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## Executive Summary

*„Most deep institutional dysfunctions are not technical matters; they are embedded in the political system. If a bureaucracy is prone to corruption or patronage it is because some powerful politician finds it in his or her interest to have things that way. Therefore, if you treat public-sector reform as a kind of technical issue, you will never get anywhere because you will not address the underlying political incentives.”*  
Fukiyama

This paper is written by someone who has worked for 2 decades on EU funded projects in institution building (particularly at the core of government) in post-communist countries – and who presented a critical paper to the 2006 NISPAcee Conference about his experiences.<sup>1</sup> That paper criticised various aspects of the EC procurement system for Technical Assistance<sup>2</sup> (TA) but also had some brief remarks about the assumptions behind the institution-building work done under the programme - eg

- the focus of the EC on European Administrative Space and on accession had blinded it to the problems of institution building in other contexts eg in Neighbourhood Policy countries;
- the model of good governance being thrust upon „beneficiaries” by the international community was unrealistic<sup>3</sup>

In 2007 the European Court of Auditors published a critical assessment of the EC programme of Technical Cooperation which echoed most of my 2006 concerns. In 2008 the EC responded with a Backbone Strategy which seems to boil down to one analytical statement and four injunctions – namely that *the system of Technical Assistance is fine; it's people (implementation) that screw up.*

Two sets of questions need to be separated – the first about **how procedurally** the procurement system might be improved to get a better match of needs and consultants. The second question is the more profound **“what?” one** – the nature of the knowledge and skill base which a consultant operating in the very specific context of Neighbourhood Countries needs to do effective work in administrative reform. The “what” question requires us to face up to the following sorts of questions –

- What were the forces and levers 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 countries whose systems are more akin to kleptocracy?
- Why do we encourage new states to introduce policy tools which don't even work in our own countries?

The EC's Backbone Strategy for the reform of TA is little more than bureaucratic tinkering to satisfy the (highly limited) concerns of auditors. The strategy doesn't even raise the fundamental WHAT questions. TA based on project management and competitive tendering is fatally flawed – imagining that short-term services procured randomly by competitive company bidding can develop the sort of trust, networking and knowledge on which lasting change depends.

This paper explores two basic questions –

- Is the strategy capable of dealing with the problems identified by the Court of Auditors?
- Is enough being done to build the knowledge, skills and values needed for effective institution building in countries with the regimes which are „impervious” to what its citizens think and feel?

In 2009 Sigma produced a very important paper which suggested that the work of the merit-based civil service agencies established with EC Technical Assistance was being undermined<sup>4</sup>. Very few people are casting such an analytical eye over the work of institution-building in neighbourhood (let alone recent member) countries – and asking critical questions about the models of the assumptions of those who work in the multi-billion industry of technical assistance about the processes of institution-building in “impervious” regimes. The paper ends by questioning basic assumptions of the Technical Assistance. Its footnotes will hopefully be useful to those who wish to read the original material – particularly relating to the tools of change (section 10)

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.freewebs.com/publicadminreform/key%20papers/Critique%20of%20TA%20for%20PAR.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> which are now also being strongly articulated by a new Association for independent TA consultants – see <http://www.ta-consultants-united.org>

<sup>3</sup> not only of recent vintage in most countries – but singularly absent in some EU member states

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.repar.org/mediaupload/publications/2009/20100311\\_SIGMA\\_sustainability\\_of\\_CSR\\_in\\_CEE.pdf](http://www.repar.org/mediaupload/publications/2009/20100311_SIGMA_sustainability_of_CSR_in_CEE.pdf)

## 1. Purpose of paper

I have worked on EU projects for institution building in candidate and transition countries for 20 years<sup>5</sup> – generally as a Team Leader - after a previous career as an innovative leader of a Regional government. Half of the time has been in Central Europe – the other half in Central Asia. I am one of an army of thousands of such individual "experts" who are attached for 18-24 months to Cabinet Offices, Ministries and municipalities in efforts to improve their performance. Sadly, we are never „mentioned in dispatches”.

My project experiences made me an early critic of the procurement system used by the EC for its Technical Assistance work – for example the inflexibility and short duration of the projects. In 2006 some of us presented this critique to the 2006 Conference of NISPAcee<sup>6</sup> which then set up a new working group to look at the experience of public administration reform.

Coincidentally, it emerged, the EC Court of Auditors was looking at the same subject<sup>7</sup> and produced in 2007 a critical assessment of the EC's Technical Cooperation work which reflected my own concerns. And, in mid 2008, the EC produced a strategic response **A Backbone strategy** – which is apparently now being implemented. In the paper which follows, I -

- set out the Court's criticisms
- consider the EC response
- challenge the limited nature of EC Technical Assistance (TA)
- suggest that not enough account is taken of the context of what I call „impervious power” in the countries which, for example, are the focus of the EC's Neighbourhood Policy
- ask how much we really know about the effectiveness of the various tools in the current toolkit of change for administrative reform in these countries
- suggest that some humility is overdue from those engaged in administrative reform TA

## 2. A moral challenge

At the 2006 Conference of NISPAcee, my paper tried to explore –

- The „accidental” nature of project impact - by virtue of the very long arm of implementation from project fiche through selection of „beneficiary”, drafting of ToR to drafting of bids (by companies expert in this arcane skill), selection by evaluation panels of key experts and the final interaction between experts (who had little input to the bid), beneficiaries and stakeholders during the life of (generally short-life) projects - which have little flexibility.
- The very different set of contexts (drivers) - both within those who were admitted to the EU in 2007; in present candidate countries; and in those which now benefit from the neighbourhood programme

An important section of the paper suggested that those of us who have got involved in these programmes of advising governments in these countries confront a real moral and intellectual challenge –

### Box 1; The moral and intellectual challenge of consultancy

*We dare 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 space and skills to make that happen?*

<sup>5</sup> During those last 20 years, I have lived and worked in 8 countries for average periods of 2 years – and have, as a good mercenary, been contracted to 8 different companies – 3 Dutch, 2 Danish, 2 German and 1 Italian.

<sup>6</sup> My paper was entitled „Mercenaries, missionaries or witch doctors?” and can be accessed at <http://www.freewebs.com/publicadminreform/key%20papers/Critique%20of%20TA%20for%20PAR.pdf>. It was written in tandem with David Coombes whose paper is at

<http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/NISPAcee/UNPAN024315.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Examining 32 projects in 12 countries

- *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?''<sup>8</sup>*

Although, therefore, the paper was critical of the EC procurement system, it was also asking questions about the capacity of the consultancy companies and individual experts – and the knowledge base which lay behind that.

### **3. The 2007 Report from the EC Court of Auditors**

By coincidence, a year after the NISPAce paper, the EC Court of Auditors produced a fairly damning report” **on the effectiveness of technical assistance in the context of capacity development**”<sup>9</sup>. This involved the examination of 32 projects in 12 countries and in the more critical environment which OECD work on capacity development seems to have created<sup>10</sup> and was written around 6 key questions – which gave the following summary answers

#### **Box 2 What the inquiry into Technical Assistance found**

*1. Does the Commission have a sound strategy for institutional capacity development, including the use of technical assistance?*

Inadequate institutional analysis in Country Strategy Papers  
No guidance on technical assistance .

*2. Are technical assistance activities within capacity development projects well designed?*

- Project choice relevant but design often inadequate
- Local ownership essential but not systematically addressed by the Commission

*3. Are technical assistance activities implemented efficiently?*

- Long preparation phase often leads to outdated project design .

*4. Problems during procurement and project start-up reduce time available for implementation*

- Experts often replaced after award of contract .
- Inappropriate selection criteria for technical assistance
- Limited choice between procurement procedures
- Inefficient use of technical assistance .
- Donor coordination varies between countries .
- Implementation arrangements not yet favorable to local ownership

*5. Are technical assistance activities and performance adequately monitored and evaluated?*

*6. Are technical assistance activities effective in terms of capacity development?*

- Technical assistance contribution satisfactory but success of projects not guaranteed
- Sustainability uncertain

The Report gave 8 recommendations – 6 of which are relevant to this paper (the underlining is mine)–

<sup>8</sup> from section five of Mercenaries.....

<sup>9</sup> <http://eca.europa.eu/portal/pls/portal/docs/1/673583.PDF>

<sup>10</sup> The OECD is making it more difficult to access its material free of charge - but this paper from Peter Morgan gives a good sense of the debate <http://preval.org/files/2209.pdf>

### **Box 3; Key Recommendations of Court of Auditors' Report**

#### **Recommendation 3**

*Design of capacity development projects should be improved, by*

- *facilitating effective ownership and leadership of the national part of the process,*
- *better defining specific capacity development objectives and related technical assistance requirements,*
- *avoiding overly complex implementation structures,*
- *being more realistic in terms of objectives to be achieved and*
- *planning longer implementation periods.*

#### **Recommendation 4**

*The procedures governing the project preparation and start-up phase, including the procurement of technical assistance, should be reviewed, in order to create more time for implementation, and more flexibility should be allowed during the inception phase to adjust the project design and/or the Terms of Reference for the technical assistance to changes in circumstances.*

#### **Recommendation 5**

*The evaluation criteria in technical assistance tenders should be reviewed, in order to better reflect the quality and previous experience of the experts and the consultancy company.*

#### **Recommendation 6**

*More options should be considered regarding procurement possibilities to allow the best possible choice of technical expertise, including expertise from public institutions and expertise available in the beneficiary country or the region.*

#### **Recommendation 7**

*In line with the Paris Declaration commitments, the Commission should increase its use of technical assistance through coordinated programmes and apply, where possible, implementation arrangements which encourage local ownership.*

#### **Recommendation 8**

*Technical assistance performance by companies and experts should be assessed systematically and a management information system for recording, reporting and consulting this performance should be developed.*

The immediate EC response to its critique and recommendations which were attached to the report was somewhat defensive – suggesting (typically for such responses) that the projects which had been examined by the Court were part of a system which had recently been reformed.

## **4. The 2008 EC Strategy**

### **4.1 Tinkering with the system**

What appeared to be a more considered EC response came in July 2008 with a curiously entitled 20 pages document - *A Backbone strategy*. It sets out 8 „principles” and 5 „axes” – a sophistication which began to arise alarm bells!

#### **Box 4; The five axes of the Backbone strategy**

1. Support strategic dialogue on Technical Cooperation and Project Implementation Arrangements.
2. Improve Technical Cooperation design, management and accountability.
3. Improve procurement, contracting and other procedures related to Technical Cooperation and Project Implementation Arrangements.
4. Enhance internal EC capacity through communication, knowledge management and training.
5. Implementation and monitoring of the Strategy.

Put more simply, overworked EC Delegation staff are being asked to –

- ”avoid supply-driven solutions - make sure that everything is driven by the beneficiaries”
- ”Get the project design right”
- ”select the right consultants”
- „Allow them flexibility” (at least in the inception period)

All the right words are brought into play - flexibility, demand-led, result-orientation, harmonised, country-owned, quality control of companies etc – but the more I looked at the paper, the more I

realised that it is basically saying that everyone just needed to try a bit harder – as is evident from the axes shown in box 4. And the more I thought about the paper, the more I realised the superficiality of my own 2006 analysis which had focussed mainly on procedural aspects - rather than the issues embodied in my later 5 questions.

*Let's face it - the Court of Auditors consists of accountants. The EC officials who drafted the response are managers. Neither accountants nor public managers are specialists in administrative reform or social science methodology and able to deal properly with the ends-means issue involved in such social interventions as administrative reform. The language of the logframe has them imprisoned in a system which believes in short causal links between activities and outcomes; if the outcomes don't happen, then it's the project designers, managers or implementers to blame! It's that simple! The possibility of a more complex – if not chaotic – world does not occur to them. Later in this paper I want to explore what the consequences of such a (more plausible) world view might be for Technical Assistance.*

For the moment let me just briefly note some points from the Backbone strategy.

#### **4.2 understanding the context**

The EC seems particularly defensive about the suggestions that their country strategies and analyses were inadequate. But one of the problems about institution building in non-accession countries is the weakness of our understanding of the way power in many post-communist countries is structured. Because countries quickly introduced elections and have open, competition between parties, the word „democracy” is used – giving us false confidence in our ability to grasp and shape institutional behaviour in these countries. The imagery associated with this word powerfully influences our perception of relevant intervention mechanisms for administrative reform.

#### **Box 5; Alice in Wonderland**

Azerbaijan was a seminal experience for me – when I realised that it had the inverse of the „normal” political-civil service relationship. I was used to a system where Ministers temporarily occupy positions of power – and civil servants were the more permanent system whose perceptions and behaviour needed to be challenged. In countries like Azerbaijan it was (and is) the other way around – the Ministers were the permanent feature (except for the Minister of Economic development in 2006 who was thrown into prison for being too ambitious!) and the civil servants who were there at their whim. There was therefore no challenge. Too many western experts are taken in by the terms and language they and others use – and assume they are dealing with systems similar to those at home.

CIS countries have been and generally remain centralised, closed and corrupt; lack the tradition of inter-war institutions of democracy and capitalism; and the pull of EU Accession as an incentive to reform. All of this raises fundamental questions about the appropriateness of the tools used in Technical Assistance. This is such a major issue that it is dealt with separately in section 10 below.

#### **4.3 black holes**

My 2006 paper explored the „black hole” between the drafting of the bid and the arrival on the ground of experts

- who had nothing to do with either the ToR or the bid;
- whose knowledge of the country was limited; and
- whose knowledge of administrative reform was often limited to that of one or two EU countries.

I realise now that an even more important "black hole" in the TA work is that which covers the drafting and approval of the project fiche and ToR. Who does it - within what framework of assumptions? The EC has published in recent years a series of manuals and Guidelines<sup>11</sup> which help at least its delegation staff understand what is involved in issues relating to „public sector reform”, „good governance”, „capacity development” and „decentralisation”. But this still leaves untouched the adequacy of the the assumptions and models used by the individuals who draft project terms of reference. I develop this point at 6.1 below.

<sup>11</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/what/governance/documents/handbook\\_2004.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/what/governance/documents/handbook_2004.pdf)  
[http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/multimedia/publications/publications/manuals-tools/t109\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/multimedia/publications/publications/manuals-tools/t109_en.htm)  
[http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/multimedia/publications/publications/manuals-tools/t106\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/multimedia/publications/publications/manuals-tools/t106_en.htm)  
[http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/infopoint/publications/europeaid/175a\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/infopoint/publications/europeaid/175a_en.htm)

Each of the four injunctions of the Backbone strategy is admirable and indeed critical to the success of the EC system of TA. It is, however, a pity that the Guidelines don't pose the question - Why each is so rarely to be found in practice? Sections 5-7 below explore that question.

### 5. Obstacles to getting a demand-driven system

Some obvious ones are –

- Lack of experience and knowledge of beneficiaries in administrative reform – and therefore of appreciation of the implications of the various tools in the change agenda
- Low priority of institution building – compared with issues of personal survival
- High rate of turnover of senior policy-makers

If the senior officials in beneficiary countries had the sort of understanding about the levers for increased public management performance needed to make the appropriate sorts of demands, then they would not need Technical Assistance!

And those with little knowledge are often the most confident in their demands. These are the two of the hard realities on which the rhetoric of demand founders. And the Guidelines don't help the Delegation staff deal with this situation. *In principle, it needs local professionals who have the skills and credibility to identify and work up the most promising change prospects. And more external TA should perhaps be applied to this part of the process.*

### 6. Obstacles to good country analysis and project design

#### 6.1 selecting the appropriate intervention

The Guidelines rightly emphasise how critical the project specification (ToR) is – and not to skimp on it. It is the crucial step in the whole process – and requires three knowledge/skill sets of a particularly advanced sort –

- Diagnostic – the realities of the local context
- Comparative specialist knowledge detached from a specific national context – to allow an understanding about levers of change
- Communication skills to seek consensus on the required tools and draft it in relevant ToR with the required balance of activities and flexibility

Luckily there are a few people being used with such skills – but even they admit they have picked it up as they went along and receive no help in improving them.

*It would be interesting to have more information about the skills and experience of the external consultants who are recruited for this critical part of the process; how they are recruited and evaluated; and what assumptions they make about levers of change<sup>12</sup>.*

In my 20 year experience, most consultants active in TA have arrived there by accident – from other careers (eg in the government service of one member state) and received absolutely no training or preparation for the utterly different role of a consultant (or expert) in transition countries. The table below is a tentative outline of some of the challenges which people who become EC experts in TA face

**Table 1; The Role Challenge for EC experts**

	<b>Manager/academic</b>	<b>Expert/consultant</b>
<b>Style</b>	Gives orders/lectures	Uses listening skills
<b>Contextual sensitivity</b>	Implicit understanding of own office culture	Uses special skills to develop explicit understanding of different office culture
<b>Knowledge base</b>	Single member state	Comparative knowledge of several member/ developing states
<b>Approach</b>	practical or theoretical	mixed

<sup>12</sup> see discussion at section 10 below



## 6.2 Time, skills and dialogue needed-

The Backbone strategy recognises that the ToR is critical – but says simply that European Delegations should take more care (and if necessary) over time. But, if (as is obvious) the ToR is the heart of the matter, then -

- a higher percentage of the budget should be used to help the system produce relevant demand-driven projects
- individuals should be selected for this critical task who have not only the relevant country and professional knowledge but also skills of listening and real consultancy
- a dialogue should be encouraged about the appropriate tools of intervention (discussed in part II of this paper) amongst those who draft ToR, PAR specialists, beneficiaries and senior levels of management of the EC Technical Assistance programme.

## 7. Pitfalls of Procurement

### 7.1 More black holes

None of the EC documents mentioned give any analysis of the commercial companies and the (freelance) consultants on which the entire multi-billion euros EC system of Technical Assistance hinges.

Companies (but not experts) are scrutinised in the EC procurement process but only for the volume of their business – not for the quality of their work. The result is that many „cowboy” companies<sup>13</sup> are in operation – who skilfully manipulate the rather simple evaluation system used for the project procurement operation. There are three basic tricks. The first is to have a specialist in project writing at HQ; then to name as experts high-quality people who just happen to be ill when it comes to taking up their appointment! The final trick is to slip a few thousand euros into the hands of a key local.

And, as far as experts are concerned, the only thing that counts for companies is the extent to which the experience shown in the CV matches the particular job requirements. The quality of the work is irrelevant. We call these companies „bodyshops” to indicate that their only task is to find experts – but they don’t even bother to carry out the most basic tests! In my entire experience, a company took the trouble to interview me only once.

And, on the few occasions consultants are mentioned in the EC Backbone Strategy, it is with some embarrassment – as if we were harlots. Not surprisingly, therefore, the Backbone strategy fails to explore its own role in ensuring that people like myself have the relevant information, knowledge, skills and...attitudes. But that would mean first defining the features you are looking for and then ensuring that consultants with these features are developed – let alone selected.

### 7.2. what should project ToR look for in its key experts?

There is a passing remark in Box 28 of the Guidelines that – „*The more the purpose of the Technical Cooperation is Capacity Development, the more important it is that the advisor can communicate, has empathy and can play a facilitating role*”. Sadly, there is no development of this. I would suggest that **skills and attitudes are the key** (rather than knowledge) - **whether the consultant is sufficiently sensitive to the local context and networks to be able to identify opportunities and networks; and has the skills to use them at the right time and manner.**

I have tried to give some examples in the next 2 boxes.

#### **Box 6; example of flexibility and attributes needed for project success**

One project was attached to the Presidential Office to help implement a Civil Service Law which the international community had saddled them with. They didn’t know what to do with it (Ministers appointed family and friends) – and the World Bank (and a previous Team Leader) had given up. Noone seemed very interested in challenging the kleptocracy. Painstakingly the Team Leader set out the various steps needed to make a reality of the Law. The project office was in the Presidential Academy for Public Administration next to the Presidential Office – and the TL decided to start working with some of its staff – one of whom was able to produce a copy of a long-forgotten document on reform which had been issued by the Presidential Office some 5 years earlier. This gave the project some benchmarks which could be used for posing questions about progress – and this formed the

<sup>13</sup> just how nasty the consultancy business is can be seen at <http://rwer.wordpress.com/2011/04/25/only-in-america-former-u-s-official-sued-haiti-contractors-for-kickbacks>

basis for a new draft of the required strategy for implementing the Civil Service Law. Jointly with 2 of the Academy staff, the first books in the Azeri language on PAR, civil service reform and HRM were written and produced by the project. And the TL started to do training sessions with public officials – none of which was in the ToR. Slowly the project got signals from the Presidential Office that the TL should go public with arguments for a more meritocratic systems of appointments – and this he did with interviews in newspapers and even an hour’s TV show. A few weeks after the end of the project, a Presidential Decree established the Civil Service Agency along the lines the project had recommended – and the very day the TL arrived back in Baku in March 2005 to escape the Bishkek Revolution, the 40 year old lawyer he had worked with and was lunching with was called to the Presidential Office to be appointed Head (Minister) of the Agency! Six years on, it is going strong<sup>14</sup>.

The Backbone Strategy did recognise that the world moves and that some changes might be necessary to precise project specifications when a project gets underway – generally some two years after the project specifications were originally drafted. But the possibility of making such adjustments (in the first month) has been part of the regulations for the past decade and is already enshrined in the system. The strategy does not propose extending that flexibility beyond the inception period – and does not, in my view, measure up to the real needs. The next box shows that it is generally needed throughout the project.

### **Box 7; an example of capacity development outside the ToR**

One municipal project had a large training component. Initial focus group discussions told us how powerless people felt (more like community groups) and we therefore decided to encourage a local change/learning capacity – working with a network of municipal people who were or clearly had the potential to be change-agents if not trainers.

Initially we wanted to focus on target groups (eg newly-elected village Heads) but events meant that we were unable to start that particular work until a few months from the scheduled end of the project. We therefore started to focus on the entire (village) municipality – and in April 2006 experimented with a new approach

- A practising and successful mayor carrying out **interviews** the day before the workshop
- His then making an initial presentation at the workshop to all staff and councillors about the **issues** which had emerged from those interviews – and some examples about how these issues had been dealt with in other places
- Participants then going into **working groups** to develop options
- The full group then assessing **which options to develop**
- The project then organised **regular follow-up, monitoring** visits

This proved to be a very successful formula – with its focus on practical problems; encouraging people to work together on them; giving examples of where and how successful initiatives had been taken; arranging visits to such places; and following up with regular visits to discuss progress. The spirit this created contrasts with that which often accompanies traditional training courses. The project’s Developing Municipal Capacity<sup>15</sup> publication tracks this process of project learning, identifies 10 problems with traditional training – and offers a typology of learning.

One of the reasons this project managed such flexibility was that a revolution created a power vacuum for some months during which time the project was free to conduct its own direct discussions with the village municipalities. But it is not at all clear how such attributes and skills might be measured in advance in a way to satisfy the rigid sort of procurement system the EC operates.

### **7.3 What do they actually look for?**

The specifications I have been receiving in the last few months continue to emphasise (years of) experience – rather than skills. Two years on I certainly haven’t noticed any changes – one European Delegation indeed compounded felonies by imposing in December 2009 a unilateral requirement of an action plan from me within one month of my arrival instead of the several months given in the ToR for the Inception report<sup>16</sup> – and stuck to this despite the lack of a counterpart appointment.

### **7.4 what encouragement is given to develop the desired features?**

I’ve been 20 years in this game – and only once has a company involved me in a sharing of experience between field staff and themselves. And once too a desk officer in a European Delegation asked me to

<sup>14</sup> see case study by Sumir Lal in Governance Reform under real world conditions (World Bank 2008) which can be downloaded in full from

<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTDEVCOMMENG/ETGOVACC/0,,contentMDK:21707692~menuPK:4859794~pagePK:64168445~piPK:64168309~theSitePK:3252001,00.html>

<sup>15</sup> <http://publicadminreform.webs.com/key%20papers/Developing%20Municipal%20Capacity%20KR%202007.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> it was a 4 year project in a huge and complex country

attend on their behalf a conference about decentralisation. *The Guidelines on the Backbone strategy say nothing to encourage such practices of experience sharing.* The EC has thrown such money around in the last few decades to encourage the development of professional associations that one has to wonder why they have not seen fit to do so for those who are the oil of an industry on which they spend about 10 billion euros? All we need is the occasional conference (to allow us to share experiences – and get up to speed with relevant developments in EU countries and EC policy) – or consultation.

### **7.5 Why do we bother with methodology in the bid?**

At the moment these are prepared formulaistically by staff with little or no experience on the ground – and yet are considered part of the contractual obligations which bind new Team Leaders. Even worse, some companies have employed staff who have made an art form of drafting submissions which are impressive to the inexperienced members of evaluation panels. *If the design and individual experts are indeed critical – then why award so many points in the evaluation for a methodology which has to stick faithfully to the ToR and in which the consultants play little or no part?* Apart from anything else, it makes the evaluation very complex – requiring the panel members to read hundreds of pages (in a foreign language).

### **7.6 A different model?**

Most companies allowed to tender have a „take the money and run” attitude. I can name the number of companies who have a serious interest in knowledge development and transfer on the fingers of one hand. And twinning<sup>17</sup> isn't the answer – nor the latest wheeze of „south-to-south” institutional links. The Americans have an interesting model which has allowed a high-quality think-tank (The Urban Institute) to win long-term contracts in several countries to assist municipal development. This approach has several advantages

- You are buying proven quality
- The contractor's basic asset is their reputation – fear of losing it acts as powerful incentive to ensure it recruits and offers good experts (unlike the present system)
- the contract gives the flexibility to negotiate adjustments from time to time.

## **8. Conclusions on the Backbone strategy**

The box gives an interesting perspective from an insider (who, for obvious reasons, has to remain anonymous)

### **Box 8; an insider's comment**

„But lets be realistic! The critique of Technical Cooperation (TC) goes back into the late 1960s when first critical reports were written for the World Bank. Lots of listening and a piles of critical writing on TC have been produced since then - also in the context of the aid effectiveness discussion as of the mid-1990s - but it's the most difficult practice to change as there are very big donor interests behind aid, visibility issues, how aid should be provided and its control (tax payers keeping a close, and currently, an even closer eye on what is financed outside the national context). The reform that has been initiated via the Backbone Strategy can address a number of issues, like cleaning the procedures to some extent (you see this in the Annex 6 to the TC guidelines), getting staff more development-oriented, looking for some more flexibility, enhancing inputs from the South, looking for alternatives to TA, etc. BUT: DEVCO has to operate within the Financial Regulations (FR) of the EU and this goes far beyond what DEVCO can influence. The FR are formulated at EU level and are enforced by the EU Member States who demand a very strict way of working, control, accountability, etc. that does precisely not leave the space and flexibility that are required to support capacity development processes. These procedures are terrible to work with, certainly if one engages in fluid change processes, systemic reforms of a partner, capacity development at large.

So there is tension, embedded in the system, and the Backbone Strategy tries to 'soften' these systemic tensions as good as it can and to introduce improvements where possible. This is how I approach it, or better: how I have to approach it. Otherwise I would not be realistic”.

The ideas floated so far in this section are summarised in the table.

<sup>17</sup> a very rare assessment of the twinning approach has been written by Tulmets and can be found at <http://eucenter.wisc.edu/OMC/Papers/Enlargement/tulmets2.pdf>

**Table 2; How the Backbone strategy might be improved**

<b>Proposal</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Switch resources to the design stage – to ensure demand-driven and relevant projects	at the moment, EC assumes that it can be done in 20-30 days should the design stage not be more open to help achieve it's driven by wider demand?
Clearer definition of expert skill profile – particularly for drafting ToR	The Guidelines talk about communications, empathy and facilitation skills
organise dialogue between those who draft ToR; PAR academics (East and West); beneficiaries; and senior managers of TA	Part II of this paper indicates that there is little discussion at the moment about appropriate tools for institution building in transition countries – let alone bringing together of such people
root out cowboy companies – emphasise less company revenue streams and more the track record of quality control in the subject area	the principle of company consortia also -needs to be re-examined.
Reduced points for methodology	This cannot deviate from the Terms of reference and is increasingly become a specialist art form carried out by office staff with little project experience
Project flexibility	At the moment this is possible during the Inception stage and the Backbone strategy simply repeats this.
Ensure wider sharing of project papers and experience	Delegations should select appropriate papers for insertion onto website. Local Institutes of Public Administration should be encouraged to use papers in their teaching.
limit companies invited to tender to those with reputations in their field and award minimum of 5 year-renewable contracts – with inbuilt flexibility	this puts onus on companies to supply only those with proven record in their field.

## **PART II**

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
- we return to the quotation at the head of the Contents page

## 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 1995<sup>18</sup> 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 corruption<sup>19</sup>; “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 Russia<sup>20</sup>?

*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 clientelist 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.*

*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.*

<sup>18</sup> Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation – southern europe, south america and post-communist europe ; by Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan

<sup>19</sup> see, for example, the useful [Anti-corruption Approaches: a literature review](#) (Norad 2009)

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.the-american-interest.com/article.cfm?piece=939>

Russia seemed to be undergoing some serious reform efforts in the early 2000s<sup>21</sup> - 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<sup>22</sup>
- 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 dynasties<sup>22</sup> with chapters on Bulgaria, Romania, Moldova, Serbia, Turkey, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan<sup>23</sup>, 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 Ionita<sup>24</sup>. 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.

<sup>21</sup> „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](http://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/505/1/ECO-WKP(2006)64.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> [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%4%83uta%C5%A3i](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%4%83uta%C5%A3i)

<sup>23</sup> Azeri and kazakh systems <http://www.forschungsstelle.uni-bremen.de/images/stories/pdf/ap/fsoap107.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> 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](http://pdc.ceu.hu/archive/00002838/01/ionita_f3.pdf)

- 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 things<sup>25</sup>. He also adds a useful historical perspective. „Entrenched bureaucracies have learned from experience that they can always prevail in the long run by paying lip service to reforms while resisting them in a tacit way. They do not like coherent strategies, transparent regulations and written laws – they prefer the status quo, and daily instructions received by phone from above. This was how the communist regime worked; and after its collapse the old chain of command fell apart, though a deep contempt for law and transparency of action remained a ‘constant’ in involved persons’ daily activities. Such an institutional culture is self-perpetuating in the civil service, the political class and in society at large.

A change of generations is not going to alter the rules of the game as long as recruitment and socialization follow the same old pattern: graduates from universities with low standards are hired through clientelistic mechanisms; performance when on the job is not measured; tenure and promotion are gained via power struggles.

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

In January 2011 *Transition Online* started a series giving some rare detail on the sources of finance of political parties in central Europe. They quoted an example of the benefit one contributor received in Romania from a 40,000 payment. I suspect the figures are considerable underestimates – the benefits of political favour in Romania (and Bulgaria) are so great that I doubt whether a 40,000 euros contribution is going to get you very much! The next box is the result of my own, brief research -

### **Box 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 a month! He obviously hasn’t been using his Rolex, Breitweiler and other 2 watches (which he values in total at 14,000 euros) and does not therefore realise that it is now mid-September 2010. Rip van Winkle rather than Midas!

<sup>25</sup> I have strong doubts about the wisdom of the British „fast-track” system which has alienated public servants in Romania (Young Professional scheme) and was (in 2011) about to be wished upon Bulgaria.

Just imagine yourself in such a situation - your boss has been sacked and is being publicly pilloried for having failed to declare external earnings. The first question of a normal person would be "Is my own declaration form in order?" But no, people like this young State Secretary enjoy such patronage (with no experience - he became a State Secretary at the age of 26 after an extended education!) and protection and seem so contemptuous of these forms that he doesn't even bother to update his form which understates his income by a factor of 40!<sup>26</sup> His out-of-date form does, however, declare some of the additional revenues he earned as a committee member of various state funds

These assets, earnings and concealments reveal systemic immorality which, in Romania's case, seems to be shaped and sustained by the role of its political parties which grabbed significant amounts of property in 1990 and which now determine the career path of young characters such as this State Secretary (nationally and internationally) and take in return a significant part of his earnings. Tom Gallagher<sup>27</sup> 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<sup>28</sup>. 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 Deming whose statistically based approach to “quality management” so transformed Japanese – and, ultimately and ironically, - American industry. Before then, organisational structures had the same features of subservience as CIS countries. And, in the immediate post-war years, Germany too developed its system of industrial co-determination and strong local government.

But, apart from such post-war scenarios, there are few examples of countries emerging from impervious power to create and operate service-oriented (and as distinct from self-serving) system of public administration. Greece, Spain and Portugal were all quoted in the early 1990s as the models for the transition countries<sup>29</sup> – but (a) they too had the huge pressure of EU accession and (b) their reputations are now somewhat tarnished.

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<sup>26</sup> It could be useful for civil society and the media to take more interest in these forms

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.opendemocracy.net/tom-gallagher/romania-and-europe-entrapped-decade>

<sup>28</sup> a recent scandal has shown that Romanian trade union leaders' noses are also in the trough

<sup>29</sup> Linz and Stepan



## 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”<sup>30</sup> – 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 half-century-old books on public administration, or else reinventing the wheel with regard to anticorruption strategies. Michael Woolcock and Lant Pritchett talk about the problem of “getting to Denmark,” where “Denmark” stands generically for a developed country with well-functioning state institutions.<sup>20</sup> 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.”<sup>31</sup>

International bodies may have 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 – state. 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 challenge<sup>32</sup> 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.

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 need<sup>33</sup> –

- *Judicial reform*; to embed properly the principle of the rule of law<sup>34</sup>
- *Budgetary reform*; to ensure the integrity and transparency of public resources
- *Civil service laws, structures and training institutions* – to encourage professionalism and less politicization of staff of state bodies
- *Impact assessment* – to try to move the transition systems away from a legalistic approach and force policy-makers to carry out consultations and assess the financial and other effects of draft legislation<sup>35</sup>

<sup>30</sup> a good overview is [http://publishing.eur.nl/ir/darenet/asset/17084/GSDRC\\_paper.pdf](http://publishing.eur.nl/ir/darenet/asset/17084/GSDRC_paper.pdf)

<sup>31</sup> [http://www.internationalbudget.org/pdf/Civil\\_Society\\_and\\_Improved\\_Governance\\_in\\_Developing\\_Countries.pdf](http://www.internationalbudget.org/pdf/Civil_Society_and_Improved_Governance_in_Developing_Countries.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> full article at [http://relooney.fatcow.com/oo\\_New\\_1805.pdf](http://relooney.fatcow.com/oo_New_1805.pdf)

<sup>33</sup> The Governance and Social Development Resource Centre has recently published an interesting overview of „Current trends in governance support” - at <http://www.gsdr.org/docs/open/HD755.pdf>

<sup>34</sup> see [http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/Rule\\_of\\_Law\\_Temptations.pdf](http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/Rule_of_Law_Temptations.pdf)

- *Functional Review* – to try to remove those functions of state bodies which are no longer necessary or are best handled by another sector or body<sup>36</sup>.
- *Institutional twinning* – to help build the capacity of those state bodies whose performance is crucial to the implementation of the Acquis Communautaire<sup>37</sup>
- *Development of local government and NGOs* – to try to ensure that a redistribution of power takes place
- *Anti-corruption strategies*<sup>38</sup> – which incorporate elements of the first three of the above
- *Performance measurement and management* eg EFQM
- *report-cards*<sup>39</sup> -

The problem with many of these tools – particularly the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> - 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”<sup>40</sup>. The research on Impact Assessment by

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<sup>35</sup> the history, experience and problems of this are well set out by Andrea Renda in various 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>

<sup>36</sup> 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](http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2005/06/22/000090341_20050622142938/Rendered/PDF/32699.pdf)

<sup>37</sup> for a rare insight into the origin of twinning see Tulmets paper quoted at reference 17

<sup>38</sup> 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>

<sup>39</sup> consumer feedback on public services - one of the tools summarised in a useful menu published by the World Bank in 2005 <http://www1.worldbank.org/publicsector/civilservice/ACSRCourse2007/Session%208/IncreasingGovEffectiveness.pdf>

<sup>40</sup> <http://john-adams.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2007/11/londons-third-airport.pdf>

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.

With one major exception, there seems to have little reflection over the past 20 years about the nature of and results from the various tools being used in TA programmes<sup>41</sup>. That exception is anti-corruption work – where there has been a huge amount of writing and a fair amount of breast-beating. Of course lots of case-studies of administrative reform have been published (not least from the NISPAcee Annual Conferences). Most, however, are descriptions of isolated initiatives - unrelated to larger issue of how the capacity of state institutions and local government can realistically be developed in neighbourhood countries.

#### **Administrative Capacity**

In 2004 SIGMA published a **critical overview of PAR in the Balkans**. “Too often”, it says “*PAR strategies in the region are designed by (external) technocrats with a limited mandate. Public Administration reforms are not sufficiently considered as political interventions which need to be sustained by a coalition of interests which includes business, civil society and public sector workers*”. The paper then went on to make the following very useful injunctions -

- Get the administrative basics right – before getting into the complexity of NPM-type measures
- Focus on establishing regularity
- Tackle systems - not agencies
- Develop the young; constrain the old<sup>42</sup>
- 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 Romania**<sup>43</sup>. 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.<sup>44</sup>

A paper<sup>45</sup> on the Russian experience of civil service reform is one of the few to try to offer an explanation of how the combination of specific internal and external factors has constrained the reform process in that particular country eg variable political leadership and support; variable administrative leadership and capacity; political and social instability; minimal civil society; the preponderance of old apparatchniks; cultural factors; and ‘windows of opportunity’ (see section 11.1 below). In 2006 Manning and others, knowing that context, and after an analysis of the lessons of global reforms<sup>46</sup>, 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

<sup>41</sup> although The World Bank's published a major evaluation in 2008 – **Public Sector Reform; What works and why?**  
<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/EXTOED/EXTPUBSECREP/0,,menuPK:4664077~pagePK:64829575~piPK:64829612~theSitePK:4663904,00.html>

<sup>42</sup> 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.

<sup>43</sup> [http://pdc.ceu.hu/archive/00002856/01/craciun\\_f2j.pdf](http://pdc.ceu.hu/archive/00002856/01/craciun_f2j.pdf)

<sup>44</sup> 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](http://pdc.ceu.hu/archive/00002838/01/ionita_f3.pdf)).

<sup>45</sup> “Hard cases and improving governance; Putin and civil service reform” by Pat Grey (2004)

<sup>46</sup> **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](http://books.google.com/books?id=iyH3MA48kQAC&printsec=frontcover&hl=ro&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false)

- Seize opportunities by forging partnerships with regional governments, cities etc and encourage pilot reform schemes and experiments at agency or sub-national level
- Create opportunities through judicial use of functional reviews – and stimulate external pressure on the Executive (eg through freedom of information legislation and Ombudsman bodies)

But note that, although these analyses are trying to understand the dynamics of change, they give little attention to the tools being used – rather look at context and stratagems.

In 2006 the World Bank produced a report - **Administrative capacity in the New Member States – the limits of innovation?**<sup>47</sup> – 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 allows 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 agencies** in some of the new EU member states<sup>48</sup> 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 -

#### *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 enough to implement EU policies and legislation serving European citizens. The internalisation of European principles of public administration should primarily aim to better institutionalise co-operation between current and future EU Member States. Advantage should be taken of the possibilities provided by article 197 of the consolidated text of the Lisbon Treaty. The new approach made possible by article 197 should also be reflected in the design of technical assistance projects.

#### *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

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[http://books.google.com/books?id=ZiHCCR1JxogC&printsec=frontcover&hl=ro&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=ZiHCCR1JxogC&printsec=frontcover&hl=ro&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false)

<sup>48</sup> [http://www.rcpar.org/mediaupload/publications/2009/20100311\\_SIGMA\\_sustainability\\_of\\_CSR\\_in\\_CEE.pdf](http://www.rcpar.org/mediaupload/publications/2009/20100311_SIGMA_sustainability_of_CSR_in_CEE.pdf)

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 value.

### *Decentralisation*

A 2001 paper by Patrick Heller which looked at the frequently quoted **examples of decentralisation** in Kerala (India), South Africa and Porto Alegre emphasised how unique and strong were the pressures for reform there<sup>49</sup>. Decentralisation which comes without that pressure (for example from the recommendations of international bodies and their officials) will be skin deep only – and capable of easy reversal.

### *Rule of Law*

Tom Carothers (US Aid) is a rare voice of logic, clarity, experience and balance in the world of international aid. In 2007, the Journal of Democracy carried an excellent paper by him<sup>50</sup> which looked at some of the global thinking about the institutional development process which affects the Technical Cooperation field. He took exception with the argument that democracy should take second place to the establishment of the rule of law. In 2009 Carothers produced another paper which looked at the experience and discussion of the past decade **with rule-of-law projects**<sup>51</sup>. His paper points out the ambiguity of that term - which finds support from a variety of ideological and professional positions and therefore leads to confused implementation if not state capture. Fukiyama also had a good paper on the subject in 2010<sup>52</sup>

### *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”<sup>53</sup>. The title of another Corruption and Anti-corruption – do donors have the right approach?<sup>54</sup> reflects the despair many feel about these efforts<sup>55</sup>.

### *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?

<sup>49</sup>

<http://abahlali.org/files/Heller%202001%20Moving%20the%20State%20The%20Politics%20of%20Democratic%20Decentralization%20in%20Kerala%20South%20Africa%20and%20Porto%20Alegre.pdf>

<sup>50</sup> [http://yimd.org/documents/T/the\\_sequencing\\_fallacy-how\\_democracies\\_emerge.pdf](http://yimd.org/documents/T/the_sequencing_fallacy-how_democracies_emerge.pdf)

<sup>51</sup> [http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/Rule\\_of\\_Law\\_Temptations.pdf](http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/Rule_of_Law_Temptations.pdf)

<sup>52</sup> [http://apps.americanbar.org/rol/perspectives\\_10/transitions\\_to\\_the\\_rule\\_of\\_law\\_by\\_francis\\_fukuyama.pdf](http://apps.americanbar.org/rol/perspectives_10/transitions_to_the_rule_of_law_by_francis_fukuyama.pdf)

<sup>53</sup> Anti-corruption Approaches: a literature review (Norad 2009)

<sup>54</sup> [http://www.humansecuritygateway.com/documents/CMI\\_corruptionanticorruptioneffortsaid.pdf](http://www.humansecuritygateway.com/documents/CMI_corruptionanticorruptioneffortsaid.pdf)

<sup>55</sup> 2 recent useful papers on the situation in ex-communist countries are “Anti-corruption – what do we know? Research on preventing corruption in the ex-communist world” by Diane Schmidt in Political Studies 2007

<http://www.esri.salford.ac.uk/esri/resources/uploads/File/Conferences/CorruptionMarch07/schmidt%20-%20Paper.pdf> 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](http://soc.kuleuven.be/io/egpa/org/2010Toul/Papers/Agnes_Batory_EGPA%202010.pdf)

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.

How these problems might be overcome is an issue I have developed in a separate paper<sup>56</sup>.

## 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 Europe<sup>57</sup>, Ralf Dahrendorf<sup>58</sup> made the prescient comment that it would take one or two years to create new institutions of political democracy in the recently liberated countries of CEEC, maybe five to 10 years to reform the economy and make a market economy, and 15 to 20 years to create the rule of law. And it would take maybe two generations to create a functioning civil society there.

A former adviser to Václav Havel, Jiri Pehe, referred recently to that prediction and suggested that *“what we see now is that we have completed the first two stages, the transformation of the institutions, of the framework of political democracy on the institutional level, there is a functioning market economy, which of course has certain problems, but when you take a look at the third area, the rule of the law, there is still a long way to go, and civil society is still weak and in many ways not very efficient.”*<sup>58</sup>

He then went on to make the useful distinction between *„democracy understood as institutions and democracy understood as culture. It’s been much easier to create a democratic regime, a democratic system as a set of institutions and procedures and mechanism, than to create democracy as a kind of culture – that is, an environment in which people are actually democrats”*.

These are salutary comments for those with too mechanistic an approach to institution-building. Notwithstanding the tons of books on organisational cultures and cultural change, political cultures cannot be engineered. Above all, they will not be reformed from a project approach based on using bodyshops, cowboy companies and the logframe. My 2006 paper referred to the classic critique of the logframe<sup>59</sup> – 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 snippy about that perspective –although it has published one Guidance note on the subject<sup>60</sup> – 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 administrative

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<sup>56</sup> available on my website - <http://www.freewebs.com/publicadminreform/>

<sup>57</sup> [http://books.google.com/books?id=obx2BX91FQUC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=obx2BX91FQUC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false)

<sup>58</sup> Is Europe’s democratic Revolution Over? <http://www.tol.org/client/article/22386-is-europes-democratic-revolution-over.html>

<sup>59</sup> 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>

<sup>60</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/multimedia/publications/publications/manuals-tools/t106\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/multimedia/publications/publications/manuals-tools/t106_en.htm)

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*”.<sup>61</sup> And perhaps the most useful recent assessment is the World Bank’s Governance Reforms under real world conditions<sup>62</sup> which 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 an interesting theory around 3 words – „acceptance”, „authority” and „ability”<sup>63</sup>.

### **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 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.

<sup>61</sup> [http://books.google.com/books?id=iyH3MA48kQAC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=iyH3MA48kQAC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false)

<sup>62</sup> <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTDEVCOMMENG/EXTGOVACC/0,,contentMDK:21707692~menuPK:4859794~pagePK:64168445~piPK:64168309~theSitePK:3252001,00.html>

<sup>63</sup> 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.

### **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 be dismissed as mavericks, “ahead of their time”.

A significant number of people have to be discontent – and persuaded that there is an alternative. The wider system has to be ready for change – and, in the meantime, the narrow and upward accountabilities of the administrative system can be – and is so often – malevolent, encouraging people to behave in perverse ways. Formal and informal systems are a well-recognised fact of organizational life<sup>64</sup>. 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 neutralised<sup>65</sup>.

### **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 no one ever carries out critical assessments of their world. They commission or preside over countless inquiries into all the other systems of society – but rarely does their world come under proper scrutiny<sup>66</sup>. 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 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”*.

### **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.

<sup>64</sup> In 1970, Donald Schon coined the phrase “dynamic conservatism” in Beyond the Stable State to describe the strength of these forces in an organisation.

<sup>65</sup> 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

<sup>66</sup> Britain’s Chris Mullin was a very rare example of someone prepared in the two sets of diaries he has published about his life as a parliamentarian and junior Minister to reveal how pointless these roles had been.



For example, „Fragile states” and „Statebuilding” are two new phrases which have grown up only in the last few years – and „capacity development” has now become a more high-profile activity. There are too many specialised groups working on building effective institutions in the difficult contexts I focussed on in section 9 - and too few actually sharing their experiences. We need a road map – and more dialogue!

## 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”<sup>67</sup>.*

### 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 organisations being able to change radically. Suddenly in the late 1980s, the language changed and everything seemed possible – “Total Quality Management” was a typical phrase. Thatcher has a lot to answer for – in creating the illusion that private management (concepts and people) had the answer.

But, after several waves of major public sector reforms in the last two decades, a lot of British people, for example, would certainly say that things have gone backward – or, with more nuancing, that any improvements are down to technological and financial rather than managerial developments. And “managerial” covers elements of both macro structures (like Agencies) and management hierarchy and behaviour - which has certainly got worse as the ethic of public service has disappeared.

But who is best placed to make such judgements? Using what criteria? Do we rely on public surveys? But survey work is so profoundly influenced by the sorts of questions asked – and interpretations. Politicians, managers and professionals all have their vested interest in the stance they take – although the older “coalface” professional is perhaps in the best position to judge.

We have a lot of comparative indicators these days about both individual public services (France regularly tops the league tables for health; Finland for education) and governance systems. But they don’t seem to have much link with the experiences of ordinary people. A combination of education and media exposure has made the European public lose its traditional deference to those with authority. And increasingly those in public positions are exposed for lacking the basic character (let alone competence) for the job. And managerialism (and the salaries which go to the top echelons) seems to be at the root of the problem.

I therefore return to the questions I posed in my 2006 paper to the NISPAcee Conference (see box 1 of this paper) and specifically how can those of us who come from such countries dare to give advice to those struggling in “transition” countries? And perhaps some of these countries have themselves reached the position to which older member of the EUs are still in transition? Many of these countries, after all, bought in the mid 1990s a strong version of neo-liberalism (everything for sale) when their taxation systems collapsed and their elites realised what a great legitimisation for their corruption the new Western Weltanschauung gave them! The greed of the financial system has now brought the welfare systems of the older EU member states close to collapse.

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<sup>67</sup> Blog comment on <http://aidontheedge.info/2011/02/10/whose-paradigm-counts>

## 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 institutions<sup>68</sup>
- Institutions grow – and no one really understands that process
- Administrative reform has little basis in scientific evidence<sup>69</sup>. 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 metaphor<sup>70</sup> 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.

**Table 4; Four approaches to development**

Approach	1. Benevolent	2. Participatory	3. Rights-based	4. Obligation-based
<b>Core concept</b>	Doing good	Effectiveness	Rights of “have-nots”	Obligations of “haves”
<b>Dominant mode</b>	Technical	Social	political	Ethical
<b>Relationships of donors to recipients</b>	Blueprinted	Consultative	transformative	Reflective
<b>Stakeholders seen as</b>	Beneficiaries	Implementers	Citizens	Guides, teachers
<b>accountability</b>	Upward to aid agency	Upward with some downward	multiple	Personal
<b>Procedures</b>	Bureaucratic conformity	More acceptance of diversity	Negotiated, evolutionary	Learning
<b>Organizational drivers</b>	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 consultants<sup>71</sup> 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

<sup>68</sup> 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>

<sup>69</sup> See the 99 contradictory proverbs underlying it which Hood and Jackson identified in their (out of print) 1999 book

<sup>70</sup> see Gareth Morgan’s *Images of Organisation* for more

<sup>71</sup> 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.

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 Wheatley<sup>72</sup> and in the development community on the implications of complexity theory reflected in UK’s Overseas Development Institute.<sup>73</sup>

They could do worse than study Robert Quinn’s book Changing the World<sup>74</sup> 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 inner change makes outer change possible has always been part of spiritual and psychological teachings. But not an idea that’s generally addressed in leadership and management training”. Quinn looks at how leaders such as Gandhi and Luther King have mobilised people for major change – and suggests that, by using certain principles, “change agents” are capable of helping ordinary people to achieve transformative change. These principles include; „Look within – be aware of your hypocrisy”; ”Embody a vision of the common good”; ”Disturb the system”; ”Don’t try to micro-manage – be aware of systems”; „Entice through moral power”.

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<sup>72</sup> See Ackoff’s Little Book of F Laws (2006); and Wheatley’s Management Science and Complexity Theory (2001)

<sup>73</sup> <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>

<sup>74</sup> <http://business.unr.edu/faculty/simmons/badm720/actchange.pdf>

## About the author

From 1970-90 years Ronald Young was an academic and elected political strategist of Scotland's (indeed Europe's) largest Regional authority - focussing on issues of social development and enterprise. He wrote extensively and critically about these experiences – in articles, papers and book contributions. In the late 1980s he represented the UK on the Council of Europe's Standing Committee for Regional and municipal authorities.

In 1990 he left Britain and spent the next decade as Team Leader of EC projects in Central Europe – mainly relating to the development of systems of local government and regional development. From 1999-2007 he lived in Central Asia and Caucasus – leading projects relating to the reform of civil service and central government structures. He readily admits that it was not easy to adjust to the new role – but appreciates the opportunity it gives to see British and European concepts with a fresh perspective.

In 2007 he returned to Central Europe to try to understand how the administrative and political systems of countries such as Romania and Bulgaria had adjusted. His first task was to head up a training project to help the implementation of the European acquis at regional level in Bulgaria. He enjoyed that – although the environment proved a challenging one!

In 2008 he established a website for the sharing of papers on administrative reform in these contexts – <http://www.freewebs.com/publicadminreform> - and blogs frequently about professional issues – at [www.nomadron.blogspot.com](http://www.nomadron.blogspot.com)

Recent additions to the website are a briefing note on *Chinese administrative reform in 2010* which also contains a summary of European experience<sup>75</sup> (drawing on a professional visit to China in early 2010); and *a sceptic's glossary*<sup>76</sup> of terms used in discussions about reform (some of which is attached here as an Annex).

He now divides his time between a house in the Carpathian mountains (which he has had since 2000) and Sofia pursuing his passion for blogging, writing and Bulgarian painting and wine.

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An electronic version of this paper is available on his website (for easy access to the footnote links)

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<sup>75</sup> <http://publicadminreform.webs.com/key%20papers/Chinese%20Administrative%20Reform%202011.pdf>

<sup>76</sup> <http://publicadminreform.webs.com/key%20papers/Just%20words%20-%20jan%2013.pdf>

## ANNEX

# JUST WORDS- a sceptic's glossary

*So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years –  
....Trying to use words, and every attempt  
is a new start, a and a different kind of failure  
Because one has only learnt to get the better of words  
for the thing one no longer has to say, or the way in which  
one is no longer disposed to say it. And so each venture  
is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate  
with shabby equipment always deteriorating  
in the general mass of imprecision of feeling*

East Coker; Four Quartets

TS Eliot

## 1. Purpose

Words are very powerful - indeed have a life of their own – some more so than others. Once we stop thinking about the words we use, what exactly they mean and whether they fit our purpose, the words and metaphors (and the interests behind them) take over and reduce our powers of critical thinking. One of the best essays on this topic is George Orwell's "*Politics and the English language*"<sup>77</sup> Written in 1947, it exposes the way certain clichés and rhetoric are calculated to kill thinking – for example how the use of the passive tense undermines the notion that it is people who take decisions and should be held accountable for them.

Fifty years before Orwell, Ambrose Bierce was another (American) journalist whose pithy and tough definitions of everyday words, in his newspaper column, attracted sufficient attention to justify a book "*The Devil's Dictionary*"<sup>78</sup> whose fame continues unto this day. A dentist, for example, he defined as "a magician who puts metal into your mouth and pulls coins out of your pocket". A robust scepticism about both business and politics infused his work – bit it did not amount to a coherent statement about power.

This glossary looks at more than 100 words and phrases used by officials, politicians, consultants and academics in the course of government reform which have this effect and offers some definitions which at least will get us thinking more critically about our vocabulary – if not actually taking political actions. Only in the latter stages of its drafting was I reminded of John Saul's *A Doubter's Companion*

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<sup>77</sup> [http://mla.stanford.edu/Politics\\_&\\_English\\_language.pdf](http://mla.stanford.edu/Politics_&_English_language.pdf)

<sup>78</sup> [http://www.rosenoire.org/archives/Bierce,\\_Ambrose\\_-\\_The\\_Devil's\\_Dictionary.pdf](http://www.rosenoire.org/archives/Bierce,_Ambrose_-_The_Devil's_Dictionary.pdf)

– *a dictionary of aggressive common sense*<sup>79</sup> issued in 1994 which talks of the “humanist tradition of using alphabetical order as a tool of social analysis and the dictionary as a quest for understanding, a weapon against *idée reçues* and the pretensions of power”. Saul contrasts this approach with that “of the rationalists to the dictionary for whom it is a repository of truths and a tool to control communications”.

I suppose, therefore, that this glossary of mine is written in the humanist tradition of struggle against power – and the words they use to sustain it. The glossary therefore forms part of a wider commentary on the effort various writers have made over the ages to challenge the pretensions of the powerful (and of the „thought police” who have operated on their behalf).

And, of course, the role of satire<sup>80</sup>, caricature and cartoons<sup>81</sup>, poetry<sup>82</sup> and painting<sup>83</sup> should not be forgotten! Nor the role of films and TV series these days<sup>84</sup>.

## **2. New words and phrases can cause amnesia!**

We should be on our alert whenever we spot a new phrase entering government discourse. New words and phrases put a particular spin on an issue and often carry the hidden implication that a new problem has just arisen.. At first I was amused at the way, for example, the vocabulary for “poverty” changed over time – inequality, disadvantage, deprivation, social malaise, marginalisation, social exclusion, social injustice etc. Jules Feiffer had a nice cartoon about it in which he has a poor kid repeat the various words which had been used to describe his condition and then said ruefully, “at least my vocabulary is improving”!

But I now realise that three powerful forces propelled these verbal gymnastics – first the need of governments to avoid admission of failure – better to imply a new condition had arisen! But the new vocabulary kills institutional memory and prevents us from exploring why previous solutions have failed

Professional interests tend also to arise around each new definition – and create a second, powerful interest favouring new vocabulary. Mystification is one of several methods used by professionals to protect their power and income.

And the last decade or so has seen a third reason for us to pay more attention to the language we use - governments have fallen even further into the hands of spin doctors and corporate interests and a powerful new verbal smokescreen has arisen to try to conceal this. “Evidence-based policy-making” is typical – first the arrogant implication that no policy-making until that point had been based on evidence; and the invented phrase concealing the fact that policy is increasingly being crafted without evidence in order to meet corporate interests! “There is no better lie than a big one!”

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<sup>79</sup> Some examples can be found at <http://everything2.com/title/The+Doubter%2527s+Companion> – and an interview with him at <http://www.scottlondon.com/interviews/saul.html>

<sup>80</sup> not just the literary sort - see section 9

<sup>81</sup> from Daumier to Feiffer and Steadman

<sup>82</sup> Brecht

<sup>83</sup> Goya, Kollwitz and Grosz are the most powerful example

<sup>84</sup> From the “Yes, Minister” series in the UK in the 1970s to “The Thick of it” of the 2000s

### 3. The mystification of professionals.....

In the 1970s, a South American priest Ivan Illich attacked professionals and to the mystification of their processes and language - with his various books which eloquently argued against the damage done to learning by formal schooling methods (*Deschooling Society*); and to health by doctors and hospitals (*Medical Nemesis*).

Stanislaw Andreski was one of the few academics who dared attack the pretensions of the social sciences – in his *Social Sciences as Sorcery* (1973 - now out of print).

The importance of demystifying complex language was continued by C Wright Mills in the 1950s and 1960s who once famously summarised a 250 pages book written in tortuous syntax by the sociologist Talcott Parsons in 12 pages!

Alaister Mant extended the attack to contemporary leadership (*Leaders we Deserve* 1983 – also out of print) – puncturing somewhat the mythology about business leaders which was being spread in the popular management books which were beginning to sell like hot potatoes. Henry Mintzberg – a Canadian management academic – is about the only one who has written simply about what managers actually do (and attacked MBAs) and, in so doing, has stripped management literature of most of its pretensions.

By reducing management exhortations to 99 self-contradictory proverbs Hood's *Administrative Argument* (1991 and also, mysteriously, out of print) showed us how shallow management ideologies are.

In 1992 John Ralston Saul gave us a powerful but idiosyncratic critique of technical expertise in *Voltaire's Bastards – the dictatorship of reason in the west*.

In 1996 Harold Perkins gave us a highly critical account of *The Third Revolution - Professional Elites in the Modern World* – whose moral critique is all the more powerful for its academic origin.

By showing the parallels with religious doctrine, Susan George challenged the economic belief systems which sustained the World Bank (*Faith and Credit – the World Bank's secular empire* (1994).

It was easier for people like Huycinski to take the scalpel to management gurus in *Management Gurus – what makes them and how to become one* (1993) since they are only peripherally of academia.

And a once worthy venture – the European Union – has, sadly, developed such powerful interests of its own that it too is part of this significant obfuscation with its use of such phrases as “subsidiarity”.

***This is an excerpt from a longer paper JUST WORDS which can be found on my website at <http://publicadminreform.webs.com/key%20papers/Just%20words%20-%20jan%2013.pdf>***

***Suggestions on both definitions and words to include would be much appreciated***



## GLOSSARY

“I don’t know what you mean by ‘glory,’” Alice said.

Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. “Of course you don’t—till I tell you. I meant ‘there’s a nice knock-down argument for you!’”

“But ‘glory’ doesn’t mean ‘a nice knock-down argument,’” Alice objected.

“When *I* use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said, in a rather scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.”

“The question is,” said Alice, “whether you *can* make words mean so many different things.”

“The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty, “which is to be master—that’s all.”

Alice was too much puzzled to say anything, so after a minute Humpty Dumpty began again. “They’ve a temper, some of them—particulaly verbs, they’re the proudest—adjectives you can do anything with, but not verbs—however, *I* can manage the whole lot! Impenetrability! That’s what *I* say!”

**Accountability;** the requirement that those in power explain – in a transparent, regular, structured and truthful way – what actions they have authorised and why. The corollary is that any failure of their explanations to satisfy will lead to sanctions – including dismissal. See also “Open Government”

**Adversarial systems;** the more political parties have in common (UK and US) the more they pretend to be poles apart and fight an aggressive, winner-take-all, no-holds-barred contest which leaves no room for civilised discourse; nor policy consensus. Bad policy-making is normally the result.

**Agent;** an intermediary who performs actions on behalf of another. A huge theoretical literature was built around this concept in the 1980s – to try to demonstrate the way in which public servants developed interests separate from that of the public – and to justify privatisation and the separation of public budget-holders from those who supplied public services. Pity that there are so few of these academics now bothering to develop a literature about the (actual rather than theoretical) self-serving and downright immoral behaviour of many of those who now own and manage the privatised bodies and “arms’ length” agencies!

**Agencies;** pretend companies – with Chief Executives and others with hugely inflated salaries and pension rights.

**Ambition;** *Our system obliges us to elevate to office precisely those persons who have the ego-besotted effrontery to ask us to do so; it is rather like being compelled to cede the steering wheel to the drunkard in the back seat loudly proclaiming that he knows how to get us there in half the time. More to the point, since our perpetual electoral cycle is now largely a matter of product recognition, advertising, and marketing strategies, we must be content often to vote for persons willing to lie to us with some regularity or, if not that, at least to speak to us evasively and insincerely. In a better,*

*purser world—the world that cannot be—ambition would be an absolute disqualification for political authority (David Hart).*

**Assumptions;** the things other people make – which cause problems. Parsed – “I think; you assume; (s)he screws up”. Project management techniques do require us to list assumptions and identify and manage risks – but in the field of technical Assistance these are just boxes to tick. In any project, the best approach is to list the worst things which could happen, assume they will occur and plan how to minimise their frequency and effects.

**Audit;** something both overdone and underdone – overdone in volume and underdone in results. A process more feared at the bottom than at the top as frequent recent scandals (Enron; global banking scandals have demonstrated). See also “Law”

**Benchmark;** a technical-sounding term which gives one’s discourse a scientific aura.

**Bottleneck;** what prevents an organisation from achieving its best performance – always located at the top!

**Bureaucracy;** literally “rule by the office” (and the strictly defined powers which surround it – as distinct from rule by whim). See “rule of law”. The adjective (bureaucratic) has now become a term of abuse.

**Capacity;** something which other people lack

**Capacity development;** something which consultants recommend and which generally boils down to some training programmes. In fact capacity is developed by a carefully planned combination of practice and positive feedback.

**Change;** something which was difficult to start in public organisations in the 1970s and is now difficult to stop.

**Change agent;** in the beginning a brave person – now a spiv.

**Citizen;** a displaced person in the modern polis – replaced by the customer who has to have money and spend it before any rights can be exercised<sup>85</sup>.

**Civil servant;** someone who used to be able to stand up to Ministers.

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<sup>85</sup> For an excellent article which explores the significance and implications of the various terms and roles see - <http://www.bdp.org.ar/facultad/catedras/cp/tecadm/Mintzberg%20gerenciando.pdf>

**Client;** someone receiving a (complex) service from a professional – usually with the protection of a professional code.

**Coalition;** a government composed of political parties which have normally fought one another in an election; which have not gained sufficient seats to form a majority government; and which cooperate with other parties to avoid facing the electorate again. Seen by some as highly civilised (encouraging consensual qualities) and by other as highly undemocratic (smoke-filled rooms)

**Commodification;** to put a market value on services which were previously considered a basic right and offered free and offer them for sale on the market in order to make profits for management and shareholders.

**Communications;** the first thing which people blame when things go wrong – parsed “I communicate; you misunderstand; he/they don’t listen”.

**Compliance;** consistency with a defined outcome. Traditionally called “obedience”.

**Consultant;** a con-man who operates like a sultan! An outsider who knows almost nothing about an organisation who is brought in to give the air of objectivity to outrageous changes the bosses have already agreed amongst themselves.

**Consultation;** the skill of bouncing other people to agree with what you have already decided.

**Contract out;** as in “put out a contract on” – to wipe out.

**Control;** to ensure that people do what the elites want. This used to be done by fear – but a range of clever carrots and sticks are now used – as well as words and language itself. Control used to be “ex-ante” (detailed instructions before the event) but is increasingly “ex-post” – through audit, monitoring and evaluation.

**Coordination;** the lack of which is the most annoying thing for the rationalist in organisations

**Corruption;** a fashionable thing to be against. A new anti-corruption industry of consultants has arisen which reformulates the public administration principles to which NPM (see below) is opposed, thereby generating maximum confusion. See also “integrity”

**Customer;** the person who has supplanted the citizen and is responsible for environmental destruction et al (see client)

**Decentralisation;** creating systems of local people who can be made scapegoats for deterioration in service.

**Deliberative democracy;** In contrast to the traditional theory of democracy, in which voting is central, deliberative democracy theorists argue that legitimate lawmaking can arise only through public deliberation – generally through the presentation of evidence and then dissection of this in discussion<sup>86</sup>

**Democracy;** a system which allows citizens to select, at periodical intervals, from a small group of self-selected and perpetuating elites

**Development;** a good thing.

**environment;** what's around me which I can use and abuse for my benefit.

**Effectiveness;** the quality of combining resources in a *harmonious* way to achieve specified objectives

**Efficiency;** a positive ratio between output and input<sup>87</sup>

**Empower;** a classic word of the new century which suggests that power can be benignly given – when in reality it has to be taken.

**Evaluation;** the process of finding out who is to blame. The EU has a very traditional model of evaluation – carried out by outside experts which takes so long (and is so long and tortuous in language) that its results cannot be used in the design of new programmes. See “learning organisation” below.

**Evidence-based policy-making;** a phrase which represents the hubristic peak of the generation of UK social scientism which captured the UK civil service in the late 1990s at the time its political masters succumbed to corporate interests and therefore were practising less rather than more evidence-based policy-making!

**Focus group;** a supposedly representative group of voters who will give us a clue about what we should be doing.

**Governance;** an academic term to describe the obvious – namely that governments lacked the power to do things on their own and required to work in partnership with private and others. Found useful by the World Bank – which is not allowed to engage in political activity – to conceal the fact that they were engaged on a highly ideological mission to privatise the world and to “hollow-out” government<sup>88</sup>.

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<sup>86</sup> see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deliberative\\_democracy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deliberative_democracy)

<sup>87</sup> for an unfashionable view see <http://rwr.wordpress.com/2011/03/16/the-efficiency-myth/>

<sup>88</sup> <http://classwebs.spea.indiana.edu/kenricha/Oxford/Archives/Oxford%202006/Courses/Governance/Articles/Stoker%20-%20Governance.pdf>

**Good governance;** from a useful insight about the importance of good government to economic and social development, it has become a pernicious phrase which is used by the global community and its experts to force developing countries to take on impossible social and political objectives. It forms the basis of the UNDP Millennium Goals. It shows great stupidity to imagine that this could be developed by a combination of moral and financial exhortations by autocracies and kleptocracies. A few voices of common sense have suggested a more appropriate strategy would be that of “good-enough governance”<sup>89</sup>.

**Greed;** something which is killing humanity and the planet – and is epitomised by ownership of an aggressive SUV; its assumed that increasing petrol prices will drive these monsters off our street – but a touch of ridicule would also help!

**Groupthink;** blinkered thinking which overcomes the leadership of an organisation when its culture has become too arrogant, centralised and incestuous: and when it is too protected from critical messages from and about the external world

**Holistic;** a magical quality - creating harmony – which some people imagine can be created in government by appropriate mechanisms of coordination. Others argue that the job will be done naturally by a mixture of decentralisation and the market.

**Hubris;** something which politicians and policy experts suffer from – ie a belief that their latest wheeze will solve problems which have eluded the combined skills and insights of their predecessors

**Human Resource management (HRM);** treating staff and workers like dirt

**Humility;** something which politicians and policy experts have too little of

**Impact;** the measured effect of an activity on identified groups.

**Impact assessment;** the proper (a) identification of the groups which will be affected by a policy change and (b) measurement of the economic impact of the change on those groups. Clearly, very demanding! See “systems approach”

**Implementation;** the act of trying to bring an intended state of affairs to fruition. The word used in the Slavic language perhaps is more powerful – execution! In the 1970s political science developed an important body of literature which showed the various ways in which the good intentions of laws were undermined. The classic book by Wildavsky and Pressman had the marvellous sub-title – “*How Great*

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<sup>89</sup> [http://relooney.fatcow.com/oo\\_New\\_1805.pdf](http://relooney.fatcow.com/oo_New_1805.pdf)

*Expectations in Washington Are Dashed in Oakland; Or, Why It's Amazing that Federal Programs Work at All*<sup>90</sup>.

**Input;** the resources which are put into an activity

**Integrity;** something which NPM has cleaned out from public life. The strategy that came after anti-corruption when we needed to hide the fact that corruption was actually increasing.

**Joined-up government;** New Labour's euphemism for Stalinism.

**Kleptocracy;** A government system in which the transfer of public resources to its elite is a principle overriding any other.

**Law;** "the spider's webs which, if anything small falls into them ensnare it, but large things break through and escape". Solon

**Leader;** the head of an organisation or movement whose attributed qualities seem to range from the saintly to the diabolical. Modern leaders are supposed to exercise moral authority rather than the exercise or threat of force – but few understand what this even means.

**Learning organisation;** something foreign to the EU since its understanding of organisations is trapped in the Weberian model. The last 15 years has seen management theory develop a view that the best way for organisations to keep up with social change is through valuing their own staff by delegation and strong ongoing feedback – not by commissioning external experts to conduct complex and irrelevant evaluations.

**Legislators;** the most despised group in any society (see "parliamentary power").

**Lobbyists;** people who make the laws

**Logframe;** the bible for the Technical Assistance world which - with a list of activities, assumptions, objectives, outputs and risks - conquers the complexity and uncertainty of the world and removes the bother of creativity. Lucy Earle's 2002 critique<sup>91</sup> should be compulsory reading.

**Manage;** to make a mess of.

**Market;** a place or system governed by rules which sets prices through the interaction of buyers and sellers. Under severely restrictive assumptions it can produce what economists call "optimum" results.

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<sup>90</sup> For more see - <http://pactu.edu.np/contents/njpg/dec2009/3-narendra-paudel-a-critical-account-of-policy-implementation-theories.pdf>

<sup>91</sup> <http://publicadminreform.webs.com/key%20papers/Lost%20in%20the%20matrix%20-%20Earle%20and%20logframe.pdf>

The most important of these assumptions are – scale (large numbers of sellers; perfect information; and absence of social costs). In the real world, none of these conditions exist. See also “quasi-market”

**Minister;** etymologically “one who acts on the authority of another” – ie the ruler. In some countries they last some time (longer often than many civil servants); in others (eg UK) they last barely a year!

**Mentor;** someone whose experience has given them a high reputation – whose advice can be used to guide others. Sometime adopted as a formal role in organisations.

**Modernise;** to restructure something which just required some oiling of the wheels.

**Monitor;** a school prefect.

**Neo-liberalism;** one of the deadliest ideologies – some costs

**New public management (NPM);** the body of literature which has in the past 20 years replaced that of old public administration. It has borrowed its concepts entirely from private sector management and has encouraged governments throughout the world -

- to see the “citizen” as a “consumer” of services
- to reduce civil service skills to drafting of contracts; definition of service targets; and regulation for services which are managed at “arms-length” by the private sector, other state bodies or NGOs
- to set up reward systems and penalties to ensure targets are met

It slowly dawned even on the NPM zealots that such an approach is positively Soviet in its inflexible emphasis on targets – and that the reward systems undermine the teamwork and policy coordination which good policies require. We are told that there is now a backlash to NPM – but that was before the global financial crisis!

**OECD;** the club of the rich nations - an apparently neutral body which was in fact one of the most important proselytisers of NPM

**Open government;** an apparent contradiction in terms – “governing” classically involves haggling, compromising, striking deals which will never look good in the cold light of public scrutiny. And even the publication of raw data can prove embarrassing to governments. But Freedom of Information Acts are being passed throughout the world – initially reactive rather than proactive and generally protective of “sensitive” information. Just a pity that this coincides with the run-down of investigative journalism - although a combination of citizen activists with new technology could ultimately prove a powerful combination<sup>92</sup>.

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<sup>92</sup> <http://www.foia.blogspot.com>

**Outcome;** the wider societal impact which a policy seems to have.

**Output;** the immediate way in which the faithful implementation of a policy can be measured.

**Parliamentary power;** when exercised negatively (in the critique and adjustment of incoherent government proposals), something to value very highly. When exercised positively (as legislative initiatives) something to treat as “pork-trough or barrel” politics.

**Performance management;** the system which sets targets and rewards and penalises accordingly.

**Performance-orientation;** a concern for the results of inputs and spending – generally in improved customer satisfaction.

**Policy;** a statement of the tools and resources which government is using to try to achieve an intended set of objectives.

**Policy review;** the critical assessment of the outcomes and outputs of a policy field. This can be carried out within government – or by academic bodies and think-tanks and commissioned by various bodies including government.

**Political party;** the last bastion of scoundrels

**Politician;** someone elected by voters who is, in theory, accountable to them but in fact does what his party and its leadership tells him – since this is the only way to survive let alone climb the greasy pole to advancement. Rebels become mavericks.

**Politics;** „A strife of interests masquerading as a contest of principles. The conduct of public affairs for private advantage” (Bierce – Devil’s Dictionary)

**Populism;** movements which take democracy too far.

**Post-modern;** distrust of explanations. “The refusal to describe humanity’s progress as a rational process whose principles can be mastered – as though historical progress were one more step on the way to heaven” (from intro to *Postmodern Public Administration* by HD Millar and C Fox)

**Priorities;** “Gouverner”, as the French say “c’est choisir”. State bodies and services can never do equal justice to all the laws they are required to implement. Many new member states continue to churn out strategic documents which are checklists of good intentions – which brings the law into disrepute.



**Project management;** a nice idea! The religion of the new generation which operates from hand to mouth on external funding. See also “assumptions” and “logframe”.

**Public administration;** a phrase which reminds us that state bodies serve the public – not the state!!!

**Public management;** something more clever than public administration – which therefore warrants higher rewards and excuses shady behaviour.

**Quality management;** a fashionable term of the 1990s of which we now hear little.

**Quasi-market;** a pretend market. In the misguided attempt to introduce business systems into public services, governments have tried to get everyone to compete against one another. Naturally this requires a lot of paperwork and bureaucrats (disguised under the term “transaction costs”) – which is, curiously, what the reforms were supposed to get away from! See also “side-effects”.

**Rationality;** how many people remember the incredible debate in academic circles in the 1960s and 1970s about rationality, bureaucracy and politics – and whether it was ever possible to have significant policy changes as distinct from incremental fudge (“disjointed incrementalism” as Lindblom called it)? Now we seem to have the opposite problem. Sadly, few academics seem to be discussing it.

**Reengineer;** to take apart and build in a different way. A new term in the public sector for an interest that goes back to the zero-budgeting of the 1960s. Why is it I always think of Stalin’s epithet for Soviet writers “Engineers of the human soul” when I hear the re-engineering word?

**Reform;** to divert attention from core questions by altering organisational boundaries and responsibilities

**Regulation;** as natural monopolies have been privatised, a vast system of public regulation has been set up to control the obvious consequences of private monopolies. See also “regulatory reform”

**Regulatory reform;** “reforming regulations that raise unnecessary obstacles to competition, innovation and growth, while ensuring that regulations efficiently serve important social objectives” (OECD)

**Rule of law;** the principle that no-one is above the law. See also “Law”.

**Sceptic;** an aggressive agnostic – a quality which is greatly missed these days

**Scrutiny;** a political form of audit which became popular in the UK recently to give local politicians something to do after local government had been stripped of most of its functions.

**Services;** what the outputs of government activities should give us – but rarely does.

**Side-effects;** unanticipated and negative impacts of policy interventions – generally more powerful than the positive. Can lead to a fatalistic view of policy-making (see Hood)

**Social capital;** a term brought into the currency of think-tanks and government by the combined efforts of Robert Putnam and the World Bank<sup>93</sup>. Most of us understand it by the simpler trust ‘trust’.

**Society;** what used to bear the responsibility for public services and is now being asked again to take them over (see present UK coalition’s “Big Society”)

**State;** a bad thing – at least for worshippers of NPM

**Strategy;** a statement of how an organisation understands the environment in which it is working; what problems or opportunities it sees as priority to deal with – and how it proposes to do that.

**Strategic;** what I consider important

**Strategic management;** a proactive style of management

**street-level officials;** a term used to describe those officials who are in close contact with the members of the public and have to exercise discretion and judgement in their behaviour (field; front-line). Its positive sense is that they often have a better sense of what the public needs than senior management. Its negative sense is that, distant from control, such officials can more easily engage in self-serving behaviour.

**Subsidiarity;** a term used by the Catholic hierarchy which is now part of EU rhetoric – can be used to legitimise the further stripping of state functions. Its origin lies apparently in Thomas Aquinas and the justification for government action only where private initiative is insufficient or lacking.

**Sustainable;** a word which, by being placed in front of development, has lost its meaning

**Systems approach;** an approach to management which appreciates the complexity of the environments in which interventions take place and invites teams to invent their own solutions based on a systematic definition of the problem facing the customer<sup>94</sup>.

**Targets;** what those in power use to measure the performance of – and to blame – others

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<sup>93</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social\\_capital](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_capital)

<sup>94</sup> <http://www.thesystemsthinkingreview.co.uk/index.php?pg=18&backto=1&utwkstoryid=257>

**Teamwork;** a word to beware! Generally used by those in power to get their way while seeming democratic. While true that decisions taken as a result of joint discussion can be often better (and more robust) than those imposed, a lot depends on the manner in which the discussion is held - whether it is structured in a way designed to elicit problems and ideas or, rather, to sanction a dominant view (see groupthink). There is a useful test (Belbin) which allows you to assess the role you play in team situations.

**Think-tank;** the shock-troops of neo-liberalism. Apparently neutral bodies (funded, however, by big business) which marketed the products for the transformation of the rational-legal state into a state of neo-liberal governance.

**Tools of government;** the various ways government tries to make you do what they think is good for you. Laws do not implement themselves. Their implementation requires a commitment to change which cannot be taken for granted in societies whose populations are struggling to survive and whose new rulers – many uncertain of how long they will survive in office – are subject to temptations of short-term personal gains. In such contexts, is it realistic to expect policy-makers and civil servants to have an overriding concern for future public benefit? To explore that question requires us to look at the wider issue of motivation. The table below sets out seven different motivations which can be found in people – and some of the policy tools which would be relevant for such motivations. Legalism, for example, assumes that people know about laws and will obey them – regardless of the pull of extended family ties (eg for recruitment). Training and functional review assumes that people simply need to understand in order to take the relevant action. Other tools assume that man is basically a calculating machine. And so on....In 2008 the British National Audit Office commissioned a study on sanctions and rewards in the public sector<sup>95</sup> – the only such government review I know. However, as Colin Talbot points out in his new book on *Theories of Performance*, the assessment is based on discredited rationalistic theory of behaviour

### Motives and tools in the change process

Motivating Factor	Example of tool	Particular mechanism
<b>1. Understanding</b>	Training Campaigns Counting and comparing – league tables	Rational persuasion Appeal to common sense Questioning when one's body compares badly
<b>2. Commitment</b>	Leadership Consultation and cooperation Training	Legitimisation; inspiration Shared vision Pride (in behaving professionally)
<b>3. Personal Benefit</b>	Pay increase and bonus Promotion (including political)	Monetary calculation ambition

<sup>95</sup> [http://www.nao.org.uk/publications/0708/sanctions\\_and\\_rewards.aspx](http://www.nao.org.uk/publications/0708/sanctions_and_rewards.aspx)

	office) Good publicity Winning an award	Reputation; Psychological Status
<b>4. Personal Cost</b>	Named as poor performer Demotion Report cards	Psychological (Shame) Monetary pride
<b>5. Obligation</b>	Law Action plan Family ties	Courts Managerial authority Social pressure
<b>6. Peer influence</b>	Peer review Bribery Quality circles	Pressure from colleagues
<b>7. Social influence</b>	Opinion surveys	Feedback from public about service quality

Source; an earlier version of this originally appeared in Young (EU Tacis 2005)

Governments trying to improve the performance of state bodies have also made increasing use of “league tables”. This involves audit bodies, for example, collecting and publishing comparative information about the performance of individual schools and hospitals in an attempt to persuade senior managers to address the problems of poor performance (1.3 in table). This can also act as a market-type force - bringing the force of public opinion against the organisation (4.3 in table).

**Training;** “surgery of the mind”. A marvellous phrase an old political colleague of mine used to describe the mind-bending and propaganda which goes on in a lot of workshops.

**Transparency;** an EU buzz-word – meaning exposing the outside world to the tortuous procedures and language of the European Commission. The reaction to the coverage which Wikileaks gave to the leaked US Embassy cables shows how skindeep is the commitment to transparency.

**Trust;** something which economists and their models don’t have and which, therefore, is assumed by them not to exist within organisations. As economic thinking has invaded public organisations, everyone has been assumed to be a “rent-seeker” – and a huge (and self-fulfilling) edifice of checks and controls have been erected

**Whistle-blower;** someone without authority who blows a whistle – and brings everyone down on them for the chaos they cause.

## **Some of the papers which can be read on Ronald Young' s website** <http://www.freewebs.com/publicadminreform>

**Building Municipal Capacity**; an interesting account of an intellectual journey

**Just Words?** a glossary and bibliography for the fight against the pretensions and perversities of power

**Chinese administrative Reform in perspective; a 2011 briefing**; one of my provocations - written for anyone involved in discussions about Chinese PAR.

**In Transit - Part One** The first section of the book I wrote a decade ago for young Central European reformers. I find it stands up pretty well to the test of time

**The Management of Government** A very thoughtful 2000 piece by management guru Mintzberg

**How do we build training systems which actually improve the performance of state bodies?** This paper extracts some lessons from the work I have done in the last decade - particularly in Kyrgyzstan and Bulgaria. Even altho I say it myself - it is one of best papers on the subject

**Democracy, Bernard, it must be stopped!** Not one of my papers but some "tongue in cheek" advice from the retiring Sir Humphrey (of "Yes Minister") to the young colleague who inherits his position. Quite brilliant! By Anthony Jay

**Overview of PAR in transition countries** This is the paper I drafted for the European Agency for Reconstruction after the staff retreat the EAR Director invited me to speak at in June 2006 in Skopje, Macedonia. The best papers are always written after the event!

**Annotated Bibliography for change agents** For quite a few years I had the habit of keeping notes on the books I was reading. Perhaps they will be useful to others?

**Lost in the logframe**; a powerful critique by Lucy Earle of the project management system which governs all technical assistance project these days and which kills creativity and joy.

**Roadmap for Local Government in Kyrgyzstan**; this is a long doc (117 pages) will take some time to download. I enjoyed pulling out this metaphor - and developing and using (in workshops) the diagram at pages 76-77

**Transfer of Functions - European experiences 1970-2000** I learned a lot as I drafted this paper for my Uzbek colleagues. I haven't seen this sort of typology before.