

ESRC Public Services Programme, Oxford Internet Institute and DPIR Public Policy  
Unit  
Public Service Workshop Series Hilary Term 2008

## **‘Paradoxes of Modernization: Unintended Consequences of Public Policy Reforms’**

12.30-1.45 Tuesdays weeks 2 to 8, Seminar Room, Oxford Internet Institute

Conveners: Christopher Hood (All Souls, Department of Politics and IR) and Helen Margetts (Mansfield, Oxford Internet Institute)

Ten years ago, James Scott in his well-known Seeing Like a State argued that what he called ‘high-modernist’ exercises in state-led social engineering projects (such as scientific forestry or ‘villagisation’ in Africa) repeatedly tended to lead to surprise and disappointment. The aim of this lunchtime workshop is to revisit that theme and explore the unintended and unanticipated effects associated with state-led ‘modernization’ in various forms.

The workshop involves speakers and participants from a range of disciplines that includes anthropology, history, economics and political science from engineering to anthropology. It aims to look at a range of particular cases and conclude by an attempt to generalize and categorize. The workshop will draw on work done by scholars studying how technology initiatives develop (often seeming to take on a life of their own) as well as work done on public sector ‘modernization’ initiatives that put heavy emphasis on the development of performance metrics and associated incentive systems. In that sense it draws on research work in the spheres of both the Internet Institute and the ESRC ‘Public Services’ research programme of which Christopher Hood is Director.

The workshop, sponsored by the ESRC Public Services Programme, the Oxford Internet Institute and the DPIR Public Policy Unit is part of a series that has been running for several years, and comprises a small informal group of faculty and graduate students interested in the analysis of public services and executive government. It aims to work wherever possible on the basis of pre-circulated short papers, with short presentations followed immediately by discussion. It works as a ‘brown bag’ workshop, so bring your own sandwich. Water, juice and coffee will be provided. All are welcome to the workshop: contact [publicservices@politics.ox.ac.uk](mailto:publicservices@politics.ox.ac.uk) if you need further information or want to put your name on the list of participants

### **Programme (subject to alteration):**

22 January: Tim Leunig (LSE): ‘The Glamour of Speed: Why Politicians Spend Money Upgrading Little Used Long Distance Train Lines Instead of Heavily-Used Commuter Lines.’

29 January: Devi Sridhar (All Souls): ‘How did “Rational” Nutrition Policy Develop in the World Bank and What Happened to it When it was Applied on the Ground in India?’

5 February: Justin Keen (Leeds): ‘The Complexity of Policy-Making: Why Are Massive IT Programmes Seen as a Cure for the NHS and What are Their Outcomes?’

12 February: What was unanticipated or unintended in the development of the internet (e.g. the growth of cyber-crime): TBA

19 February: David Marsden (LSE): ‘Why Do we Keep Adopting Pay-for-Performance Systems in the Face of Evidence that they Fail to Motivate?’

26 February: Peter John (Manchester): ‘Why do High Performing Local Authorities Strive to Improve their Performance When the General Public only Notices the Poor Performers? Voter Reaction to Incumbents’ Performance in English Local Governments, 1999-2007’

4 March: Perri 6 (Nottingham): ‘When Forethought and Outturn Part: A Conceptual Framework for Understanding Unintended, Unanticipated and/or Unwelcome Consequences of Public Policy’

### **Some Background Reading**

Below we include a preliminary list of background readings, combining the initial list of readings on the theme of unintended consequences we identified last year, the additional readings suggested by other participants, notably Avner Offer and Andreas Busch, and a few more specifically associated with modernization in some sense. We have also added some readings from Perri 6’s final conceptual-framework paper, which we expect to make available to participants in the workshop on 29 January.

Anscombe, G E M (1957) Intention, Oxford, Blackwell

Boudon, R (1982) The Unintended Consequences of Social Action, Basingstoke, Macmillan

Bovens, M, 't Hart, P and Peters, B G eds. (2001) Success and Failure in Public Governance, Cheltenham, Edward Elgar (classifies explanatory variables in terms of programmatic success/failure and political success/failure)

Brooks, H (1986) ‘The Typology of Surprises in Technology, Institutions and Development’ Ch 11 in W.C. Clark and R.E. Munn eds Sustainable Development of the Biosphere, Cambridge, International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis, Cambridge University Press: 325-50.

Bueno de Mesquita, B and Lalman, D (1992) War and Reason: Domestic and International Imperatives New Haven, Yale University Press, esp chs. 1–2 (war is often portrayed as an unintended consequence and some argue that wars break out much more frequently than they ought to from a rational actor perspective)

Collingridge, D (1992) The Management of Scale: Big Organizations, Big Decisions, Big Mistakes, London, Routledge.

Grantham, A (2001) ‘How Networks Explain Unintended Policy Implementation Outcomes: The Case of UK Rail Privatisation’ Public Administration 79 (4): 851-70

Gray, P and 't Hart, P eds. (1998) Policy Disasters in Western Europe London, Routledge (policy failures typically involve consequences that are unintended at least by some of the actors)

- Grice, H P (1971) Intention and Uncertainty, Proceedings of the British Academy LVII, Oxford, Oxford University Press
- Hood, C and Peters, B G (2004) 'The Middle Aging of New Public Management: Into the Age of Paradox?' Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory 14 (3)
- Levitt, S and Dubner, S (2006) Freakonomics: A Rogue Economist Explores the Hidden Side of Everything, London, Penguin
- Lewchuck, W (1987) American Technology and the British Vehicle Industry, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, chs. 9–10, esp. pp. 224-5 (unintended consequences from a rational actor perspective)
- Lorenz, E H (1991) Economic Decline in Britain: The Shipbuilding Industry, 1890–1970, Oxford, Clarendon Press (unintended consequences from a rational actor perspective)
- Merton, R K (1936) 'The Unanticipated Consequences of Purposive Social Action' American Sociological Review 1: 894-904.
- Merton, R K (1998) 'Afterword: Unanticipated Consequences and Kindred Sociological Ideas: A Personal Gloss' in C. Mongardine and S. Tabboni eds Robert K Merton and Contemporary Sociology, New Brunswick, Transaction Publishers: 295-318
- Moore, W E and Tumin M M (1949) 'Some Social Functions of Ignorance' American Sociological Review 14: 787-95.
- Moynihan, D P (1969) Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding, New York, Free Press.
- Preston, F W and Roots, R I (2004) 'Introduction: Law and Its Unintended Consequences' American Behavioral Scientist 47, 11: 1371-75
- Scott, J (1998) Seeing Like a State: How Certain Attempts to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed, New Haven, Yale University Press
- Sieber, S (1981) Fatal Remedies, New York, Plenum.