

CHAPTER 2**EXECUTIVE GOVERNANCE and its PUZZLES**

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1. INTRODUCTION

The phrase ‘executive governance’ refers to the merger of two discrete bodies of work, the study of executive government in political science and the study of governance in public administration. We focus on their intersection; on common ground and shared puzzles. We start with a brief account of the several approaches to executive studies in political science, and of the various waves in the study of governance. We cover the core executives of Westminster and Western Europe parliamentary polities. After this conspectus of the literature, we devote most of our attention to the shared puzzles where executive studies and governance intersect. We focus on four puzzles: predominant or collaborative leadership; central capability or implementation; formal or informal coordination; and political accountability or webs of accountabilities. We conclude with some suggestions about the directions for future research under the headings of: the interpretive turn, court politics, and presidential studies.

2. APPROACHES TO EXECUTIVE GOVERNMENT

This section introduces briefly the main approaches to the analysis of executive government that are directly relevant to the study of governance. We focus on: formal

institutional analysis; modernist empiricism; political biography, the core executive, and the predominant prime minister. We realize this listing is not exhaustive. It omits, for example, rational choice analysis, and the psychology of political leadership because they do not engage with the literature on governance (but see Rhodes 2006a).

2.1 Formal institutional analysis

Eckstein (1963, pp. 10-11) points out 'If there is any subject matter at all which political scientists can claim exclusively for their own, a subject matter that does not require acquisition of the analytical tools of sister-fields and that sustains their claim to autonomous existence, it is, of course, formal-legal political structure' (see also Rhodes 2006b). Perhaps the most famous example of this approach is the work on Westminster polities. This notion is remarkably diffuse but commonly refers to a family of ideas that includes: parliamentary sovereignty; strong cabinet government; ministerial responsibility, where ministers are individually and collectively accountable to parliament; a professional, non-partisan public service; and a legitimate opposition (Rhodes, Wanna and Weller 2009, chapter 1)

Most relevant for our discussion is the notion of the 'efficient secret' of 'the closer union, the nearly complete fusion, of the executive and legislative powers' (Bagehot 1963, p. 65). In the 2000s, parliamentary government continues to be defined by this buckle. For Shugart (2006, p. 348), the executive arises out of the legislative assembly, and can be dismissed by a vote of 'no confidence' by that legislature. So, the party or parties with a majority in parliament form the executive, defined by key positions (that is, prime minister and cabinet). The cabinet is collectively responsible for its decisions, and its members (or ministers) are individually responsible to parliament for the work of their departments. The Westminster approach also assumes that power lies with specific positions and the people

who occupy those positions. Examples of work in this tradition include: Birch 1964, Jennings 1959, and Wheare 1963.

2.2 Modernist empiricism

Modernist-empiricism (sometimes labelled positivism or behaviouralism) treats institutions such as legislatures, constitutions and executives as discrete, atomized objects to be compared, measured and classified. It adopts comparisons across time and space as a means of uncovering regularities and probabilistic explanations to be tested against neutral evidence (see Bevir and Rhodes 2006, chapter 5). The favoured method is the survey. For example, Blondel and Müller-Rommel's (1993a, p. 15) work on Western Europe studies the 'the interplay of one major independent variable – the single-party or coalition character of the cabinet – with a number of structural and customary arrangements in governments, and of the combined effect of these factors on decision making processes' in twelve West European cabinets. It is 'a fully comparative analysis' with data drawn from a survey of 410 ministers in nine countries; and an analysis of newspaper reports on cabinet conflicts in eleven countries. Similarly, Aberbach, Putnam and Rockman (1981) conducted a survey of politicians and bureaucrats in seven countries, exploring their social origins, their roles and styles in policymaking, their ideology, their commitment to democratic principles, and the interactions between politicians and bureaucrats.

2.3 Political biography

'Life history' refers to auto/biography and the collection and use of personal documents - memoir, diary, oral history, and other personal documents and stories– to write 'a life' (Denzin 1989, chapter 2, Roberts 2002, chapter 3). Marquand's (2009, p. 189) appellation 'tombstone biography' remains apt. It refers to ' an ingrained centuries-old habit

of mind' in which 'biographers take it for granted that their task is to portray their subject as more worthy than she or he might otherwise be thought to be (Pimlott 1994, p. 157). For all the dangers of becoming 'valets to the famous' (Pimlott 1994, p. 159), this tradition has produced many accomplished life histories. The volume of 'private information' reported in the work of biographers is impressive, and will bear such secondary analysis as mapping the membership of the prime ministerial courts (see section 5.2 below).

Life history can be a tool for answering broader questions in the study of politics that go beyond the life itself; they are not just chronological narratives (Walter 2002, Rhodes 2012a). Often the uses of biography are cast in general terms. Thus, Pimlott (1999, pp. 39, 41) writes about 'a character in an environment' because it 'illuminates a changing environment'. He wrote about Harold Wilson 'as a way of assessing the change of attitudes that swept Britain in the post-war period, and especially in the 1960s'. So, political scientists writing life history can and do apply insights from the academic study of politics.

2.4 Core executive

The core executive approach was developed in the analysis of British government by Dunleavy and Rhodes (1990), but it has travelled well (Elgie 1997, p. 2011). It defines the executive in functional terms. So, instead of asking which position is important, we can ask which functions define the innermost part or heart of government. For example, the core functions of the British executive are to pull together and integrate central government policies and to act as final arbiters of conflicts between different elements of the government machine. These functions can be carried out by institutions other than prime minister and cabinet; for example, the Treasury and the Cabinet Office.

But power is contingent and relational; that is, it depends on the relative power of other actors and events. Ministers depend on the prime minister for support in getting funds from the Treasury. In turn, prime ministers depend on their ministers to deliver the party's electoral promises. Both ministers and prime ministers depend on the health of the global economy for a stable currency and economic growth to ensure the needed financial resources are available. This power-dependence approach focuses on the distribution of such resources as money and authority in the core executive and explores the shifting patterns of dependence between the several actors. Power relations vary because all core executive actors have some resources, but no one consistently commands all the resources necessary to achieve their goals. So, they exchange such resources as, for example, money, legislative authority or expertise. These exchanges take the form of games in which actors manoeuvre for advantage. The term 'core executive' directs our attention, therefore, to the key questions of 'who does what' and 'who has what resources' (and for examples of work in this idiom see: Elgie 1997 and 2011, Rhodes 1995, Smith 1999 and their citations).

2.5 Prime Ministerial Predominance

This thesis is associated with the work of Richard Heffernan. He argues the proposition that power is relational and based on dependency is 'only partially accurate. Power is relational between actors but it is also *locational*. It is dependent on where actors are to be found in the core executive, and whether they are at the centre or the periphery of key core executive networks' (Heffernan 2003, p. 348). Power-dependence characterizes core executive relationships, so Heffernan focuses on the distribution and dispersal of resources and shifting patterns of dependence between multiple actors. Prime ministers command many 'institutional resources', including patronage, prestige, authority, political centrality and policy reach, knowledge, information and expertise, control of the agenda, and Crown Prerogative; for

example, to delegate powers and responsibilities to ministers and departments (Heffernan 2003, pp. 356-57). They also have ‘personal resources’ such as: reputation, skill and ability; association with political success; public popularity; and high standing in his or her party (Heffernan 2003, p. 351; 2005, p. 16). It follows that the more resources a prime minister has, or can accumulate, the greater their potential for predominance. But many ministers also have resources that are not necessarily available to prime ministers. They can include ‘a professional, permanent and knowledgeable staff, expert knowledge and relevant policy networks, time, information, and, not least, an annual budget’ (Heffernan 2005, p. 614). There is much variation between countries but the minister without resources is the exception rather than the rule.

From the start, Heffernan’s (2003, p. 350) argument about predominance had many qualifications. He suggested that prime ministerial authority is ‘contingent and contextual’. Prime ministers have the ‘potential’ to be predominant ‘but only when personal resources are married with institutional power resources, and when the prime minister is able to use both wisely and well’. So, the prime minister’s personal resources are ‘never guaranteed. They come and go, are acquired and squandered, are won and lost’ (Heffernan 2003, p. 356). Later versions of the prime ministerial dominance argument also make significant qualifications (Heffernan 2005, pp. 616-7). In short, contingency, or one damned thing after another, means that predominance is transient.

So, we read the later Heffernan (2005) and Bennister and Heffernan (2011) as an important set of qualifications to the prime ministerial predominance argument. It is significant that they wrote their first version during the heyday of the Blair ‘presidency’, while their qualifications reflect his later decline. In his most recent article, in reply to Dowding (2013), Heffernan (2013, pp. 642 and 643) emphasises that the prime ministers can have ‘more or less political capital’ and their ‘power waxes and wanes’. These qualifications downplay prime

ministerial predominance and bridge the gap between their approach and proponents of the core executive (see section 4.1).

3. APPROACHES TO GOVERNANCE

The literature on governance is large and scattered (see Kjaer 2004, Pierre 2000). We describe the main waves of governance in the study of public administration: network governance and metagovernance (and for more detail see Rhodes 2012b).

3.1 Network governance

The network governance literature has been reviewed and classified many times before (Börzel 1998 and 2011, Klijn 1997 and 2008, and Rhodes 1990 and 2006c). We offer only a brief recap of the several strands (see section on ‘Political accountability or webs of accountabilities’).

In Britain, the first-wave of governance narratives is referred to as the ‘Anglo-governance school’ (Marinetti 2003). It starts with the notion of policy networks or sets of organizations clustered around a major government function or department. Central departments need the cooperation of such groups to deliver services. For many policy areas, actors are interdependent and decisions are a product of their game-like interactions, rooted in trust and regulated by rules of the game negotiated and agreed by the participants. Trust and reciprocity are essential for cooperative behaviour and, therefore, the existence of the network. These networks are a distinctive coordinating mechanism different from markets and hierarchies and not a hybrid of them. Such networks have significant degree of autonomy from the state - they are self-organizing - although the state can indirectly and imperfectly steer them

(Rhodes 1997, p. 53). In sum, for the Anglo-governance School', governance refers to governing with and through networks (see Rhodes 2007).

In Germany, there is the work of Renate Mayntz, Fritz Schapf and their colleagues at the Max Planck Institute on *steuerungstheorie* (see for example, Marin and Mayntz 1991, and Scharpf 1997). They were among the first to treat networks, not as interest group intermediation, but as a mode of governance.

In the Netherlands, scholars at the Erasmus University focused on more effective ways of steering networks; see for example, Kickert et al 1997, Koppenjan and Klijn 2004. Such ideas caught on rapidly and mutated to embrace working in partnerships and collaborative management (see section 4.1).

Most recently, attention turned from describing the growth of networks to the normative implications of that growth and the questions of how to find ways of participating in networks that preserve legitimacy and accountability, and how to hold networks to account (see section 4.4). The search was on for new forms of democratic governance and new mechanisms of accountability (see for example Bevir 2010).

Finally, America caught up with Europe and brought their characteristic modernist-empiricist skill set to bear on networks and governance. If European scholars favoured case studies, their American colleagues combined 'large N' studies of networks (for a survey of this work see Meier and O'Toole 2005) with an instrumental view that sought to make the study of networks relevant to public managers (see for example Agranoff 2007, Goldsmith and Eggers 2004).

3.2 Metagovernance

Critics of the first-wave characteristically focus on the argument the state has been hollowed out. For example, Pierre and Peters (2000, pp. 78, 104-5 and 111) argue the shift to network governance could ‘increase public control over society’ because governments ‘rethink the mix of policy instruments’. As a result, ‘coercive or regulatory instruments become less important and ... “softer” instruments gain importance’. In short, the state has not been hollowed-out but reasserted its capacity to govern by regulating the mix of governing structures such as markets and networks and deploying indirect instruments of control (see for example: Bell and Hindmoor 2009, Jessop 2000 and 2003, Kooiman 2003, and Sørensen and Torfing 2007).

Metagovernance refers to this new mix; to the state’s use of negotiation, diplomacy, and more informal modes of steering to secure coordination. As with network governance, metagovernance comes in several varieties (Sørensen and Torfing 2007, pp. 170-80). However, these approaches share a concern with the varied ways in which the state now *steers* organizations, governments and networks rather than directly providing services through state bureaucracies, or *rowing*. These other organizations undertake much of the work of governing; they implement policies, they provide public services, and at times they even regulate themselves. The state governs the organizations that govern civil society; ‘the governance of government and governance’ (Jessop 2000, p. 23). Moreover, the other organizations characteristically have a degree of autonomy from the state; they are often voluntary or private sector groups or they are governmental agencies or tiers of government separate from the core executive. So, the state cannot govern them solely by the instruments that work in bureaucracies (see section 4.2).

4. THE PUZZLES

According to the literature on executive studies, we have witnessed the emergence of the predominant prime minister. According to the Anglo-governance school, the core executive's capacity to steer is reduced or hollowed-out from above by international interdependencies such as membership of the EU, from below by marketization and networks, and from within by the competing agendas and ambitions of ministers and agencies. As Helms (2012, p. 2) argues:

The 'governance turn' in political science moved the focus of political analysis on decision making and problem solving but at the same time cultivated strongly sceptical views about the possible relevance of individual political leaders.

We unpack this broad characterization of the relationship between the two fields of study by focusing focus on four 'puzzles' (Hecló 1974, pp. 305-6): predominant or collaborative leadership; central capability or implementation; formal or informal coordination; and managerial accountability or webs of accountabilities. We have devised these puzzles to encompass and systematize the diverse debates in executive governance. In particular, we focus on *shared* puzzles; on the intersection of executive studies and governance.

4.1 Predominant or collaborative leadership

The classic debate in the Westminster formal institutional tradition (see section 2.1) concerned the relative power of prime minister and cabinet (see Blick and Jones 2010, chapters 1 and 2), Latterly, the presidentialization thesis took over from this debate. For Poguntke and Webb (2005, pp. 5 and 7), presidentialization has three faces: the executive face, the party face, and the electoral face. Presidentialization occurs when there is a shift of

‘political power resources and autonomy to the benefit of individual leaders’ along each face and a corresponding loss to such collective actors as cabinet (see also see: Foley, 2000: chapter 1). The problem with this argument is that it was both mislabelled and overstated. We do not have the space (or indeed inclination) to rehash the debate (see for example, Dowding 2013, and the several replies in *Parliamentary Affairs*, 66 (3) 2013). We restrict ourselves to three comments.

First, in the *electoral arena*, personalization is a prominent feature of media management in all countries and has a significant if small electoral effect in most. If we must use presidential language, it is here in the electoral and party arena that it is most apt. We live in an era of spatial leadership in which prime ministers cultivate selective political detachment or distance from their party and their government, especially their problems (Foley 2000, p. 31).

Second, in the *policymaking arena*, there is some truth to the claim of a centralization of policymaking on the prime minister. However, this claim applies to selected policy areas, with the equally important qualification that the prime minister’s attention is also selective (see section 4.2).

The prime minister’s influence is most constrained in the *policy implementation arena*. This arena is conspicuous for its absence in the presidentialization thesis. It is central to the network governance narrative. In this account, other senior government figures, ministers and their departments, and other agencies are key actors. There is much that goes on in government about which the prime minister knows little and affects even less. Many of these policy arenas are embedded in dependent relationships with domestic and international agencies and governments, making command and control strategies counterproductive. So, there is another story of prime ministerial power that focuses on the problems of governance

and sees the prime minister as constantly involved in negotiations and diplomacy with a host of other politicians, officials, and citizens.

We accept that prime ministers can be predominant but few control and then only for some policies, some of the time. At this point, the argument can be helpfully recast taking account of the network literature. Burch and Holliday (1996 and 2004) see the prime minister as the core, or nodal point, of the core networks supported by enhanced central resources that increase his or her power potential. However, ‘the enhancement of central capacity within the British system of government reflects contingent factors, including the personalities of strategically-placed individuals (notably, but not only, the PM)’. They note that such changes are ‘driven by prime ministerial whim’ and ‘if they so desire, [prime ministers] try to shape the core in their own image’. However, their ability to manage these core networks ‘depends on the motivation and skill of key actors, and on the circumstances in which they find themselves at any given moment in time’ (Burch and Holliday 2004, pp. 17 and 20). Similarly, Helms’ (2005) comparative study accepts that resource exchange is central to analysing executive leadership (see Elgie 2011 for further comparative citations). The shared meeting ground for all sides in this debate is the idea that the prime minister is the ‘principal node of key core executive networks’ (Heffernan 2005, p. 613).

We can now introduce a second strand to the network governance literature. Accepting that central actors depend on subnational and other actors for the delivery of key services, the network governance literature explores the limits to command and control strategies and explores other cooperative leadership styles. The literature on collaborative governance will serve as an example.

Ansell and Gash (2008, p. 544) define collaborative governance as a collective decision-making process ‘where one or more public agencies directly engages non-state stakeholders’ in the ‘formal, consensus oriented, and deliberative’ implementation of public policy or management of public programmes. The key question is whether opposing stakeholders can work together in a collaborative way. The answer is a ‘cautious yes’, and a key part of that answer is leadership, which is: ‘crucial for setting and maintaining clear ground rules, building trust, facilitating dialogue, and exploring mutual gains’ (Ansell and Gash 2008, pp. 12-13). Such leadership is variously described as, hands-off, soft, integrative, facilitative or diplomatic. The shared feature is that it is not directive, hands-on, or command and control. There is also a related literature on how to manage your networks that focuses on steering, not rowing (see for example: Agranoff 2007; Goldsmith and Eggers 2004, Huxham and Vangen 2005).

4.2 Central capability or implementation

With the perceived centralization of policymaking, the executive studies literature focused on central capacity or central capability. Political leaders are constantly searching for tools that will deliver better coordination and regulation in a governance environment seen as more pluralized, fragmented and contested. This environment continually exposes their dependency and the inability to exert control and influence.

The literature on Westminster governments notes the pluralization of advice, the growth of central advisory units, and the attendant challenges for coordination and in managing new dependencies. Among Westminster governments, prime ministers and ministers traditionally looked to the career public service for policy advice and for structures and routines to support their decision-making. Under the pressures of governance they have

relied increasingly on staff in their private offices. The task of supporting ministers is now shared between partisan personal staff, non-partisan career officials, external consultants and others. Ministerial support arrangements have become more varied, requiring someone to manage them.

A growing body of literature documents the growth of staffing and support units in the core executive throughout advanced industrial democracies. Peters, Rhodes and Wright (1999, p. 15) note that ‘growth, institutionalization, as well as politicization and hybridization are common features of the staffing of summits’. The pressures fuelling this growth are said to include: the 24/7 news cycle and the personalization of politics; the exigencies of the war on terror; increasing demands for domestic policy coordination; and the pluralization of policy advice (Peters, Rhodes and Wright 2000, pp. 6-11). The emergence and growing importance of political staff is a response to these pressures and the need to coordinate inputs from multiple sources, referred to as the pluralization of advice (Blick 2004, Eichbaum and Shaw 2009, Tiernan 2007). The consequences of this trend are a matter of dispute. For proponents of the presidential and predominance theses, this growth of staff support has strengthened prime ministers at the expense of ministers, cabinet and other players, allowing them to become predominant (Bennister 2007; Walter and Strangio 2007).

Proponents of the governance narrative observe that this growth seeks to sustain a command and control prime minister when governance is characterized by ‘rubber levers’. They observe, for example, that the continuous reform of the British centre speaks of the failure of centralized interventions (rarely control). Also, despite a large and growing Prime Ministerial Office with its many advisers, the experiences of the Rudd and Gillard governments in Australia are not obvious examples of clear, central political direction.

Nonetheless, political advisers are now an essential ‘third element’ in the core executives of most parliamentary governments (Eichbaum and Shaw 2010, Tiernan 2007).

As well as pointing to the limits to centralizing strategies, the metagovernance literature also argues for a new toolkit for central agencies. Its proponents argue there are several ways in which the state can steer, rather than command, the other actors involved in governance (see for example Jessop 2000, pp. 23-4, and 2003). First, the state can set *the rules of the game* for other actors and then leave them to do what they will within those rules; they work ‘in the shadow of hierarchy’. So, it can redesign markets, reregulate policy sectors, or introduce constitutional change. Second, the state can try to steer other actors using *storytelling*. It can organize dialogues, foster meanings, beliefs, and identities among the relevant actors, and influence what actors think and do. Third, the state can steer by the way in which it distributes *resources* such as money and authority. It can play a boundary spanning role, alter the balance between actors in a network; act as a court of appeal when conflict arises; rebalance the mix of governing structures; and step in when network governance fails.

Finally, a central image in the governance narrative is of a pendulum swinging from centralization to governance and back. Against the centralizing strategies of the core executive networks, it argues for a bottom-up, not a top-down, view of government. The focus is implementation, yet for many the study of implementation is one of ‘yesterday’s issues’ (Hill 1997) and an ‘intellectual dead end’ with ‘lots of leads, little results’ (deLeon and deLeon 2002). The governance narrative revives to the topic, highlighting that implementation is mediated through the actions of front-line workers whose perspectives reflected local conditions, local knowledge and professional norms. Thus, Maynard-Moody and Musheno (2003, chapter 12) argue street-level bureaucrats “actually make policy choices rather than simply implement the decisions of elected officials.” They fix client identities,

often stereotyping them, which, in turn fixes the occupational identity of the street-level bureaucrat as, for example, bleeding heart or hardnosed, which, in turn, sets the decision premises for the street-level bureaucrat's judgments. They manage the "irreconcilable" dilemmas posed by clients' needs, administrative supervision (of rules and resources), and the exercise of state power. They are not heroes, but they are an example of bottom-up leadership; of the complexities of network governance

Executive studies may pay little attention, but implementation remains a critical issue for governments of all persuasions and a central concern of the governance narrative. When service provision spans governmental jurisdictions, and the public and private sectors, it involves markets or contracts and patient choice, hierarchy or bureaucracy, and networks or partnerships. Not only does each implementation structure have its own set of strengths and weaknesses but mixing these structures can be like mixing oil and water. Implementation studies dramatize the dilemmas of core executives confronted by network governance.

4.3 Formal or informal coordination

The spread of network governance also undermines coordination. Despite strong pressures for more coordination, the practice is 'modest'. It is negative, organized by specific established networks; rarely strategic, intermittent, selective, sectoral, politicized, issue-oriented, and reactive (Wright and Hayward 2000, p. 33). For example, John Howard (Prime Minister of Australia) described 'a whole of government approach' as a key challenge to the Australian Public Service (APS). The APS aim was to encourage public service agencies to work, formally and informally, across portfolio boundaries to achieve a shared goal (MAC 2004, p. 1). There were problems. Departments are competing silos. The rewards of departmentalism are known and obvious. For interdepartmental coordination, it is the costs

that are known and obvious! Coordination costs time, money and staff; whole-of-government is a sideshow for most managers. Above all, coordination was seen as *for* central agencies, serving their priorities, not those of the departments.

These problems arise before we introduce networks into the equation. Staying with our Australian example, federalism is a major check on the ambitions of national governments. The Commonwealth does not control service delivery. It has limited reach, so it has to negotiate. For example, a major review of school funding initiated by the Rudd-Gillard Labor government, proposed a new, 'needs-based' funding model for the nation's schools. The Labor government promised significant funding increases for public schools, but these schools are mainly funded and run by State governments. So, although the relevant legislation was passed, the plan foundered when State premiers objected to the terms of the new funding arrangements. Despite intense bilateral negotiations and offers of additional funding, the Commonwealth succeeded in securing the agreement of only four States (of six) and one Territory (of 2) before the federal election in 2013, when Labor was defeated. In short, central coordination presupposes agreement with the priorities of central agencies when it is the lack of such agreement that created many of the problems – a genuine Catch 22.

Networks make the goal of coordination ever more elusive. As Peters (1998, p. 302) argues 'strong vertical linkages between social groups and public organizations makes effective coordination and horizontal linkages within government more difficult'. Once agreement is reached in the network, 'the latitude for negotiation by public organizations at the top of the network is limited'. However, these remarks presume hierarchy is the most important or appropriate mechanism for coordination. Many years ago, Lindblom (1965) persuasively argued that indirect coordination or mutual adjustment was messy but effective. Public transit in the San Francisco Bay Area is a multi-organizational network and Chisholm

(1989, p. 195) shows that only some coordination can take place by central direction, so ‘personal trust developed through informal relationships acts a lubricant for mutual adjustment’.

Core executives confront two broad tasks in such multi-organizational networks. They have to manage not only individual networks but they also confront a portfolio of networks, Central agencies are the nodal points for both the portfolio and individual networks. Each of central agency belongs to, and seeks to manage, a group of networks; its ‘multi network portfolio’ (Ysa and Esteve 2013). Managing the network portfolio has its own distinct challenges. The most obvious challenge is to find out which networks the agency is trying to manage. All too often, an agency has no map of its own networks let alone the networks of other central agencies. There will be no mechanisms for coordinating the responses of a central agency to either the portfolio or individual networks. Networks are messy. There are no guarantees of successful results, only the relentless pressure from the sour laws of network governance and the imperatives of constant nurturing. The role of any central agency is to manage their network portfolio, and to provide collaborative leadership.

In sum, coordination is the holy grail of modern government, ever sought, but always just beyond reach, and networks bring central coordination no nearer. However, they do provide their own informal, decentralized version, provided the core executive can tolerate the mess.

4.4 Political accountability or webs of accountabilities

A central theme in executive studies that follows logically from the claim of a predominant or presidential prime minister is the loss of accountability. Thus, Savoie (2008, p. 232) argues that centralization suits prime ministers because they can set aside formal

processes and get things done quicker. But there are significant costs. Savoie (2008, pp. 230 and 339) argues that the key adverse consequences are centralization and the collapse of accountability. When there are few if any veto points, a powerful centre can act with impunity, acknowledging no other's authority. An Australian example again is instructive. The 2001 political controversy known as the 'Children Overboard' affair arose from the allegation that refugees, also known as boat people, threw their children overboard to gain entry to Australia. The allegation was untrue but government ministers deliberately ignored 'inconvenient information'. Political staffers and public servants provided 'plausible deniability' for ministers in parliament and the media (for the relevant sources see Tiernan 2007, pp. 171-2). Veteran political journalist Paul Kelly (2009, pp. 611-12), concludes the case exposes a 'profound failure of accountability' that was exploited for the political benefit of the government of the day.

Proponents of the governance narrative also argue there has been a breakdown of accountability, but for different reasons. They argue conventional notions of accountability do not fit when authority for service delivery is dispersed among several agencies. Bovens (1998, p. 46) identifies the 'problem of many hands' where responsibility for policy in complex organizations is shared and it is correspondingly difficult to find out who is responsible. He also notes that fragmentation, marketization and the resulting networks create 'new forms of the problem of many hands' (Bovens 1998, p. 229). These dilemmas are often laid bare in the 'accountability and blame' phase that follows natural disasters. The police and fire services would seem to be archetypal command and control bureaucracies but responding to disasters involves many interlaced networks able to react rapidly to changing local conditions (Arklay 2012). So, who is to blame when something goes awry – the bureaucracies or the networks? The inevitable inquiries after disasters struggle with the

messiness. Hayclarity of organization when redundancy, or overlap and duplication, is strength (Landau 1979).

As Mulgan (2003, pp. 211-14) argues, buck-passing is much more likely in networks because responsibility is divided and the reach of political leaders is much reduced. It is common for network governance to be closed to public scrutiny, a species of private government. The brute conclusion is that we face a crisis of accountability because centralization weakens traditional accountability to parliament and the multiple accountabilities of networks erode central control,

5. WHITHER THE STUDY OF EXECUTIVE GOVERNANCE?

Finally, we identify likely trends in the study of executives. We focus on: the interpretive turn, court politics, and presidential studies.

5.1 The Interpretive Turn

First-wave narratives of the changing state focus on issues such as the objective characteristics of policy networks and the oligopoly of the political marketplace. They stress power-dependence, the relationship between networks and policy outcomes, and the strategies by which the centre might steer networks. The second-wave narratives focus on the mix of governing structures such as markets and networks and on the various instruments of control such as changing the rules of the game, storytelling and changing the distribution of resources. In contrast, the third wave of interpretive analysis focuses on the social construction of patterns of rule through the ability of individuals to create meanings in action. An interpretive approach highlights the importance of beliefs, practices, traditions, and dilemmas for the study of the

changing state. It represents a shift of *topos* from institutions to *meanings* in action. It explains shifting patterns of governance by focusing on the actors' own interpretations of their *beliefs and practices*. The everyday practices arise from agents whose beliefs and actions are informed by *traditions* and expressed in stories. It explores the diverse ways in which situated agents are changing the boundaries of state and civil society by constantly remaking practices as their beliefs change in response to *dilemmas*. It reveals the *contingency* and contestability of narratives. It highlights a more diverse view of state authority and its exercise.

There are many routes to this 'constructed' state and governance (see for example: Bevir and Rhodes 2010, Dean 2007, chapter 2, Hay 2011, and Miller and Rose 2008, chapter 3). Its singular advantage is that it is 'edifying'; it is a way of finding 'new, better, more interesting, more fruitful ways of speaking about' executive governance (Rorty 1980, p. 360). Thus, Bevir and Rhodes (2010) discuss some of the distinctive research topics that spring from an interpretive approach under the heading of the '3Rs' of rule, rationalities, and resistance. Interpretive theory suggests that under *rule*, political scientists should ask whether different sections of the governing elite draw on different traditions to construct different narratives about the world, their place within it, and their interests and values (see section 5.2). An interpretive approach draws attention to the varied *rationalities* that inform policies across different policy arenas. Britain, like much of developed world, has witnessed the rise of neoliberal managerial rationalities and the technology of performance measurement and targets (see section 4.4). Finally, politics and policies do not arise exclusively from the strategies and interactions of elites. Other actors can *resist*, transform, and thwart the agendas of elites. An interpretive approach draws attention to the diverse traditions and narratives that inform actors at lower levels of the hierarchy, and citizens; for example, the role of street-level bureaucrats (see section 4.2).

5.2 Court Politics

Court politics have existed throughout the ages in the Manchu Court, Imperial Rome, and the English court during the Wars of the Roses. It is the stock of fiction whether the faction of *The White Queen* or the fantasy of *The Game of Thrones* (see Campbell 2010). In its current reincarnation, the idea marries the core executive to the analysis of prime ministerial predominance (Rhodes 2013). Also known as high politics, the approach builds on the notions of interdependence and the bargaining games of elite actors. For Cowling (1971), the high politics approach meant studying the intentions and actions of a political leadership network which consisted of ‘fifty or sixty politicians in conscious tension with one another whose accepted authority constituted political leadership’. High politics was ‘a matter of rhetoric and manoeuvre’ by statesmen (Cowling 1971, pp. 3–4). For Savoie (2008, pp. 16-7) the court encompasses ‘the prime minister and a small group of carefully selected courtiers’. It also covers the ‘shift from formal decision-making processes in cabinet ... to informal processes involving only a handful of actors’. This conception is too narrow. We accept there is often an inner sanctum but participants in high politics are rarely so few. We prefer Cowling’s more expansive definition, allied to Burch and Holliday’s (1996) notion that the centre is a set of networks. These networks are still exclusive. The number of participants is still limited. But, as well as the core network or inner circle, we can also talk of circles of influence (Hennessy 2000, pp. 493-500); a use that resonates with political folklore and practice

There are an increasing number of ethnographic fieldwork studies of governing elites and their courts (see Rhodes 2011). Also, the information in biographies, autobiographies, memoirs and diaries can be treated as raw data for this approach (see section on ‘Political Biography’). There are too many items of journalists’ reportage, auto/biographies, memoirs

and diaries for a comprehensive listing. Recent examples for Australia include: Blewett 1999, and Watson 2002. Recent examples for the UK include: Blunkett 2006, and Rawnsley 2001 and 2010.

Such courts matters. They are key parts of the organizational glue holding the centre together. They coordinate the policy process by filtering and packaging proposals. They contain and manage conflicts between ministerial barons. They act as the keeper of the government's narrative. They act as the gatekeeper and broker for internal and external networks. The notion also directs our attention to the analysis of rival courts in departments and in other levels of government. Baronial politics live inside and outside the heart of government (see section 4.1).

Presidential studies

Scholars of executive governance are often sceptical about the utility of concepts and ideas drawn from presidential studies, believing the differences between presidential and parliamentary government are too great. However, many argue that parliamentary governments are increasingly characterized by the fragmentation of executive authority, the growth of the core executive, the pluralization of advice, and the increasingly personal and leader-centred nature of prime ministerial leadership. So, we pose the question of what lessons can we learn from the presidential literature?

Political leadership

Theakston (2011, p. 79) argues the presidential studies literature holds significant promise for executive studies scholars seeking ways 'understanding and analysing the components of prime ministerial style and skills, within a framework permitting comparison, generalization and evaluation. He draws particularly on Greenstein's (2004) six-point

framework for analyzing the political and personal qualities and skills of US presidents. . They cover: skill as public communicators; organizational capacity; political skills; policy vision; cognitive style; and emotional intelligence. Theakston (2002 and 2011) adapts this framework to the Westminster context, arguing that most analyses of the core executive pay too little attention to the individual characteristics and skills of prime ministers (see also Verbeek 2003).

The style and skills of individual prime ministers are indeed significant, but only as part of a broader analysis of relationships and dependencies – the ‘court politics’ of the core executive. The presidential studies literature has long recognised the need also to understand the leader’s operating context, notably the ‘bargaining uncertainty’ inherent to their role when there is a separation of powers (Neustadt 1991 [1960]).

Institutionalization

In the United States, the concept of the ‘institutional presidency’ is well established (Burke 2000). It recognizes that ‘leadership in the modern presidency is not carried out by the president alone, but rather by presidents with many associates’. Scholars of the institutional presidency have described the development of the staffing structures and advisory arrangements that support the President. They chart the growth in size and organizational complexity of the ‘presidential branch’. This descriptive literature contains few lessons of wider applicability (see section on ‘Central capability or implementation’).

Of greater interest are the consequences of this growth. First, it creates new dependencies, pathologies and transaction costs that have not been documented (see section on ‘Court Politics’). Second, it provides contending explanations of this growth. For many, it is a consequence of presidential overload (Ragsdale and Theis 1997). Others, however, argue

that 'White House staff growth is largely driven by successive presidents' search for assistance in managing interactions with Congress, the media and the public, as well as by the long-term rivalry between the president and Congress, and only marginally by an expansion in the size or workload of the federal government' (Dickinson and Lebo 2007, p. 207).

Presidents have responded to 'a more fluid, less stable and distinctly more partisan bargaining environment' by 'embracing tactics formerly restricted to political campaigns'. So, executive growth is a response to, and fuels, executive bargaining. It can be seen as creating a presidential court with all the interpersonal conflicts and politicking such a phrase implies.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Executive studies and the governance narrative may interweave but they have distinct and distinctive foci. Executive studies focuses on prime ministerial predominance, building central capacity, formal top-down coordination, and traditional mechanisms of accountability. The governance narrative sees networks of dependencies, disconnected implementation structures, informal coordination and webs of accountabilities.

There are connections. Executive studies incorporate the insights of network governance. The prime ministerial predominance argument sees the prime minister as the node of the core executive networks. We suggest a focus a court politics; on the inner circle and its circles of influence, and Bennister (2007, p. 337) agrees. There are shared concerns. There is agreement on an accountability deficit, even if the accounts of its causes differ. The two literatures are the opposite sides of the same coin. The governance narrative explores the limits to executive intentions and practices. There are a plethora of

shorthand phrases seeking to capture these differences: hands-on or hands-off, top-down or bottom-up, and rowing or steering, to mention only three. They all tackle the puzzles we have discussed.

Our puzzles are best likened to anomalies or incongruities. As Thomas Kuhn (1996, pp. 62-4, 67, 76, and 82) argues anomalies ‘appear against the background provided by the paradigm’ of normal science. However, when ‘normal technical puzzling-solving activity breaks down’ and ‘the tools a paradigm supplies’ are no longer ‘capable of solving the problems it defines’, then the cumulating anomalies will lead to a crisis and the transition to a new paradigm. The command and control paradigm of executive government confronts at least four anomalies. We are left puzzling about these shared puzzles and with the biggest puzzle of all; whether the interpretive paradigm offers greater edification.

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