TIME, POLICY, MANAGE MENT

GOVERNING WITH THE PAST

CHRISTOPHER POLLITT

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Preface

This book argues that time is a vital, pervasive, but frequently neglected, dimension in contemporary public policymaking and management. It traces the character of that neglect and goes on to review the theoretical and conceptual means for redressing it. It argues that the temporal dimension is crucial for many policy problems and management challenges, and supports that argument with empirical evidence from many countries. It wrestles with diverse literatures, some of which may be relatively unfamiliar to most students in the field. It connects with important debates about policy agenda setting, governmental decision making and organizational adaptation, learning and change. It is intended to be an exploratory voyage across a broad ocean of great strategic importance to our subject. Let me explain something of how this expedition got started.

On Race Hill, next to the Race Course on the eastern margins of Brighton, stands Brighton General Hospital. It is where my father suddenly died, at the end of the twentieth century, in a dingy rehab ward. His departure came a short time after crossing the road to the fish and chip shop, when his poor eyesight and indifferent hearing had failed to pick up an oncoming car. (Officially, he was getting better at the time of his death and was about to be discharged. He would have been the first to appreciate the dark humour of dropping dead in a rehabilitation ward.) When I had last lived in Brighton, as a teenager in the early 1960s, 'The General', as it was called, had already been regarded by locals as a bit of a slum, and by the time my dad arrived at the hospital more than 30 years later, the grim nineteenth century workhouse buildings had hardly improved. Many devoted and skilful medical and nursing staff worked there, but it was a dump nonetheless, and was frequently recognized as such by Brighton folk.

So—here, as in many health service and other public service locations in many countries—there were considerable *physical* and *locational* continuities over time. The NHS had undergone several major re-organizations between the day when I left Brighton and the day I returned for my father's

funeral, but the old workhouse buildings still stood, and Brighton's other major hospital (the Royal Sussex), just down the road, was also an unprepossessing patchwork of buildings, some dating back more than a century. During one of these visits to Brighton I happened to be reading a rather gushing book on change management in the public sector. 'Everything is changing—and must change—continuously and fast', seemed to be its (tediously repetitive) theme, and from this it drew many sweeping conclusions about how public sector managers needed to conduct themselves and 'flexibilize' their organizations. This was in tune with a number of statements by British ministers at the time, in speeches emphasizing the imperative of further 'modernization', despite the fact that the UK public sector had arguably already undergone more re-organization during the previous 15 years than any other in the Western world. Connecting the textbook and these politically correct themes with what I saw before me, I thought that many Brighton residents would be delighted if some of the old public service buildings around town (not only the two main hospitals) *would* change, and would they please do so a bit faster than had been the case for the previous 40 years? Of course the evangelists of change management would have pointed out that, while bricks and mortar may have survived, the organizations themselves had been reformed many times during the four decades that I was out of town. To which the obvious retort would have been, 'So why couldn't these new organizations get themselves and their users some decent buildings in which to provide their services?'

From this small beginning I found myself thinking further about continuities and changes over time—far beyond concrete matters of physical infrastructure—and then about the temporal dimension in management and policy more generally, internationally, not just in the UK. As I did so, it dawned upon me that very little seemed to be written about this, at least not in the kind of scientific journals that I have been paid to read and write for. (Several years and much reading further on, I realize that this initial perception was not entirely accurate. There *is* a fair amount of written material, but it is not mainstream, and one often has to cross disciplinary boundaries and delve into relatively obscure corners to find it. Thus, my first impression remains broadly true for mainstream public administration and public policy literature—time in general, and the influences of the past in particular, are not at all to the fore.) Therefore, since I have come to the conclusion that time and the past are actually very important indeed, I see this paucity in its treatment as both regrettable and remediable. *Time, Policy, Management* is an attempt to plug the gap—to restore the temporal

dimension to a central role in our thinking about public administration and policy. It would be only a small overstatement to say that *every* management and policy problem has a temporal dimension, and that a sensible solution to that problem is unlikely to be found unless both the influences of the past and the time taken to create things in the future are explicitly taken into the analysis.

However, I want to do much more than simply oppose those writers and rhetoriticians who insist that the past is dead and unimportant, and that all we have to do is create and then implement new 'visions' of innovation, empowerment and joined-up e-governance. These prophets are easy targets, because their basic stance is fragile—and often embarassingly evangelical and unthought-through. I want to attempt something more difficult—not simply to assert that 'the past matters' but to begin to say *how* it matters, and to conceptualize and explain temporal relationships. That quest will take me to various kinds of material. I will look at the recent theoretical literature, in various disciplines, which explicitly deals with temporal factors—including treatments of the idea of 'path dependency' in political science, sociology, economics and history, ideas of cycles of fashion and notions of the evolution of organizational populations. I will also look at a number of particular cases which I have recently had the opportunity to investigate. These comprise investigations of the development of a set of public services organizations in two countries over the past 30–40 years. Furthermore, I will re-work and re-interpret empirical work by many other authors, in order to tease out the influence of temporal factors. The conclusions I draw from this range of material are that the temporal dimension is frequently crucial, not simply in terms of inherited buildings and other 'sunk investments', but also in the form of laws, inherited political relationships, inherited management systems and inherited attitudes and cultural norms, both expert and public. The past cannot be dismissed or discarded, it must be acknowledged and negotiated with. Furthermore, the future cannot be rushed—there are some things which take their time, even in our era of virtual ephemera.

Whilst this is first and foremost an academic book, I would like to think that 'practitioners' (in this case public officials, politicians and public affairs journalists) will also find something of interest. Chapter 7 is explicitly addressed to them, but that is not meant to imply that the other chapters are either irrelevant or impenetrable to non-academics. As for my academic colleagues, I have written in a way that is intended to make the greatest part of the book accessible to masters students as well to those further on in their career. Occasionally I may descend into an 'in-group'

discussion of some particular theory or method, but never, I hope, for so long as to exclude the general academic reader from the broad line of argument. In short, the aim has been to produce a broad account of a big topic, crafted in a fashion that will enable a variety of types of reader to gain something of interest to themselves.

Of course, the result of these efforts cannot be the final word on the role of time in governing (to be banal, time knows no finalities). My hope is a much more modest—though still important one: that this book will serve as a first step in the restoration of the past and of the nature of temporal processes as essential components in the study of public policy and management. Putting these materials together has convinced me that there is something major here to be unearthed and debated. My own continuing research will pursue it, and my prime ambition for the book is that it might enthuse others to join in the hunt.

CJP

Järventaka summerhouse
Finland

Acknowledgements

The longer one plays the academic game, the lengthier one's list of creditors become. In this instance my first thanks must definitely go to the Hans Sigrist Foundation at the University of Bern. Their wonderful prize (and prize money) in 2004 gave me the breathing space and the means to re-orient my research in a new direction, of which I hope this book is merely the first fruit.

Second, I want to express my gratitude to the Public Management Institute at Katholieke Universiteit Leuven and, in particular, to its Director, my good friend, Geert Bouckaert. It afforded me a visiting senior fellowship during 2006 which enabled some of the empirical work which informs this book to be accomplished. It also provided unwaveringly constructive conversations, sometimes over memorable meals, and excellent secretarial and back-up services (thank you, Annelies Vanparijs, Inge Vermeulen and Anneke Heylen). Halfway through the writing of the book Leuven also offered me a permanent job, so I am now a happy denizen of that ancient, handsome and well run city.

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1

The End of Time?

Minkä taakseen jättä, sen edestään löytää
[The things you leave behind you will meet in the future — traditional
Finnish saying]

All democratic accountability presupposes a lasting organizational
framework for ensuring that the fulfillment of today's promises can
be controlled in the future and that politicians can be held accountable
and elected away

(Ekengren 2002: 158)

1.1 Setting the Scene: Losing Time

The above quotation from Ekengren speaks of the importance of continu-
ity, of keeping records, and of the institutional arrangements for doing
that. The preceding Finnish saying suggests that, even if one forgets or
chooses to ignore the past, it will come back to bite you. Yet, with its
incessant focus on innovation and modernization, contemporary policy
discourse often implies that the past is either irrelevant or only a negative,
restraining influence. Either way, the past should play little part in pro-
gressive policymaking, which should be focused on the latest bright new
dawn. Alongside this downgrading of the past sits an impatience for the
future. The argument that we will have to wait a long time for things to
change, or for new solutions to be implemented, is an increasingly hard
one for today's public figures publicly to espouse. 'We want it now,' and,
'Why are we waiting?' are (in more or less sophisticated formulations)
predictable responses to those who plead for more time and more public
or political patience. Deferred gratification is not a message which most
contemporary politicians will willingly utter.

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Opposition to 'the past' is nothing new, and neither is an insistence by the powerful on their own special brands of time. History exhibits many examples of regimes that changed official times and calendars in order to eliminate their citizens' misguided affections for past ways, to emphasize the unprecedented novelty of their policies, or simply to address practical problems:

One forgets that for thousands of years the calendars people used ran into trouble again and again; they had to be reformed and improved repeatedly until one of them reached the near perfection the European calendar has attained since the last calendar reforms

(Elias 1992: 193)

Perhaps Elias was here rather too optimistic about the stability of modern calendars. In modern times, too, there have been examples of radical attempts to tinker with time. After the French Revolution the Jacobins adopted a 'rational' calendar which, though unpopular from the beginning, limped on in official use for more than a decade. Zola's novel, *Germinal*, is named after the month (each was of three ten-day weeks) which began on 20 or 21 March. Hitler irritated his generals by insisting that they used Berlin time even when fighting their momentous battle at Stalingrad, two time zones to the east. Pol Pot declared 1975 as 'Year Zero' for his Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia, and emptied whole cities of their inhabitants in his genocidal attempt to realize his dream of a virtuous, rice-based, communist utopia.

But it is not only dictators and revolutionary cadres who want to erase the past and kick-start the future. I will argue that attitudes and practices encouraging such behaviour are increasingly, if unobtrusively, widespread in 'normal' everyday policymaking—and in many countries. Yet if it is true that the pace of change in modern societies has accelerated and is accelerating further, arguably this makes considerations of time and of the past even *more* important, not less so.

Consider, for a moment, just some of the temporal dimensions of one recent and highly publicized event. Unlike the French Revolution calendar or Pol Pot's Year Zero, the disaster caused by Hurricane Katrina had little or no *overt* relationship to time at all—at least not as represented by calendars or public policies. It therefore serves our purpose of illustrating some of the pervasive yet often little noticed features of our subject. Katrina struck the Gulf Coast of the US on 29 August 2005. It proved to be the largest natural disaster in US history to date. It took the lives of more than 1,000 residents, left well over one million others displaced, and

may end up having cost between US$100 and US$200 billion in redevelopment expenditures. Thousands of the victims neither received aid nor saw any helpers for a week or more after the original storm. Different authorities and agencies failed to coordinate their efforts and in some cases they even quarrelled. Many could not communicate with each other because of incompatibilities in their respective equipments. It was also a public relations disaster for, among others, the federal government and President G.W. Bush. The Director of the Federal Emergency Agency (FEMA) was soon removed from his job. So how does all this connect with time, timing and the past? The answer is 'in many ways'.

To begin with, there is the simple point that effective emergency services absolutely require both a plan and training for many staff in different agencies on how to implement that plan. Paradoxically, the fact that one does not know exactly what form the next emergency will take makes planning even more necessary. Such preparation for coordinated action takes months or even years. Resources are important, of course, but even a lot of resources cannot make up for lack of preparation (and after Katrina many resources stood idle for days while the respective organizations got themselves sorted out). On the Gulf Coast state officials were confused by the unfamiliarity of recently introduced federal procedures and structures. Some existing emergency plans (including, most significantly, the one for New Orleans) were not put into action. Furthermore, the leaders of emergency management organizations need to be well seasoned with relevant expertise—not every leadership position needs to be filled by an expert, but some do. And expertise is something that takes a long time to acquire—most real experts have been 'marinated' in their field for years. Finally, the acquisition of expertise itself depends significantly on the careful analysis and discussion of what has happened during earlier similar events (in the case of the Gulf Coast and Florida hurricanes there were plenty of at least partial precedents).

Unfortunately, in the case of Hurricane Katrina, the relevant federal agency (FEMA) had recently been downgraded within the machinery of government; had received a number of senior political appointees with few relevant skills; and had lost some of their most experienced senior staff (Sylves 2006; Waugh 2006). FEMA had been absorbed within the gigantic new, post-9/11, Department of Homeland Security. Its role in preparing for natural disasters had taken a poor second place to the overwhelming political interest in planning to anticipate further terrorism. (As we will see later, overconcentration on the last big thing that happened, to the detriment of other events, equally or more likely to occur, is a commonly recognized failing in decision making. In popular language this is referred

to as 'trying to win the last war.') This downgrading of FEMA happened at a time when the possibility and likely effects of such a storm were well known to the experts, with earlier hurricanes having given many object lessons in what might be required: 'The vulnerability of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast were certainly known well before Katrina began winding her way through the Caribbean. The hazard had been described in government reports, media stories and academic studies' (Waugh 2006: 13). This vulnerability was not solely a matter of weak levees and weak planning regulations which permitted buildings to be placed in exposed locations. It was also a matter of highly optimistic (some would say ignorant) assumptions concerning the ability of the local residents to survive for a few days before they would be reached by the emergency services. Poverty, poor health, reliance on daily trips to the supermarket and the pharmacy, as well as other factors meant that 'The expectation that federal resources would not be needed for seventy-two to ninety-six hours was disastrously wrong. The scale of the disaster and the vulnerability of the population required a much faster response' (Waugh 2006: 21).

Thus the Katrina disaster illustrates a number of temporal features: the importance of preparation over the long term; the need for expertise based on accumulated experience; the need to learn systematically from earlier, similar events; the way the short term effect of re-organization can be to depress the performance of organizations, even if its longer term effect could be positive; the importance of being able to provide very fast action right at the start; the danger of assuming that the citizens of a modern consumer society have the capacity to survive, even for a short time, without the usual range of services, and so on. It also reprises a regular theme in the analysis of major accidents and disasters—the slow and undramatic accumulation of apparently minor weaknesses over considerable periods of time, which, when combined on the day in question, lead to catastrophic failure.

This is just one example, and while Katrina begins to indicate some of the issues this book will be dealing with, there are many others which it does not illustrate at all. It does, however, show how policymakers and managers operated clumsily or neglectfully in both the short and the long term. What is perhaps less well appreciated is the extent to which academic social scientists have generally played along with this indifference to the dimension of time. To demonstrate this, the remainder of this chapter will explore how academic writing about public policy and management frequently neglects the important issue of time. After offering some evidence for this tendency the case will be made for time to be treated more explicitly in academic analysis. Subsequently, I will also identify some of the

practical difficulties that arise when all eyes are turned to the present and the future, and what happened in the past is ignored or forgotten.

1.2 The Plan of the Book

This first chapter simply gets some big ideas out on the table. Thereafter the scheme of the book involves two parts. The first is an alternation between empirical material and theory. Thus, the next chapter, Chapter 2, sets out some theoretical approaches to time, and maps some of the debates that surround them, and then Chapter 3 introduces two case studies upon which these 'timeships' can be tested out. That alternation continues, chapter by chapter, to the end of the book.

The second part is a progression from a particular set of cases to a broader appraisal of the field. Thus Chapter 3 introduces the recent histories of two particular sets of public service institutions, one in England and one in Belgium. Hopefully this may engage the reader in a very concrete consideration of the effects of time and history. Later in the book (especially in Chapter 5) a much wider range of empirical material is considered, drawing on many sectors and countries. Thus by the end of the book the reader should be in a position to make at least a preliminary assessment of the importance of time for the field—for academic theorizing and for practical management in general, not just in one sector or country.

Some readers may wish me to say more to demarcate the territories of public administration and public policy. They will be largely disappointed. Many pages have been written—many of them wasted—making fine distinctions between public administration and public management, and between public management and public policy. Regrettably, this has often been academic quibbling of the most barren kind. I fully agree with my colleague, Larry Lynn, that there are no significant academic differences between the field of public administration and public management—other than those of an ideological or fashionable nature (Lynn 2005: 28, 2006). Commentators who have insisted that public management is different from public administration in that it is more dynamic, less concerned with rule-following and more oriented towards using resources to achieve optimal performances (etc.) are simply missing the point. As for the differences between public policy and public management, that is another frontier that has been manufactured mainly for the convenience of academic factions. The two subfields are heavily overlapping and strongly mutually influential—the study of most public management

definitely involves an appreciation of policymaking. Equally, woe betide the policymaker or adviser who makes or frames policy without regard to how its implementation will be managed (Hill and Hupe 2002: esp. chs. 3 and 4). Trouble lies in wait for anyone who seeks to understand policymaking by dividing it into neat stages or periods, with formulation separated off from implementation and implementation itself separated from the humdrum business of routine operational management (John 1998).

For convenience, the contents are summarized in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 The Sequence of the Book: A Summary

Chapter	Contents
1. The end of time?	A brief introduction to why the past has become neglected in public management and administration, and why we should pay it more attention.
2. Timeships navigating the past	Introducing a range of theories and perspectives which deal explicitly with the past and the temporal dimension. As a broad overview, this chapter is considerably longer than any of the others.
3. History in action: a tale of two hospitals	A historical treatment of comparative case studies of top hospital management, 1965 2005.
4. Beyond history?	What can we add to our understanding of temporal issues by using the other 'timeships' introduced in chapter 2?
5. Review and re-interpretation	Reviews and re-interprets a series of treatments of the time dimension in the public policy and management empirical literature. Concludes with a theoretical analysis extending the consideration of the 'timeships' introduced in chapter 2.
6. A toolkit for time?	Short summary of the available concepts and tools for analysing temporal relationships. Suggests some possible areas for further research.
7. Wider implications for governments	Based on the previous chapters, what are the implications for practical public management and policymaking?
8. After all	Concluding reflections and speculations.

1.3 The end of time?

In 2004 Paul Pierson, an American political scientist, published a book entitled, *Politics in Time* (Pierson 2004). In it he argued that political science in particular, but also the social sciences more generally, have become increasingly decontextualized. A prime form of this decontextualization was the loss of an explicit theoretical treatment of time—time has become no more than the difference between t^1 and t^2. Indeed, there is a loss of interest in time altogether, whether treated theoretically or simply mentioned as, say, a process of historical development. Pierson's gloomy assessment is supported by a number of distinguished scholars from a variety of disciplines, including sociology (Abbott 1997, 2001) and comparative history (Thelen 2003), as well as by a number of colleagues from political science (Goodin and Tilly 2006). A Swiss/French scholar put it directly: 'le temps demeure un theme peu étudié par la science politique, voire par les sciences sociales en général' (Varone 2001: 195; 'Time remains a little studied theme in political science, or even in the social sciences more generally' (author's translation)).

Eric Hobsbawm, the historian, made a similar point in a characteristically pungent manner: 'modern social science, policymaking and planning have pursued a model of scientism and technical manipulation which systematically, and deliberately, neglects human, and above all historical, experience' (Hobsbawm 1998: 36).

Pierson gave various reasons for the alleged decontextualization. His prime suspect was the popularity of rational choice theories. Many or most rational choice analyses are either context-lite or totally context-free. In effect, their authors assume that the model of the rational maximizer applies everywhere and at all times. To be fair, it should be acknowledged that some rational choicers do go well beyond this—the theory as such is capable of modelling contexts quite elaborately. As John (1998: 124) says 'modern rational choice theory is sensitive to the importance of cultural and historical contexts' (see, e.g., Goldstone 1998; John 1998). In principle, he is correct. In practice, however, many of the academic practitioners of rational choice do not allow for context at all. For them, people in Abu Dhabi are not fundamentally different, *qua* decision making, from those in Albuquerque, and people in the past and the future can be assumed to have taken, or to be about to take, decisions in the same way as they do in 2008: 'Game theoretic approaches do not easily stretch over extended spaces (to broad social aggregates) or long time periods without rendering key assumptions of the models implausible' (Pierson 2004: 99).

What Pierson says of politics seems true for public management too, up to a point. Here, however, there have also been additional decontextualizing trends, which are not mentioned in *Politics in Time*. The most important of these has probably been the influence of generic management theories, purveyed by the business schools, management consultancies and management gurus. When Kotter writes about change management or Senge promulgates his ideas about 'the learning organization' and the 'fifth discipline', or Kaplan and Norton promote the balanced scorecard, they are not primarily concerned with putting their ideas and recommendations into particular historical or cultural contexts (Senge 1990; Kaplan and Norton 1992, 1996; Kotter and Cohen 2002). On the contrary, elements in these works imply that their recipes are universal, transcending cultural and historical barriers (Jackson 2001: 128–9). Contexts shrink in importance, often becoming little more than local colour for the application of generic principles (Pollitt 2003a: ch. 7).

The objection may be made that most of the references in the previous paragraph come from the 'popular' end of the management literature. However, quite apart from the fact that these popular works are also among the most influential and widely known, the point still holds for more scholarly work. A professor of organization theory at a leading American business school put it like this:

For the most part, research in organization studies is focused on attempts to derive general principles of behavior that would apply across contexts, and few studies spend much time trying to situate their analyses in some specific setting or pay much attention to organizational history or particular features of the site where the data was collected

(Pfeffer 2006: 459)

Or again, a review of recent scholarship on entrepreneurialism concluded that:

The declining attention to historical context in empirical entrepreneurial research is perplexing, especially given the widely espoused stance in the theoretical litera ture that entrepreneurship *needs* to be understood as a *dynamic* phenomenon operating in *specific* contexts

(Jones and Wadhwani 2006: 14, original italics).

What is particularly surprising is how much of the voluminous literature on 'change management' does little or nothing to analyse, still less theorize, the temporal dimension. Consider, by way of example, a useful and widely used synthesis, Paton and McCalman's *Change Management* (2000). This is by no means the most neglectful example with respect to time,

indeed, it is in some ways one of the more time-conscious change texts. Yet its treatment is extremely limited. It does introduce a seven step heuristic—the TROPIC test—which is designed to help implementers of change programmes. And the 'T' stands for 'Time scales'. But this turns out to be a very simple binary: 'Is the available time scale for change short (in which case harder methodologies should be used) or long (in which case softer methodologies may be more appropriate)? It is useful, but only the most preliminary step; what about the typical organizational change problem, where some elements can be changed quickly, others will take 12–18 months and others still years and years? And later, there is a one-page discussion of the past (Paton and McCalman 2000: 42–3). Here we encounter the standard assumption of many change management texts—the past is basically a source of conservatism and resistance. The cultural web 'will protect itself', defending and justifying old ways of doing things. This leaves the authors in a slightly awkward position, because they also want to advocate a consensual approach to change. Their solution is instructive: 'Gaining a consensus takes time and commitment. It involves the re-engineering of the cultural web and in extreme cases may require the wholesale dismantling of existing organization structures and procedures in an effort to jettison ''baggage''' (ibid.: 44). So gaining consensus may require a complete change of culture *and* organization. This is 'tough love' indeed, and one wonders what kind of 'consensus' it would be likely to achieve. What is clear is that the past is *not* seen as a resource, or a potential ally, in the change process, but principally as a problem.

Indeed, knowledge of how things were done in the past seems increasingly irrelevant. This is not entirely new—if we take Charles Handy's *Understanding Organizations*, one of the best-selling serious management texts of the 1970s and 1980s, we find an indicative treatment of the relationship between time and the modern manager. In his final substantive chapter Handy identifies a number of generic managerial dilemmas. One of these is 'the dilemma of time horizons'. This section begins with a clarion call: 'The manager is, above all, responsible for the future' (Handy 1976: 367). This is developed ('Much of his [sic] time should be given to anticipating the future' etc.), but then qualified with the observation that 'this management of the future has to go hand in hand with the responsibility for the present...he...must be interested in today as well as tomorrow...It is not easy to live in two or more time dimensions at once' (p. 367). Note here the complete absence of the past—no mention at all of learning from the past, building on the past, honouring the past.

The past is left as a closed, and by implication uninteresting and irrelevant, book. Turning to the recent literature on the 'transformation' of government we find an American academic quoting with evident approval Mr David M. Walker, the Comptroller of the US General Accounting Office: 'Transformation is about creating the future rather than perfecting the past' (Breul 2006: 7).

Some generic management gurus go even further, and explicitly outlaw the study of the past: 'Re-engineering is about beginning again with a clean sheet of paper. It is about rejecting the conventional wisdom and received assumptions of the past . . . How people and companies did things yesterday doesn't matter to the business re-engineer' (Hammer and Champy 1993: 2). Hammer and Champy may have been an extreme example, but as such they express in a particularly pure form the more general disposition within management studies. As Pfeffer and Sutton put it, 'We glorify firms that make successful changes, deify their leaders, and demonize those that cling to the past'. And yet

sometimes that resistance [to change] is well founded, well intentioned, and actually helpful in keeping companies from doing dumb things. Even presumably good changes carry substantial risks because of the disruption and uncertainty that occur while transformation is taking place. That's why the aphorism 'change or die' is empirically more likely to be 'change and die'

(Pfeffer and Sutton 2006: 159, 185)

Management, after all, is supposed to be about *action*. Several widely used public management textbooks favourably contrast this active spirit with the more passive notions of stewardship and rule-following which were supposed to have characterized traditional public *administration*. Public *management*, by contrast, emphasizes targets, results, performance, leadership, innovation—all present or near-future oriented concepts. Traditions, precedents and standard operating procedures are more likely to be regarded as the enemy than as part of the way forward. Reviewing the American literature, O'Toole and Meier remark that, 'Few ideas these days seem as retrograde as the quaint notion that stability can be helpful in the world of public administration' (2003: 43). It is therefore perhaps unsurprising that, as Hood and Jackson noted in their survey of administrative doctrines: 'the world of public administration, as well as private corporate management, often seems to be positively programmed to forget yesterday's ideas' (Hood and Jackson 1991: 19; see also Pollitt 2000).

However, this bleak view must be qualified somewhat. There are other groups of management academics who have taken a far more sophisticated

interest in the significance of time. There is even a journal entitled, *Time and Society*, and a recent book, *Making Time*, that will be alluded to further in later chapters (Whipp et al. 2002). However, these works seem far less well known, and less cited, than the Handys, Kotters and Senges.

In the field of public policy the loss of time has perhaps been less striking than in public administration. Nevertheless, it is a recognized symptom. A pair of leading American policy analysts commented that: 'One of the truly great failings of the policy sciences has been the inability to produce reliable longitudinal studies' (Baumgartner and Jones 2002: 6). On a brighter note, however, Baumgartner and Jones were themselves notable pioneers of the quantitative analysis of changing policy agendas over time. This work has grown considerably over the past two decades, and is discussed further in Chapter 5. Yet the bigger picture remains disappointing. The leaders of the study of American political development comment that:

At a time when social, economic and strategic conditions   a 'new' multicultural ism, a 'new' globalism, a 'new' U.S. hegemony   all but trumpet the irrelevance of America's past, the absence of more comprehensive thinking about the relation ship between past and present is conspicuous . . .

(Orren and Skowronek 2004: 4)

On the European shore, one academic interested in the sprawling topic of EU governance recently undertook a literature search of time related publications. His first conclusion was that, 'time is an under-researched dimension of European governance', and he then went on to find that:

. . . first, there is no work that explicitly addresses EU enlargement and temporality and . . . with the exception of Ekengren (2002), there are no publications which examine the temporal aspects of Europeanisation of national political systems and/ or the European administrative space more specifically . . . Second, among the (few) papers that do examine time as a methodological device there are hardly any papers that provide a conceptualization of time as a variable

(Meyer Sahling 2007: 2, 3)

When policy scholars do give explicit attention to time they discover processes which tend to reinforce the messages of this chapter. Thus Talbert and Potoski, in a quantitative study of the behaviour of the US Congress over the period from 1947 to 1993, conclude that, 'overall, the results show that the House agenda has become significantly more volatile over time, with agenda items receiving lower levels of debate than those in earlier periods' (Talbert and Potoski 2002: 201). If we turn to the

practitioner literature we find the Director of the US Central Intelligence Agency from 1997 to 2004 remarking that in his many dealings with Congress: '...occasionally I found myself wishing committees had focused more of their time on the long term needs of the U.S intelligence rather than responding to the news off the day' (Tenet 2007: 35).

Other works on public policy do mention 'time' but do not do much with it. A recent overview by Knoepfel et al. (*Public Policy Analysis*, 2007) offers one page on time as a 'temporal resource'. It notes that, although 'lack of time' is frequently mentioned in government and parliamentary reports, academics have seldom addressed this issue (p. 78). It gives a few interesting glimpses (e.g., 'public and private actors can capitalize on time by indicating that they will only act if the other actors act first, simultaneously or subsequently') but does not develop this insight any further.

Finally, and more narrowly, a recent engine of decontextualization—somewhat paradoxically—has been the fashion for 'evidence-based policy' or, more particularly, the use of meta analysis as a tool for aggregating and averaging out the results from existing primary research. Meta analysis usually reduces those existing studies to a data matrix containing measurements of the intervention, the populations to which it was applied, and the outcomes. The problem here is that:

> However lengthy, the rows and columns of variables will always omit the crucial explanatory apparatus needed to understand how programmes work. Anything that cannot be expressed as a variable   any information on process, reasoning, negotiation, choice, programme history, and so on   is excluded from this standard information warehouse, abruptly killing off all explanatory options
>
> (Pawson 2006: 54)

Thus this technique—commonly regarded as the pinnacle of research-based rational policymaking and management—may in practice become a way of absorbing or assuming away critical contextual differences which are crucial to understanding why a particular programme or activity works reasonably well at one place or time but not at another. It aggregates results but not rationales. The mechanisms which produce the results—and the almost inevitable variations in results—may well remain locked up inside the policy black box (Pawson 2006).

In concluding this section I should repeat that the neglect of the past here chronicled has certainly not been universal. In some parts of the social sciences and humanities there have been revivals of interest in temporal perspectives, even to the point where proponents of this revival have coined the phrase 'the historic turn' (McDonald 1996). There has

also been a lively literature on 'varieties of capitalism', which has made extensive and sometimes sophisticated use of concepts of path dependence (e.g., Hall and Soskice 2001; Crouch 2005). This will be referred to later—although pitched at a higher level than most of this book it does offer some useful pointers to the advantages and limitations of concepts of positive feedback and historically constrained choice. On the whole, though, one might say that such developments—most noticeable in anthropology, sociology, economics and political economy—have made only marginal impacts on publications in public management and public policy. For the most part these remain present and future oriented, and history-lite.

1.4 En Passant: Other Victims of Decontextualization

Time is certainly not the *only* important aspect of context to be neglected by much contemporary scholarship, and there are books and papers to be written about, for example, how the specifics of place and task have also been diminishing in our academic work. In this book, however, I deal with these other aspects only tangentially, usually when they intersect with temporal factors.

As an example of the influence of space/location, take the (real) case of a split site hospital where so much time is lost by doctors travelling between campuses that the requisite level of local back-up medical staffing cannot be afforded, and the financial viability of the split site operation is called in question (*Evening Argus* 1991). Or consider the different challenges faced by those managing a police force in a broad rural area, where speeding down narrow country lanes is one of the main complaints of residents, compared with those in a traffic jammed, run down inner city area, where hard drugs and street crime are the main causes of popular concern. (Issues like this have been one reason why developing locally sensitive performance indicators for crimes has been problematic for some police forces which, within their jurisdictions, embrace both prosperous rural and run down urban areas. 'Averages' in this context can be seriously misleading.)

Alternatively, as an example of the influence of task, consider a state forestry agency with the job of (inter alia) maintaining biodiversity in the forest, and compare it with that of a local community mental health agency. The former works over quite long periods of time, over wide areas and with fairly precise scientific measures of outcomes. The latter works locally, with individuals, sometimes for quite short periods, and

finds it very difficult to disentangle its efforts from many other influences in order to achieve any reliable measure of its own 'results'. Its 'treatments' are individualized, not standardized. Furthermore the roles of both organizations differ enormously from routine bureaucratic operations such as the issuing of driving licences or the registration of births, marriages and deaths, where standardized procedures are carried out in highly measurable ways over short time cycles (Pollitt 2003a: ch. 7). These three types of task cannot be successfully managed in the same way. The forestry agency is, in terms of James Q. Wilson's classic analysis, a procedural agency, because although there are measurable outcomes they tend to occur in the distant future, so management is obliged instead to monitor what their staff are doing now (Wilson 1989: 163). The community mental health service is a coping agency where managers cannot usually observe discrete outputs or outcomes from the work of staff, and where the 'production function' itself is not well understood. The office which issues driving licences is a production organization, where both outputs and outcomes are relatively easily observable within short periods of time (Wilson 1989: 159–69).

A final example of the influence of task is Stephen Johnson's fascinating history of the management of the US and European space programmes (Johnson 2002). His exposition makes clear how intimately the development of a successful form of systems management was connected to the key characteristics of the technology (rockets, computers, precision) and the task (achieving reliability in novel, one off, exceedingly complex and expensive systems). When a missing hyphen in a line of software code causes the launch of a satellite to fail five minutes after its huge carrier rocket leaves the ground, the need for tight management is stark (Johnson 2002: 100).

I will occasionally refer to the specific influences of place and task, but I cannot, within these covers, do them anything approaching justice. Time is the focus here.

1.5 Does it Matter?

1.5.1 Introduction

Why be concerned about this? Why bother to oppose those who declare that 'history is dead', or that a combination of the net and 'globalization' have projected us all into a world where time and space no longer matter,

because both have shrunk to inconsequence? There are two principal rationales for concern, an academic one and a practical one. The first is that there are strong reasons to contest such analyses as inaccurate or, at the very least, tremendously exaggerated. The second is that, in the real world of public policymaking and management practice, serious harm can come from the idolatry of ceaseless change and constant modernization. I will now develop each of these two reasons in more depth.

1.5.2 Some Academic Arguments

There are at least two obvious ways in which time could be important for public policymakers and managers operating in the present, and/or planning for the future. The first is in situations where *something which has happened in the past imposes significant constraints or costs on present choices*. Thus, if one is choosing where to site a new airfield, the existing pattern of roads and railways does not absolutely determine where the airfield is to go, but it does make some sites considerably more convenient/less costly than others. The second way is *where one is planning some future programme or action, and it becomes clear that some of the elements in that programme/ action are bound to take a long time*—and that the completion of implementation therefore lies some way into the future. Such a characteristic may, for example, influence political decision makers, whose personal time horizons are frequently quite short (the next election, the next party conference, the big international summit/trade talks/treaty negotiation in six months' time, or even tomorrow's TV news). The head of Prime Minister Blair's public service Delivery Unit drew the following as his first key lesson from the experience of trying to force rapid improvements in the UK's public services: 'A week may be a long time in politics but five years is unbelievably short' (Barber 2007: 193). Equally, one academic has recently written an interesting re-interpretation of the new public management (NPM) in which he suggests that the NPM has resulted in the replacement of longer term administrative perspectives on time by shorter term political perspectives. He argues that control of one's own time—and even more so that of others—is a very basic aspect of power (Varone 2001).

We need to consider, therefore, whether the two types of circumstance italicized in the previous paragraph are rare or common? And, even if they are common, are the time factors highly consequential or just a marginal influence? This first chapter can be no more than indicative and illustrative. In that spirit, then, consider just three categories of activity:

1. Processes that simply take a long time (and *cannot* be made very quick, however many computers and task forces may be deployed).
2. Contexts in which temporal sequence is crucial to outcome.
3. Contexts in which cycling or alternation are typical—one thing follows another in a circular or to and fro pattern.

PROCESSES THAT SIMPLY TAKE A LONG TIME

There are a surprising number of these, and collectively their impact on the public sector is probably very large indeed. They include:

- Generational change, including the imminent disappearance of the baby-boomer generation from Europe's public services. This has huge implications for both accumulated experience and public service ethics. The OECD notes that,

  > despite a looming crisis due to an aging civil service and the staff reallocation needed to face the new demands on the public service as a consequence of the aging population, not many countries seem to have addressed this issue in a systematic manner
  >
  > (OECD 2005: 183)

  Clearly this is an inheritance from the past. Note also that it is probably already too late fundamentally to change the attitudes and values of the post-baby-boomer generation—those who are currently taking over the top jobs in many countries. Professional socialization has done its work and the new generation is already impregnated with its own particular norms and conceptual frameworks.

- Cultural change, including shifting public expectations of public services and levels of trust in government. The confidence of 1980s generic management gurus that organizational cultures could be intentionally redesigned within a few months has, in the public sector at least, turned out to be largely misplaced (see the bestselling Peters and Waterman (1982) and its many derivatives). As James Q. Wilson put it: 'Every... organization acquires a culture; changing that culture is like moving a cemetery: it is always difficult and some believe it is sacrilegious' (Wilson 1989: 368). So culture is a constraint from the past—but (and this is often overlooked) it is also frequently a resource, and one that political and management leaders should be careful not to fritter away. In Denmark, for example, there are high levels of trust in the public service, and this is a considerable asset for Danish governments (Kettl et al. 2004).

- Fundamental organizational restructuring. Of course in some countries—especially the UK—such restructuring can be announced and formally put in place very quickly. But getting the new structure to 'settle down' and work as well as it is capable of is usually a matter of years rather than months (Pollitt 1984). Staff have to be appointed and need time to learn their new roles. New relationships have to be formed. New standard operating procedures must be formulated, and so on. The kind of constant, hectic restructuring that we witnessed in, say, UK social services departments during the 1990s, or in the NHS since 1989, is almost certain to produce short term losses of efficiency and day to day focus, if not worse (Pollitt 2007). Recently, in a sophisticated study of organizational change in the US federal government, a leading American academic comments that, 'leaders do not persist long enough in the change efforts they do launch' (Kelman 2005: 8). So deep restructuring is one of those things that simply takes a long time, even if its leaders can often find some useful 'quick wins' along the way.

- Training professional staff (including doctors, lawyers, teachers, social workers and civil servants). If we want a new kind of doctor we will have to wait for years before we can actually get one – this is not an issue of having the power to make the change (which, of course, may also be a problem) but simply of the time it takes to train a medical student up to qualification. This is important because, as (rather surprisingly) the OECD recently put it: 'In all dimensions of management individuals' motivation, values and attitudes are more important than formal systems' (OECD 2005: 204). Professional training is therefore both something that comes, often stubbornly, from the past (in the shape of existing professional socialization) *and* something which usually takes a long time to change.

- Building new political coalitions that can be relied on to support specific programmes or agencies. Daniel P. Carpenter has given us an outstanding scholarly analysis of how this was done by bureau chiefs in the US during the first three decades of the twentieth century (Carpenter 2001). For example, Harvey Wiley, Chief of the Chemistry Bureau in the US Department of Agriculture waged a successful 20 year campaign to build a coalition to support a national pure food and drug law. Today, with global warming all over our news media, we tend to forget that some scientists and lobby groups have already been working on this issue for two decades or more. The verdict of Sabatier, a leading public policy theorist over the past quarter century, is that the policy process

usually involves time spans of a decade or more, as that is the minimum duration of most policy cycles, from the emergence of a problem through sufficient experience with implementation to render a reasonably fair evaluation of program impact

(Sabatier 1999: 3)

He goes on to observe that

In fact, a number of recent studies suggest that time periods of twenty to forty years may be required to obtain a reasonable understanding of the impact of a variety of socio economic conditions and the accumulation of scientific knowledge about a problem

(ibid.: 3)

- Certain high-tech programmes, projects and systems. While this book was being written the French government signed a contract for €7.9 billion for six Barracuda class nuclear attack submarines. Each submarine would take ten years to build and commission, and would replace Rubis class submarines, which would themselves be more than 30 years old at the time of their retirement (Mackenzie 2007: 14). At almost exactly the same time, Prime Minister Blair's Labour government faced a large back-bench rebellion when it forced through a House of Commons vote to replace the Trident nuclear ballistic submarine force, winning only by dint of votes from the Conservative party. The government argued that it was essential to have the vote in March 2007 because otherwise the 17-year lead time for developing the replacement technologies would leave a gap when the UK would no longer be able to use the relevant American missile technology, because it would have been phased out. Various possible cost figures were in circulation, with estimates of a capital cost of about €33 billion being among the most widely quoted. These hugely expensive programmes were therefore necessarily based on estimates of military need projected 10–20 years into a highly uncertain future. Meanwhile, in the civilian sector, a number of governments entered into US$ billion contracts for giant IT systems to underpin such basic systems as taxation, social security or healthcare. 'By the 1990s the average life of an IT contract in Britain and Europe was five to seven years; in the USA it was longer, often ten years' (Dunleavy et al. 2006: 55). In a number of well publicized cases these procurement processes went horribly wrong, but governments found it extremely difficult to extricate themselves from such long term commitments. Increasingly, they also wrestled with what are often called 'legacy systems'—large outdated computer systems

which had become so embedded in their organizations that replacement threatened not only high expenditures but widespread changes in working practices and standard operating procedures—with all the attendant risks of service disruption during the transitional period.

- Complex international negotiations on security, trade, standards and other issues—negotiations of a kind that have become increasingly common in our increasingly globalized world. At the time of writing we are witnessing a tortuous and extended sequence of 'Doha Round' negotiations concerning world trade—a process with major implications for the future development of the world economy, but also one which spans years. Roy Denman was an important official player in an earlier bout—the 'Tokyo Round' in the 1970s. Reflecting on the eventual (and relatively successful) conclusion of that process he wrote:

> What was the deal? Was it worth the six years it had taken to piece it together? It had taken six years not only because the number of participants was just short of a hundred and the subjects covered much wider than in any previous negotiation, but because getting the necessary authority on both sides of the Atlantic took time. And when this was obtained the outcome of the US Presidential election of 1976 had to be awaited. Thus it was not until the spring of 1977, when the new Administration had shaken down, that the negotiations could get fully underway.
>
> The final results were worth the long haul. Industrial tariffs were cut by about a third.

(Denman 2002: 203)

- One might add that the law making process itself tends to be quite lengthy, especially in countries where minority coalitions or consensual cultures (or both) mean that there are many legislative veto points which have to be bargained away. One might also add that 'regime change'—such as that currently being attempted in Iraq or Afghanistan or East Timor—frequently involves most or all the processes identified in the above list. It is thus a horrendously complex task, and the hubris of those who claim(ed) to envisage regime changes in a year or two can only be wondered at.

To conclude this subsection, it may be worth recalling a theory of bureaucracy that was quite popular in the 1960s and 1970s, in which the time span of management decisions was made the central criterion for organizational design. After empirical work in both the private and public sectors, Elliott Jaques made a successful career out of the following hypothesis:

the existence of a universal bureaucratic depth structure, composed of organizational strata with boundaries at the levels of work represented by time spans of 3 months, 1 year, 2 years, 5 years, 10 years, and possibly 20 years and higher. These strata are real strata in the geological sense, with observable boundaries and discontinuity.

<div align="right">(Jacques 1978: 223; see also Jacques 1976)</div>

This theory has pretty much disappeared now, but in its day it helped to inform large scale re-organizations of, amongst other organizations, the UK National Health Service. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, while we may strongly doubt the existence of 'universal depth structures', it remains generally true that we expect our top managers to think about long term, strategic issues and, as Jacques recommended, we pay them far more than the humble operatives who only have to think a few days or months ahead.

CONTEXTS IN WHICH TEMPORAL SEQUENCE IS CRUCIAL TO OUTCOME

These are situations where what has happened in the past is a crucial determinant of the feasibility of current options. The extreme point in this category is irreversibility—the burned bridge or boat. Less extreme are those circumstances where going back is possible, but so costly as to be unusual. One of these is the choice of electoral system. Once chosen, such systems are highly influential of what can and cannot be done in terms of public policy-making and management reform. For example, the existence of a majoritarian electoral system is probably the biggest single predictor of the implementation of radical NPM reforms (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004). Electoral regimes are extremely difficult to change. The doyen of comparative political systems, Lijphart, could find only 5 examples of such shifts during the twentieth century—which does not sound much like the 'ceaseless change' proselytized by the management gurus (Pierson 2004: 152).

Other examples would include the choice of a pensions system; the choice of a health insurance system (Pierson 2004: 76; see also Blank and Burau 2004; Esping-Andersen 1990) and the choice of a position-based or a career-based civil service (OECD 2005). Each of these choices, once made, tends to create self-reinforcing mechanisms which make it increasingly hard to go back to some other system. These choices each define and constrain very large areas of public sector activity. Consider, for example, the way in which public management reform in France has been constrained by the system of specialist *corps* in the French civil service (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004: 248–9) or how the late eighteenth century

French model of a Directorate General of Waterways (Rijkswaterstaat) survived in the Netherlands right into the twenty-first century (De Jong and Mayer 2002).

A final example of the importance of sequence and the difficulty of going back would be the introduction of freedom of information legislation. After 1989 the introduction of such laws became a popular sport, with many governments following the few—such as Sweden and the US—who already had such provisions. From five countries possessing similar legislation in 1980, the number had risen to 59 by 2004 (Roberts 2006: 16). Not everything in the garden was rosy, however. Some governments became convinced that freedom of information had gone too far and needed to be reigned in, in the interests of strong government and protection against terrorism. The administration of George W. Bush was certainly one of these. However, as Alasdair Roberts shows in some detail, they could not succeed:

> The Bush administration and its sharpest critics had one thing in common: a misapprehension about the reversibility of history. The Bush administration believed that it could roll the clock back to the pre Watergate years, and so launched an assault on the many rules it believed had undercut the power of the presidency and, more broadly, the governability of the American system. The administration's critics accepted the premise that the clock could be rolled back   not only that, but also that it *had* been rolled back. Of course, neither side was right. Shifts in the political, cultural and technological context of American politics over the last three decades have been too profound to allow an easy reversal of history. These changes in context made a direct assault on the regime of post Watergate controls impossible
>
> (Roberts 2006: 79)

CONTEXTS IN WHICH CYCLING OR ALTERNATION ARE TYPICAL

Administrative theorists have identified a number of ways in which cycles of fashion, or alternations between opposing principles, can arise. Hood, for example, posits a limited number of cultural systems, in which the taking of any one of four basic positions—hierarchist, egalitarian, individualist, fatalist—tends to degenerate into one of the alternatives. Because each basic mind-set has its own limitations, a period operating within that frame gradually produces an enhanced awareness of 'what is missing'. The grass on the other side is often greener. Thus there is an 'apparent tendency for public management systems in time to produce

their polar opposites' (Hood 1998: 191). In an earlier work, at a lower level of aggregation, he examined individual administrative doctrines, and concluded that many of these exist as opposed pairs (Hood and Jackson 1991; see also Simon 1946). Thus we have, for example, the belief that civil servants should be mainly appointed with secure long term tenure opposed by the belief that fixed term, conditional (e.g., performance related) appointments are better. Or we have the idea that administrative discretion should as far as possible be minimized through rule making, opposed by the idea that administrative discretion signals necessary and desirable flexibility. Or we have a cycle of public service values. Here is Jorgensen, writing about how the Danish Agency of Governmental Management regards the basic value of effectiveness:

But effectiveness has over time been defined differently... After a certain period, the narrow definition of effectiveness will always be heavily criticized and then be followed by a broader definition. The broader definition, on the other hand, makes it harder to measure effectiveness. Consequently, controlling other public organ izations by measuring effectiveness is made more difficult and the agency is prompted to return to the narrower definition. Presumably, the basic value dynam ics in the case of the Agency of Governmental Management is that of a swinging pendulum

(Jorgensen 2007: 390)

Or we have the competition between specialization and integration (in one of its modern forms specialist agencies versus 'joined-up government'—see Pollitt 2003b). Painter has noted that in the UK the New Labour Reforms of 1997–2006 may have achieved:

A reforming discontinuum, with positions oscillating along the dimensions iden tified above [provider competition and user choice versus strengthened co ordin ation between different services author], leaving unresolved dilemmas in the organization of the public services. Manifest in many of the policy intitiatives of the Blair governments is the temptation to lurch from one panacea to another. Yet, constant and ill considered upheaval is almost certainly dysfunctional

(Painter 2006: 144; see also Moran 2005; Pollitt 2007)

Or again we have waves of police reform, in which, 'A repetitive dialectic seems to play itself out cyclically, with a thesis of tough ''law and order'' prompting its antithesis in a renewed stress on the need for public consent' (Reiner 2000: 204).

Other scholars have suggested that there may be an alternation between opposite fashions, including centralization and decentralization

(Pollitt 2005) and even the OECD has noted a recent international 'tendency to lurch from one reform to another' (OECD 2005: 203). Reviewing the last 40 years of US federal administrative reforms Light (1997) entitled his book, *Tides of Reform*, and tides, of course, alternate between 'in' and 'out'. Light identifies four main reform philosophies which existed during the half century he surveys, and then comments:

Because Congress and the presidency simply do not know what does and what does not actually make government work, and because they have no overarching theory of when government and its employees can and cannot be trusted to perform well, they will move back and forward between the four reform philosophies almost at random

(Light 1997: 5)

Rather different is Magnus Ekengren's analysis of the governance of the European Union. He claims to have found a strongly cyclical component in the hectic focus of member state officials on the sequence of Presidencies, summits and other key regular meetings. Governments cling to these timetables, he suggests, because of the lack of an agreed vision and accompanying set of political goals in the future:

In European governance the future is shortened and shaped into rapidly recurring but at the same time irrevocable decision making situations, in which an opportunity missed is an opportunity lost. To a great extent EU commitments mean that 'we shall do all we can but given the hard to predict negotiation game we cannot guarantee results'

(Ekengen 2002: 158)

Cycles/alternations are thus very common, but they are not the only recurring time pattern. In a lifetime's work on the diffusion of innovations Evrett Rogers has unearthed a characteristic S-shaped curve in which, over time, operators adopt a new technique or approach (Rogers 2003). This curve applies to Rogers' many public sector examples as much as to his private sector ones. In the first two stages only a few adopt—first the innovators themselves and then the 'early adopters'. Then the adoption curve becomes steeper, as the 'early majority' and the 'late majority' begin to use the innovation. Finally it begins to flatten out as the 'laggards' finally get on board. Rogers' diffusion model has been used across a wide range of disciplines and fields, including some studies in public administration (e.g., Van Thiel 2001).

Finally mention should be made of an underlying, very general reason why public policies may alternate, and that is the way in which (perhaps

particularly but not exclusively in the social policy sector) policymakers are subject to the 'duality of error' (Hammond 1996 esp. pp. 55–9). Policies which rest on making distinctions between the deserving and the undeserving, or the criminals and the innocent, or the truly sick and the malingerers very often face the dilemma of choosing between a generous regime which embraces all the deserving but also many of the undeserving, and a hard line regime which cuts down the waste on the undeserving but at the price of excluding more and more of the deserving. This problem has been recognized since at least the Tudor 'sturdy beggar' of the sixteenth century, and it has many contemporary manifestations. The policy choice between the different types of error (injustice to the excluded deserving and injustice to society that has to pay for hoards of undeserving 'scroungers') 'can be seen to have a long history of oscillation that deserves analysis, irrespective of hypotheses regarding specific periods of the swing of the pendulum' (Hammond 1996: 55).

1.5.3 Some Undesirable Practical Consequences

Even if the above phenomena (long term developments, sequential logic, alternations and cycling) exist and are common, do they really matter in practical terms? Arguably, they matter rather a lot. The argument will be illustrated here and then returned to in more depth later in the book, particularly in Chapter 7.

The first specimen is the case of a Dutch telecommunications regulations agency. In the early years of the twenty-first century this agency was attempting to regulate the telecommunications sector, especially the recently privatized giant, KPN. Part of its work involved fighting court cases with the phone companies, trying to get its regulations—and its interpretations of its regulations—confirmed as legal, fair and practical. To do this it was obliged to hire a good deal of high powered legal help (mainly because the public service would not pay the sorts of salaries that would be likely to attract such high flyers to work for the agency as a career option). So these lawyers would come in, master a particular case, take it through court and then depart at the end of their contracts. After a while the agency realized that it was losing much of the knowledge gained during these legal proceedings. The experts were leaving at the end of their contracts taking their files with them. Sometimes they might next go to work for telephone companies, poaching on the useful foundation of their knowledge of gamekeeping. Belatedly, an attempt was made to create a central electronic

archive and to oblige the hired lawyers to deposit all their materials in the archive before the termination of their contracts.

Although ostensibly this case only concerns quite short time cycles—six to 18 months for a particular legal decision to be reached—the effects of time were still significant. Gradually the agency came to realize that, although all the short term action revolved around winning or losing particular cases, there was a crucial longer term process underlying this, and one to which their human resource management and knowledge management policies were poorly adjusted. The agency would only be respected and effective if it built up a reputation for accumulated expertise and legal effectiveness over time. But its hiring policies and contract terms virtually ensured that this did not happen. It was, for a while at least, an organization that had fragmented and externalized its own memory. It was learning fast and forgetting almost as quickly (Zonnevijlle and Pollitt 2002). Nor was this an isolated example. Researching the UK telecommunications regulator, OFTEL, Hall, Scott and Hood discovered something very similar—a hectic 'meetings culture' in which no one gathered, classified and stored episodic data. Whilst this fast moving circus had some advantages, it is also led to 'weaknesses in its institutional memory sometimes reflected in a tendency to reinvent the wheel' (2000: 53). More generally, one set of effects from radical new public management (NPM) style reforms has indeed been a loss of organizational memories—a dwindling of the influence of the past (Pollitt 2001). Downsizing, contracting out, repeated organizational restructurings and a shift, first from paper to electronic data storage and then from one type of software to another have combined to reduce that which public sector organizations remember of their own pasts—even their very recent pasts in some cases. The consequences are that mistakes are repeated and the tacit craft skills and networking know-how of long serving staff are lost. Although written during the 1970s, Nobel Prize winning novelist J.M. Coetzee perhaps anticipated the mood of many long serving public service professionals under NPM when, in his *Waiting for the Barbarians*, he puts these thoughts into the mind of his provincial magistrate: 'The new men of the Empire are the ones who believe in fresh starts, new chapters, clean pages; I struggle on with the old story, hoping that, before it is finished, it will reveal to me why it was that I thought it worth the trouble' (Coetzee 2000: 26).

My second illustration concerns performance management. Nowadays, in North America and Western Europe, few public sector organizations exist without their own sets of performance indicators. These are used by managers, superior authorities, elected politicians and citizens themselves

to help assess the progress/regress of these organizations in the discharge of their responsibilities. The question obviously arises, however, 'progress compared with what?' In principle this could be answered in several alternative ways: achieved performance could be compared to targets or standards set, to the performance of other organizations or to the previous (past) performance of the organization in question. Suffice it to say that the first two approaches (targets and synchronic 'league tables' of similar organizations) seem to have been considerably more popular than diachronic comparisons with the organization's own performance in the past. In a study of 12 newly 'autonomized' English public service organizations in the mid-1990s found that none of them could trace their own performance back very far—so none could actually demonstrate whether they had been performing better or worse prior to autonomization, although this did not stop all sorts of stakeholders having all sorts of firm opinions on the matter (Pollitt et al. 1998: 164–5). The performance trail had quickly gone cold. In a parallel study of performance reporting by central government agencies Talbot found that the 'churn rate' (the speed at which individual indicators were dropped or redefined) was very high— only 36 percent of the 1995 key performance indicators (KPIs) were directly comparable with those of two years previously (Talbot 1996: 26). Similarly high churn rates have been recorded in studies of another radical NPM reformer—New Zealand. Why might this be a problem? Because from the perspective of both staff and users, 'whether we are doing better or worse than last year and the year before' is arguably a crucial consideration. It speaks directly to staff pride and motivation, and to user experience and satisfaction. Whether we are doing better than a school/hospital/ police force somewhere else in the country is a far more theoretical and abstract matter, and in any case is frequently obscured by desirable methodological scaffolding (standardizing case mix for hospitals; standardizing sociodemographics for schools, etc.). But it is the league table that, in the UK at least, the government and the media appear to love. Present (synchronic) comparisons are primary, past (diachronic) comparisons—at least those stretching back more than 12 months—secondary, often to the point of total neglect.

Varone's analysis of the NPM takes this kind of argument much further. He claims that, through an insistence on performance related contracts and the use of performance indicators, the NPM leads to a fragmentation of the public service and the replacement of a longer term, society oriented administrative perspective by a shorter term, politically controlled perspective, weighted towards the immediate gratification of consumer

demand (Varone 2001). Whilst Varone's paper is seriously short of support-ing empirical evidence—more in the nature of a logical conjecture—the basic idea that there has been a shift in the way time perspectives are constructed within public administration is persuasive and worthy of further research.

The third and final illustration is of a very broad and long term influence on public management. I refer to the basic nature of the political system in a particular country. Changes in such systems are rare, and most Western European states have had much the same type since the Second World War, if not longer. So this is not something which can easily be changed and, indeed, is not something which most politicians and public man-agers expect to change. It is an inherited framework, and one which has profound effects on public management. Let us, for a moment, compare two systems which comparativists would classify as 'consensual' or 'con-sociational'—Denmark and the Netherlands—and two systems which would be classified as 'majoritarian'—New Zealand, prior to its 1993 shift to proportional representation, and the UK (see Lijphart 1984, 1999). In the first, the electoral systems embody some kind of proportional representation, and governments are customarily coalitions (in Denmark's case frequently minority coalitions). In the majoritarian states electoral systems are majoritarian (or 'first past the post') and governments are usually composed of a single party. How does this affect public manage-ment? In a myriad ways. To begin with, what senior civil servants are expected to do is different. In the UK and New Zealand one's loyalty is to the government of the day, which is composed of one party with a more or less coherent programme and the power to push that pro-gramme through the legislature, even if other parties don't like it. Top civil servants are in no doubt that their task is to carry out that pro-gramme. In Denmark and the Netherlands the 'programme' is likely to be more general, with more vague pronouncements and areas for future negotiation and clarification. Senior civil servants need to be finely at-tuned to differences of position between the parties that currently com-pose the executive. Indeed, civil servants may sometimes be used as 'go betweens', seeking compromise among ministers from different parties or even talking to leaders of parties outside the government, particularly where minority coalitions need their votes in the legislature (Kettl et al. 2004).

Furthermore, the influence of the political system goes deeper into public management than just the top mandarins and chief executives. It may affect the way in which management reforms are received and

responded to. The standard comparative work found significant differences between majoritarian regimes and consensual regimes in terms of the speed and vigour with which they adopted NPM reforms (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004). Majoritarian regimes tended to be more radical, faster and rougher in the process of implementation. This broad finding was echoed in a more detailed study of executive agencies in Finland, the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK, where performance management tools appeared to have been used in a much more uncompromising way in the (majoritarian) UK than in the other (consensual) countries (Pollitt 2006a). When Finns or Swedes contemplated a 'hard' use of performance indicators—for example to discipline individual managers and 'name and shame' poorly performing agencies, they drew back. In several different ways they told the researchers that 'we just don't do things like that around here', clearly referring to their public service cultures, inherited from the past.

The 'transitional' states of Central and Eastern Europe offer many examples of the practical problems which arise from the nature of political systems. Although these states may have joyously acquired democratic political institutions, and although they have sought and received a good deal of assistance and advice in modernizing their public services, the shadow of the former communist regimes still hang quite heavily over many reform efforts. Elections and new laws cannot erase a deep-rooted set of negative public attitudes towards the bureaucracy. Low status and low pay hardly makes the civil service a top destination for the 'brightest and the best' of the younger generation. Widespread corruption—fuelled by low pay and one-party rule—cannot be eliminated overnight. Political patronage turns the creation of bright new organizations into just a new performance of the old play—'jobs for the boys'. Central ministries frequently lack the skills and capacities to 'steer' semi-autonomous agencies, which then become dangerously self-determining. It may well be a generation before this complex combination of constraints can be fully addressed. Meanwhile, parachuting in modern Western management techniques that take for granted the existence of well trained, well paid and corruption-free public servants is at best an exercise in superficial optimism, and at worse an invitation to deepening cynicism by both citizens and public servants themselves (Löffler and Vintar 2004; Pollitt 2004; Moynihan 2007).

1.6 Summary

With a few honourable exceptions, the past has been squeezed out of contemporary academic treatments of public management and public policymaking. Even where it gets a mention it is usually in an untheorized role—most commonly as a crude and unwelcome constraint on current options: a hangover. A number of eminent voices, from several different disciplines, testify to this loss of the past and exclusion of history.

The argument of the book—already launched in this chapter—is that this overwhelming focus on the present and the future (often accompanied by an intellectual colonization of the past as irrelevant 'tradition' or 'the era of bureaucracy') is deeply destructive of our understanding. It impoverishes our academic theories and it infantilizes our policy and management responses. It cuts us off from a rounded understanding of many of the key processes and institutions that inhabit our public sectors.

To complain, of course, is not to cure. What kind of intellectual remedies can be brought to bear on the current situation is the agenda for the chapters to come.

2

Timeships—Navigating the Past

> We live embedded in the passage of time a matrix marked by all possible standards of judgement: by immanent things that do not appear to change; by cosmic recurrences of days and seasons; by unique events of battles and natural disasters; by an apparent directionality of life from birth and growth to decrepitude, death and decay.
>
> (Gould 1988: 10)

2.1 Introduction

Having established the presumption that recent studies of public policy and management often neglect—or at the very least underconceptualize—the temporal dimension, we should next ask what can be done about it. The argument has not been that no attentions at all are paid to temporal processes or the temporal dimension, but rather that such attentions have remained the preserve of a minority of scholars. So the mainstream of public policy and public management articles and books are 'time-lite', especially at the 'popular' end where management experts dispense uncontextualized advice on how to do things better. A sensible first step, therefore, would seem to be to look at the minority of time conscious work more closely, so as to see what tools and approaches are already available for this kind of analysis. What kind of ships have been built to assist our time travels?

This is, incidentally, easily the longest chapter in the book. I could think of no sensible way of splitting it. It may be sensible to take it in stages, one or two theories at a time. Later chapters will all be shorter, in some cases dramatically so.

There is a sense, of course, in which almost all the social sciences and humanities are necessarily about the past, and therefore implicitly about what happens over time, but this 'trite but true' observation should not delay us. We cannot study everything. We should rather hasten on to those works where time is explicitly at issue. Some lie squarely within the fields of public policy and public management but some of the most interesting research and thinking seems to have been done at the borders of these fields. One example would be the extensive range of work on the concept of path dependency, most of which has been undertaken in economics, sociology and political economy, with only a few papers straying over into the general public policy or public management literature. Another would be the generic management research which has addressed differing perceptions and models of time—but overwhelmingly in private sector contexts (e.g., Whipp et al. 2002).

It is a general law that large literature searches on almost any topic yield unmanageably huge quantities of potentially relevant material. This law fully applies to the preoccupations of this book. I have therefore had to make a very difficult—and no doubt ultimately indefensible—selection of which approaches to cover and which to leave out. In making this selection I have been guided by a preference for perspectives and concepts that have *sometimes* been applied—even if rarely—to public sector organizations, and which come from disciplines or fields which have some sort of active frontier or interchange with mainstream public policy and public management. In short, the choice has been for neighbours who at least occasionally stray onto 'our patch'. I have therefore excluded (to take just two examples) the interesting thoughts of physicists on the nature of time and most (but not quite all) the immense work of psychologists on memory and cognition. Ironically, perhaps, it has not been practicable to go very far back in time, so that is another limitation. For all I know there could easily have been some eighteenth century Prussian cameralist who penned an exquisitely insightful text on the importance of the time dimension in advising the ruler, but I must rely on readers and reviewers to educate me in such matters.

After several iterations I finally selected the following:

1. Traditional historical approaches.
2. The path dependency framework.
3. Theories of cycles or alternations in administrative fashion.
4. Sociological studies of time and management.
5. The organizational ecology/organizational evolution perspective.
6. The analysis of the cognitive processes and biases of decision makers.

The reasons why these seemed valuable should become apparent as I describe them. The five are not treated equally. The first two are given much more space both because they are themselves very broad in nature and because their potential contributions appear to be equally wide. The third and fourth are also important, and I have tried to give a substantial account of at least some of the scholarship here. The fifth and sixth are treated far more swiftly and superficially, although each adds something significant to the general picture.

The aim, then, is to describe these various ways of handling temporal issues and then to assess their potential or actual usefulness to scholars working in the fields of public policy and public management. My main perspective is—does the theory produce coherent, convincing and interesting answers to significant questions? It is therefore a 'consumer' perspective on theory rather than a 'producer' perspective (although I hope that of a reasonably well informed consumer). I am not myself testing hypotheses or (at this stage) reporting a particular study, rather I am reviewing the work of others. Those who are more interested in methodological, philosophical or ideological aspects are advised to follow up the original references.

2.2 Traditional Historical Approaches

> When it comes to understanding *the past* historians are the acknow ledged experts but when it comes to understanding *how we understand the past*, there are no experts
>
> (Martin 1993: 31, original italics)

Charles Tilly sums up the significance of history for public policy and management as follows:

Not only do all political processes occur in history and therefore call for knowledge of their historical contexts, but also where and when political processes occur influence how they occur. History thus becomes an essential element of sound explanation for political processes

(Tilly 2006: 420)

But what kind of explanations are these? Here is one contemporary commentator, explaining what it is that historians do: 'historically self-conscious analysts reconstructing fully contextualized accounts and representing them in a theoretically sophisticated narrative that takes account of multiple

causes and effects' (McDonald 1996: 10). It is worth pausing to disentangle this formulation. It contains several elements. First, the historian is supposed to be 'historically self-conscious'. That seems straightforward—would the historian be a historian if s/he did not partake of this particular form of self-consciousness? Second, historians are 'reconstructing' a 'fully contextualized' account. So they are not just 'telling it like it was'—reading off from an objective and authoritative set of records. They are *constructing* something, and that something is to be fully contextualized. '*Fully* contextualized' is actually a bit of a tall order (what could one ever leave out?) but it certainly emphasizes the need to have an eye and an ear for those local details and chance events and coincidences that went to make up the particular events under scrutiny. In this way such an approach sets itself against those types of explanation that reduce particular events to simple instances of the working out of general covering laws, where 'local detail' is irrelevant or even obscuring of the underlying macro theoretical truths. So how are these contextualized accounts delivered? As *narratives*—explanatory stories—which take into account multiple causes and effects. All in all, therefore, this kind of history represents 'thick description', leading to a credible, coherent and accurate narrative. What is sought is not the testing of an elegant hypothesis drawn from a general theory about how society works but rather a highly specific and contextualized explanatory story which allows us to understand how this particular set of events came about.

So far, so good. However, those who read historians' and philosophers' accounts of what historians do soon realize that there is not one thing called 'history' but a range of approaches and ways of working with evidence. For example, some historians actually *do* employ some kinds of covering laws, which they frequently borrow, with greater or lesser degrees of acknowledgement, from the social sciences. Indeed, at one extreme, some work within an explicit and overarching macro theory of how societies develop and where history is going. This kind of teleological history is actually quite common, with Karl Marx as only the best known member of a populous club. Sewell (1996: 247) explains it like this:

A teleological explanation is the attribution of the cause of a historical happening neither to the actions and reactions that constitute the happening nor to concrete and specifiable conditions that shape or constrain the actions and reactions but rather to abstract transhistorical processes leading to some future historical state. Events in some historical present, in other words, are actually explained by events in the future. Such explanatory strategies, however fallacious, are surprisingly common in recent sociological writing and are far from rare in the works of social historians

In the same vein, we read experts explaining current events in terms of a future 'globalized' or 'digitalized' world that is inevitable and must be realized. Or we read (well, we used to read) Marxist historians who defined some current disturbance as a manifestation of the capital logic that would soon/eventually lead to the revolt of the proletariat and the collapse of unsustainable and bourgeois liberal democracies. The Marxists' frequently observed 'contradictions' were contradictions within a teleology of the unfolding plan of history—don't argue with the future. Of course, this type of 'explanation' is certainly not restricted to Marxists and is even more popular with politicians and the mass media than it is with historians. The following passage was written before Blair and New Labour came to power in Britain, but it fits so much of their rhetoric very well: 'the term *modern* often serves as a label for those processes or agents that are deemed by the analyst to be doing the work of the future in some present, while *traditional* labels those equally current forces in the present that the analyst regards as doing the work of the past' (Sewell 1996: 247).

'Historians with a plan' are one wing of historical writing. The opposite wing are perhaps more numerous. These are those who emphasize context, narrative and complexity but reject explicit theory altogether, express suspicion of general laws (teleogical or otherwise) and instead found their camp on particularities. As Richard Evans says, 'Most historians have always believed the establishment of general laws to be alien to the enterprise in which they are engaged' (Evans 2000: 48). The conservative philosopher, Michael Oakeshott, put it even more vigorously: 'The moment historical facts are regarded as instances of general laws history is dismissed' (Oakeshott 1983: 154). In this vein we find historians writing whole books which attempt to refute the idea that historical explanation is or should be of the 'covering general law' type. When I was an undergraduate writing papers on the philosophy of history I struggled through a difficult book entitled, *Laws and Explanation in History*, which took 172 pages to reject the idea that historical explanations were actually derived from general laws (Dray 1957). Dray argued that, while historians undoubtedly make use of general concepts like 'revolutions' or 'social class', a historian is 'never content to explain what he [*sic*] studies at the level of generality indicated by his classificatory word' (Dray 1957: 48). Thus:

the historian, when he sets out to explain the French Revolution, is just not interested in explaining it as a revolution   as an astronomer might be interested

in explaining a certain eclipse as an instance of eclipses: he is almost invariably concerned with it as different from other members of its class

(Dray 1957: 47)

Again, therefore, the emphasis on the historian's focus on the unique and the particular for its own sake.

One strong branch of such traditional history is the biographical approach, whose exponents focus less on structures and more on the agency of (usually charismatic or at least prominent) individuals. Kings and king makers, cardinals, generals and even the occasional civil servant still find a prominent place on the history shelves. Such treatments are of particular interest here when they show their actors as adept in handling what might be termed the 'tactics of time'. That is, knowing when to delay, when to strike an agreement, when to launch a *blitzkrieg* (retreat), when to emancipate the slaves or when to introduce a reform bill. Such tactics involve sensing the mood of popular opinion, seizing upon a moment of weakness among one's enemies, waiting for a particular kind of accident or scandal to occur in order to bolster reform proposals, working for years behind the scenes to build up coalitions of support, and many other temporal 'moves'. This conscious manipulation of temporal processes by individual actors is much commented upon in day to day media treatments of contemporary politics, and represents another level of analysis that is certainly worthy of attention. In this book we will address it at various points, but without attempting to construct a full scale 'handbook of time tactics'— interesting endeavour though that would be. Our main emphasis will remain on 'macro processes' (Büthe 2002: 483), structures, institutions and organizations.

The whole 'uniqueness' perspective, still strong in history, was perhaps most beautifully expressed by someone who was a novelist and poet rather than an academic historian, W.G. Sebald:

But what can we know in advance of the course of history, which unfolds according to some logically indecipherable law, impelled forward, often changing direction at the crucial moment, by tiny imponderable events, by a barely perceptible current of air, a leaf falling to the ground, a glance exchanged across a great crowd of people. Even in retrospect we cannot see what things were really like before that moment, and how this or that world shaking event came about

(Sebald 2005: 13)

Today, however, while general laws in the large sense of rules governing the rise and fall of civilizations and types of society may still be resisted,

most historians are nevertheless perfectly ready to use general concepts and to look for patterns and trends. The idea that each event is unique and cannot be compared to and classified alongside others is no longer the mainstream, if it ever was:

history has moved away from description and narrative to analysis and ex planation; from concentrating on the unique and individual to establishing regu larities and to generalization. In a sense the traditional approach has been turned upside down

(Hobsbawm 1998: 84)

Well, perhaps. There are still many, many historical journal articles and books that focus on the unique; rely principally on narrative techniques; and breathe no breath of theory in any shape or form. Regularities may creep in around the edges, but they are not yet the central focus. Social science concepts will be used, but not in order to confirm or refute some more general theory. Hobsbawm is surely correct to say that analysis and explanation have gained ground, but perhaps the other elements in his assessment (movement away from narrative and from the unique) should be read in the knowledge that he himself was a programmatic historian, albeit one of the most subtle and distinguished of the breed.

A more qualified description of the new historical mainstream comes from the Professor of Modern History at Cambridge. Noting that laws are by no means the same thing as generalizations, Evans observes that:

History, in the end, may for the most part be seen as a science in the weak sense of the German term *Wissenschaft*, an organized body of knowledge acquired through research carried out according to generally agreed methods, presented in published reports, and subject to peer reviews. It is not a science in the strong sense that it can frame general laws or predict the future

(Evans 2000: 62)

What we are left with, therefore, is 'history' as a variety of approaches, ranging from the macro teleological to those which, at the opposite ex-treme, concentrate massive erudition on some unique event, with no wish to relate it to any 'regularities' or general theories. The middle ground, or mainstream, is certainly concerned with analysis and explanation, but still within a highly contextualized understanding and still within a predom-inantly narrative approach that makes historical writing very different from what we find in mainstream political science, sociology or public administration journals. This view of history, and historical explanation, is neatly summarized by McCullagh (2004: 171):

the causes of historical events are enormously varied, and not confined to the pursuit of class interests or power, nor do all involve the exploitation of the poor, the foreign or females. Causal explanations in history do not show that an effect had to happen. They simply point out causes that increased the probability of its occurrence. Nor do explanations which refer to people's reasons for acting always show that an action was rational. Sometimes the reasons are poor ones, and the action rather stupid. Finally, people do not always behave as their culture dictates. Some rebel against it, and find original ways of responding to situations.

Historians operating in this middle ground may well make use of social science theories or concepts, but will not raise these to the status of laws or place the 'testing' of such abstractions ahead of the construction of an accurate and detailed narrative. An Italian administrative historian puts it as follows:

the history of public administration fits more closely with a view of history as a search for regular patterns and recurrent trends in the ocean of past events and remote experiences; and . . . it is therefore necessary to employ models, general schemes and interpretive grids to give sense and perspective to the ongoing flux of time . . . Of course, these 'laws' do not have absolute value; nor can rules of this kind be experimentally verified in the laboratory

(Aimo 2002: 318)

The historical interplay between particulars and their contexts were nicely illustrated by another Italian administrative historian's comments on comparative political studies. Comparative political scientists could certainly compare, say, parliaments in different countries, and discuss the varying relations these organs had to executives or electoral systems. However, no self-respecting historian would accept that that was the whole story:

Parliaments differ from one another also because of the spatial organization of their meetings, because of the way their members are accustomed to conflict or negoti ation, because of the rhetoric used in the debates. And rules of conflict and negotiation no less than parliamentary oratory are the result of an incredible number of factors, the outcome of a long lasting cultural process, into which political scientists hardly enquire

(Rugge 2006: 142 3)

A further—and telling—example of the importance of history came from the doyen of budgetary theory, Aaron Wildavsky. Wildavsky vigorously defended the (unfashionable) virtues of incremental budgeting—the trad- itional process by which only marginal new expenditures (the 'increments')

received full political attention, while the main part of the budget (the 'base') ran on from year to year without particularly rigorous scrutiny. Simultaneously, he poured scorn on some of the more 'rational' budgeting techniques which were heavily in fashion when he was writing during the 1960s and 1970s. Take 'zero-based budgeting', or ZBB, a much lauded practice which, theoretically at least, entailed starting with the assumption that every penny of spending had to be re-examined and re-evaluated, from the bottom up, each year. Of ZBB, Wildavsky remarked:

The ideal specimen of an ahistorical information system is zero base budgeting. The past, as reflected in the budgetary base (common expectations as to the amounts and types of funding), is explicitly rejected. There is no yesterday. Noth ing is to be taken for granted. Everything at every period is subject to scrutiny. As a result calculations become unmanageable

(Wildavsky 1979: 38)

This, he claimed, produced a situation in which, 'Both calculation and conflict increase exponentially, the former worsening detection and the latter impeding the correction of errors' (ibid.: 38). In short, without historical continuities, budgeting becomes more difficult, operational planning less certain, programmes more volatile—not a situation that well managed administrations should be searching to impose upon themselves.

To sum up, histories usually yield complex descriptions, rich with multiple causes, accidents and mistakes, local details and unique coincidences. These characteristics have a number of advantages for students of public management and public policy. To begin with, historical accounts are usually immediately recognizable to non-specialist readers. They use (for the most part) everyday language and they assume a narrative form (although there are exceptions—some highly technical histories can be as impenetrable to the lay reader as nuclear physics—Evans 2000: 57–9). They are rich with the kind of detail that reassures readers that the authors know what they are talking about. With specific relation to the temporal dimension, the narrative, descriptive form almost automatically acknowledges the significance of the *sequence* of events and of the 'climate of thought' at different periods of time. Historians are usually careful to identify the kind of longer run processes, or gradual changes in background conditions that often come to have major effects on policy and practice, but seldom feature in either the headlines or narrow focus social science accounts. Population changes, generational shifts in popular attitudes, the gradual replacement or one technology by another—these are the stuff of historical accounts. 'Rome was not built in a day', and neither was Britain's decline as an

imperial power with global reach contained within a single event or period. Historians have also helped to identify cyclical or alternating patterns of the kind discussed in Chapter 1—as in the 'perpetual quadrille' (Taylor 1954: ix) of Balance of Power Western Europe from the mid-nineteenth century until the First World War.

Overall, one might say that the good ship History was more like a flotilla than a single vessel. The flagship is of a traditional design, in which it is easy to assume that what one is hearing is simply 'how it was'—a convincing narrative, unencumbered by much theory or method. But this is a deceptive appearance, in so far as there is actually a fair amount of both lurking just beneath the decks. The *theory* is principally inductive and inclusive— explanations are produced by constructive attention to many details and aspects and in the best work there is an ecumenical willingness to try out a range of competing explanations before steering towards the one that seems to do the best job of synthesis. There is no compulsion to generalize the eventually constructed explanation to many other situations, and no requirement that the form of the explanation must be capable of yielding predictions about the future (although many historians would subscribe to the idea that the past can yield certain kinds of lessons or pointers for the future—see, e.g., Schlesinger Jnr. 2007, and also Chapter 6 of this book). With particular respect to time, there is commonly an unspoken theoretical assumption to the effect that explanations of particular events will normally require some elucidation of developments over time—that a proper explanation should include the antecedents to the present situation, and that actors need to be understood in relation to 'where those actors have come from', and that particular episodes were often seen at the time as similar to or different from previous notable episodes, and that ideas about these similarities and differences would have influenced the actors on the day (e.g., Crawford 2006). Historical *methods* focus on the scrupulous and disciplined use of a variety of sources, with written documents still usually being given pride of place, especially for institutional and political histories. All this may seem unsatisfactory to the hard nosed, hypothesis-driven, deductive species of social scientist, but then historians have their own strong criticisms of the attempts of these same social scientists to reduce complexity and context to a few fixed relationships between a limited set of variables.

Meanwhile, alongside this flagship sail some lesser vessels of rather different and more specialized characteristics. These include a substantial cruiser powered by general social theories—such as Marxist history or Latin American histories based on the mutually antagonistic *dependencia*

and modernization theories. Here there may still be a lack of specific hypotheses to be tested, but the historical account is self-consciously constructed within a prechosen overall framework, such as one specifying the specific conditions of late monopoly capitalism, or postcolonialism, or whatever. There are also several frigates in which historians explore the concept of time itself, and experiment with the idea that there may be different times moving at different speeds (e.g., fast moving political events versus slow moving social and cultural changes—see Evans 2000: 132–3). This is a thought we will return to in section 2.5 below.

2.3 The Path Dependency Framework

2.3.1 Background

In the fields of political science, comparative history, economics, institutional sociology and organization theory there is currently a lot of interest in the concept of path dependency (Arthur 1994; Clemens and Cook 1999; Alexander 2001; Mahoney and Rueschemeyer 2003; Thelen 2003; Pierson 2004; Crouch 2005; Gains et al. 2005; Saint-Martin 2005; Mahoney and Schensul 2006; Struyven 2006). This academic excitement is not surprising, in so far as path dependency (PD) seems to offer a general conceptual architecture for matters as fundamental as the passing of time and the succession of events. The concept has been strongly debated in disciplines such as economics and institutional sociology for roughly 20 years, but it has come to academic public policy and (especially) public management only occasionally and more recently.

   In the beginning PD was usually applied at the level of whole systems—as a category for understanding the trajectories of whole economies or welfare states (classically, in North 1990; for a recent application to public administration, see Lynn Jnr. 2005). Increasingly, however, it has been applied at the meso level too—either to budgetary systems (Linder 2003) or to specific public policies for such diverse subjects as agencification, local government reform, healthcare, pesticide policy or training systems (see Gains 1999; Tuohy 1999; Greener 2001; Hacker 2002; Thelen 2003; Gains et al. 2005; Kay 2005; Pralle 2006; Sundström 2006). Kingdon's classic work, *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies*, also makes central use of the notion of 'windows of opportunity', which is a cousin of the PD concept of 'punctuations' (Kingdon 1995: 226–7). Kelman even makes an unusual attempt to apply PD ideas at the individual level (2005). Thus

there have been studies of particular sectors and policies and technologies. Notable work on 'punctuations' and paths in US policymaking has been produced by Baumgartner and Jones (1993, 2002). There therefore seems no reason in principle why it should not also be used to analyse the development of specific organizations—one notch down from systems, policies or programmes, but still at the meso level of analysis. The added value of such an extension of the scope of the concept will be explored in detail in the next chapter. If theories making use of the concept were to work well in such an application it could considerably enhance our understanding of organizational stability and change within public administration.

In the remainder of this section the aim will be:

1. To provide a general introduction to the characteristics of the PD concept, with particular reference to its (previously limited) application within the fields of public policy and public management.

2. More particularly, to probe the advantages and disadvantages of deploying PD at the level of the analysis of specific policies or even particular organizations.

One justification for such an exercise is that until recently the most prominent and explicit applications of the PD concept have either been rather abstract and general (e.g., Mahoney and Rueschemeyer 2003; Pierson 2004; Kay 2005) or they have been pitched at a macro level, that is, deployed to explain features of whole systems or regimes (e.g., North 1990; Alexander 2001; Korpi 2001; Lynn Jnr. 2006; Crouch 2005). Unfortunately, in both public policy and public administration there has been a tendency for some authors to use the phrase 'path dependencies' quite loosely, without much further attempt to set up and explicate the underlying assumptions, concepts or processes (e.g., Richards 2003). By contrast, this treatment will devote explicit attention to theoretical premises and logic.

Why is an application at the level of policies and organizations potentially useful for our purposes? There are several strands here. First, and most straightforwardly, the PD concept may help students of particular policies and organizations to understand their durability. The durability of specific organizations is a different matter from the durability of whole welfare states or forms of capitalism (which is where PD originally made its name). On the one hand it is quite clear that many public sector organizations enjoy great longevity but, on the other, much public management scholarship is focused on change rather than stability, so PD may be helpful here. Similarly, some policies seem able to embed themselves

for decades or even generations, despite the changing environments around them. Second, PD offers something beyond the usual incrementalist models by drawing attention to the possibility of sudden, rapid moments of change—'punctuations' set in longer sentences of relative continuity ('paths'). In other words PD is built upon assumptions of discontinuous, non-linear change (precisely the kind of change that contemporary complexity theorists and change management gurus are most interested in). From their quantitative and longitudinal studies of US policies Baumgartner and Jones conclude that the distributions of key variables are frequently 'fat tailed' or leptokurotic, and that this supports a model of punctuated equilibrium: 'in change data, the tails of the distribution are extreme changes—punctuations' (2002: 295). Third, PD is helpful in breaking the management and policy scholars' frequent bad habit of focusing exclusively on current pressures, possible futures and the strategies for linking these. It encourages an equal concern with the past—with the 'DNA' of organizations which they received at birth, possibly many years previously and in very different circumstances from those of today.

2.3.2 Path Dependency: Its General Characteristics as Applied to the Field of Public Policy and Administration

Theorists using PD concepts usually aim to explain why some important things stay the same—or almost the same—over considerable periods of time. Why, for example, does the UK remain an abrasive, majoritarian political system and the Netherlands continue as a multiparty, consensualist political system? Many such theorists place great weight on the existence of increasing returns to those who follow the particular path (and therefore decreasing returns/increasing penalties to those who don't). Increasing returns (an economic concept but one which can be stretched to cover social and political processes) are seen as a prime form of *positive feedback mechanism*. For example, the English, 'first past the post', electoral system tends to punish small parties harshly, making it very difficult for individuals who try to start a new party and who would like to see the system to evolve towards having a multiparty basis.

A PD perspective also allows for local and regional variety and, implicitly at least, resists any suggestion of globally induced uniformity. Abbott, writing of the Chicago School of Sociology, contrasted their view that, 'one cannot understand social life without understanding the arrangements of particular social actors in particular places and particular times'

with mainstream social science 'variables analysis', where: 'the idea of a variable is the idea of a scale that has the same causal meaning whatever its context' (Abbott, 1997: 1152). Thus most theorists working with PD tend to emphasize particularities of context—of time, space and task (Griffin 1992; Abbott 1997, 2001; Pierson 2004; Mahoney and Schensul 2006). Peter Hall put it succinctly when he wrote that theorists using PD, 'see the world not as a terrain marked by the operation of timeless causal regularities, but as a branching tree whose tips represent the outcomes of events that unfold over time' (Hall 2003: 385).

Another attraction is that, by dealing with some of the obvious continuities in public life, PD complements the somewhat obsessive concern exhibited by some academics for what is new, what is changing and for the whole ideology of 'modernization' (for a good official example of the latter, see Prime Minister and Minister for the Cabinet Office 1999; an academic critique of 'hyperinnovation' can be found in Moran 2003).

The first, central, notion—feedback which increases returns to the current path—immediately prompts further questions. Prominent among these have been the following:

1. What is the nature of the mechanism(s) which keep the system/policy/sector/organization on track?
2. Under what circumstances do significant changes ('punctuations') nevertheless take place?
3. Is path dependency a widespread, general condition, or does it occur only under particular circumstances?
4. How should we conceptualize smaller 'within path' changes and distinguish them from punctuations?

One may also want to add one further question, that does not seem to be much addressed in the existing literature:

5. Is the journey down the 'path' an acceleration or a deceleration and, related to this, what is its periodicity (e.g., does it slow down after a few years, or does it speed up for a given period and then hit some kind of critical threshold?)

2.3.3 What are the Feedback Mechanisms?

Here we immediately encounter an unusual feature of PD. It: 'is neither a framework, nor a theory, nor a model . . . [It is] an empirical category, an organizing concept . . . Path dependent processes, even when identified,

require theorizing' (Kay 2005: 554). Thus it is not referred to here as 'path dependency *theory*', but rather as PD 'concepts' or 'frameworks'. Without some specification of what the feedback mechanisms are, and how they operate, what we have in PD is a conceptualization (valuable in itself) but not yet an explanation.

What might these mechanisms be? Some focus mainly on the economic concept of increasing returns. Other theorists maintain that increasing returns, though sometimes important, are only one of the mechanisms that lead to path dependency. Kay, for example, refers to: (a) sunk costs; (b) policies which enable certain interest groups and constrain others; (c) investments/disinvestments in administrative infrastructure (capacity building/demolition); and (d) the establishment of formal or informal contracts with individuals (Kay 2005: 562–3). Potentially, this radically widens the field of mechanisms that can produce PD. In this broader view the list of candidates is long and varied. They may be utilitarian/functional, political or cultural in character (Thelen 2003: 218). They may be material, or ideational, or a mixture of the two. They range from fairly crude calculations of short term profit to 'softer', longer run processes of socialization into a particular institutional environment. In this sense PD is, as Kay suggests, very open-ended. For example, it is open to colonization by either rational choice economists or institutionalist sociologists, although their PD-based explanations will tend to be very different, one from another.

There have certainly been attempts to classify the mechanisms or situations that tend to produce path dependency, although none of these seems to have achieved general currency. Some are predominantly economistic in approach (e.g., Arthur 1994, who lists high sunk costs, network effects, learning effects, etc.) while others are more sociological, including cycles of legitimation or coercion (e.g., Powell and DiMaggio 1991; Steinmo 2003; Thelen 2003). The former tend to see feedback occurring through a process in which rational actors strategically (or at least calculatively) assess their situations and come to the judgement that continuing down a particular path is in their best interests. The more sociological approaches allow for less calculative, more culturally and norm induced behaviour (but behaviour that nevertheless cleaves to 'the path'). Writers in this second tradition may choose not to use the term 'feedback' at all, because they wish to avoid its rational/calculative connotations.

2.3.4 *Under what Circumstances Do Significant Changes Nevertheless Take Place?*

No PD-users claim that there is no change at all. Explicitly or implicitly, they all allow for frequent small changes ('within path'), but focus on major changes which are expected to occur only at long and irregular intervals—usually termed 'punctuations' or 'critical junctures' in the literature. There is something of a divide among writers holding this position as between those who see critical junctures as mainly contingent and those who believe them generally to be predictable (although there could, of course, be a mixture of the two). The former position links with the emphasis given by some complexity theorists to random or unforeseeable conjunctures (see, e.g., Stacey et al. 2000; Teisman and Van Buuren 2007). The latter is more characteristic of economic approaches, where critical junctures can be connected to more foreseeable/predictable changes in the structures of economies or to technological breakthroughs (North 1990; Pierson 2004).

There is a link here to the literature on organizational learning. Strategic thinkers may try to change path when they have learned that the old path is no longer optimal. This learning may be the result of single loop, double loop or deutero learning (Argyris and Schön 1996). On the other hand, path change may take place in a more brutal fashion, because actors have failed to learn and are finally presented with environmental pressures so strong as to exclude choice ('there is no alternative'). The relative frequency of these two types of path switch (deliberate/learning-based versus forced/unexpected) is a fascinating and largely unexplored question, but one the answer to which lies beyond the scope of this book.

Are these forks in the path necessarily big events? And are they patterned or random? Opinions among theorists differ sharply. Some maintain that initiating events can themselves be quite small—'for want of a nail'. One promising way of circumnavigating this difficulty is by drawing a distinction between *precipitating events* and the *initial conditions* that precede them (Arthur 1994; Goldstone 1998; Mahoney 2006: 460). Initial conditions are usually rather larger scale circumstances, which can to some extent be foreseen, or, at least, detected in retrospect and across a number of cases: for example, fiscal crises often precede major public management reforms. They are key features of the relevant *contexts*. Thus the precipitating event itself becomes less important in the overall explanatory schema, and it matters less if it turns out to be some apparently trivial or random occurrence. However, when precipitating events come

together with initial conditions we have a punctuation, or critical juncture. A punctuation is the period of time when old trajectories are broken and a new path is begun. Thereafter we need to find what continuing mechanisms sustain the new path.

Recently some institutional historians have challenged the model of punctuated equilibrium in a more fundamental way. Their argument is not so much that punctuations don't happen, rather that they are far from the only way in which major change can occur. Thus, for example, Streeck and Thelen (2005) want to blur the line between occasional radical change and long periods of stability by arguing that there are a number of ways in which big changes may result from a series of smaller steps. Further, they argue that some or all of these incremental, or gradual, steps may arise from endogenous dynamics within particular institutional regimes. Dramatic exogenous shocks are therefore not necessary in order to achieve 'transformation'. This more complicated picture of the possibilities is shown in Table 2.1, below.

In Table 2.1, cells A and D denote the classic path and punctuation model of most path dependency and agenda setting models. However, without denying that many phenomena may fit these categories quite well, Streeck and Thelen insist that B and C are equally possible. Their interest lies mainly in B—the achievement of radical change in a gradual manner—and their book documents a number of examples of this. Further examples can be found in other works—for example, in Geneschel's analysis of long term developments in German telecommunications regulation and healthcare (Geneschel 1997). Streeck and Thelen suggest that there are a number of processes by which B can come about, and name these as 'displacement', 'layering', 'drift', 'conversion' and 'exhaustion' (Streeck and Thelen 2005). There are, however, some difficulties with this further elaboration of the taxonomy of institutional

Table 2.1 Types of Institutional Change

| | | Result | of Change |
		Within path/incremental	Radical/transformation
Process	Gradual	A. Classic incrementalism.	B. Gradual, but eventually fundamental change.
	Abrupt (punctuation)	C. 'Radical conservatism' rapid return to path.	
of Change			D. Sudden, radical change.

Source: Developed from Streeck and Thelen 2005: 9.

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change. The distinctions between the five processes do not seem entirely clear, and in any case it seems that at least some of them may as well lead to 'within path' change as to transformation (Thelen 2003). Thus they are not processes which are unique to one type of result— they are in themselves indeterminate in this respect. There is a further reference to the idea of gradual, but transformative change in section 2.2.8, below.

Finally, one may note that, although not the focus of Streeck and Thelen's concern, cell C is also interesting. Here there is some major shock and resulting change, but eventually the system or institution re-turns to something like its former state. One might say that an institution is knocked off path but soon clambers back onto the road. This type of change is hardly unknown. Take, for example, the decision by the 1964 Labour government in Britain to divide economic responsibilities between two ministries, thus terminating the longstanding fiscal and economic dominance of the Treasury and putting alongside it a powerful new min-istry of economics and planning—the Department for Economic Affairs (DEA). At the time this was certainly seen as something of a revolution in Whitehall, especially as an energetic and senior politician was given charge of the DEA. Yet within two years the department was already losing status, and after five it was abolished (Pollitt 1984). The Treasury, needless to say, re-absorbed the most important of its functions. The DEA hardly left a ripple on the pond.

2.3.5 Is Path Dependency a Widespread, General Condition, or Does it Occur Only Under Particular Circumstances?

This is a crucial question. Several prominent economists and political scientists have persuasively argued that positive feedback mechanisms are widespread, especially in politics (North 1990; Pierson 2004). A more sociological perspective may lead to the conclusion that PD is even more pervasive. This follows from the fact that, from an economic perspective, PD occurs in rather special circumstances where economically rational outcomes are somehow derailed. From a sociological or historical–institu-tionalist perspective, however, PD would be the norm rather than the exception, since the dominance of rational behaviour is not the under-lying assumption. Therefore both economistic rationalists and (even more) institutional sociologists would appear to see PD as widespread. Against this, others have suggested that 'there are more incentives to break from a path dependency trajectory than Pierson allows' (Gains

et al. 2005: 29). That may be, but it is noteworthy that the research on which this counterclaim is based showed that, even where a very powerful central executive legislated to introduce a radically new system for local authorities, more than 60 percent of the target organizations held to the previous path, and only 17 percent complied with the model urged on them by the executive. The PD glass was more than half full!

A further general feature merits recognition—one which relates to the issue of the prevalence of PD and also to the nature of the explanations produced from its use. In most of its applications thus far it has used a nominalist strategy of causal analysis. Thus explanations are couched in terms of comparisons of aggregate categories, such as majoritarian versus consensual political systems, or individualist versus collectivist cultures (see Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004 or Gains et al. 2005). Mahoney (2003: 338–9) is very clear about the implications of this approach:

A nominal strategy implicitly or explicitly assumes a nonlinear understanding of causation built about the idea of necessary and sufficient conditions. This under standing of causation is quite different from that employed by most large *N* re searchers, who often analyse linear causation and who rarely test for necessary and sufficient conditions. By contrast, an ordinal strategy is more compatible with the linear and correlational assumptions that guide much large *N* research

This connects with the issue of the prevalence of path dependent processes because, from a realist standpoint, if most of the world of politics and public administration consists of linear processes, then the application and value of the PD framework will ultimately be limited. If, however, it is a world characterized by many non-linearities and discontinuities—sudden, potentially transformative conjunctions and accidents—then PD becomes a very important academic worksite indeed.

2.3.6 How Should We Conceptualize Smaller, 'Within-Path' Changes?

It is glaringly obvious that change in organizations is unceasing. Even if the big issues—governance structures, budgetary principles, professional socialization—change only slowly or in sudden 'punctuations', many smaller items are changing all the time. New equipment, new staff, new rules, new titles, new training programmes: all these and more are the staple of everyday life in the office. How, then can we distinguish between smaller 'within-path' changes, and the big punctuations? The PD influenced theorist is obliged to make judgements here.

In this context Thelen has suggested that the concepts of 'institutional layering' and 'institutional conversion' may be useful (Thelen 2003). In her account, institutional layering occurred when 'innovators accommodated and in many ways adapted to the logic of the pre-existing system, working around those elements they could not change'. Conversion happens when 'institutions designed with one set of goals in mind are redirected to other ends' (Thelen 2003: 226, 228). So in both cases change occurs, but within a path-determined institutional framework that is not itself overthrown.

By allowing for these types of within-path change we can escape the crude image of PD as a conservative framework within which long stretches of complete stasis are occasionally punctuated by tsunami of transformational upheaval (Crouch 2005: 4). It might be objected by sociologists, however, that Thelen's extensions of PD amount to a kind of 'closet rationalism', in which rational actors adapt to constraints while awaiting the window of opportunity for a real punctuation. We should allow, therefore, for the possibility that within-path adjustments are norm driven or contextually determined rather than cleverly calculated by far-seeing strategic actors. In short, PD cannot escape the chasm that yawns between, on the one hand, economistic rationalism and, on the other, sociological/institutionalist accounts that rely much more on the social construction of norms, procedures and cultures. The PD concept apparently manages to sit, uneasily, on both sides of this gap, but only by allowing itself to be 'powered' by different forms and mechanisms in each of the two territories. There is no one 'theory of path dependency' but rather at least two major bodies of theory which take up and use the concept in very different ways.

2.3.7 Incrementalism: An Aside

The concept of incrementalism has a long history in political science, and has recently found a kind of new echo in Streeck and Thelen's argument that gradual change can, over time, accumulate until it amounts to a 'transformation' (Streeck and Thelen 2005). They distinguish between five processes which can produce this effect, 'displacement', 'layering', 'drift', 'conversion' and 'exhaustion'. All share the property that the 'drip, drip' of small changes—many of them endogenous rather than exogenous—can eventually lead to a substantially new regime.

In political science the original idea of incrementalism is strongly associated with the name of Charles Lindblom (Lindblom 1959, 1979). It arose

as a critique of the idea that policy decisions were usually taken on the basis of strategic, rational analysis. In its later, more developed form, incrementalism had three principal elements:

- Incremental politics—where outcomes were changed only in small successive steps, not through great leaps forward.

- Incremental analysis—where decisionmakers used bit by bit partial analyses rather than a rational comprehensive analysis of all the possible options, their outcomes and their respective costs and benefits. So we buy the car because it handles well, is stylish and of an attractive colour, but fail, at the time of purchase, to investigate its fuel economy or reliability.

- Partisan mutual adjustment (PMA)—where decisions are arrived at through a process of fragmented and partially decentralized decision-making (Lindblom 1979).

The three can go together, but do not necessarily do so. In particular, for our purposes, one can have PMA that results in non-incremental outcomes.

Incrementalism has been a very widely used concept (and one that is often oversimplified—usually as just the first or the third of the three elements identified above). It might therefore be thought that incrementalism would figure in this book as a major theory. After all, at first appearance, it seems directly to support the idea of a slowly changing, small stepping 'path'. On reflection, however, this identification seemed to misconstrue Lindblom. Incrementalism does not necessarily imply a conservative, path hugging trajectory. From early in the career of the concept, some commentators pointed out that *over time*, incremental politics can lead to major changes. This will occur if all or most of the small steps are taken in roughly the same direction. Indeed, Lindblom himself wrote that: 'A fast-moving sequence of small changes can more speedily accomplish a drastic alteration of the status quo than can only infrequent major policy change' (Lindblom 1979: 517). Furthermore, the incrementalist model is not primarily concerned with time. It does not present a distinctive 'time pattern' of outcomes (on the contrary, as indicated above, it is apparently compatible with both transformation and very slow change). Its chief focus is on how decisions get taken (by limited analysis coupled to PMR). Therefore, in terms of the PD framework one might see PMR as a particular species of mechanism, although one that, under varying circumstances, can produce either slow, within-path (incremental politics) or more drastic

change. When the latter occurs one is dealing with the phenomenon already noted by Streeck and Thelen (section 2.2.5, above), in other words, a series of small changes all in the same direction produce a transformation without a punctuation (a big change without a big crisis).

2.3.8 Is the Journey Down the Path Accelerating, Decelerating or Steady?

The original idea of increasing returns may seem to imply an accelerating trajectory down the path. If, however, the range of mechanisms allowed is broadened (see section 2.2.4) then it becomes ever more unlikely that all the mechanisms will work in the same way. Some may work for a while but then decline in force, others may accelerate over time, and so on. Several may work alongside each other, but with different acceleration/deceleration characteristics. Empirically there seems no reason to expect a single pattern, and every reason to interrogate each mechanism, once identified, in order to discover its behaviour over time. Yet this has been rarely attempted in most of the literature cited here. A beginning is made when PD concepts are applied to two cases in Chapter 4.

2.4 Theories of Cycles or Alternations in Administrative Fashion

Whereas those using path dependency concepts conceive of time as sequential, moving forwards like an arrow, or a branching tree, there is also a long history of writers who see events as cycling rather than sequencing. The difference between the two ways of thinking was elaborated and popularized by Stephen Jay Gould in his widely selling book *Time's Arrow, Time's Cycle* (Gould 1988). Gould was dealing with the discovery of 'deep' geological time, where Darwinian evolutionary theory provided explanations for the branching forks of natural selection while geologists concentrating on changes in landforms (erosion and uplift) found notions of cycling or oscillation more useful. Although he was certainly not writing about public policy or administration, it is worth briefly reproducing the essence of Gould's distinction:

The essence of time's arrow lies in the irreversibility of history and the unrepeatable uniqueness in each step in a sequence of events linked through time in physical connection   ancestral ape to modern human, sediments of an old ocean basin to

rocks of a later continent . . . The metaphor of time's cycle captures those aspects of nature that are either stable or else cycle in simple repeating (or oscillating) series because they are a direct product of nature's timeless laws, not contingent moments of complex historical pathways

(Gould 1988: 194, 196)

One of Gould's basic points is that we need to understand *both* types of process, and the interrelation between them, if we are to be able to map the history of the natural world.

We must not seek one in order to exclude the other . . . but neither should we espouse a form of wishy washy pluralism that melds the end members into an undefined middle and loses the essence of each vision the uniqueness of history and the immanence of law

(Gould 1988: 199)

This precept can profitably be held in mind when we transfer the analogy to the world of governments, policies and programmes.

Many writers in public management and policy studies have drawn upon the idea of cycles or alternations, but they have not necessarily gone very far into the specification of the underlying mechanisms ('laws' according to Gould, perhaps no more than 'probabilistic tendencies' in the social sciences). Thus, for example, Davis et al. (1999) studied machinery of government changes in Australia, Canada and the UK over the period 1950–97 and came to the conclusion that there was some evidence of a cycle (albeit not a regular one) between favouring larger numbers of smaller organizations and smaller numbers of larger organizations in central government: ' . . . all three nations oscillate about the appropriate configuration of government, as prime ministers are torn between the attraction of narrowly focused departments and the advantages of fewer, but more broadly based departments' (Davis et al. 1999: 28). This apparent pattern is echoed in the more recent work on the UK by Talbot and Johnstone (2007), where they find a cycle between disaggregation and re-aggregation of organizational forms (see also Pollitt 1984). In the US, too, a long view over the decades reveals 'tides' of administrative reform within the federal government, although this is an alternation between four different basic philosophies rather than two dimensional cycling (Light 1997). An even longer view (500 years!) of the organization of central banks suggests that: 'the institutional standing of central banks has oscillated between an ideal-typical situation of ''formal integration'' in the state apparatus, and an ideal-typical situation of

formal de-coupling and ''independence'' from the rest of the state appar-
atus' (Marcussen 2007: 147). In all these cases the underlying mechanism
appears to be that organizational designers, in a highly uncertain world
where there are no firm rules as to the best solution, tend to opt for one
set of forms until their particular disadvantages become apparent, where-
upon they begin to look for opportunities to move back towards a differ-
ent form that reduces these disadvantages—but at the cost of introducing
drawbacks of a different kind. The grass on the other side always looks
greener, so, over the years, reformers wobble between alternatives which
each carry advantages and disadvantages. This process applies equally to
situations in which ministers take a leading role in organizational reform
and those in which the initiative lies with senior public servants. We
should note, however, that, even if there are such cycling mechanisms
affecting machinery of government changes, this does not mean
that cycling is necessarily a general phenomenon. In the machinery of
government case it seems to derive from at least two specific conditions:
first, the absence of any stable, generally accepted design principles
and, second, a limited number of apparent options, each one of which
contains significant advantages *and* disadvantages (dilemmas, by any
other name).

Another area where cycling has been widely noted is that of budgeting.
To begin at a pedestrian level, it is obvious that (in the developed world)
many if not most public sector budgeting systems operate on a formal
annual cycle. Reforms in the most 'advanced' countries over the past
decade or two have introduced some 'end of year flexibility' and elements
of longer term budgeting—but still in multiples of a year (e.g., three year
budget commitments of varying degrees of firmness). Yet even in the more
'advanced' systems research indicates that, at operational levels, 'annual-
ity' still has important and sometimes distorting effects (Hyndman et al.
2007). Beyond this, budget scholars note cycles and patterns of a slightly
less obvious nature. Rubin, for example, detects a pattern of increasing and
then reducing the degree of executive discretion in particular US federal
budgets (Rubin 2000: 274–6). Congressional controls become operation-
ally asphyxiating, and the executive eventually wins greater spending
freedom. This holds for while and then a scandal or overspend arouses
the ire of the legislature and the discretion is increasingly hedged about
with new controls.

But perhaps the best known and most spectacular example of cycling is
the electoral cycle itself (Schultz 1995). Much has been written about
this—although it should be noted that the precise effects are likely to

vary considerably according to the type of political system: a strong majoritarian system behaving somewhat differently from a multiparty consensual system. In a strong majoritarian system like the UK's, for example, it is widely recognized that the time in the cycle at which to launch radical and possibly unpopular new policies is near the beginning of a term of government. At that point there is plenty of time left for the electorate to get used to the new policy and for the government to shift the agenda onto other, less contentious issues. Furthermore, a government's legitimacy is expected to be high during the early 'honeymoon period'. At the other end of the cycle, however, as the next election looms, one may expect controversial policies to be put away in the storeroom, while government leaders search for 'safe', populist measures that will induce marginal voters to support their party.

A further example of cycling in political science is the 'issue attention cycle' (Downs 1972). Downs argued that, in the US at least, the characteristic relationship between the mass public, the mass media and the political system led to a cyclical parade of 'crises' in different subjects: 'Each will rise into public view, capture centre stage for a while, and then gradually fade away as it is replaced by more fashionable issues moving into their ''crisis'' phases' (Downs 1972: 43). Downs emphasized that these cycles may be quite unconnected to the actual, objective severity of the 'condition'. Indeed, *'usually, objective conditions regarding the problem are far worse during the pre-problem stage than they are by the time the public becomes interested in it'* (ibid.: 39, original italics).

We now move from political science to generic organization theory. These are writings which treat organizational phenomena generally, without making any particular distinction for public sector organizations. And here there has been a considerable interest in cycles. This body of scholarship is allied to the ecological/evolutionary approach described in section 2.5 below. Its practitioners tend to deploy biological metaphors of life cycles and natural selection. As so often happens, adherents of the life cycle approach are at their strongest when pointing to the weaknesses of other approaches. Thus Kimberly et al., in their book, *The Organizational Life Cycle*, mount a spirited critique of the dominant 'static, ahistorical and arid' brand of organization theory (Kimberly et al. 1980). Much of what they say resembles some of the arguments I put forward in Chapter 1: that, 'organizational snapshots become the rule, not the exception' (p. 3) or that a positivistic form of scientism, 'results in ahistorical perspectives on organizations and places a generally negative value on historical analysis and in-depth case studies' (p. 4). However, Kimberly adds an important

extra reason. Noting that most organizational research is sponsored by clients, he points out that: 'Whether the client is a government agency, a giant corporation, or a small non-profit social service unit, its concern over performance generally constrains the kinds of questions asked by researchers and the kind of time frame within which they seek answers' (Kimberly et al. 1980: 5). At the time of writing this generalization would appear to remain accurate, certainly as far as public administration is concerned and probably for public policy consultancy also (Pollitt 2006b). At any event, Kimberly, whilst cautious about adopting biological metaphors in an uncritical fashion, does want to argue that many if not most organizations go through a life cycle, and that their characteristics (strengths and weaknesses) are likely to vary systematically according to the particular stage they are currently at. In order to see these patterns one requires an approach that takes a long term view—a historical approach or examination of time series data, or whatever.

Different scholars differ on how closely to follow the analogy with biological life cycles. Some want the whole thing: birth, childhood, adolescence, maturity, senility and death. Others want to break away from this in order to find specifically *organizational* forms of cycle. Thus Tichy (1980), for example, says that there are three basic cycles corresponding to the three central problems, which, in his view, all organizations have to solve. These are:

1. The technical design problem: how to arrange production efficiently.
2. The political allocation problem: how to distribute power and re-sources.
3. The ideological and cultural mix problem: how to maintain and strengthen the 'normative glue' that holds the organization together.

None of these problems is ever fully solved—constant adjustments are required, and these result from peaks and troughs in the intensity of each problem. If all three problems happen to peak simultaneously, then the organization is facing a crisis. Tichy uses this model to examine the case of a neighbourhood health centre in the Bronx, New York. He finds his threefold conceptual categorization useful in mapping the centre's development over a ten year period. It is noticeable, however, that (rather like some path dependency papers) the categories are used in such a way that a credible pattern is drawn but little is said about the underlying mechanisms and why they should produce *cycles*, rather than random oscillations.

Reviewing the cycles literature, Miles (1980) does not pick up on the lack of analysis of mechanisms. He does, however, recognize that many of the basic concepts are disputed, or at least fuzzily defined. He emphasizes the importance of the context of organizational birth/creation as powerfully shaping the direction and character of organizational development (again, this sounds quite path dependence-ish, although it does not use that label). He notes that most writers in the genre recognize some version of the concept of 'organizational drift'—mid-life periods when the initial drive falters and tensions emerge 'between the establishment and maintenance of meaning, on the one hand, and the pressure towards rationalization and efficiency, on the other . . .'(Miles 1980: 436). He accepts the importance of 'dysfunctional persistence'—that inefficient organizations or those that are patently not achieving their official goals may nevertheless survive (this will be taken up again in section 2.5). Usefully, he also identifies a research bias towards organizational births rather than deaths. Whilst there was already, in 1980, a sizeable literature on innovation and start-up (and it is even more extensive now), the number of studies of organizational 'terminations' is relatively modest. One obvious reason, delicately omitted by Miles, is that there is less money in it. Another, which he does mention, is that: 'the management of organizational decline and termination is a humiliating experience and one that subject organizations and their managers are loathe to have studied or publicized' (Miles 1980: 439).

Thus we are left with subfield or organization theory which offers some interesting general concepts but which has in practice mainly focused on the life cycles of firms in the market place, and which seems curiously slow to go in search of the actual mechanisms that generate the observed 'cycles'.

In concluding this section it may be useful to make a few basic points and illustrate them graphically. To begin with, Figure 2.1 illustrates a very basic concept of cycling/alternation. In this case the organizational policy cycles from centralized solutions to those that are decentralized, and then back again—the 'grass on the other side is greener'. For the policymakers at the top of the system this may seem like steering (or 'tacking'—see Dunleavy et al. 2006: 243). For the long serving and probably long suffering middle manager it may seem more like a turning wheel—every four or five years centralization swings around again. As we have noted above, the actual subject matter of the cycling/alternation may vary enormously: it could be from overspending to cutbacks, or specialization to re-integration or giving greater managerial autonomy to tightening accountability.
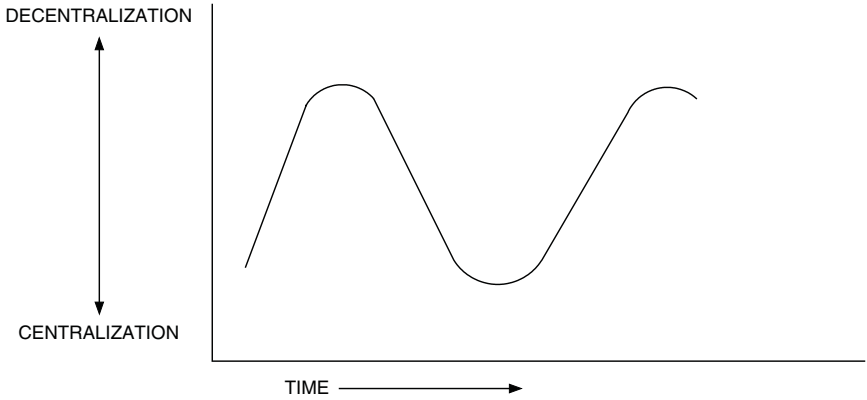
Figure 2.1   A basic concept of cycling/alternation
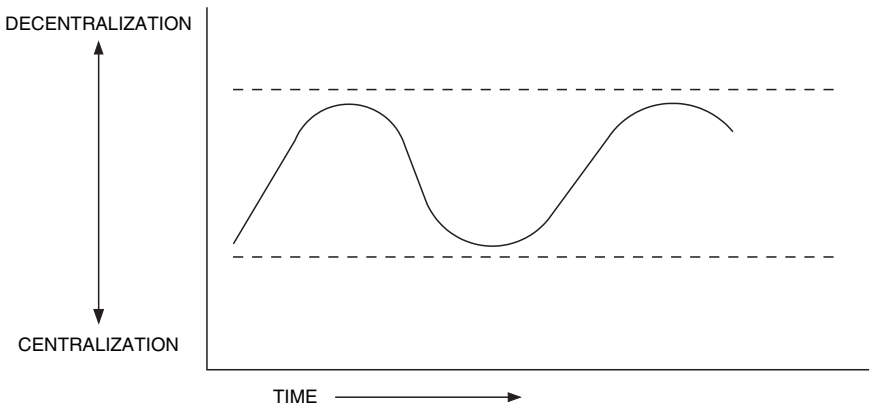
Figure 2.2   Cycles/alternations, within limits

Figure 2.2 gives a slightly more sophisticated picture, where structural constraints are portrayed. Here, therefore, the cycles/alternations take place, but within limits (a path, if you like). An example might be cycles of centralization and decentralization in countries like Finland or Sweden, where the autonomy of the local authorities is so firmly guaranteed by custom and constitution that any swing to centralization cannot go beyond a certain point. In the UK, which does not have the same structural constraints, central government can push much further in its control of local authorities (the amplitude of the cycles is bigger).

The next step in complexity would be to show that rates of cycling/ alternation differed between different jurisdictions, again on account of
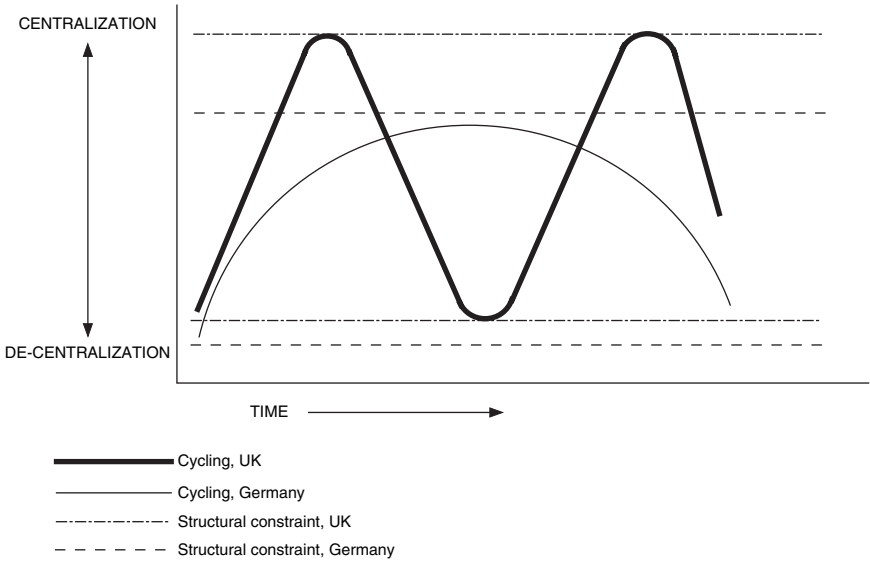
Figure 2.3 Rates of cycling/alternation, differing between jurisdictions

structural factors. Thus, machinery of government changes can be carried out much more quickly and easily in 'law-lite' states with majoritarian regimes (such as New Zealand or the UK) as compared with more legalistic and/or consensual/multiparty regimes (such as Denmark or Germany) (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004; Pollitt 2007). Figure 2.3 depicts this added consideration. In this particular case, with centralization/decentralization again on the vertical axis, Germany is portrayed as having stronger structural constraints against high centralization, and the UK as having slightly stronger constraints than Germany against high levels of decentralization. At the same time, the law heavy, coalition run nature of German government means that the speed at which it is likely to cycle is slower than that at which the UK can swing. Thus both wavelengths and amplitudes differ between the two countries.

Finally, we should note that cycles can be combined with trends ('arrows'). Thus, for example, cycling between centralization and decentralization could be combined with a long term trend to increasing public sector productivity, or cycling between specialization and integration could be combined with a long term trend towards the professionalization of the public sector. Figure 2.4 shows one of the many possible examples of this (note that the vertical axis now represents a different variable from in Figures 2.1 to 2.3, above).
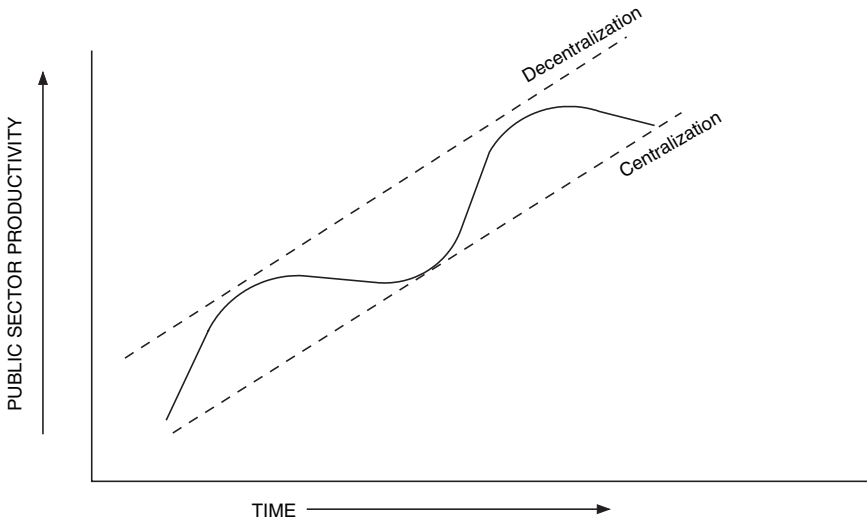
Figure 2.4   Cycling/alternation combined with long term trends

2.5 Sociological Studies of Time and Management

Up to this point in the discussion we have assumed that time is time is time. One 'thing'—a measurable flow of events, trends or cycles, something that we all share. It is a very important thing, true, but something essentially external, which we must deal with as a kind of valuable natural resource: 'the metaphor about ''spending time'' is not a metaphor at all. It is reality. People ''spend'' time just as they spend money. Both are extremely valuable resources—and time is scarcer than money' (Behn 2006: 13). Some management academics, however, have directly challenged this way of thinking: 'many commentators regard the time line on the *x* axis of their graphs, uniformly calibrated by the calendar and clock, as a sufficient means of capturing time in their work on management. A major theme of this collection is to challenge that assumption' (Adam et al. 2002: 2).

Instead these scholars want us to consider the possibility of several different types of time, running alongside, and across each other, each type being socially constructed by the particular cultural and social context from which it emanates. Indeed, they see struggles between different 'times', or rather between different interests which use their own forms of time as instruments with which to seek their own purposes. In their view the electronic revolution has added a further twist to this competition,

because now we have supercompressed time, electronic instaneity. This leads them to advise time researchers to build a very complicated boat indeed:

At the very least, the handling of temporal complexity involves the following: the electronically networked temporality (instaneity, simultaneity, immediacy, real time interactions, non sequential and non linear discontinuous processes), which is combined with clock time (externalized, invariable, decontextualised, spatial, quantitative, linear and sequential), which, in turn, is superimposed on the time of living and social processes (embodied, system specific, contextual, irreversible)

(Adam et al. 2002: 19)

Adams et al. thus distinguish three main types of time—'electronically networked temporality', 'clock time' and 'the time of living and social processes'. But they are by no means the most fecund typologizers in the field. Bluedorn and Denhardt (1988) review a large number of 'time studies', displaying an impressive, not to say bewildering, range of categorizations and concepts. These include McGrath and Kelly's (1986) description of 256 possible 'temporal types'! We also hear of 'rhythm, mesh, tempo and pace', of 'contingent periodicities', of 'cycle interconnectedness, cycle frequency and cycle discretion' and of 'monochronic' and 'polychronic' time. Even an essayist on still photography is centrally concerned with time, arguing that the effects of many if not most photographs depend on the viewers' assumptions about what had happened just before, or what would happen after the particular image they are shown (Dyer 2007).

Finally, we should take note that one of the most widely read works on organizational cultures, Hofstede's *Cultural Consequences*, selects long versus short term orientation as one of his six basic dimensions of culture. Reviewing a number of international and comparative value surveys, he comes to the conclusion that, for example, the people of East Asian countries tend to have a much stronger orientation to the long term view than Western countries (Hofstede 2001: 351–72). Hofstede argues that this has important implications for organizational culture and behaviour: for example, by encouraging East Asians to place higher priority on persistance, thriftiness and respect for status, and a lower priority on leisure time. Interestingly, he also finds that this value set encourages a stronger focus on the future, with less importance being accorded to celebrating the traditional past.

This mélange of work is far too extensive and diverse to review here. Instead I must cherry pick, looking especially for concepts and approaches that resonate with the world of policymaking and public administration.

One major author, upon whom the recent time and management theorists have drawn, is Helga Nowotny. In her book, *Time: The Modern and Postmodern Experience*, she set out a sweeping and dynamic historical story in which clock time established its dominance during the machine age, but where more recent developments have led to an 'extended present' characterized by a process through which the present eats up much of the future and some of the past (Nowotny 1994; see also Elias 1992). The future as a loosely defined space in which 'progress' would occur and utopias could be constructed has, according to her, been partly replaced by a sense of a future full of problems—problems which have to be controlled by planning for them *now* (hence the 'extended present'). These problems include global warming, new epidemics, the long term management of ever growing quantities of toxic wastes, changing demographics and their negative impacts on the welfare state—and so on. 'The future has become more realistic, not least because the horizon of planning has been extended . . . The invocation of the future, in the name of which political action was justified for a long time, had to be reduced and at least partly transferred to the present' (Nowotny 1994: 50).

Modern ICTs have played and continue to play a central role in changing perceptions of time, particularly in inducing a sense of simultaneity—of everything being connected or connectable in the present moment—a sense which progressively undermines the distinctiveness of local times, seasonal cycles and other protected or scared concepts of time. Further, the 'time is money' equation of capitalism now demands continuous innovation, continuous consumption and continuous destruction/disposal of 'obsolescent' goods and services—and ideas (ibid.: 11, 73). Yet alongside this market shaped version of time there continue to co-exist a number of other 'times', including an increasingly popular notion of 'personal' or 'proper' time, during which we can, as individuals, 'really be ourselves' (ibid.: 36–7). A political discourse is growing in which people claim to have a right to such 'quality time'—a proposition that would have made little sense in former historical periods, before the bourgeois revolutions, when 'individual' or 'personal' time scarcely existed as a separate category from the collective time of the family or community.

Whilst this may be fascinating background, what implications does it have for the study of public policy and management? There would seem to be several. First, Nowotny sees clearly that time can and is used strategically, that, handled by skilful agents, it is an instrument of power. The powerful keep the less powerful waiting. More generally: 'Many sets of strategies are at the disposal of strategic action in time and through time:

accelerating or slowing down; fixing a deadline; promising; waiting and keeping the other waiting; acting at the right moment, deciding or biding one's time' (ibid.: 145). Here we are back to what was referred to in section 2.1 as 'time tactics'—an issue which will reappear at several points in subsequent chapters (see especially Chapter 7, section 7.3.5). It is an issue with a long history: 'Secretaries . . . come and go while the career services stay on . . . Career officials can fight an unpopular order or change with the oldest and most lethal weapon in the arsenal of public bureaucracy: delay' (Warwick 1975: 68).

Novelists as well as sociologists recognize the connection between time and power. J.M. Coetzee, in a book originally published in 1980, described an unnamed empire that was engaged in what seemed to be a losing struggle to ward off anonymous and possibly imaginary 'barbarians':

Empire has created the time of history. Empire has located its existence not in the smooth recurrent spinning time of the cycle of seasons but in the jagged time of rise and fall, of beginning and end, of catastrophe. Empire dooms itself to live in history and plot against history. One thought alone preoccupies the submerged mind of Empire: how not to end, how not to die, how to prolong its era

(Coetzee 2000: 146)

Returning to Nowotny, she argues, implicitly at least, that the present spiral of intensified innovation, consumption and then disposal is unsustainable, both in terms of its material and environmental consequences and socially, in terms of its gobbling up of 'proper time' and a variety of local or special times. The 24/7 model, she seems to be saying, radically downgrades the future as a distinct and different category. Such observations have widespread implications for a wide range of public policies (education, working hours legislation, childcare provision, retirement) and, more directly, for the public services themselves (how they will be staffed, how far will they too fall victim to the cycle of endless innovation and what consequences would this have for notions of continuity and trust?) One particular example concerns that valuable substance which so many contemporary politicians say they are seeking or building—trust. Trust, as Nowotny observes, presupposes a long lasting, durable relationship (between, for example, politician and citizen, employer and employee, professional and client). Furthermore, 'promises presuppose trust, and trust saves time, but promises are conditionally open to the demand that they are kept and are consequently also subject to the strategy of the interval' (ibid.: 146). It is not hard to see the tensions and

paradoxes in the present situation where politicians promise to build trust and stability whilst in the next breath holding out visions of endless, relentless modernization, innovation and flexibilization.

Such ideas do not readily translate into a specific practical message or methodology. Nowotny's work is philosophical, discursive, analytic. But it invites and provokes many possible empirical investigations, from the small scale (in depth studies of the management of personal time and work time) to the large (the impacts of ICTs on organizational memories).

2.6 The Organizational Ecology/Organizational Evolution Approach

For more than 30 years organization theory has included a band of theorists who find an evolutionary approach the most useful, especially for handling questions of organizational mortality and survival (e.g., Kimberly et al. 1980; Kaufman 1991; Baum and Singh 1994). Whilst they by no means always agree among themselves, this group are of interest in the context of this book because they posit certain mechanisms operating over time—indeed, their whole approach to explanation is set within a framework in which outcomes unfurl through logically connected temporal sequences of events.

At the minimum an evolutionary theory requires two kinds of fundamental process—ecological interaction and genealogical replication (Baum and Singh 1994: 4). Thus organizations interact with their environments (especially with other organizations) whilst at the same time attempting to preserve, enhance and pass on information (replication). Information comes in forms such as routines, specifications, standard operating procedures and general organizing know-how. The primary focus of much evolutionary research has been on interaction—the processes by which some organizations get selected as 'winners' and others as 'losers'. This is frequently likened to the process of natural selection in Darwinian biology. It seems, however, that mistakes in replication are much more common among organizations than with the RNA/DNA transmission in living creatures. Organizations and their members are rather poor at copying—a finding that is certainly echoed in research on 'lesson learning' in public policy and public administration (Dolowitz and Marsh 1996; Stone 1999; Pollitt 2003a, b). Research that links interaction (selection) with genealogical replication (or, indeed, goes into the details of the replicatory mechanisms themselves) is far less common (Baum and Singh 1994: 6).

One interesting finding common to a number of evolutionary organization theorists is that inefficient or ineffective organizations do not necessarily disappear or 'die'. On the contrary, the phenomenon of 'permanently failing organizations' appears to be quite widespread: 'Whereas mortality tends to decline with age for broad classes of organizations—old organizations are less likely to die than are young ones—what little evidence there is suggests that performance does not improve correspondingly with age' (Meyer and Zucker 1989: 14). Permanently failing organizations have—according to Meyer and Zucker—usually been taken over by their internal constituencies (workers, managers, etc.) and are no longer being run primarily for the sake of the value they are delivering to their owners or to the wider society. Public sector organizations, in this view, are even more susceptible to permanent failure than market-based organizations:

> The public sector is different. As often as not, public sector objectives are ill defined and interests in and around public organizations are divergent from the outset. Public organizations, therefore, carry from their beginnings many of the liabilities that emerge only much later, if at all, in private firms
>
> (Meyer and Zucker 1989: 136)

This kind of thinking has even led one academic to write a kind of handbook on how to terminate public sector organizations and policies—how to seize windows of opportunity and deploy various tactics in order to kill off the (presumably numerous) policies, programmes and organizations which have lived beyond their usefulness (May 2004).

Although superficially appealing (and benefiting by association from some of the scientific status ascribed to biological theories) this perspective is infested with problems and analogical pitfalls. To begin with, what are the 'species' in this evolution? How should organizations be divided up into species, if indeed the organization is the basic unit for analysis? And how can notions of replication be applied when organizations are constantly changing their own forms, merging and splitting with other organizations, often of different sizes and types? It looks as though, in the world of organizations, interspecies breeding is rather common and, what's more, a particular individual can re-engineer itself into another species (local hospital into multinational, multiservice healthcare corporation, for example). The very definitions of 'birth' and 'death' are problematic—when a ministry is renamed, divided and downsized, is that a new life or a transformed continuation of the old? Furthermore, the knowledge and competence acquired by one organization can be transmitted to other organizations at any time and by a variety of means—there

is no need for organizational mating and reproduction, or at least not in any formal and obvious way. An additional pitfall is the sometimes-made assumption that, in the interaction with its environment, it is the organization that has to do all the adapting. This seems to fly in the face of the evidence that some large organizations (e.g., Microsoft, the Pentagon, the Ministry of this or that) have the capacity significantly to remodel their own environments. Political scientists have long ago noticed that one of the abilities which governments possess to an unusual degree is the power to alter the rules of the game—by legislation, the exertion of coercive force or by other means. It is as though the tiger can remodel the jungle. All this stretches the biological analogy to breaking point (Crouch 2005: 60–1). Nevertheless, there is something of interest here—especially in the notion that certain phenomena are best explained by examining entire populations of organizations (or of a given type of organization) over time (rather than, say, by case studies, histories or sampling). Disappointingly, most evolutionary theorists seem to have given only limited attention to the concept of time itself. Their theories need it – the processes of replication and interaction take place over time, and much hangs on just how long these processes might take—and yet there is very limited direct discussion of this, at least in the cited texts.

Kaufman is perhaps the 'evolutionist' who offers the clearest and most radical statement of the position. He argues that leadership and strategies do not actually seem to have much effect on the overall population of organizations. These intentional 'inputs' are not the most convincing way of explaining the pattern of organizational births and deaths. Instead Kaufman posits an impersonal and partly random set of mechanisms, operating within an overall context that is subject to historical development towards greater complexity and interdependence (or, to put it another way, more and more organizations). Kaufman expresses this last idea as the proposition that 'the medium out of which organizations form becomes thicker'—Kaufman 1991: 143). He finds the evolutionary analogy, and much evolutionary vocabulary extremely useful ('variation and natural selection among organizations'), but he is careful to distinguish his approach from sociobiology and to remind that he is dealing with organizations, not organisms.

Kaufman's basic explanation for organizational mortality is that 'their engines stop' and their engines stop 'usually because they develop resource problems'. They develop these problems 'because their environment is volatile and adjusting to it is not easy' (p. 33). A few organizations nevertheless survive for a long time. Their triumphs, however, are probably not

the product of intelligent foresight by skilful leaders, but more likely just chance (pp. 67–72). But this does not inhibit retrospective rationalization: 'The leaders and members of surviving organizations are usually disposed to attribute the endurance of their organizations to their personal virtues and gifts rather than to the laws of chance' (Kaufman 1991: 69). We might add that this illusion (if it is such) is not only fostered by organizational members but also by the growing army of management experts and gurus, who devote a lot of energy to distinguishing precisely those strategies and qualities which are supposed to guarantee organizational success. A Kaufmanesque view might put most of them out of business.

This is fascinating stuff, but it poses great difficulties for the empirical researcher. Studying one or two organizations is difficult enough, but studying whole populations of organizations is a formidable undertaking. Kaufman himself recognizes this with stark clarity:

> it would be folly to claim that the medium in which organizations form grows thicker everywhere and constantly. Like other natural processes, this one is not uniform or steady.
>
> That means that the index must be the average thickness of the medium globally; otherwise there is no way to test the hypothesis . . . Obviously, measuring the thickness of the medium on a global scale would be a monumental task . . . Con ducting the test would clearly require great ingenuity, resolve, perseverance, pa tience and money

> (Kaufman 1991: 143 4)

Ingenuity, resolve (etc.), one might add, which seem no nearer today than they were in 1991. However, perhaps Kaufman's aims were just too high. There seems no reason why the concepts and methods of evolutionary approach should not be applied to some more do-able subset of organiza-tions, always provided that a defensible definition of the relevant 'species' or group can be established so as to delimit the territory. Indeed, this is exactly what many organization population theorists have done. The problem for our present purposes, however, is that the group or territory has usually been defined in terms of firms operating in markets (e.g., Dobrev and Kim 2006). These categories are very hard to translate into public sector contexts. There are, however, some studies that are pitched at a more abstract level, and which arrive at interesting conclusions that are potentially relevant for the public sector. One recent example would be Ethrij and Levinthal's (2004) computer modelling of processes of organ-izational design. They conclude that attempts to fundamentally redesign organizational architectures in order to adapt to environmental change

are more likely to succeed in organizations with strong hierarchies ('hierarchy was shown to be a necessary and sufficient condition for the success of design efforts', p. 430). Such architectural adaptations yielded definite benefits when rates of environmental change were low or modest, but 'when the rate of environmental change is high, adaptation does not yield survival benefits' (ibid.: 431). These findings therefore remind us that speed and timing are often crucial. How quickly can organizations be reshaped *relative to* the rate of change of the key environmental influences?

Unfortunately, with the exception of Kaufman's (1976) *Are Government Organizations Immortal?*, there are few studies of public sector organizations which use a population approach (I will return to this in Chapter 4, section 4.5.3). Some studies do attempt to take an overview of most or all the organizations in the public sector, or some large fragment thereof (e.g., Hood and Dunsire 1981; Pollitt 1984; Davis et al. 1999) but these projects, rare in themselves, do not use an ecological approach. Thus the potential of an ecological approach to the public sector remains largely unrealized.

2.7 The Analysis of the Cognitive Processes and Biases of Decision Makers

We have already reviewed five bodies of scholarship that address the role of the past and the lapse of time. Alongside these a much more individualistic approach to time has been flourishing, fed by contributions from a variety of psychologists and decision theorists (e.g., Fischoff 1975; Hammond 1996; Brändström et al. 2004). These investigators seek both to model the ways in which individual decision makers use information drawn from the past and to examine the effects of varying time pressures on decision making. Their ranks include such notable alumni as Nobel Laureate Herbert Simon (March and Simon 1958) and Irving Janis, famous for his concept of 'groupthink' (Janis and Mann 1977; see also Allison and Zelikow 1999: 280–7).

One should declare straight away that, while acknowledging the potential importance of this line of inquiry, it is not remotely possible, within these covers, to do justice to the range of work in question (some idea of the range of micro level studies of decision making can be gleaned from an early review by Bluedorn and Denhardt 1988). It is abundantly clear, however, that what the psychologists and decision theorists are telling us is that most of us most of the time do not make decisions in the purely

rational way sometimes assumed by economists (Dörner 1996). The research constantly unearths 'biases', 'cognitive constraints' and 'the inevitability of error'. Furthermore—and this is what is of most relevance here—some of what appear to be the most common biases and distortions have strong temporal dimensions. Thus one of the most frequently cited cognitive constraints is 'limited time' (Hammond 1996: 303) and two of the most common decisional biases are 'availability' and 'hindsight'. Availability bias means that we tend to assign higher probabilities than would be rationally warranted to events that can easily be brought to mind—in other words, which are already 'on our minds'. Typically these are things which have happened *recently*, or which are *emotionally salient* for us. If we had a bad car crash last week we may well be more worried about driving today than we would have been two weeks ago, even if no other factors in our lives have changed (Tversky and Kahneman 1974). The crash was both (a) recent and (b) emotionally salient, so it heavily influences our perceptions of the risk of further driving. Three years later, however, the immediacy of the crash is likely to have disappeared, and we may have reverted to our former state of self-confidence on the road. Rationally speaking, we may have been too anxious in the immediate aftermath of the crash and then too complacent three years later. The mere passage of time has achieved this shift from underconfidence to overconfidence. The application of this to policymakers is temptingly obvious—they may be too worried about repeating last month's mistake and not worried enough about repeating the disastrous policy of ten years ago (even if there were still someone around to tell them about it).

The hindsight bias is perhaps more subtle, but also of potentially very broad application. It is the tendency, after an event has taken place, to believe that one had a better predictive understanding *beforehand* of what was going to happen than one did actually have (Fischoff 1975). Thus, if we know that the business process re-engineering project at Hospital X completely failed to achieve its goals we may be more inclined to say, 'Well, anyone could see that was coming', and to identify the 'obvious' reasons for failure, than we would have done before the failure had become apparent. The worrying implication of this is that it reduces our ability to learn from the past. It means that we are often insufficiently surprised by what happens, because we quickly tell ourselves that we had really seen that outcome all along. This is a bias which may have been 'discovered' by psychologists but which was actually celebrated in a range of popular sayings long before it became a matter for laboratory investigation.

This kind of work suggests, therefore, that time alone may influence our judgements. Based on hindsighted knowledge of the past, we may exaggerate the extent to which we saw things coming, but simultaneously we may forget or unduly downplay many of the things that did happen, while paying exaggerated attention to recent failures and threats. We are not good intuitive calculators of the probability of future events, falling victim to a variety of both cognitive and emotional biases that warp our use of our own experiences (Dörner 1996; Hammond 1996).

Psychologists are not, of course, the only people who have noticed these biases. The distinguished American Professor of Public Administration, Frederick C. Mosher, wrote a book that examined the histories of two central US agencies—the General Accounting Office and the Bureau of the Budget/Office of Manpower and Budget (Mosher 1984). In the book, Mosher comments on how members of these agencies all seemed to regard the periods they had worked there as the golden age of that agency:

It seems to be a common foible to look back at certain periods of our lives with particular sentiment and cheer as the days of keen happiness and associa tion . . . The same is true of organizations and our associations with them. We tend, I think, to glorify organizations when we were associated with them at their beginning or their reincarnations or when our own work was most important to them, and we have a tendency to believe that the organizations have been going downhill ever since

(Mosher 1984: 192)

In psychological terminology this appears to be a combination of emotional saliency bias and hindsight bias—these organizations were where we were when we were young and vital, and looking back we (think we) can see that more clearly than we could at the time. Mosher's warning is one that academics, as well as public officials, should take heed of.

The closer we hold the magnifying glass to either change or stasis, the more important the foibles, skills and biases of individuals seem to become. To examine these systematically entails the kind of access that policy analysts and public management researchers seldom achieve. A partial glimpse can perhaps be had by reading the second edition of the classic treatment of the 1962 Cuba missile crisis, *Essence of Decision*, by Allison and Zelikow (1999). Here the thinking of key individuals at key moments are sometimes recorded—and 'playing for time' does indeed seem to have been a crucial tactic at various points—the naval blockade that President Kennedy eventually chose was 'not so precipitous as a[n air] strike' (Allison and Zelikow 1999: 120). But that is a unique work, where a

quarter century of opened files and new testimonies have been painstak-ingly added to a brilliant original study of two relatively small groups of decision makers. In many other policy contexts it would be very hard, and sometimes impossible, to replicate.

2.8 Timeships: Concluding Remarks

We have identified now a motley fleet of timeships, constructed for differ-ent purposes and therefore, unsurprisingly, differently sized, armed and powered. Must these vessels fight and collide with each other, or is there scope for them to sail together in some kind of formation?

It is certainly a complex task to relate these different approaches one to another. To begin with, it is clear that we are not facing a simple choice—choose one approach and discard the others. Several of these timeships can definitely at least sail alongside each other, or even engage in joint manoeuvres. Certainly paths ('arrows') and cycles can co-exist, as Gould pointed out. Furthermore, as Joseph Schumpeter insisted, history can be the ally, not the enemy, of theory: 'personally, I believe that there is an incessant give and take between historical and theoretical analysis and that, though for the investigation of individual questions it may be neces-sary to sail for a time on one tack only, yet on principle the two should never lose sight of each other' (Schumpeter 1949: 264). Recently there has been a re-affirmation of this point by a number of quite 'hard edged' political scientists, for example:

Social scientists interested in explaining historical processes can, indeed should, refuse the choice between modeling causal relationships and studying history... Narratives as a way of presenting empirical information, have distinctive strengths that make them especially suited for historical scholarship, and structuring the narratives based on the model allows us to treat them as data on which to test the model

(Büthe 2002: 481)

Thus there seems no reason why historians should not borrow from the PD framework in order to look for turning points and/or constancies in their narratives. Equally, historians may identify cycles and alternations, and propose mechanisms that may underlie and explain such patterns. By the same token, pattern theorists, whether they are looking for paths, punc-tuations or cycles, would do well to respect the discipline of careful docu-mentary analysis and attention to chronology and detail that has long

been the hallmark of good historical scholarship. There may appear to be a clash between theorists who want to use a path dependency framework and those who prefer a model of cycles or alterations, but this clash need not run very deep. No one said that *everything* is path dependent or that *everything* runs in cycles. It is entirely possible, indeed likely, that both types of pattern exist, sometimes side by side or one inside the other (arrows and cycles again—see Figures 2.1–2.4). It may be an empirical question as to which predominates in a given field or sector. In sum, the first three approaches (and probably the fourth) can all be applied at the level of a given policy or sector, but also at the level of individual organizations. They are essentially mutually complementary—at least potentially.

Beyond this, however, much depends on the kinds of question for which we seek answers, the investigatory methods which are chosen to fit those questions and the levels of analysis at which we choose to operate. Thus, to take two obvious examples, one would not use psychological models of individual decision making to investigate whole populations of organizations, and neither would one rely on a population ecology approach to explain why a particular policy developed in one or a small number of specific organizations. These two approaches—the fifth and sixth on my list—are probably the furthest apart from each other—at least in terms of the scale of the analysis (micro versus macro) and the treatment of the individual (creative and central versus impotent and unimportant). It is hard to see how they could usefully be combined within a single study (especially so since Kaufman is at some pains to stress that organizational decision makers are commonly deluded and mistaken about both the causes of their problems and the effects of their actions). Thus, as always, much depends on precisely which question one is starting out with. 'Why did the Poll Tax fail?' is a question requiring a different kind of answer from, 'Why do governments alternately centralize and then decentralize?' and that is different again from, 'What are the effects of increasing complexity on policymaking?'

One challenge for most of these approaches is the identification and explication of the *mechanisms* that actually do the work of change or stasis. In the foregoing this point was most extensively elaborated for the path dependency framework, but it equally applies to traditional history, to cycling models and most certainly to ecological/evolutionary approaches. In each case we can ask not only what the mechanisms of change and stability are, but also how various they are? Can we classify them into a manageable number of types or groups? If so, we can begin to generalize

across (carefully defined) situations, and to advance testable hypotheses of the form, 'In contexts of type A, mechanisms of types B produce outcomes of type C'. If not—if there are a very large number of such different and ungroupable mechanisms—then our explanations become steadily more particularistic and ad hoc. In the following two chapters we will analyse two case studies which address this issue (among others).

The various vessels in the fleet differ enormously in where they float between the opposing coasts of structural as against agency-based explanations. Traditional history is, as already said, a rather copious flagship, generously accommodating a wide range of both structures and agents, but with an understandable partiality for colourful and powerful individuals—Churchill, Napoleon Bonaparte, Nelson Mandela, Good Queen Bess, Catherine the Great and, for specialist and minority audiences, Sir Humphrey. On the other hand, more theoretically driven varieties of history like to downgrade these leaders and upgrade the price of wheat, the invention of the machine gun or spinning jenny, or the shifts in global capital. The path dependency framework is less oriented to agency-based explanations, focusing principally on major punctuations and path reinforcing mechanisms. Agents do enter at the margins, but mainly as smart or lucky individuals who, knowingly or otherwise, jump through the windows of opportunity to effect radical change. Theories of cycles and alternations also tend to downgrade individual agency. Governments cycle from centralization to decentralization, or from aggregation to specialization, irrespective of which particular individuals are in power on the day. Budgetary cycles and electoral cycles continue whether we are being led by Clinton or Bush, Thatcher or Blair, Chirac or Mitterand. Organization theory's cycles are similarly impersonal—organizational life cycles go on cycling, whoever is seated at the boardroom table. Sociological studies of time are not particularly interested in agency either. Different conceptualizations of time may compete with each other, but they do not seem to have individual champions. Helga Nowotny's study is completely impersonal—individual leaders are almost totally absent, and the concept of agency is, to put it mildly, subdued. Individuals may suffer and resist, as their 'proper time' is commandeered by 24/7 consumerism, but these individuals do not have names. My fifth selection—organizational ecology/evolution—is deliberately and explicitly structural. Agents are mere bearers of the larger statistical forces of interaction and replication. The big picture is of the essence, and no single agent could conceivably change the direction of evolution. Indeed, as Kaufman and others have suggested, our individual interpretations of events (and responses to them) may be no

more than froth on the surface of the pond, of little significance to the underlying currents of evolutionary change. Of course agency makes a comeback in my sixth and final perspective—the psychological study of decision making. Yet it is a curiously depersonalized, standardized form of agency. This is not Churchill or Good Queen Bess, with all their idiosyncracies. It is Mr or Mrs Average, with his/her standard complement of cognitive and emotional biases. The great leaders share our common failings—they too succumb to group think, hindsight and emotional saliency. This is democratic, but not particularly colourful or strategically sophisticated.

One further point to emerge from the foregoing is that the more formally analytic approaches to the past tend to be extraordinarily time consuming and data hungry. In these approaches the past doesn't come cheap. The (deservedly) influential American policy analysts, Frank Baumgartner and Bryan Jones, assembled five main data sets to support test their model of 'punctuated equilibrium'. The first of these alone (Congressional Hearings since 1947) contained 67,291 cases (Baumgartner and Jones 2002: 32). Two years were spent just deciding how to reclassify budget items so as to achieve consistent categories over time. Yet even with all five of its large data sets this policy agendas project has been criticized for failing to address implementation issues—it focuses on legislative hearings, legislation, budgets and newspaper stories—not on what actually happens once policies are turned into operations (John 1998: 182). On a smaller scale, Bearman et al. (1999) worried that undue prior theorizing in historical narratives led to the premature discarding of too much relevant evidence and the production of fragile interpretations that could easily be upset by the appearance of a few new pieces of information. 'The stronger the theory, the thinner the history', they said (p. 508). They therefore attempted formally to model historical narratives in ways that would not be so vulnerable to early, theoretically driven narrowing of the evidence base. However, their model case, based on just 17 interviews with inhabitants of a north Chinese village—entailed the laborious plotting of 1995 separate events and the relationships between them, so as to construct dazzlingly complex network diagrams. One wonders how such a method could, in practical terms, be applied to the kind of broad policies and multi-organizational reorganizations that make up much of the subject matter of public policy and management? At the extreme, of course, we have Herbert Kaufman's proposal to measure the average 'thickness' of the organizational 'medium' globally and over time—a gargantuan project, as he acknowledges (Kaufman 1991: 144–51). Such formal approaches

are theoretically do-able. And sometimes they are actually done—as in the Baumgartner and Jones case. Computers make everything much easier, but they usually do not remove the need for small armies of people to code and input the data, and they certainly do not abolish the need for someone who understands both the methods and the substance to interpret the results. Unfortunately, therefore, these prerequisites (not least lots of time and shoals of hard working graduate assistants) mean that these types of research can in practice only be contemplated by a few exceptionally well resourced research centres. They are long term team efforts of a kind with which more than 90 percent of published academics in the field probably never have any contact, or any serious possibility of undertaking. The rest of us must wonder at their industriousness and rigour, but must also interrogate their findings to see if the results of all this labour (a) are credible in the face of other data not included in the models and (b) actually advance our understanding of the issues at hand.

Perhaps a suitably upbeat note on which to end would be to point out that, despite the widespread neglect of temporal factors documented in Chapter 1, the social sciences have actually furnished us with a substantial portfolio of potentially relevant analytic approaches. There is no single Theory of Time, but rather several perspectives on times, some of which are more mutually complementary, while others are more divergent. For our purposes the ultimate test, of course, is how useful these approaches are in generating convincing descriptions and explanations of public policymaking and management. And precisely that is the subject of the next three chapters.

3

History in Action—A Tale of Two Hospitals

Let no one say the past is dead.
The past is all about us and within
(Noonuccal 1990; in 1964 Oodgeroo Noonuccal became the first Australian aboriginal to publish a book of verse. She died in 1993. I noticed the above words carved into a sculpture on the main campus of the University of Canberra during a visit in October 2006)

3.1 Introductory Narrative

Having made a general examination of some of the academic vessels available for navigating the past (Chapter 2) we will now attempt to put to sea on an actual voyage. First, we will board a historical craft and voyage across 40 years of development in two hospital systems—one in Brighton, England, and the other in Leuven, Belgium. In Chapter 4 we will then compare the fruits of this historical account with those alternative perspectives given by making parallel voyages using the other 'timeships'.

We begin with a short summary of the two stories. Brighton is a (largely) prosperous southeast English town with a population (with its neighbour, Hove, together with which it was designated a city in 2000) of around 0.25 million. For most of the period since the mid-1960s it has had two medium sized general hospitals, the Royal Sussex County Hospital (hereafter RSCH) and the Brighton General. Both are nineteenth century foundations, both have rather untidy campuses (as indicated in the Preface) and neither has ever been fully modernized. Since the mid-1960s the relevant authorities have made two or three attempts to get a new hospital built on

a new site, but each attempt has failed. As the Chair of the Brighton Health Authority put it in her 1985 new year's message to staff, local acute healthcare was constrained by, 'the enormous obstacles presented by our obsolete buildings. A new hospital is essential' (Cumberlege 1987). Six years later Brighton's medical consultant staff wrote a joint letter to the then Conservative Secretary of State for Health saying:

To our dismay we . . . hear that any money set aside . . . for Hospital Building pro grammes in Brighton has now disappeared. New building worth £51 million had been approved in principle five years ago. Our three remaining acute hospitals:

   Royal Sussex County Hospital, largely built in 1828
   Brighton General Hospital, built in 1865
   Hove General Hospital built in 1888

are falling apart with a £23 million maintenance backlog

(Brighton Health Bulletin, No.253, December 1990: 3)

But the new hospital did not come. Instead, a number of small hospitals have been closed and acute services have been incrementally concentrated on the increasingly crowded RSCH site. Since the late 1990s a good deal of new investment has been put into that site, but it was still the case that, at the end of 2006, 209 beds were in buildings constructed before 1850, compared with only 277 in those built since 1960. Meanwhile acute services at the Brighton General have been run down, and no advanced surgery has been conducted there since the early 2000s.

This has been, therefore, a local history of slow, incremental change, false starts and disappointments, but a definite underlying trend towards concentrating 'hot' services at the RSCH. In 2005 the RSCH suffered the ignominy of simultaneously failing to gain any stars at all in the government's hospital performance league tables (Surrey and Sussex Strategic Health Authority, 27 July 2005), developing one of the largest budgetary overspends of any hospital in the country (Minutes of the Strategic Finance and Planning Group, 23 September 2005), and being the subject of an 'undercover' BBC TV documentary showing nurses ill-treating elderly patients on one of its wards (*BBC News* 2005). Significant bed closures followed as management attempted to right the financial position. Thus, by the end of our period of study (1965–2005) Brighton's hospital services could hardly be termed a 'flagship' for the NHS.

I turn now to the Flemish city of Leuven. Like Brighton, it is a prosperous city, though with a population of only 50,000 it is rather smaller

(the population rises to about 90,000 if you include Leuven's necklace of overgrown villages). Like Brighton, it is a university town, although Leuven's university—Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (KUL)—has been there since 1425, whereas Brighton's two universities are of less ancient foundation (Sussex was founded in 1961 and the University of Brighton was designated a university in 1992, after formerly being a polytechnic).

A major turning point for Leuven came right at the beginning of our period—the events of 1968, known in Flemish as *de splitsing* (the splitting-up). What was splitting was the university, as the Francophone academics and students were virtually expelled and left to set up an alternative, Francophone (Walloon), university 15 kilometres away at Louvain la Neuve. The Flemings remained *in situ*, and that applied as much to the Leuven hospitals and the medical school as to the rest of the University. The whole drama was part of the larger conflict between the two major language groups in Belgium—the Flemings and the Walloons.

Shortly after *de splitsing*, Piet de Somer, the then rector of KUL, appointed an enterprising young doctor, Jan Peers, as Director of Medicine and General Director of the St Rafaël Clinic. Building on previous planning and extensive investigations of alternative hospitals systems by his predecessor, Jan Blanplain, Peers soon became the formative influence in pushing for a new, single site hospital just outside the old city, at Gasthuisberg. Within a decade a huge new hospital, designed on a low rise, key pattern was beginning to manifest itself on the site. Formally inaugurated on 26 January 1985, the new UZ Leuven (University Hospital Leuven) is now the biggest hospital in Belgium (1,800 beds by 2003) and in a recent survey of primary care doctors' opinions scored as the best teaching hospital in Belgium in 12 out of 13 medical specialties (Test Gezondheid 2005). It has swallowed most of the smaller, pre-existing facilities and is in many respects the trend-setter for the whole country, and certainly for the Flemish part of it.

In this chapter I will interrogate these two contrasting stories, situated only a few hundred miles apart. Brighton tries and fails (several times) to get a new hospital, and ends up with most of its acute 'eggs' placed in the basket of an apparently failing hospital. Leuven emerges from a major political crisis (*de splitsing*) with a plan for a single site new development, which it manages to push through rather rapidly, and goes on to develop a flagship national teaching hospital.

3.2 Important Caveat

It should be noted that this history is being given a very particular focus—one concerned with the development and decay of physical and technological facilities, and of organizational forms. New hospital buildings, technological advances and changes in organizational structures are the prime concerns. These are, of course, far from being the only aspects of hospital life. A great deal depends on the skills and management of staff, the availability of finance, changes in the patterns of disease and hospital usage, and so on. These factors will not be ignored, but they will be treated mainly in relation to the prime focus. I argue that the chosen focus on 'hardware' is not a capricious one, since building a new hospital was, for both the British and the Belgian top managers, a primary goal over extended periods of time.

However, a firm caveat needs to be entered to the effect that good medicine and nursing can be (and frequently are) practiced in old buildings, and even with poor local management. Equally, good local managers may be doing their remarkable best yet be undone by ill-considered national reforms which are forced upon them, or by low quality clinical practice within their institutions (which managers can seldom, if ever, closely control). The latter may never be discovered, or (increasingly likely these days) it may bring both political and media criticism down upon their hospitals. Nothing said here should be interpreted as a judgement of particular individuals, be they managers or doctors, or both.

3.3 Sources and Methods

Sources are a crucial feature of any historical account. In this case we had generous access to both persons and papers, although the nature of the documentation differed somewhat on either side of the Channel.

One reason for choosing the period since the 1960s was that a good proportion of the key decision makers were still alive and potentially available for interview. In the event, we were able to interview all the hospital chief executives for both the Brighton and Leuven hospitals for virtually the whole period, plus a good number of other senior figures. In all we conducted 15 interviews with the key players and observers, using a standard schedule of questions but departing from that if the respondent wanted to lead us onto new or different issues. Records of these interviews were usually sent to the respondents so that they could

correct any mistakes and add further thoughts if they so wished. We also examined a large number of documents. In Leuven we were able to see speeches and policy papers, consultancy reports and a number of retrospective accounts produced for the 75th anniversary of the foundation of the university hospital in 2004. In Brighton the documentation was more extensive. Hospital Board minutes and planning documents were available back to 1993. A full set of the monthly local *Health Bulletin* was analysed back to that journal's foundation in 1967. The Brighton newspaper, *The Argus*, has an archive which enabled us to track down reports on the hospital going back to 1985. The far greater public documentation for the Brighton case probably reflects the fact that it is a unit within a publicly accountable National Health Service, whereas Leuven University Hospital is a non-profit-making foundation, subject to government regulation but not a direct part of the state apparatus, even if it treats and relies upon public patients largely paid for through the Belgian national health insurance system. The research was carried out in 2006 and 2007, in cooperation with my colleague Professor Geert Bouckaert. Full details will be published elsewhere.

3.4 The Brighton Hospital Story, 1965–2005

Now it is necessary to fill in somewhat more detail concerning the two stories (which of course reveals, inter alia, that this initial picture of failure in Brighton and success in Leuven is too simple). It is important to understand national and local political contexts, issues of geography and place, the management strategies, the climate of thought and a number of other factors. For the moment this will be done without explicit recourse to theory, relying on documentary and interview evidence and treating issues in a common sense, descriptive way.

Table 3.1 (below) summarizes the main turning points of the development of the Brighton hospital system.

In reading Table 3.1 it is vital to understand that the evolution of hospitals in Brighton cannot be read exclusively, or even primarily, as a local story. For the first 15 years of the existence of the NHS virtually no new hospitals were built anywhere in England. Then the 1962 Hospital Plan unlocked the situation at a national level, so that starting our story in the 1960s makes sense. More specifically, throughout the period under scrutiny the main Brighton hospitals have been constituent parts of the UK National Health Service and, more specifically, of a varying sequence of

Table 3.1 The Brighton Story

Period	Main Events
1960s	Brighton and Lewes consists of 2 major hospitals (the RSCH and the Brighton General) and 11 smaller hospitals. Major redevelopment of the RSCH is planned and the first part of a large three-part tower block is built at the end of the decade.
1970s	Second and third parts of the tower block are cancelled. Instead a new greenfield site hospital is proposed at the Falmer site, near to the new University of Sussex. Because of mid-1970s fiscal crisis central government refuses to provide the necessary capital investment to finance this project.
1980s	Piecemeal developments at the Royal Sussex and the Brighton General. The smaller hospitals begin to close down and merge with the two larger units. In the late 1980s the health authorities put forward a proposal for a major new hospital at Holmes Avenue, Hove. This would co-exist with the RSCH, giving two 'hot' sites for the town.
1990s	Holmes Avenue proposal is rejected by the government (although a polyclinic is sited there instead). Brighton General declines (still consisting mainly of mid-nineteenth century workhouse buildings) begins to lose acute services but the Royal Sussex gains a major new building on site. More small hospitals close.
2000s	The Royal Sussex scores very badly in the national government quality league tables, and at the same time becomes one of the hospitals with the largest budget overspends in the country (2005). Central government sends in a team of accountants. On the other hand, a total of almost £100 million worth of new investment is put into the RSCH site, creating new buildings and refurbishing old. Also, after negotiations with the two local universities a medical school is set up.

Area, District, Regional, Strategic and NHS trust authorities. The first major restructuring of this organizational superstructure took place in 1974, and further important upheavals followed in 1982, 1985, 1993, 2001 and 2006 (Pollitt 2007). As we shall see, the periodic proposals for major new hospital construction in Brighton tended to founder at one or more of these higher levels—at a Regional level, in the Ministry itself, or at HM Treasury. One of the main reasons for this was that one thing new hospitals inescapably require is capital—and lots of it—and in the NHS system, capital could only be obtained from above. However, the authorities 'above' had more to worry about than Brighton's wishes and needs. The upper tiers had to look at which were the most urgent needs across the whole region. The Ministry had to look at what were the national policy priorities. The Treasury had to look at the state of the economy and of public finances, and to take consequential decisions about what should be the overall level of public investment. Multilevel, networked governance is nothing new to the NHS.

So why didn't the 'higher levels' furnish the capital that Brighton so clearly needed and demanded? It appears that there is at least a three part answer to this. First, Brighton may have been needy, but it was not the neediest place in the area or region. Two other south coast towns—Eastbourne and Hastings—had hospital facilities that were judged to be in even worse conditions, and they received priority capital to fund major new developments (interviews). Second, Brighton was singularly unfortunate (or tactically clumsy) with the timing of its bids for new hospital development. The mid-1970s bid for a new hospital on the Falmer site (out of town, next to the university campus) coincided with the biggest public expenditure crisis since the Second World War. Humiliatingly, the Labour government of the day had to go to the International Monetary Fund for a loan, and part of the price of that was a particularly savage series of public expenditure cuts. New public sector investment virtually disappeared for a while, the Falmer hospital included. The second bid, in the late 1980s, combined a major redevelopment at the RSCH with a brand new medium sized hospital at Holmes Avenue in Hove. The bidding process dragged on for years and, in the end, it too ran into a period of strict national capital rationing by the Treasury (accompanying the severe economic downturn at the end of the 1980s). The third reason was that the local elites never spoke with one voice—there was constant internal controversy. As one ex-chief executive said, despite a careful analysis of many possible sites, 'the harsh reality was that nobody could agree' (interview). To put it crudely (the actual dispositions were more subtle) local Brighton politicians were nervous about the closure of the old Brighton General while a new hospital was built in the rival town of Hove. Meanwhile the Hove politicians were keen on the Hove (Holmes Avenue) development, although many of the doctors were publicly critical of the impracticality of having two 'hot' sites (at RSCH and Holmes Avenue) because of the staffing and time implications of intersite travel. This led to a public wrangle between the doctors' leaders and the influential Conservative MP for Hove, Tim Sainsbury (*Brighton Health Bulletin*, April 1991: 2 and May 1991: 7; *Evening Argus* 1991)—hardly the basis for a firm and convincing bid to the Ministry.

Eventually the Holmes Avenue proposal was radically downgraded to a polyclinic, and government approval was finally secured for almost £50 million of new investment on the RSCH site. For the second or third time since the mid-1960s, the substantial lobby that favoured a new, greenfield site, hospital lost out.

Turning from capital to revenue expenditure, there were again 'higher reasons' why Brighton suffered a rough ride, manifesting itself in drearily regular 'crises' and rounds of cuts, dutifully reported in the *Brighton Health Bulletin* and the local paper, the *Brighton Argus* (see, e.g., *Brighton Health Bulletin*, September 1983, 173: 2). Being part of a national service, it was not only capital that was rationed on a regional or national basis but also current spending. From 1976 onwards these area and regional budgetary comparisons took a very particular form. In that year the government received and adopted the report of the Resource Allocation Working Party (RAWP). This recommended a new method for allocating NHS revenue funds. Instead of looking at last year's expenditure and adjusting it for inflation and new developments (i.e., an incremental approach), RAWP proposed to allocate funds where they were most needed, with need being measured by standardized mortality and morbidity statistics (Pollitt 1987). In plain words this meant that revenue monies went to areas that had sicker populations—which, by and large, meant a shift of resources out of (wealthy, healthy) southern England to (poorer, sicker) northern England. Clearly this was not good news for the southeast region or, within that, for Brighton. Throughout the 1980s it led to persistent complaints by doctors and managers in Brighton that they were 'underfunded'. However, it should be added that the accuracy of these claims were contested by others, and contemporary studies of the effects of the RAWP formula, conducted at regional and departmental level, apparently did not show Brighton as a particularly hard hit case (interviews).

The constraining influence of 'higher levels' on the wishes of top managers and medical staff in Brighton appears to have become more, rather than less, sharp as the years have gone by. The focus of control moved beyond broad issues of capital and revenue, and concentrated more and more on specific aspects of performance. According to one longstanding Brighton manager, the regional health authority during the 1980s had constantly probed and questioned (and sometimes said, 'No'), but had basically maintained a civilized and constructive dialogue (interview). From the late 1980s, however, there was a shift. Much of the top–down direction was now originating in Whitehall itself rather than at an area or regional level. As early as 1993—the year the new trust came into existence—one finds the board minutes dominated by national, not local, initiatives—waiting list targets, financial targets, market testing of services, the 'New Deal' for junior doctors and so on. Under the New Labour administration from 1997 Whitehall's grip intensified. In the late 1990s and early twenty-first century there was 'much more interference and even

bullying' (interview). Another experienced ex-chief executive acknow-ledged that nowadays 'there was an obsession with top–down perform-ance management', and that under Alan Milburn's period as Secretary of State (1999–2003) central 'performance management went into orbit'. 'We are now performance managed to the nth degree' (interview). Nationally, many chief executives had lost their jobs for perceived performance fail-ures, and fear and disillusionment had become widespread.

The whole NHS structure was, of course, set within a wider political system—one which had profound effects on how it operated. The British system is well known in comparative political studies as majoritaran/plur-alist/'first past the post' (Lijphart 1984, 1999). One MP is elected for each constituency—s/he who gains the largest share of the votes. There is no proportional representation of candidates supported by the other voters, even if (as frequently happens) votes for the losers exceed the votes re-ceived by the winner. Not to vote for a winner is thus in common political parlance a 'wasted vote'. Governments are almost always formed of one party and they face one main opposition party (and some smaller ones, which have been of varying importance). The party of government nor-mally commands a highly disciplined majority of the votes in the legisla-ture and can therefore get its ideas translated into policy and legislation with less difficulty than almost any other government in Europe. The style of conduct in the House of Commons is usually deeply 'adversarial', in other words, if the government party takes a position on a given main issue the opposition party will usually criticize it vigorously, and bend over backward to find itself a different position. There is little of the culture of compromise and interparty negotiation which characterizes many of the continental European states, most certainly including Belgium.

All this has had consequences for the NHS, and for several reasons. To begin with it has meant that the NHS, as a very popular but very expensive core element in the welfare state, has often been treated 'as a political football' (as the saying goes) between the major parties. Instead of seeking compromise and multiparty solutions to healthcare reform, each party has proudly boasted how *different* its 'solution' is from those being advanced by their opponent. This desire to emphasize differences and neglect the common ground has been particularly apparent since the Thatcher Con-servative administration (1979–90). Mrs Thatcher's 1989 white paper, '*Working for Patients*', introduced a bitterly controversial form of internal market to the NHS, spurring a fierce debate about the proper role of market mechanisms in healthcare which continues until this day.

A further significant consequence of the nature of the political system is that single-party governments have been able to reach out and apply their current organizational doctrines within the NHS rapidly and without much direct constraint. '*Working for Patients*' was a case in point—the Conservative government was able swiftly to impose its main provisions, despite the fact that it was strongly opposed, nationally and locally, by the representative associations of doctors and nurses and by public opinion. The sheer unrelenting dance of reforms and new initiatives since the early 1980s is testimony to central government's unfettered powers to both meddle and mend. The following is no more than a selection of the major restructurings:

- *1982*. Brighton becomes a district health authority as part of the national re-organization into districts, areas and regions.
- *1985*. Introduction of general managers at each level, replacing the previous system of 'consensus management'.
- *1993*. RSCH becomes part of Brighton Health Care Trust—an independent public corporation under the new NHS 'internal market' reforms of the Thatcher and Major governments.
- *2001*. The system of eight regional offices was abolished and replaced by four regional directorates of health and social care.
- *2003*. The four regional directorates were themselves abolished and replaced by 28 strategic health authorities.

3.5 The Leuven Hospital Story, 1965–2005

Again, the main events are summarized in tabular form, in Table 3.2.

A federal level hospital policy began to emerge in Belgium during the mid-1960s—just prior to the launching of the idea for a new, greenfield site, KUL hospital. The first Hospital Act came at the end of 1963, and introduced the idea of planning the hospital system as a whole. The first national plan itself appeared in 1966 (European Observatory on Health Care Systems 2000).

The early years of the project for a new KUL hospital were remarkable in many ways. *De splitsing* was a national political crisis, and one where the most dramatic manifestations were centred on KUL. The Flemish politicians and academic leaders were, as they saw it, decisively ending more than a century of dominance of their half of the country by a patronizing Francophone elite. This provided the immediate backdrop for the emergence of the

Table 3.2   The Leuven Story

Period	Main Events
1960s	*1968*. KUL splits between Francophones and Flemish speakers. The KUL rector appoints a young doctor to lead the project for a new university hospital (extensive research into different hospital designs already having been undertaken).
1970s	Support coalesces around a major new development on the Gasthuisberg site at the edge of the city. Rival plans for redeveloping city centre hospitals gradually fade. The medical director secures a new salary arrangement for medical staff that binds them closely to the collective success of the new hospital. Construction gets underway.
1980s	*1985*. Inauguration of new UZ buildings on Gasthuisberg site. Rapid growth of beds and income.
1990s	UZ suffers a major financial crisis in 1997/98. Management consultants are called in and the top management arrangements are changed. The hospital is more closely bound in to the university's governance structures.
2000s	UZ returns to a positive financial balance, and is placed top of almost all categories in a national quality survey of primary care doctors. It appears to be the largest and best hospital in the country.

new hospital, envisioned from the outset as an international class *Flemish* teaching hospital.

As usual, political opportunity favoured the prepared. During the 1960s the Director of St Rafaël had carried out a study of 55 university hospitals looking for the most suitable solution for future development (Blanplain 2004: 9). (St Rafaël was one of two university hospitals within the old city of Leuven, and attached to KUL—St Rafaël was the Flemish hospital and St Pieter was the Francophone hospital. Geographically they are virtually back to back. This twinning symbolized the divisions between the two language communities in Belgium.) So at the time of *de splitsing* the senior medical establishment at KUL already had ideas for the way ahead. Furthermore, *de splitsing* led to the need for the Francophones ejected from Leuven to redevelop their medical facilities, which they did by building a new university at Louvain la Neuve and a new medical school at Wouluwe St Pierre, an eastern suburb of Brussels. These new projects involved considerable federal government finance and so, by the unwritten rules of the Belgian political game, the Flemings were also entitled to ask for something comparable (interview). And at that moment there were no serious Flemish rivals—no other Flemish university was proposing a major new tertiary hospital. KUL was, in fact, in a strong position. Not only had it

been so centrally involved in *de splitsing*, but it had also been responsible for training more than two-thirds of Flemish doctors.

So the politics of the situation were crucial. Once the federal government gave its permission for the building of a new hospital everything else followed. The federal government itself provided a 60 percent subsidy and the remainder was borrowed from banks, but these loans were reimbursed over a 30-year period through an element in the running cost payments which the hospital received—again from central government. Getting government permission was no doubt eased by the coherence and relatively small size of the Flemish elite. In the allocation of ministerial portfolios at the federal level the Ministry of Health usually went to a Christian Democrat (at least until the late 1980s) and the new UZ at Leuven was every inch (or I should say every millimetre) a Christian Democrat project (though not *only* a CD project). KUL and the medical school were closely connected not only to the political party but also to the Roman Catholic hierarchy (the university's chancellor is, *ex officio*, the Cardinal Archbishop of Mechelen-Brussel). All these fractions of the Flemish elite could be expected to welcome the idea of a major new hospital run by a Christian institution rather than by the state (interviews). It was possible, at least temporarily, to achieve a unity—or near unity—that would have been far more difficult in a much bigger, more diverse country like the UK.

However, not everything was plain sailing. There *was* one rival—an internal one—for the scheme to build a brand new hospital outside the city at the St Gasthuisberg site. This was a proposal to rebuild and merge the two inner city hospitals, St Rafaël and St Pieter's. It was supported by a group of Flemish medical staff led by the then Dean of the Medical faculty. The contest was settled in a way unthinkable within the hierarchical British NHS—by allowing both projects to proceed until one of them became an obvious winner and the other an obvious loser. That is why, in 2006, I was able to walk around an empty, decaying 1970s tower block which was to have been part of the new inner city hospital, had it not become clear that (a) there would not be enough money to finish both projects and (b) the St Gasthuisberg project embodied more modern and progressive concepts of care, and commanded a stronger network of support, including the minister and the rector of KUL (interviews).

From the mid-1970s to the late 1980s the new hospital continued to grow, and its finances remained tolerably healthy. There were fluctuations, of course, with downswings into losses in the early 1980s and early 1990s, but this was understood to be largely the outcome of a system in which university hospitals developed new treatments and technologies and were

only reimbursed for these some years later when the federal payment authorities had adjusted their payment categories to accommodate the novelties. This decade was, therefore, something of a golden age. At the formal inauguration in January 1985 the KUL rector referred to the ambitious new hospital as the result of nearly 20 years of planning, and thanked the government for supporting the investment without insisting on too much detailed control (De Somers 1985). The UZ Director, Professor Peers, then spoke, emphasizing the special characteristics of a university hospital. He noted the need to integrate a highly diverse range of specialist services, the high turnover of patients (many being quickly returned to their local hospitals or primary care doctors), the need for a large size (to support 24/7 availability of the full range of services and the large hinterland, stretching well beyond the region (Peers 1985). No doubt with the presence in his audience of the Prime Minister and Minister of Health in mind, he then devoted a substantial part of his speech to the need for the government fully to recognize the higher costs per bed-day of university hospitals in its reimbursement system.

Thereafter UZ Leuven became steadily more independent of the central KUL authorities—why would the latter interfere when everything seemed to be going well (interviews)? In the end, however, the 'growth and independence' formula seemed to come unstuck. From the late 1980s the Belgian federal authorities had been tightening reimbursement formulae and rules, desperately trying to get a grip on soaring hospital care expenditures and 'surplus' beds. Between 1980 and 1990 the number of hospital beds per 1,000 Belgian inhabitants fell from 6.67 to 5.65. UZ Leuven seems to have been slow moving to anticipate this, with the result that by 1996/97 a large deficit had developed and the rate of growth of activity had slowed. Many new staff were appointed during a financial upswing and the full impact of their additional salaries was felt as the financial cycle turned down (interviews). Different parties to this crisis still disagree about the seriousness of the underlying position (interviews). 'I don't think there was a financial crisis at the time', says one well placed interviewee. Another opined that, 'It's delicate. It was not a real crisis, in fact'. A third, equally well placed, interviewee was firmly of the opinion that the hospital's financial losses were huge and, 'we had to act quickly', and a fourth confirmed that the financial situation had been out of control. But, whatever ultimate truths might lie beneath the accountancy, it is also clear that more was involved in the upheavals than just a negative bank balance. There were also issues of management styles and systems. A feeling had grown in some quarters that the university, although still the final guarantor of the

UZ's finances, had lost control over its strategy. There were also concerns about the degree of internal control—were the mechanisms in place to steer this large and expensive organization in a rapidly changing financial and political environment?

At any event, in October 1997 the management committee decided that a major structural reform of the hospital was essential. The management consultancy, McKinsey's, was brought in to make a report, and they diagnosed a serious lack of necessary information for top management, a lack of transparency and a failure to develop detailed processes for budgeting and strategic decision making (McKinsey's 1998). Significant changes swiftly followed. Professor Peers stepped down as Director, and a new governance regime was instituted which strengthened KUL's control of the UZ and made the vice rector for biomedical sciences the chair of the hospital's supervisory board.

Thus, in terms of organizational form and management continuity, UZ Leuven has, by the standards of the British NHS, been very stable indeed. The organizational form—a Christian-based university hospital financed mainly by the state but not of the state—remains unchanged, although there have been a number of major adjustments to the reimbursement formulae which have necessitated management action. In more than 30 years the hospital has had just two directors. The major structural change was the tightening of KUL supervision represented by the 1998 insertion of a vice rector as *ex officio* chair of the supervisory board—a significant indicator in Flemish terms, but pretty small beer by the norms of NHS restructuring.

In the early years of the twenty-first century UZ Leuven enjoyed a financial upswing that seemed to confirm the correctness of the actions taken during the 1997/98 crisis. At the time of writing, however, there were some clouds on the horizon. Politically, Leuven had long ago lost the pre-eminent position it had held during the 1960s and 1970s. Since the late 1980s the relevant minister was no longer from the CVP. The tightly knit first generation of the independent Flemish elite had reached the ends of their careers, and their successors were facing a more complicated world. Other university hospitals had sprung up in Flanders, obliging UZ Leuven to begin building a formal network among other Flemish hospitals, to give it a better bargaining position than it would have had if it had tried to stand alone. The federal government redoubled its efforts to control hospital spending and reduce perceived overbedding, producing financial crises at a number of institutions (Joye 2003). Nevertheless, the story closes in 2005 with UZ Leuven as the biggest, best regarded teaching

hospital in the country, an undeniable achievement, both professionally and politically.

3.6 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has told and compared the stories of the development of two hospital systems over a 40-year period. It has 'explained' the differences—some of them—between Brighton and Leuven. It has produced what I hoped and intended to be accurate and plausible accounts. But what kind of explanations have these been? How, exactly, has time featured in these narratives?

This historical treatment has been holistic, yet selective (which is typical for conventional historical accounts). It has not been driven or ordered by any overt theory, yet has selected from a mass of evidence a relatively small number of events which are deemed to have been significant. These have included details of individual personalities, local organizational structures, administrative procedures, group conflicts and national policies. How was that selection made? This history—like most histories—does not make the selection principle clear. It produces a seductively accessible account (easy to read, apparently Olympian in its capacity to overview many complex events) yet the explanatory mechanism remains largely implicit rather than up-front. What is clear is that the explanation takes the form of *narratives* (we will come back to those later in the book). Time is important because, in a narrative, one thing follows another and the prior event apparently explains, or at least creates the context for, its successor. Thus the intensity of *de splitsing* and the preceding history of Francophone dominance explains the subsequent fervour of the Flemish elite in pushing their project of a world class hospital. And in the Brighton case (to take just one example) the whole history of English socioeconomic development, which had led to the southeast becoming richer and healthier than the north, eventually crystallized from 1976 onwards into a national policy which, unfortunately for Brighton, led to a redistribution of healthcare expenditure to the north.

As Chapter 2 made clear, this kind of historical account, while attractive and accessible to the general reader, is certainly not the only way that the time dimension of public programmes and organizations can be conceptualized and investigated. In the next chapter, therefore, we will explore what differences appear if we change the lens on the Brighton/Leuven story, and try to 'read' it from other perspectives.

4

Beyond History? The Added Value of Alternative Approaches

Perhaps the most serious challenge to history's claim to be scientific rests on the belief that a true science can exist only if it is able to posit general laws

(Evans 2000: 47)

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter offered a historical account of the development of the hospitals systems in Brighton and Leuven. In this chapter we will look at the other five approaches introduced in Chapter 2, to see what they are like 'in action'. How far and how do they 'add value' to the historical account? How far can they be deployed to address the kinds of questions we dealt with in Chapter 3—questions concerning the evolution of physical and organizational infrastructures—and how far are they better suited to other kinds of explanatory task? Do they enable us to escape from all the contextual qualifications and specificities of (most) history and ascend to the higher plains of theoretically derived generalization?

I will follow the same sequence as that by which the 'timeships' were introduced in Chapter 2. This therefore begins with the path dependency framework, which can be directly applied to the Brighton/Leuven story. However, as we move through the subsequent approaches we will find ourselves drawn further and further away from the kinds of issue examined in those two cases, and more into other areas in which the particular approaches in question can be shown to better advantage.

4.2 The Path Dependency Framework

4.2.1 Introduction

How far will the application of path dependency ideas take us beyond the conventional historical narrative outlined in Chapter 3? We can now go back over the story with a fresh lens. Then, at the end of section 4.2, we arrive at some provisional conclusions concerning the 'added value' of the PD framework.

4.2.2 Punctuations

There is first a need to justify the particular starting points we adopted for the Brighton/Leuven research. By starting in the mid-1960s had we perhaps just missed some important development, that would, if added, make the patterns we saw look rather different? We think not. In the UK virtually no new NHS hospitals were built between the founding of the service in 1948 and the launch of the first national Hospital Plan in 1962. Thus, with a focus on new hospital construction, our study opens just when, in national terms, a serious modernization of the NHS capital stock was beginning to get underway. In Belgium there was a broadly similar awakening to the need to develop national level policies towards hospitals, the first sign of which was the 'Cluster Law' (Hospital Act) of December 1963. The first hospital plan, with targets for each region, was formulated in 1966. Meanwhile, also during the 1960s, healthcare insurance was progressively extended to wider social categories, creating a greater effective demand for hospital services. We begin the Leuven story just as these new features start to take effect. In both countries, therefore, the national hospital system has recently become a focus for explicit public policy-making: governments are beginning to try to form views about the appropriate number of hospital beds, how they should be geographically and sectorally distributed, and how they should be paid for.

In the fieldwork all respondents were specifically asked about major turning points *and* about what things remained the same. Turning points and continuities were also sought in the documentary analysis. In fact there was a high degree of agreement between key actors as to what the main turning points were—both in Leuven and Brighton. These are summed up in Table 4.1.

In the case of Leuven the punctuations were, first, the early years of Flemish autonomy (1968–73) and, second, the major financial crisis that

Table 4.1   Major Punctuations in the Brighton/Leuven Stories

Brighton	Leuven
1960s. First of three planned tower blocks is built on the RSCH site.	*1968. de splitsing*; Flemish community gains political autonomy.
Early 1970s. Second and third tower blocks at Royal Sussex cancelled, as Falmer Greenfield site proposal emerges as the favoured alternative.	*Early 1970s*. Decision to develop major new hospital on Gasthuisberg site.
	1973. New salary scheme for doctors worked out for UZ Leuven.
1976. Proposal for a new hospital near the University of Sussex is rejected by government as unaffordable.	
1988. Proposal for new hospital at Holmes Avenue, Hove, is put forward.	
Early 1990s. Holmes Avenue proposal downgraded to a polyclinic, capital development programme subsequently emphasizes new buildings on the RSCH site.	*1997/98*. Major financial crisis at UZ Leuven. New governance structure introduced and leadership changes.
2005. Multiple crisis at the Royal Sussex: major budget overspend, lowest categorization in government performance league tables; undercover TV programme exposes abuse of patients on a geriatric ward.	

UZ Leuven underwent in 1997/98. The first of these provided a window of opportunity, unusually favourable in several respects, for an elite group of Flemish Christian Democrat politicians and entrepreneurial doctors and academics to launch the project of a single site new university teaching hospital (Gasthuisberg/UZ Leuven). The second punctuation marked the running out of steam (and out of depth) of the original elite, and gave an opportunity for the new political and university leadership not simply to replace the old guard, but to refashion the governance structure of the hospital so that it would be better placed to plan and control costs in the less expansionary (and less 'go it alone') healthcare environment of the twenty-first century.

A significant difference is that, in the case of Brighton, we are looking more at might have beens rather than at real, radical change. There were three milestones that most of our interviewees agreed were highly significant. The first of these occurred in the mid-1970s, when Brighton's bid for a new hospital next to the University of Sussex campus was torpedoed by a major national public expenditure crisis, and the ensuing clampdown on public sector capital spending. Ironically, it was probably the switch to this

greenfield site project (enthusiastically supported by medical leaders at the time) that contributed to the failure to complete parts two and three of the original 1960s tower block. The second might have come in the early 1990s when a proposal for a major new 400-bed hospital in Hove was scaled down to something much less ambitious after the local elites could not agree on a single solution and were, in any case, promised only limited capital by central government. The third—a combined budgetary and quality crisis at the leading hospital—came right at the end of the period we are examining. While its full impacts are still emerging they certainly will *not* include the construction of a new hospital, all thought of which has now been abandoned in favour of further phased redevelopment of the existing site.

4.2.3 Change: Mechanisms to Explain the Punctuations

Although our focus was on individual hospitals it soon became abundantly clear that national politics featured heavily in both stories. In the Leuven case the key actors were activists at both local *and* national level (a feature, perhaps, that is more characteristic of certain continental European systems—such as the Belgian and the French—than of England). They were able to leverage cabinet level discussions in order to fuel a local project (at that time the cabinet minister responsible was usually of the same political party as the group pushing for the new hospital at Leuven). They were able to present the new UZ as simultaneously a jewel in the local crown *and* a beacon for emergent Flemish autonomy. Thanks to previous preparation, they were able to inject a well defined project into the highly volatile national political situation following *de splitsing*. The new hospital rode on the back of a national political crisis (the Flemish outrage at proposed Francophone incursions)—a punctuation of the most obvious kind. Later there would be rivals elsewhere in Flanders, but at the beginning of the 1970s Leuven stood out as a pioneer with a plan.

The role of national politics was quite different in the Brighton case. Twice, when the local elites had geared themselves up to bid for a new hospital, they were thwarted by developments at higher levels. The first bid foundered in the massive economic crisis of the mid-1970s. The second failure—in the late 1980s and early 1990s—was less dramatic and clear cut, but it was a failure nevertheless. It appears to have had three components. First, (unlike Leuven in the late 1960s) the local elites did not present a united front to the government. The spokespersons for the

medical profession fought the managers and some of the local politicians, in the local media and elsewhere (*Brighton Health Bulletin*, April and May, 1991; *Evening Argus*, April and May, 1991). This cannot have helped what was in any case an awkward looking proposal (for redevelopment at the RSCH site *and* a new medium sized hospital just a few miles away in Hove). Second, the NHS constituted a far more explicit and formularized system for allocating capital between different projects than ever existed in Belgium. This meant that the Brighton bid was carefully weighed against the measured need in other parts of the country. Based on this comparison Brighton did not emerge as the most needy. Within the southeast Region both Eastbourne and Hastings had even more crumbling hospitals than Brighton, so they came higher up the soup line. Third, Brighton's timing was again unfortunate/unlucky. The late 1980s / early 1990s saw an economic downturn—not of the scale of the mid-1970s, but nevertheless enough fatally to restrict what the Treasury and Department of Health were willing to provide. The message came down the hierarchy that what was proposed just could not remotely be afforded (interviews).

In short, Leuven managed to hitch their star to a national political crisis, Brighton did not. Leuven was able to play within a system where patronage and politically determined 'fair shares' were dominant, whereas Brighton was just one player in a much larger and more bureaucratized system of resource allocation. (One senior doctor who had spent years planning hospital developments in Brighton spoke to us despairingly of the 12 phase procedure that meant that any bid took years to reach a final decision; interviews.) Leuven made its bid at an economically reasonably propitious time, whereas both Brighton's attempts came during periods of fiscal restraint. One might say that whereas Leuven profited from a national political punctuation, Brighton could find no such window of opportunity, indeed, its first bid disappeared into a black hole, in the shape of the capital spending freeze which resulted from the oil crisis and the IMF loan.

The circumstances favouring the Leuven project did not last indefinitely. All our Belgian interviewees were agreed that the financial crisis of 1997/98 was a major watershed. This was therefore a second punctuation. It had various components, some internal to the hospital, some external, and most of them were of the 'slow growing' kind rather than the 'sudden shock'. Two important external factors were the gradual tightening of the government's grip on healthcare finance, which meant that the financial cycle appeared to be gaining amplitude. So the 1997 'downswing' (when new treatments and new staff were costing

the hospital but were not yet fully reimbursed) looked bad to the accountants. A second, linked, factor was the relationship with the parent university, KUL. *De facto* the hospital had become steadily more independent of the university's top management. Yet KUL retained the ultimate financial responsibility if things went wrong. Internally, it seems that the management arrangements that had worked so well to get the new hospital off the ground were less suited to the running of a large, complex, established institution that was developing in all sorts of directions without a very clear strategic plan. The outcome was a changing of the guard in top management, and the installation of both a new, closer set of governance relations with the university and a new strategic planning system (McKinsey 1998).

4.2.4 Continuity: Mechanisms to Explain the Paths

Thelen warns that 'the factors responsible for the reproduction of an institution may be quite different from those that account for the existence of the institution in the first place' (Thelen 2003: 214). Thus the reasons why, say, UZ Leuven grew steadily from the late 1970s to the early 1990s may be quite different from the reasons why the decision to launch the Gasthuisberg project was taken in the first place.

Once the decision to develop a large new hospital at the Gasthuisberg site had been taken, what positive feedback mechanisms kept the decision in place? There were at least three. First, what had happened in the early 1970s was a public commitment by a network of high profile Christian Democrat politicians, clinicians and administrators to the idea of a new kind of hospital. This would not only put autonomous Flanders on the map but would also set a model for the modernization of hospital care throughout the whole of Belgium (interviews). The political 'sunk costs' in this project were therefore very great: U-turns would have been a huge blow to pride and status, whereas continuing the project to fulfilment (the inauguration eventually took place in 1985) promised a long stream of new achievements as the hospital developed. Second, in material terms, a series of large, expensive, specialist buildings rapidly arose on the Gasthuisberg site. They could not readily be used for anything else (specific assets, in terms of the new institutional economics). To go back on all these very visible bricks and mortar (or, more accurately, on all this concrete and steel) was inconceivable. The more the site grew, the less feasible abandonment became. The third factor was the way that the original director, Professor Jan Peers, had installed, in 1972, an innovative salary

system that both encouraged cooperation between departments (with the goal of achieving more integrated care) and ensured that the young assistants had incomes they could live on. This system discouraged the fragmenting tendencies of individual private practice and emphasized the collective interests of the hospital (interviews). This system survived into the twenty-first century.

Of course, there were problems. The somewhat complex and unpredictable Belgian reimbursement system meant that the hospital had to 'loss lead' by developing new treatments before they were recognized for payment by the government. However, most of the leading players understood that these dips would be followed by periods in which the federal authorities recognized the new treatment and, for a while, the pioneers could make good money (interviews). Whilst it was true that, throughout the 1980s, the federal government was seeking to restrict hospital expenditures, its tactics were not particularly effective. In 1982 it did introduce a moratorium on the total number of beds, but UZ Leuven was already 'in the system' by then. The degree of control over the system which the politicians could exercise was significantly less than that wielded by the Secretary of State for Health in the UK. Gasthuisberg could continue to expand its services. When the crisis finally came in 1997/98, it was not fatal. The hospital retained its pre-eminence, but from then on had to plan and control more carefully, and found it necessary to turn to a strategy of more intense cooperation and alliance with other Flemish healthcare institutions, thus recognizing that the post-1968 era of 'Leuven as lone pioneer' had long since passed (interviews).

The Brighton story is again very different. The RSCH never escaped its 'path'. On my visits to the site in 2006/07 I could plainly see, written in brick and concrete, a story of continuing incrementalism—a new bit here, a refurbishment there, with the hospital's main entrance still ushering the visitor to a dingy, crowded nineteenth century structure. It is true that the last decade has witnessed a lot of new building, but in a sense it has been 'within-path' because much of the new investment has gone into reproviding ancient facilities such as the (highly impressive) new Royal Alexandra Children's Hospital, which has been relocated from an unsuitable building elsewhere in the city to the RSCH site. The mirage of a brand new hospital, on a more suitable site, has continued to elude local healthcare leaders.

The main mechanisms that kept the RSCH on this incremental path were the planning and capital investment routines of the NHS. There was never the combination of spare capital and high priority within the

system that would have allowed a total rebuild at the RSCH site or new build on a new site. The Brighton case was always being compared, by the higher NHS authorities, with other priorities—not just the decaying facilities at Eastbourne and Hastings, but also the policy (from 1976) of moving expenditure to the north of England, where mortality and morbidity rates seemed to speak of a greater need (interviews). Furthermore, Brighton was only 50 miles from London, where an array of famous teaching hospitals fought fierce bureaucratic and political battles to defend and enhance their own (overbedded) positions. This was a bureaucratic, 'rationalized' system rather than the more direct political bargaining that characterized Leuven. Within the rules of this system Brighton was never able to make itself quite special enough to qualify for exceptional treatment. It was a medium sized fish in a big pond, not a big fish in a small pond like Leuven.

For both Brighton and Leuven there was also a technological factor that tended to generate significant path dependencies in medical and nursing practice, although these were of less importance for our story because they were only loosely related to buildings. I refer to the development of new medical technologies, which was going on all the time, but with some acceleration from the 1980s onwards. A very senior and experienced Leuven doctor put it simply: 'In health care everything is long term. To develop a new technology is ten years' (interview, 2006).

4.2.5 Reflections on the Two Cases

If we compare our two cases we can see both differences and similarities. The types of *punctuations* were very different. In Leuven the crucial punctuation was a national political crisis centred on the demand for increased autonomy by the Flemish community. The hospital project was able to ride on the back of this. The precipitating events were the demonstrations and street dramas of *de splitsing*, but the initial conditions were the growing strength and organization of the Flemish elite over the previous decade or more, combined with the foresight of the medical leaders in already researching modern designs for research oriented hospitals in a number of countries (interviews). The later, lesser punctuation (1997/98) was both financial and managerial. It entailed the new hospital re-orienting itself to deal with a changed financial and political environment in which it was no longer either quite so special or quite so autonomous as it had become during the 1970s and early 1980s.

In Brighton the first punctuation was also connected with a national crisis, but of a rather different kind. It was a national (indeed, global) economic crisis that unfortunately coincided with Brighton's bid for a new hospital to be constructed near the university at Falmer. The precipitating event was the economic and fiscal crisis that obliged the government to freeze public sector investment. The initial conditions were the global shift of power towards the oil producing states (OPEC), and the emerging conditions of 'stagflation' in Western European economies. The second punctuation was a more complicated affair, involving increasing fiscal restraint at national level, but also a somewhat unconvincing bid that was opposed by local medical leaders and which looked untidy to the strategic planners (one medium sized new hospital in Hove, plus redevelopment of the RSCH site in Brighton). The precipitating events here do not seem to have been at all dramatic. It was more a case of the initial conditions not being particularly favourable, and the long, drawn out bid process gradually losing steam as it was subjected to multiple scrutinies. The third punctuation (the financial crisis of 2005/06) was perhaps more similar to the second punctuation at Leuven. The response was broadly similar—tighter planning, closer accountancy, cutbacks, changes in senior management.

What kept these two organizations on path between the punctuations? In the Leuven case it soon acquired the inertial momentum that comes from being a big, very well known institution, with lots of staff and buildings. The mechanisms were essentially twofold. First there was one of legitimation—this was the proud new hospital of the Flemish community and no sensible Flemish politician would seek to close or reduce it. The second was one of sunk costs—as soon as a large, specialized building began to appear on the Gasthuisberg site it became more and more difficult to turn back.

We should note, however, that these feedback mechanisms are not constant over time—there is not just one always ascending curve, as some theoretical conceptualizations of increasing returns might lead one to expect. For example, as far as legitimation was concerned, with the passage of time Flemish politicians representing rival centres, such as Amsterdam, began increasingly to urge the prior claims of their own local developments. It was not that the political justification for UZ Leuven disappeared, but rather that it became less potent relative to other claims—uniqueness was progressively lost, the upward curve flattened out. As far as the sunk costs were concerned a different 'curve' can be discerned. In the early stages this is probably a process with increasing

returns—as the hospital grew and more investment was committed and more staff began to work there it became more and more difficult to turn back towards some other solution. After a certain point, however, this process levelled out. The hospital was no longer expanding (or not much) but it existed, and housed too many organized interests to be removed or radically downscaled.

The contrast with the English system was stark. Here legitimation lay within a national system that, however imperfectly, aimed at some kind of interlocational equity and therefore, given strong capital rationing, only rarely allowed very large investments in one place. This constraint continued to exert its effects throughout the period under consideration, but especially after the 1976 Resource Allocation Working Party Report (this was the report, referred to in Chapter 3, which proposed to shift the allocation of funds within the NHS from a historical/incremental basis to an explicit, needs-based formula). Furthermore the existence of many small, local hospitals (a spattering of sunk costs across the local map) meant that immense amounts of political energy and management time were spent on the long drawn-out rationalization programme of closing smaller hospitals and bringing their key services on-site at the RSCH or reproviding them in other forms, some of these community—rather than hospital—based. There was never a big enough single bang to release the large amounts of capital that would have been necessary to launch a new general hospital. Within the larger NHS system the feedback to Brighton's attempts to jump to a new situation with a new hospital was mainly negative rather than positive.

The Leuven UZ was also able to keep to its expanding path because of its relative autonomy. It was important that this was not a state owned hospital and, although subject to government regulation in a myriad ways, its management could not be directed by the government or by some regional state authority, as could the RSCH. Leuven was able to fashion its own solution to the crisis of 1997/98, and has since pursued a medium to long term strategy which addresses the changing healthcare environment and prominently features the construction of its own network with other healthcare institutions (interviews). By contrast, the RSCH suffered, rather than gained, from 'network effects'. The NHS network—much firmer and more hierarchical than anything in the Belgian healthcare system—meant that Brighton's claims were constantly assessed relative to those of others all over the country. Brighton had to accept the authority emanating from the network of which it was already a part, rather than 'designing' and constructing its own network as—to a certain

extent—UZ Leuven was able to do. If one looks at the board minutes of the two hospitals during the 1990s it soon becomes apparent that a difference is that more and more of the agenda items in Brighton are essentially questions of how to respond to national, top–down initiatives, whereas the Leuven items are more often to do with pushing forward the hospital's own strategy.

What all this reveals, therefore, is that there are a number of mechanisms simultaneously at work, and that their influence over time is by no means necessarily captured by the economist's notion of constantly increasing returns. On the contrary, the picture is much more complicated, as is portrayed in Figure 4.1.

The first column of Figure 4.1 briefly describes the mechanisms. The second shows what the curve of influence over time seems to have been. Thus, for example, the building of a new hospital begins to gather legitimacy (top line in Figure 4.1) as a planning idea, but then sharply increases once construction begins (at which point visible U-turns would be politically humiliating). Much later, political legitimacy may begin gently and gradually to decline, as the hospital becomes just another taken for granted feature of the local and regional scene. Another factor promoting decline was the appearance of rival university hospitals elsewhere in Flanders:

Mechanism	Strength Over Time	Likely to be Widespread?	Brighton and / or Leuven?
Political legitimacy / 'sunk costs'.		In the case of prestige projects, yes.	Leuven.
Creation of large specific assets.		In the case of large scale specialized infrastructure, yes.	Leuven (perhaps Brighton, slightly, from late 1990s).
HRM systems focused on collective solidarity.		Wherever such systems are introduced.	Leuven.
Externally imposed planning and capital investment procedures.		In centralized, highly planned systems.	Brighton.

Figure 4.1   Some mechanisms that keep organizations 'on path'

KUL lost its uniqueness. Other factors may also reduce political legitimacy. For example, if a hospital becomes involved in public controversy (high perioperative death rates, big budget deficits, etc.)—though this did not seem to have applied to the KUL case. But gradually, overall, as a new hospital ages, it is likely to become something to be maintained and defended, certainly, but no longer something to be actively promoted and thrust into the headlines as 'the new thing'.

If we look at a new hospital from the point of view of the creation of a large specific physical asset (second row in Figure 4.1) we can suggest that, in the construction phase and operations phase, there is a strong element of path dependency. It makes no sense to anyone to stop in the middle of construction, or to close a bright, shining new facility. (In fact one or two new hospitals or parts of hospitals in the NHS have been temporarily 'mothballed' through lack of finance or skilled staff, and this always generates intense media and public criticism.) Over time, however, this situation changes. Eventually repairs and reconstruction/modernization become necessary, and at that point the investment alternatives are likely to open up again—there will be forked paths to choose between (e.g., refurbishment on this site or new build elsewhere, or perhaps investment in a new kind of health service or technology). In short, specific assets have their own life cycles—the strong path fixed when the first brick is layed eventually peters out, and new crossroads open up.

The third row deals with a factor that was mentioned as important in several of the Leuven interviews and documents. A system of remuneration that stressed the collective rather than the individual effort (with an HRM philosophy, enunciated from the top of the organization, that reinforced this 'all for one and one for all' approach). In Belgian terms this had been an innovation, marking a move away from the more individualized approach to the fees earned from specialist medicine. It had been introduced right at the beginning—in the first 'punctuation'—and lasted more than three decades. The curve of the line in Figure 4.1 is intended to convey the idea that there is a cautious early phase where it is not entirely clear that the new system is going to survive, but once it seems to be bedded in it produces quite a rapid sense of collective institutional adherence among staff. It subsequently continues to do this until some new development disturbs it (such as the development of similar systems elsewhere, which may reduce its relative attractiveness, or evidence of 'free-riding' within the system, that causes disillusion and discontent).

The pattern for the planning system (bottom row in Figure 4.1) is different again. Its influence in keeping the hospital on a particular path grows gradually over time as the planners develop more and more sophisticated measures and procedures—as 'rational' or 'needs related' budgeting becomes more elaborate and formulaic (as it has tended to do within the NHS).

Some mechanisms are likely to be very common, others will exist only in particular contexts. Thus political legitimacy will almost always be involved with visible, prestige public projects such as hospitals, high speed rail links or new educational institutions. But tight planning and capital investment procedures are likely to be somewhat less universal. They depend on or derive from larger system features, in this case features which are present in the UK but much less so in Belgium.

Finally, our case studies allowed us to observe many examples of 'within-path' change. All sorts of reforms and improvements were introduced both in Brighton and Leuven that did not disturb the basic trajectories of these organizations. One prominent example might be the saga of the Holmes Avenue site in Hove. Originally touted as the site for a new 400-bed general hospital, when capital for that scheme was not forthcoming, the plan reverted to an incremental concentration of 'hot' services on the RSCH (i.e., it stayed on-path) but the Holmes Avenue site was developed, as a more modest, but extremely useful polyclinic and mental health facility. This appears to have been an example of what Thelen (2003) would term 'conversion'. Another would be the periodic changes in the system for allocating capital in the NHS. Different criteria were announced at different times, and local management adjusted to these, but the basic framework of regional and then national comparative analysis against elaborate and purportedly objective criteria was never seriously disturbed.

There were also many examples of Thelen's other type of within-path change—'layering'. One was the way in which UZ Leuven adapted its planning to take greater advantage of the federal government's payment rules after the financial crisis of 1997/98. These rules could not be changed, but they could be worked so that the hospital could still pursue its strategic goals without exposing itself to quite such large financial risks. Another was when the RSCH leadership, having secured capital for a new cardiac care centre during the 1990s, used this as a vehicle for a more general redevelopment, initiating a major building programme at the RSCH site which was at first only partially funded (what later became the Millenium Wing—*Bulletin* 2000, interviews).

4.2.6 Conclusion: The Added Value of the Path
Dependency Framework?

Explanations using PD tend to be complex rather than elegant (Hall 2003: 387). They include an undeniable element of judgement concerning what counts as a major punctuation and what, by contrast, qualifies as only 'within-path' change. It should be noted, however, that in both our cases there was a high degree of agreement among our interviewees as to what the critical junctures had been. Nevertheless, within the PD category the theorist has to search around for explanatory factors and cannot apply a 'one size fits all' model to them, even when they are identified. PD offers an interpretive perspective, but leaves the scholar with a lot of further work to do.

Contrary to some impressions, PD is not just about how everything stays the same. Alongside and in addition to fairly stable feedback mechanisms, PD-based explanations may embrace highly variable contextual factors as well as sudden events and opportunities. They are therefore particularistic explanations, and are never likely to become particularly standardized (this is probably even more true of the sociological variant than the economistic variant). On the other hand, it may be possible to arrive at some classification of feedback mechanisms that would allow more systematic comparisons across cases, and might permit more formal modelling of the temporal dynamics (building on the trajectories hypothesized in Figure 4.1—see Büthe 2002).

So it seems that it *is* possible to apply PD to specific organizations and to 'get something out of it', as well as using it on a larger scale, to examine the evolution of welfare states or policy regimes. However, thus far the 'added value' of PD *at the organizational level* appears to be moderate rather than revolutionary. It is noticeable, for example, that in both the Brighton and the Leuven cases the explanations rest heavily on the characteristics of the relevant systems at regional and national levels. Context certainly matters, but traditional history picks up on this too—it is not an insight exclusive to PD analysts. The higher level elements play prominent roles in explaining both the punctuations and the path reinforcing mechanisms. Thus it may be that the PD concept is most fruitful when it is used to set the study of particular organizations firmly within larger systems or contexts.

As for the mechanisms themselves, those identified comprise both economic factors and political, administrative and even cultural processes. The Brighton–Leuven research suggests that we need considerably more than the concepts of 'increasing returns' and 'sunk costs' (useful though these can be) in order to make sense of local organizational development.

The research identifies mechanisms which feedback in curves of different shapes over time—rapidly increasing then levelling off; increasing slowly then gradually decreasing; and so on. And it is clear that specific administrative mechanisms—planning and budgeting routines—can play an important role in path maintenance, as can levels of local institutional legitimacy. These are all important in the Brighton and Leuven stories (and cannot be reduced to economic concepts). This research points to the need to develop a taxonomy of political, administrative, economic and cultural processes, each with its own curve or trajectory over time which, as an ensemble, define the path within which, during 'normal times', the organization is likely to develop.

The punctuations are, in a curious way, a slightly disappointing aspect of the analysis. Judging by the Brighton and Leuven cases they tend to be rather obvious—dramatic events that are much talked about and hard to miss. Neither are the initial conditions so hard to identify, at least in retrospect. It is the subsequent mechanisms that restore stability and path which require rather more ferreting out and conceptualization.

Overall, therefore, the PD framework is of considerable value. First, it provides some broad concepts (positive feedback, punctuations, etc.) which can be applied in many circumstances, including organization level analysis. Second, these concepts prompt some very useful questions about both continuity and change. Third, these questions set us on the track of mechanisms, each of which may have its own particular time profile. Eventually, perhaps, it may be possible to recognize commonly occurring *ensembles* of such feedback processes, for it seems they often operate in combination rather than singly. The notion of path dependency certainly does not itself furnish any ready made explanations, but it does orient research in fruitful directions.

4.3 Theories of Cycles or Alternations

4.3.1 Traces in the Brighton–Leuven Study

Whilst there are some cyclical patterns in the Brighton and Leuven cases, they hardly dominate the narrative. For example, the Brighton documentation strongly suggests that fiscal crises are recurrent, and that this regular drama is strongly connected to the national and regional difficulty of budgeting annually in advance for such variable and volatile phenomena as the behaviour of physicians and the health status of communities.

Budgets are set and then any one or two of a whole host of potential disturbances occur. Doctors prescribe more drugs than was anticipated (that is their 'clinical freedom'), or they carry out more/fewer procedures than was planned for, or they are the recipients of national pay deals which are more/less than the poor budgeteers had expected. Colder winters deliver more half-frozen elderly persons to hospitals, or warmer summers dehydrate them, or general practitioners' increasing reluctance to provide home visits drives larger numbers of the local population to turn up at the hospital accident and emergency department, or there is an influenza epidemic. All these developments load new costs onto the hospital. Reading through decades of the Brighton hospitals' *Bulletin* leaves the indelible impression that all these uncertainties produce a cycle of (fairly) regular financial crises, with rather predictable public statements by the responsible officers as yet another budget shortfall emerges. But all this, of course, is the product of a national system of top–down financing, closely controlled (ultimately) by the Treasury, and the Ministry of Health.

The Leuven story is different—the national system is far less restrictive, but there is still a cyclical nature to hospital finances. As a research and teaching institution, KUL develops new treatments, which are effective but not yet 'recognized' by the federal reimbursement categories. So it 'loss leads' on these, in the expectation that, first, they will be recognized for reimbursement and, second, that this recognition will be followed by a period in which KUL will reap what are, in effect, 'monopoly profits' (interviews). Through the 1980s and early 1990s these cycles increased in amplitude until finally, in 1997/98, the 'powers that were' decided that the cyclical deficit was unacceptably large, and something had to be done. Note, however, that this was a Leuven decision, whereas in the Brighton case it would have been a regional or even national decision.

Yet as far as the main focus of the twin narratives are concerned—the development of the hospitals' physical facilities—at first no clear cycling seems to be present. The punctuations are all 'one offs', unique combinations of circumstances that do not cycle away and back again. Neither does the crucial relationship between management and doctors seem to cycle. This is more of an arrow, an arrow pointing to increasing managerial influence over time. The trajectory of this arrow, however, differs between the two countries, with the managerial projectile flying much higher and faster in the UK than in Belgium. The greater managerialism of the NHS is symbolized by the fact that all the top managers at KUL have been medical doctors, whereas that has been a comparative rarity in the NHS as a whole, and a 'never happened' at the RSCH. But it goes beyond this: the hands-on

management of clinical care by means of performance indicators, targets and protocols has gone much deeper in the UK than in Belgium.

There is, however, one obvious and quite important qualification to the 'no cycling in physical facilities' conclusion. That is the life cycle of the buildings themselves (look again at Figure 4.1, row 2). New buildings are briefly new, and then they gradually decay. Periodically, major investment decisions have to be taken to refurbish or replace, either at the present site or elsewhere. The mechanism, therefore, is simple physical decay, the rate of which is in turn governed by the quality of materials originally used, how well they were put together, how intensively they were used, how well they were maintained, and so on. For hospital buildings the life cycle is often rather a long one. As indicated in the previous chapter, in 2006 approximately 43 percent of the beds at the RSCH were in buildings erected before 1850. Therefore what we have here is a long cycle—possibly so long that a 40-year study such as ours will miss the crucial punctuations. (It would be interesting to revisit the UZ Leuven story in another two or three decades' time, when most of this very large facility will be getting old at the same time, and major refurbishment/replace decisions will presumably have to be taken.) Yet closer inspection of the Brighton and Leuven stories do indeed reveal some evidence of building cycles falling within the 1967–2007 period. The parlous state of the old buildings at RSCH are mentioned in many official documents (see quotations at the beginning of Chapter 3). They provided a constant and prominent component in the pressure for new investment, up to and including the eventually successful 1994 bid for redevelopment of the whole site (Brighton Health Care NHS Trust 1994). Brighton may not have got a new hospital on a new site, as many of its representatives had wished, but in the end it did get almost £100 million of new public investment, not least because of the obvious maintenance and functional problems with its very old core buildings.

4.3.2 Other Applications of Cyles/Alternations/Patterns

As cycling was not a particularly prominent feature of the Brighton/Leuven study it may be worth offering another example, in which patterns over time are more central. But because the notion of a cycle or alternation is illustrated and discussed in a number of other places in this book (e.g., Chapters 1, 2 and 5) it seemed useful here to take a look at a rather different kind of pattern, the S-curve of innovation that was briefly referred to in Chapter 1, section 1.4.
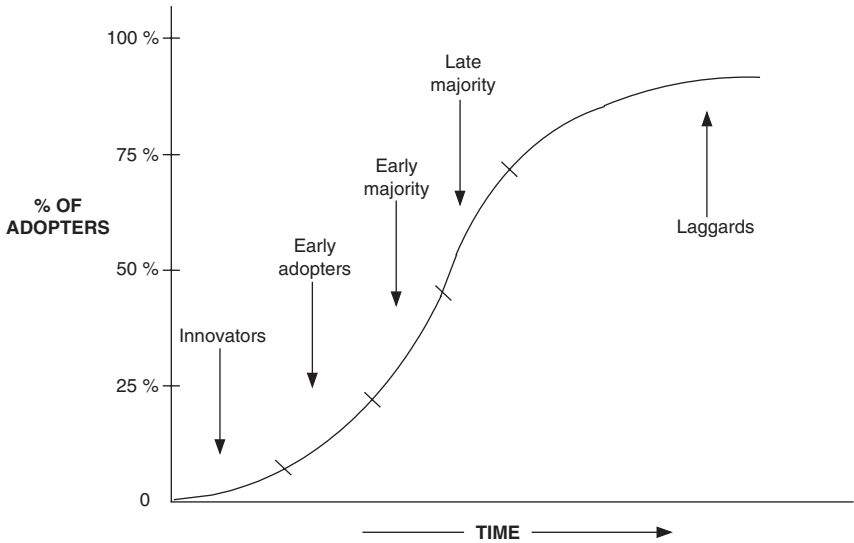
Figure 4.2   The diffusion of innovations
Source: Adapted from Rogers 2003.

The notion of an S-curve (see Figure 4.2) first became widely discussed following the publication of Everett Rogers' book, *Diffusion of Innovations*, in 1962. Forty years later the fifth edition still uses this model (Rogers 2003).

The basic idea is that the adoption of innovations—whether machines, techniques or software—follows an accelerating, then decelerating curve over time. In the early stages only a few people come on board—originally the innovators themselves and then the 'early adopters'. Then larger numbers adopt and the curve steepens—the 'early majority' followed by the 'late majority'. Finally, the slope begins to level off as the 'laggards' finally follow the majority. Each group may have particular sociological characteristics, for example, early adopters may be rather better educated than average; more desperate for a solution to a pressing problem; social 'outsiders' for some reason (and therefore less tied to group norms); or any combination of these. The basic 'S' shape may be steep (rapid adoption) or heavily leaning forwards (slow adoption over time). In one sense it is a cycle, not because it comes back to the same place where it started (which it does not) but because it goes through the same sequence of rise and (eventually) decline, when a new innovation begins to wind its way up the 'S'. In IT these successive 'Ss' can be very close together—for example, the

transition from floppy disks to sticks—but in other fields they may be very spaced out (nearly 200 years from the first successful experiments before the Royal Navy generally adopted citrus fruit as a preventative for scurvy in 1795), and then another two centuries before modern dietary methods took over.

Rogers has found this curve in countless studies of innovations all over the world. Many of his studies involve public projects of one kind or another—the adoption of modern mathematics teaching in Pittsburgh schools; public health programmes in Peru; the control of scurvy in the Royal Navy; a programme to encourage women to use a new type of contraceptive in Indonesia; and the STOP AIDS project in San Francisco. His work is directly relevant to practitioners, to the extent that he identifies a range of 'success factors' for the successful diffusion of innovations. Many of these have to do with the relative success of change agents in contacting potential users, gaining their trust, identifying their specific (self-perceived) needs and adapting the innovation to local cultures and beliefs. Furthermore, the tactics of innovation promotion vary with the stage reached—actions that are appropriate to encourage early adopters are unlikely to be the most appropriate for the late majority.

4.3.3 The Added Value of Looking for Patterns Over Time

As was indicated in Chapter 2, section 2.1, traditional historians have sometimes operated with a strong sense of pattern—not least in the Marxian idea of the dialectic. Few, however, deploy *ab initio* an explicit pattern in the way that Rogers does or Hood and others use Grid-Group Cultural Theory (GGCT) (Hood 1998; Rogers 2003). So what are the advantages of such explicit approaches? One obvious one is their memorability—it is much easier to remember the S-curve or the two by two GGCT grid than a whole library full of specific and particular histories. Second, these are powerful heuristic devices and also help to provoke important questions, such as why does a particular case appear *not* to fit the S-curve, or why does another fall only uncomfortably and untidily into the GGCT framework? Third, pattern identification is immediately provocative of theory building: once you see a pattern you are almost obliged to look for the explanations for these observed regularities.

There is a danger here, though—one we have already hinted at in our application of the path dependency framework to the Brighton and Leuven cases. It is that the researcher may assume that the wide appearance of a particular pattern means that there must also be a constant

underlying cause. However, that would be to commit an isomorphic fallacy—to assume that similarities of outward form automatically denote similarities of underlying mechanisms. As any biologist knows, this may not be the case at all: quite different species may evolve externally similar forms in order to cope with particular features of the environment. And in public policy cycles in, say, budgeting, elections and organizational decentralization may be driven by three quite different sets of mechanisms.

Finally, it may be worth making the point that simply *describing* regular patterns may have a considerable value in itself, even before pushing on to identify possible causal mechanisms. For practitioners and academics alike, it is important to know if you are in the middle of (or towards the end of) a process that cycles, or alternates, or bends in the form of an S-curve. It provides a useful map, even if one does not yet know what underlying geological processes explain the landforms across which one is travelling.

4.4 Sociological Studies of Time and Management

4.4.1 Traces in the Brighton/Leuven Study

The design of the Brighton/Leuven study was never intended to provide systematic information about the participants' perceptions of time, and therefore all that can be done here is to note a few traces of these factors that emerged in our interviews and in the documentary sources. The Brighton/Leuven cases certainly *could* have been the subject of an investigation of time perspectives, but that would have required different methods and focus.

Perhaps the most interesting 'trace' came when interviewees were talking about the timescales for the development of new medical techniques, and about the time foci of, respectively, doctors and senior managers. The founding leader of the new UZ Leuven told us that, 'In health care everything is long term. To develop a new technology is ten years' (interview, 2006). Several Leuven interviewees also commented on the need for continuity in the management of a large hospital, and observed that the UZ had been fortunate in having only two leaders in well over 30 years. Brighton, too, had begun with high continuity in management—just two top managers between 1974 and 2004. In the National Health Service as a whole, however, the average tenures of top managers began to

shorten. From the mid-1990s it became normal for managers to 'move on' quite quickly and, increasingly, for managers perceived to be weak to be sacked or sidelined. This climate infected Brighton too, so that the chief executive who took over in 1991 said it had been important for him to reassure clinicians that he was going to stay—that he was 'a Brighton boy' (interview). Meanwhile, a leading Brighton clinician told me that it seemed that 'a culture of bullying' had developed where hospital chief executives had been pressurized from the higher echelons in the NHS. There had been 'increasing short termism' which had led to 'something of a separation between doctors and managers'. Hospital specialists, explained my interviewee, expected on average to serve for something like 15 years in a particular post, whereas managers nowadays moved on very quickly. This gave the two groups quite different time perspectives (interview, 2006).

4.4.2 Other Applications of Sociological Perspectives on Time

Between 1996 and 2000 Ida Sabelis carried a study of the phenomenon of 'compression'—'the reduction or condensation of tasks within a time frame, the struggle over performance by doing more in less time, the dynamics arising when things are ''left out'' in order to concentrate on what is considered a *core* task' (Sabelis 2002: 90, original italics). Sabelis interviewed a number of top Dutch managers, including several from the public sector. Here is one Permanent Secretary:

We seem incapable of doing that [selecting the most important information] because of the huge availability of information we have nowadays. We cannot decide what is relevant . . . And the drive to think that we have to do it ever faster, the acceleration of it all, wanting to have and do everything within this life . . . it all has to be shortened and fast and accelerating. We are always in a hurry, always rushing

(quoted in Sabelis 2002: 100)

How does he personally cope with this glut of information? 'When I get a report that is longer than two or three pages, it cannot be well thought through. It is sent back because of its length' (ibid.). Meanwhile, a national level educational administrator took a more benign view:

But all right, sixty hours [work per week] is reasonable. You may be busy with perhaps thirty different tasks. And you have a better performance because you do more things; you become more efficient under pressure . . . And then I reach the

point where I have to pull myself together and decelerate: stop, take time out and make choices . . .

<div align="right">(ibid.: 97)</div>

Sabelis finds that the phenomenon of compression is widespread and widely acknowledged among the top managers she interviewed, even if they have somewhat different psychological strategies for coping with it. She concludes that compression is a way of leaving things out (often by transferring them to subordinates) and getting to the essence of decisions in the shortest possible time. But she also suggests that those concerned seldom understand and/or acknowledge the costs of this particular 'time tactic'. There is a loss of breadth and human contact with the issues under consideration. Insisting on two-page reports or working on 30 issues simultaneously, in small fragments of time: 'How does this fit with the proclaimed need for creativity, invention, empathy, and open-minded-ness (not to mention sustainability) in modern management?' (Sabelis 2002: 102).

4.4.3 The Added Value of Sociological Perspectives on Time and Management

The fundamental contribution of this perspective is to replace an unques-tioned assumption of linear clock time with an understanding that per-spectives on time are themselves culturally constructed and conditioned, and that they can vary between groups, contexts and activities. As such, empirical research which uses this approach needs to 'get inside the heads' of the group(s) being studied. This perhaps tends to lead to relatively small scale studies (although large scale surveys can also tap into attitudes and values concerned with time—see Hofstede 2001). Alternatively, as in an-thropology or cultural history, cultural symbols and practices can be interpreted as carrying meanings about the group or society's deep-seated time beliefs. This latter approach may support broader generalizations than the micro studies involving in-depth interviews with a few individ-uals, but it is also—inevitably—less direct and detailed. All in all, one has to say that the 'multiple times' perspective has not as yet been much used in public policy and management. At first sight it appears to have consid-erable potential, but we await the researchers who will fully exploit the opportunity.

4.5 Organizational Ecology/Evolution

4.5.1 Introduction

A study of just two local hospital systems does not lend itself well to an ecological approach. There is little, on the exclusive basis of our research in Brighton and Leuven, that we can say about hospitals in general (and certainly nothing we can say about public sector organizations in general). However, there were other aspects of the Brighton/Leuven stories which, although not focal for the narrative in Chapter 3, can be interpreted as aspects of evolutionary processes. In this section we will therefore begin with these, and then build outwards, by referring to other, wider studies that may show the advantages and limitations of the evolutionary approach more clearly.

4.5.2 A Subplot in Brighton and Leuven: The Extinction of the Small Hospital

The aspect of the Brighton and Leuven stories that carries the strongest aroma of organizational evolution is the trend towards large high-tech hospitals and away from smaller local hospitals. This trend can be seen in both cases, and in both countries, and, indeed, is part of a broad trend in many Western countries.

 In the Brighton case, for example, in 1967 the Brighton and Lewes hospital group comprised a total of 13 hospitals. By 2007 most of these had closed, leaving only the three behind—the Royal Sussex, the Royal Alexandra Hospital for Children (rebuilt and relocated to the Royal Sussex site, so arguably now de facto part of RSCH) and the much reduced Brighton General, at which all 'hot' surgery had now ceased. In other words all the small hospitals had closed, and even the larger Brighton General had been substantially downgraded in favour of the RSCH. The reasons for this concentration were broadly the same as why small hospitals all over the UK were closing during that same period. Medical technology advanced so that equipment and buildings became more specialized and expensive. Levels of training for staff to operate such equipment became more demanding. The patients treated became, on average, sicker (because less serious cases could now be dealt with outside hospital or could be discharged earlier than would previously have been the practice). All these trends—technological, professional and social—intertwined to point towards large scale, high-tech centres as the answer.

Small hospitals could not afford the big equipment and could neither afford nor attract nor provide adequate training for the medical and paramedical specialisms. In many cases there were strong local campaigns to save them, which often prolonged their lives beyond what the planners might have liked, but in the end they closed. All this could be seen as evolutionary—as organizations responding to environmental changes, with the obsolete species (small hospitals) gradually dying out. Political and healthcare actors could make their moves and speeches, but in the 'not so long run' none of this could hold back the flight of the evolutionary arrow.

The Leuven case also shows evidence of the closure of smaller hospitals. During the course of the development of the new UZ seven smaller hospitals had been merged or closed but, 'we did not add a single bed' (interview).

4.5.3 Other Examples of the Evolutionary Approach

In Chapter 2, section 2.5, I referred to the work of Herbert Kaufman. Kaufman was, inter alia, the author of a famous book entitled, *Are Government Organizations Immortal?* (Kaufman 1976). In that work he came to the conclusion that federal government organizations in the US did indeed typically enjoy exceptionally long lives—much longer than private sector organizations over a comparable period. Some years later two public administration professors decided to go back over Kaufman's calculations to see if they agreed with his methods and conclusions (Peters and Hogwood 1988; see also Casstevens 1980). They didn't agree, and the nature of their analysis helps to illustrate further both the strength and the weaknesses of the evolutionary approach when it is applied to public sector organizations.

Whilst certainly acknowledging the potential of the ecological approach, Peters and Hogwood pointed to a number of questionable aspects in Kaufman's original method. To begin with, the way births and deaths were counted significantly underestimated their totals. Kaufman had looked at the organizations that existed in 1923 and then tried to ascertain how many of them still existed in 1973. Therefore his method could not take any account of organizations which had been invented *after* 1923 but had disappeared *before* 1973. Equally, it ignored organizations created after 1923 which still existed in 1973. Given that this intermediate period included a stretch of frenetic organizational creation (Roosevelt's 'New Deal'), this was a serious omission (sometimes

called 'middle censorship'). Many of these New Deal organizations had, in fact, disappeared by 1973. A second flaw was that a strict focus on births and deaths misses the point that much organizational change in the public sector can be conceptualized as *succession*, rather than birth or death—that is, a given organization is minimally, partially or fundamentally re-organized into something substantially different. Peters and Hogwood found an enormous amount of this kind of change, implying that the degree of organizational instability in the US federal sector was far higher than Kaufman's original account suggested. In addition, Kaufman's results depended very much on the level at which 'organizations' were defined. Cabinet departments may well change only slowly, but if one looks at a lower level, subordinate offices, bureaus and committees may change much more rapidly. Finally, there was the fact that Kaufman's sample had included only ten of the 11 executive departments existing at the time of his study. This excluded both the huge Department of Defense and many, many other kinds of federal organization (in 1983 only 45 percent of Federal organizations were in executive departments). Peters and Hogwood conclude that,

there has been a great deal of change in government over the fifty year period we investigated [and that] while dramatic termination or initiation events are cer tainly important, the modal change in government is actually the transformation of an existing organization and probably an existing policy as well

(Peters and Hogwood 1988: 131)

4.5.4 The Added Value of Evolutionary Approaches

There is something refreshingly different about evolutionary approaches. The dramatic alarums and excursions of who said what to whom and why this decision or that was taken retreat into the background (or disappear altogether). One is left with impersonal processes inexorably working themselves out over extended periods of time and on a large scale. In this sense an evolutionary perspective can act as a highly valuable corrective to a closer focus on daily or weekly events. It stands as a kind of permanent alternative hypothesis—well, minister X or manager Y made this or that move, but did it really have any impact on the long run trend? It is not at all like traditional history, glorying in the particular and the circumstantial, but is rather more Olympian and fatalistic—'this is the way things go'.

On the other hand, it is probably not a coincidence that we have rather few evolutionary studies to call on. As outlined in Chapter 2, section 2.5, there are considerable conceptual problems in setting the evolutionary model up. We saw in 4.5.3 (above) how Peters and Hogwood arrived at very different conclusions from Kaufman, when both used evolutionary approaches to investigate the same population of organizations over the same period of time. Additionally there are practical problems, although Kaufman et al. show that these are not unsurmountable. They are, in brief, the need to assemble a suitable data set for the selected population of organizations over a relevant time period. The wider the population about which one wishes to generalize (University hospitals? All NHS hospitals? Public sector organizations in general?) the less likely one is to be able to construct a reliable database, and the greater the effort will be expended in trying.

4.6 The Cognitive Processes and Biases of Decision Makers

4.6.1 Introduction

As with the sociological perceptions of time and the organizational evolutionary approaches, we must begin with the acknowledgement that the Brighton/Leuven study was not designed to probe the individual psychological processes of decision makers. I will therefore follow the same procedure as in the previous two sections, by first picking up the faint traces of cognitive factors that can be found in the Brighton and Leuven stories, and then turning to other studies which better illustrate the added value of these perspectives.

4.6.2 Traces of Cognitive Factors in the Brighton and Leuven Cases

Our interviews produced traces of cognitive factors, but no more than isolated hints here and there. One example would be the financial crisis at KUL UZ in 1997/98. Some interviewees claimed that senior management, which had been successful in pursuing an expansionary policy as the hospital grew, took this too far and failed to recognize the shifts in the environment—particularly a tighter government attitude to finance— early enough. This was, therefore, a sort of hindsight bias. Another example would be a discussion of the problems of closing small hospitals which we had with an experienced politician who had played central roles

in the Brighton story during the 1980s. This interviewee strongly emphasized that, 'the timing of closures and the way they are presented is crucial' (interview, 2006). One had to wait for a politically opportune moment and then seize it, presenting the change not as a closure but as an improvement. These cognitive tactics were essential for success.

One of the key players in the KUL UZ story made a fundamental point about cognitive factors. He said that in Belgium the 1980s was the period during which it was first conceived that hospitals could be seen as a kind of enterprise, and therefore required professional management. 'We needed to learn the general rules of management—of hospital governance' (interview, 2006). Previously hospitals had been thought of as hospitals—places that had ethical commitments and which provided services and care—but not as organizations that needed to be managed according to definite principles. In its way this shift could be thought of as a very important punctuation indeed.

4.6.3 Another Example of a Study of Cognitive Factors

There are not many mainstream public management or policymaking books that make central use of psychological concepts in their explanations. One interesting recent exception is the book, *Unleashing Change: A Study of Organizational Renewal in Government*, by Harvard Professor Steve Kelman (Kelman 2005). Kelman analyses what he believes to have been a successful reform of US federal procurement practices between 1993 and 1997. He argues that, contrary to the common assumption that bureaucrats usually resist reform, there may well be a reservoir of support for change which, if carefully cultivated, can induce shifts in both attitudes and behaviours. He also argues (and this is highly pertinent for our concerns here) that the temporal sequence of actions, and the mere passage of time itself can have important effects.

Kelman divides his story into two analytically distinct phases, initiating change and consolidating change. Using data derived from a huge survey of front-line employees ($n = 1,593$) and an extensive series of structured interviews ($n = 272$) he bases his analysis on a detailed statistical analysis of employee attitudes to the reform. In the first (initiating) phase he finds that 18 percent of the sample were a 'change vanguard', 25 percent were 'early recruits', 17 percent were 'fence sitters' and 41 percent were 'skeptics or critics'. The change vanguard were not necessarily specific enthusiasts for the particular reform—at least, not at first. Rather they were deeply discontented with the status quo (heavy bureaucratic rules, little on the

job autonomy) and open to new ideas. Psychological traits were significant predictors of this sort of attitude—the vanguard tended to have higher than average risk tolerance, high self-confidence and low deference. The challenge for reform leaders was to activate this discontented group and convince them that the particular reforms on the table (which were more aimed at better value in procurement than at increasing front-line job autonomy) could be good for them too.

Once the reform was launched the project moved into the second, consolidation phase. Kelman believes that there are many positive feedback mechanisms which allow a change effort to 'feed on itself': 'Thus launching and persisting in a change effort itself increases the likelihood the effort will succeed. What is amazing about this is that it occurs automatically, with no further intervention on the part of change leaders other than to launch and persist with the effort' (Kelman 2005: 111). One such mechanism is the learning curve—the way in which just doing something a few times increases the operator's speed, accuracy and confidence (always assuming it isn't a disaster!). More interesting, perhaps, for us is what Kelman calls 'as time goes by' reinforcement. This develops because one or more of four psychological mechanisms come into play:

1. 'Mere exposure'. If sufficiently prolonged, turns the new procedures into something familiar, part of the comfortable *status quo*.

2. Commitment develops as a kind of habit. Once something has been done a few times it acquires a certain resonance for the doer—it is 'how I do this'. This is closely linked to the previous mechanism of mere exposure.

3. Cognitive dissonance. This is a very common concept in psychology—in this case it suggests that 'the more a person tries reform, the more he or she will like it, because the drive to reduce dissonance encourages people to change attitudes to make them more consonant with their behavior' (Kelman 2005: 125).

4. 'Foot in the door'. Here it becomes easier to persuade a person to take further steps down a particular path once they have been persuaded to take the first step—to 'dip their toe in the water'. Like cognitive dissonance, this mechanism would be expected to have the most influence on those who were 'don't knows'/fence sitters, and didn't have well formed and strongly held attitudes at the beginning of the reform.

In the event Kelman found that the 'as time goes by' factors had only a very modest influence. More important were the effects of an individual's first exposure to reform, and the attitudes of the other members of his/her workgroup. If the first exposure was regarded in a positive light, then an element of self-fulfilling prophecy began to operate as a kind of positive feedback (*expecting* it to be good the second time and third time, etc.). Alongside this, 'social influence from a respondent's workgroup had a dramatic impact on the reform attitudes of individuals' (Kelman 2005: 157). In a fascinating afterthought, however, Kelman notes that: 'many feedback effects that may have played a crucial role in getting change consolidated are likely to come over time to stop working so strongly, or, at the extreme, even to start generating negative feedback, creating a self-limiting effect for further increase in change support' (ibid.: 159).

Of course, Kelman's analysis was not perfect. It has been criticized for technical weaknesses in the statistics, for making large generalizations on the basis of one particular US case and for the possible influence of Kelman's personal involvement as an appointed administrator responsible for the reform (Hill 2006). From the perspective of this book it is worrying that all the data about how attitudes developed over time comes from surveys carried out in 1998/99 which asked respondents to look back over the years and describe their attitudes at earlier stages. Kelman is fully aware of the possibility of bias and sets out elaborate arguments to the effect that his findings are robust to these influences, but some doubts remain. Nevertheless, *Unleashing Change* is an unusual book which shows some of the potential of psychological theory for explaining how organizational reforms unfold over time. Clearly the concepts of path dependency, positive and negative feedback, can be applied at the level of individuals and small groups as well as at the levels of organizations and institutions.

4.6.4 The Added Value of Psychological Perspectives

In the study of particular decisions or episodes the potential value of a psychological analysis is surely huge. Psychological theories and techniques allow us to get inside the minds of decision makers far more systematically and penetratingly than we can hope to do through the occasional fragments of exposed thought usually cited by historians or policy analysts. However, there are several reasons why this large potential is only occasionally realized. First, there is the practical but vital question of access. When politicians or managers are taking crucial decisions they are not usually in the mood to submit themselves to batteries of

psychometric tests or to fill in lengthy questionnaires. Indeed, they may find it prudent actively to conceal their deeper thoughts and motives. Second, there are limits to how far psychological approaches can be used to investigate the past. Most obviously, we cannot go back to question Napoleon or Hitler, but, less obviously, it is widely accepted among scholars that (for reasons psychologists can immediately explain) asking people to recall states of mind more than a few years back is a highly uncertain business. Hindsight bias and other forms of selective memory are exceedingly common. One may be able to take the edge off this constraint by consulting contemporary documents but, then again, the extent to which leaders entrust their innermost thoughts to the printed page is limited. Even such intimate records as diaries or letters may be written with an eye to posterity. Third, there is also a scale problem. A psychological focus may work well for moments of crisis, where a small elite have to make momentous decisions (such as the Cuba Missile Crisis—Allison and Zelikow 1999). If, however, we are looking at a spatially and temporally less concentrated issue—the evolution of the welfare state, say, or central–local relations in Germany since 1970—then both the time span and the size of the cast make it much harder to capture the relevant population and subject them to any form of psychological investigation.

4.7 Broadening the Scope

In the last two chapters I have pushed and pulled at the Brighton/Leuven cases, using all six of the approaches originally identified in Chapter 2. Through the last few sections, where the particular approaches were not built into the original research, I have begun to look at other cases and topics, and only to note 'traces' in the Brighton/Leuven material. In the next chapter this process will be taken much further. We will expand the empirical scope enormously, examining a wide range of studies in which, in one way or another, explicitly or implicitly, time is at issue.

5

Review and Re-Interpretation

If you can look into the seeds of time.
And say which grain will grow and which will not,
Speak then to me.

(Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 1, iii, 58 60)

5.1 Introduction

The main aim of this chapter is to show that perspectives which give explicit attention to temporal dynamics can yield new insights across a wide range of policy and management contexts and issues. In Chapter 1 it was argued that there were strong *prima facie* reasons for believing that there was a general need for sharper attention to be given to temporal issues—that this was not a lack confined to a few specialist topics, but a more general bias. In the opening chapter it was also conceded that one book—certainly *this* book—could not provide an adequate survey of the broad ocean of public management and public policy. What can be attempted, however, is an illustrative and indicative selection: a review of some of the work that has been done, in various diverse countries, policy sectors and types of organization. All the selected work is strongly empirical and much of it combines that with explicit theorizing. However, whereas some of it is explicitly concerned with temporal factors other work reviewed here is not. This is a deliberate attempt to show that important research projects which were not originally focused on the time dimension can be fruitfully re-interpreted from that perspective. Thus, the analysis in this chapter will extend/re-interpret/interconnect the materials under scrutiny.

Hopefully this broader perspective can at least reinforce the working hypotheses that 'time matters' and 'the past persists' in public policy and management generally, not just in a few particular zones. Obviously, however, these summaries cannot do full justice to the various research projects described, and interested readers are urged to consult the originals. Beyond surveying and summarizing, however, this body of material provides a platform on which—at the end of the chapter—to extend somewhat the theoretical trajectory of the book.

5.2 Building Agency Autonomy in the United States, 1862–1928

We begin with an outstanding work of administrative history. Daniel P. Carpenter (2001) has produced a narrative analysis of the development of bureaucratic autonomy in a range of US federal agencies in the latter part of the nineteenth and the early part of the twentieth centuries. His book is a worthy representative of what, in Chapter 2, I referred to as the 'new historical mainstream'—a search for patterns and trends over time, which employs a narrative form but uses models, concepts and elements of theory, whilst simultaneously attempting to hold onto particular contextual detail and variety. 'Narratives have value precisely because they can show us what theory tends to cloud: historical change is contingent and rarely foreordained' (Carpenter 2001: 35).

Carpenter sets himself the task of explaining why, in the first decades of the twentieth century, some federal agencies (such as the US Department of Agriculture and the Post Office) were able to forge themselves considerable independence from the political leadership in Congress, while others (such as the Interior Department) were not. Carpenter's answer is that, to achieve autonomy, agencies must build public reputations for themselves, and ground these reputations in carefully constructed coalitions of political support, preferably drawn from rather diverse networks. To build reputations agencies need a particular message—perhaps that they have unique expertise, or that they support widely held values, or that they provide a particularly excellent service. Whatever it is, it needs to be something that singles that agency out as unique. To do this—and to build and sustain the necessary networks of support—the agency also needs considerable organizational capacity. A few speeches and reports will not suffice by themselves: autonomy is the product of continuous work on many relationships over protracted periods of time. Carpenter describes the process like this:

Bureaucratic capacity is first and foremost a function of organizational evolution. Neither formal authority nor spending suffices to create an organizational ability to discover and solve problems. Simply put, bureaucratic problem solving and policy analysis requires that the agency attract problem solvers and analysts to its ranks and retain them for long periods. Neither law nor appropriations alone can attract such officials to an agency or keep them there

(Carpenter 2001: 28)

The crucial effects of accumulation of expertise over time are elaborated thus:

Among policy analysts, experts and technicians, high turnover can be quite dam aging to agency capacity. Officials with longer tenure, rising to authority within their bureaus (with experience at many different levels), possess enhanced leader ship skills and the ability to solve organizational dilemmas. Longer tenured offi cials possess a better sense of the history of their programs and are better able to make comparisons over time. In other words, bureaus with lower turnover rates are usually better equipped to learn

(ibid.: 29)

Incidentally, it is hard to imagine a description that could be more at odds with the combination of hectic restructuring and policymaking through teams of transient political advisers that has characterized some governments in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century (Moran 2003; Pollitt 2007).

Thus Carpenter arrives at his peroration:

From the Civil War to the Great Depression, in pockets of the American state, genuine bureaucratic autonomy was forged on the anvil of agency reputations. The primary actors in this saga were bureau chiefs and program leaders driven by maximal control over their programs and organizations. These leaders took direc tion of the hiring process in the Gilded Age, using weak tie networks and internal socialization to transform their agencies into politically distinct entities. They built capacity by assembling talented offices where turnover was minimized and they used inspection and intermediary institutions to reintegrate their organizations. They completed the process by participating in the construction of lasting legitim acy in the form of organizational reputations, forms of institutional trust that were embedded in elite and local networks

(ibid.: 366)

The Forging of Bureaucratic Autonomy highlights a number of issues which are salient for the present analysis. At the most simple level, it shows how certain processes just take time—years and years rather than months or

weeks. Building coalitions and assembling loyal groups of expert staff committed to the organization in the long term are fundamental to agency autonomy, but come from the long haul not the quick fix. (Some aspects of coalition building may have speeded up by the twenty-first century, but assembling teams of staff who really 'know the business' *and* are viscerally committed to the organization is still a matter of years.) Carpenter explains how the Chief of the Chemistry Bureau waged a 20-year campaign before he finally managed to persuade Congress to pass a landmark law protecting the purity of foods and drugs. It also shows how carefully crafted laws can act as punctuations which shift the path. They empower agencies to take action, develop new services, enhance legitimacy and identify themselves with popular public causes. And they can be hard to reverse—which politicians would subsequently want to be seen to be advocating a reduction of protections for the great American (or British or Swedish) public?

5.3 Forty Years of Performance Management in Sweden

Sundström (2006) undertook a very detailed study of the development of 'management by results' in Swedish central government from 1960 on into the twenty-first century. Sweden has been recognized as a leading country with respect to this set of rationalistic management techniques which, under various names and extensions ('management by objectives', 'performance management', 'state economic and administrative system/ SEA', etc.) has been a central component in public management reforms in many countries (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004).

Sundström's work reveals many items of interest. To go first to his conclusions, he shows that this family of rationalistic steering techniques has been promoted and sustained over four decades or more by a relatively small set of senior officials positioned mainly in the same central agencies which were created to carry the original 'programme budgeting' initiative of the early 1960s. This victorious campaign occurred despite the fact that successive pilot projects and successive evaluations (many undertaken by the self-same agencies!) indicated that there were recurrent and serious problems and limitations with the techniques in question:

The study shows that this public management policy reform (PMP) reform hasn't primarily been a story about rational adaptations to world wide changes in the economy or technology, or imitation due to government's disposition to follow

rules and act appropriately. The course of events is better understood by forces of inertia inherent within Swedish public administration and the way the PMP sector has been organized and regulated

(Sundström 2006: 421)

The project was based on an intensive reading of official documents going back to the late 1950s, and on 40 interviews with participants. Sundström uses a historical institutionalist perspective, with the path dependency concept as a core tool. He regards historical institutionalism as distinct from, and complementary to, rational choice institutionalism and sociological institutionalism, both of which have more closely pre-specified 'models of men' (respectively, as following logics of consequence and appropriateness). Historical institutionalism is more eclectic—'to remain open to explanations of both actor and structure character and for different kinds of 'models of man' (p. 402).

Sundström finds one major punctuation, a crisis of confidence in the 'growing discontent with the public sector's rigid and inefficient way of working' (p. 414). This developed in the late 1950s and intensified after officials from the agencies with responsibility for administrative policy defended themselves without offering any new way forward. 'At this moment PB [Program Budgeting] appeared like a saviour' (p. 415). Thereafter he finds 'within path change' but no fundamental shifts.

Going beyond Sundström's own interpretation, we may note a number of other features of this research. To begin with, the succession of a series of differently acronymed but highly similar rationalistic steering techniques is a familiar one in a number of other countries. Each new set of initials is trumpeted as the new way forward, but in terms of basic assumptions about how individuals and institutions will react, the systems are almost identical. The line of internal evaluations which report 'substantial progress, but a few difficulties and there is still some way to go' is also well known in a variety of other contexts, as is the reluctance of these evaluators either to question basic assumptions or to refer to previous assessments and therefore to see that the 'difficulties' mentioned are endemic rather than ephemeral (ignorance/fear of the past). Finally, the general lack of interest/understanding, or certainly of effective intervention in these technical matters by politicians, is also a common story—even the supposedly highly valuable product of these systems, performance information about government agencies—attracts little attention from legislatures or the public (Pollitt 2006c). This leaves the field open to senior

officials, consultants and expert advisers, and one of the subplots in Sundström's story is that of the growth over time of a community/network of influential 'people specializing in accounting and budget techniques' (p. 418). Above all, however, there are two basic points that Sundström's research makes clear. First, it is only in the longer time perspective that one sees through the surface impression of 'the latest innovatory reform' to the powerful continuities and repetitions lying underneath. Second, what might appear to be a functionally driven global movement to performance type/results oriented steering is—in Sweden at least—not actually based on proven results or even widespread demand from 'users' but is rather sustained by a network of officials who have constructed their careers around the prestige and legitimacy of these evolving techniques.

5.4 Health Care Policies in Canada, the UK and the US, from the 1970s to the 1990s

Carolyn Tuohy authored a much-praised comparative study of the dynamics of change in healthcare policies in these three countries (Tuohy 1999). She details the impacts of fiscal, demographic and technological pressures of the different systems during the 1990s. These considerable and largely shared external pressures may have provided a certain common logic to policy responses, but:

the working out of a common logic of a given policy arena will be mediated by the particular logics of national systems. And those national systems, with their distinctive logics, are products of the eras of their birth, when broad political forces created windows of opportunity for policy change. These particular logics, then, are in an important sense 'accidents' of history

(Tuohy 1999: viii)

Each logic is the product of, first, the institutional mix and, second, the structural balance. The institutional mix consists of varying proportions of hierarchical, collegial and market mechanisms, and each mixture carries somewhat different implications for information flows. The structural balance lies between state actors, professionals (especially but not exclusively the medical profession) and private financial interests. It carries implications for lines of accountability. The distinctive national logics were thus quite contrasting. In the UK, the broad lines of the institutional mix and structural balance had been laid down during the postwar political

settlement, with the creation of the National Health Service in 1948. It was a predominantly hierarchical and collegial arrangement in which the accommodation between the state and the professions dwarfed private financial interests. In the US, by contrast, where the main lines had been determined during President Johnston's 'Great Society' programmes of the 1960s, private financial interests were strong, and the institutional mix was market and collegial, with a much smaller (though expensive) state presence.

The outcomes of the policy ferment of the 1990s was varied. Under President Clinton, the US federal government attempted a major health-care system reform but the project collapsed. Instead, however, private market interests pushed through rapid structural change and, in doing so, extensively 'tamed' the collegial power of the medical profession. In Canada, despite strong cost pressures, sufficient political authority and interest could not be assembled to produce more than incremental change. 'Indeed, only in Britain was sweeping change in the public policies governing the decision-making system enacted and implemented' (Tuohy 1999: 4) although even there, hierarchical and collegial forces soon reasserted themselves to soften and constrain the impact of market forces. But how were the reformers able to achieve a breakthrough in the UK which eluded their counterparts in Canada and the US? Tuohy (p. 70) puts it like this:

a rare window of opportunity for structural and institutional policy change in the British health care arena opened when a government in its third majority term, with the consolidated authority to make such changes, also formed the will to take the political risks of doing so. That window opened at a time when the dominant set of policy ideas about structural and institutional change in the British healthcare arena revolved around concepts of an 'internal market'. Without a specific reform agenda, it was that set of ideas upon which the NHS review seized

In arriving at these conclusions Tuohy used a combination of historical institutionalism and rational choice. She explored 'the distinctive logics of particular decision-making systems, within which actors respond, rationally, to the incentives facing them, given the resources they can bring to bear'. However, she also acknowledges the limits to rational choice, setting out very clearly how 'Periodic episodes of policy change establish the parameters of the systems within which actors make their choices. And these episodes are best understood as products of particular historical contexts' (ibid.: 6).

5.5 Windows of Opportunity in Public Policymaking

John Kingdon's book, *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policy*, is very widely cited and has been described as a modern classic. Originally published in 1984, the treatment here is based on the second edition, which appeared in 1995. Kingdon sets out to investigate how policy issues come to be issues in the first place. He asks questions such as how particular subjects manage to attract attention, how are political agendas set and why do certain ideas seem to be 'right for the time'.

Kingdon aspired to produce a general book on the theory of policy-making, but in practice most of his empirical work was focused on the US Federal health and transportation sectors, with additional cases in the second edition drawn from the Reagan and Clinton Presidencies—the radical 1981 budget, the 1986 Tax Reform Act and the (failed) 1993 healthcare reform. The further one travels from the US—and especially from the distinctive characteristics and procedures of the American legislature—the more Kingdon's analysis may require adaptation. Nevertheless, this was, by any standard, a work of broad scope.

At the core of Kingdon's model is the idea that there are three, largely mutually independent flows coursing through the government and through public life more generally. These are, first, the flow of problems, second, the flow of policies and, third, the flow of political activity. Occasionally, however, policy entrepreneurs are able to connect up all three flows, and when they do that a major shift in policy may occur. Policy entrepreneurs were seen as having been very important in 15 of Kingdon's 23 original case studies. They performed both advocacy and brokerage.

The circumstances under which joinings-up of the different streams take place are relatively rare and short lived, and Kingdon calls them 'windows of opportunity'. 'Policy windows open infrequently, and do not stay open long' (Kingdon 1995: 166). Policy windows are opened 'either by the appearance of compelling problems or by happenings in the political stream. Hence there are ''problem windows'' and ''political windows'', (ibid.: 194). Sometimes the opening is predictable, sometimes not (ibid.: 186–90). Predictable openings are often coupled to cyclical processes such as annual budgets, changes of administration, or deadlines built into 'sunset' legislation (May 2004). 'The cyclical nature of many windows is . . . evident' (Kingdon 1995: 186). Policy entrepreneurs have to be ready with their ideas and plans, both for the predictable windows and the unexpected ones. 'When you lobby for something, what you have to do is put together your coalition, you have to gear up, you have to get your

political forces in line, and then you sit and wait for the fortuitous event' (Interest group analyst, quoted in Kingdon 1995: 165).

Kingdon has a good deal to say about what we have referred to as 'time tactics'. For example: 'Savvy politicians often speak of the importance of timing. As one bureaucrat said, "The important thing is that a proposal come at the right time". What they mean is that the proposal must be worked out beforehand, and must surface and be pushed when the window is open' (ibid.: 172).

Another aspect of this 'timeliness' is to couple your project or plan to whatever happens to be the dominant concern of the day. Kingdon gives the example of urban mass transit, whose advocates, at different periods, strongly linked their pet programmes to (a) efficiency and congestion relief; (b) pollution and environmental improvement; and (c) energy conservation. Yet another issue is the agenda capacity of an administration, which Kingdon suspects is often cyclical. Agenda space expands during the early 'honeymoon period' which many elected administrations enjoy, and then contracts. 'During a time when reform is in the air, such as 1932–36 or 1965–66, the system deals with many more agenda items than it does during a more placid time' (ibid.: 185).

While some parts of Kingdon's model have a cyclical character, others are more arrow-like and evolutionary. He sees the way in which some policy alternatives get selected and others dropped as 'analagous to biological natural selection':

In what we have called the policy primeval soup, many ideas float around, bumping into one another, encountering new ideas and forming combinations and recombinations. The origins of policy may seem a bit obscure, hard to predict and hard to understand or structure.

While the origins are somewhat haphazard, the selection is not ... These criteria include technical feasibility, congruence with the values of [policy] community members, and the anticipation of future constraints, including a budget constraint, public acceptability, and politicians' receptivity

(Ibid.: 200)

It does not take very much reflection to realize that time plays a very important role in Kingdon's scheme of things. To a considerable degree he explicitly recognizes this, but it may be possible here to take the time dimension in his work just a little further than he does himself. To begin with, his framework clearly balances between notions of structure and agency, without falling heavily for one side or the other. His windows of opportunity may sometimes be determined by institutional structures and

cycles, but they still depend on agents (policy entrepreneurs) to bring them alive. Sometimes these agents may even be clever enough to precipitate (begin to open) a window by their own actions and anticipations. It is explicit that there is a craft here—some are well equipped with time skills and others are not. At the same time he accepts that some events are unpredictable—effectively random, and not part of forecastable cycles. Yet policy entrepreneurs can be more or less prepared for these too—the well organized ones will have their policy ideas in the top drawer, just in case. Kingdon also distinguishes between medium term institutional cycles (budgetary rounds, the arrival and departure of administrations) and long term cultural shifts (changes in 'national mood'). Thus he allows us to 'examine the role of ideas as well as structure' (Greener 2005: 69). Yet, like Baumgartner and Jones (though not to quite the same extent) this is a study of agenda setting only—it does not include much about policy implementation which, as we see from other studies in this chapter, has a temporal architecture of its own.

5.6 Policies that Work and Policies that Don't, in Six Countries

Bovens, t'Hart and Peters edited a major comparative study of 'success and failure in public governance' (Bovens et al. 2001). The states that were compared were France, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and the UK. The policies included management of the declining steel industry, reforming the healthcare system, policy towards the financial/banking sector and the crisis generated when it was realized that blood supplies for transfusions were contaminated with HIV.

In one way, this book was a counterintuitive choice for discussion in this chapter. In the introduction and conclusion there is virtually no discussion of temporal factors, and neither does 'time' feature in the index. A few contributors do mention path dependency, but, apart from that, explicit treatment of the time dimension is scarce. What is attempted here, therefore, is a re-analysis to show that time did matter, even if the editors and some of the contributors did not select it for particular comment.

The most explicit reference to path dependency comes in the chapter on the Swedish steel industry. It seems that steel was not the first industry in structural decline which the Swedish government had had to deal with. A policy learning process had been running for two decades, and steel was handled with more success than, say, the earlier crisis in shipbuilding. At an

early stage a Royal Commission had been appointed, which recommended extensive rationalization and concentration of the industry (including the closure of private plants) and a new governance structure which combined public and private ownership. 'The Commission outlining the restructuring of the steel industry was a path-dependent solution to the structural crisis. A similar approach had been employed in other industrial sectors and, historically, Sweden has relied on committees of this sort to manage difficult policy questions' (Pierre 2001: 139). The author also notes a highly specific feature of the technology: '[steel] plants can be run for an extended period of time with little or no capital investment in upgrading to maximize the returns until closure is inevitable', and suggests that such purely financial calculations may have been more to the fore in the privately owned US steel industry than in its partly state owned European counterparts (Pierre 2001: 139).

Strangely, however, the other five national chapters on the management of steel say very little indeed about time factors. This is despite the fact that installing new steel making technology (often an important factor in regaining a measure of competitiveness) is an activity measured in years rather than months and that planning training and development measures to combat the highly concentrated unemployment which results from the closure of large steel works is also at least a medium term exercise. Steel plant closures are a classic example of a problem which is difficult for politicians because the pain comes first (fights with the unions; highly publicized closures; devastation of local communities) and the benefits come much later (a smaller, more efficient and profitable industrial sector). (Incidentally, as Pierre points out, one of the features of the relatively successful Swedish exercise was that the Swedish political culture allowed much of the analysis and planning to be done through relatively non-partisan expert commissions—this could be seen as a past-bestowed additional 'resource' as compared with, say, the highly adversarial politics of steel in the UK.)

The chapters dealing with healthcare reform offer somewhat more frequent, although still spasmodic and unsystematic references to the influences of temporal factors. In particular, both the chapters on reforming the medical professions and those on the crisis in blood transfusions brought about by the spread of AIDS show that factors of timing and duration can be of crucial significance to both outcomes and our judgements about outcomes. Moran's overview of policies to control the medical profession immediately notes some strong 'path' elements lying at the very roots of healthcare policies:

In the case of health care, resource commitments had, and continue to have, a sort of unstoppable momentum: demographic factors, such as the ageing of popula tions, advances in medical technology and the rising expectations of populations about what health care should deliver, all inexorably combine to push up the resource demands

(Moran 2001: 173)

5.7 e-Government

As with Bovens et al., I have here chosen a study that does not make explicit use of any of the 'timeship' approaches discussed in Chapter 3 and which does not feature 'time' or 'path dependency' in its index, or in any of its headings or subheadings. Yet the book is positively awash with observations concerning the importance of temporal factors. Dunleavy et al. (2006) have produced a fascinating and authoritative study of relations between IT corporations and the state, and their influence on e-government policies and practices. They cover a wide range of states—Australia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Japan and the UK.

Time makes its entry early on, in the chapter where Dunleavy et al. are establishing their theoretical framework. Having described the founda-tional roles played by large scale IT in the modern state, the authors go on to argue that changing such systems is a major enterprise which can usually only be undertaken at long intervals, and which, once done, 'locks in' certain ways of doing things and 'locks out' others. As they say: 'if some goal A is non-attainable within an existing system, then there may not be any feasible way that policymakers can achieve A, short of re-doing the IT system in a new investment, which may take years' (Dunleavy et al. 2006: 26). They then go on to point out how the technical characteristics and costs of such big systems tend to produce a 'punctuation and path' approach to policy change (my words, not theirs):

agencies (especially large agencies) often adopt a practice of cumulating minor changes into *widely spaced and expensive big IT renewals or refreshes*. This dynamic can easily create a five to ten year 'big bang cycle' approach, in which short term policy changes are frozen out and almost all change hangs on renewals of major IT infrastructures. This strong IT periodization of planned policy changes and cap abilities reflects both the considerable costs and risks of undertaking fundamental IT systems redesign and the normal political and administrative tendencies to wards hyping up the 'transformational' impact of large scale IT changes

(Ibid.: 27, original italics)

Their own preferences seem to lie in the direction of avoidance of such dramatic punctuations. At various places in the book they express admiration for governments that have opted for more incremental and modularized approaches—splitting big contracts up into smaller packages; maintaining a plurality of suppliers; and making greater use of modularization instead of always going for large, unique systems. They support this position with a good deal of evidence drawn from the five case study states (the UK comes out as worst in the great majority of the many tables in which they usefully summarize the data).

Later in the book, the authors discuss the relationship between what they call 'digital era governance' (DGE) and the new public management (NPM). They offer a range of models for this relationship, including U-turns, fluctuations around a rising trend of modernization/progress, dialectical change around a rising trend, or 'tacking' (their word for what I have called alternations—they prefer the sailing metaphor because it gives a sense of actor-based steering—ibid.: 242–8). They offer diagrams of the different processes yet never actually label the horizontal axis (which happens to be *time*). Neither do they discuss the periodicity of the fluctuations, dialectical alternations or tackings. My belief is that much more could be done with this data—for example, that the tackings and swervings could be plotted onto an actual calendar and related to the need to replace legacy systems, and the arrival of radically cheaper or better forms of the technology and the occurrence of publicly obvious, politically embarassing technological failures (of which there have been many). What we then might find is not so much the chronological alternation with NPM (which Dunleavy et al. seem at times to treat almost as a binary system) but something which is arguably closer to their own belief in the autonomous importance of technological change—namely a trajectory of punctuated development that is explained largely on its own endogenous terms, without the need to posit some on-going dialectic with the NPM. At any event, it is noticeable that *all* Dunleavy et al.'s models depict the development of DEG as having a discernable and regular pattern over time (p. 243, fig. 9.4).

5.8 Personnel Stability and Organizational Performance

O'Toole and Meier are leading American public administration professors who specialize in the testing of precise hypotheses by the use of hard edged quantitative analysis. Inter alia they have published a number of papers

examining data from Texas school districts, which have the advantage of yielding large numbers of observations over time on topics including educational test scores, resource inputs and (to a limited extent) management styles. In the particular paper reviewed here, O'Toole and Meier examined the question of whether personnel stability contributed to the educational performance of students (O'Toole and Meier 2003).

Two measures of stability were chosen. First, for how many years had the superintendent of the district been employed by that district (not necessarily as superintendent, but in any capacity)? Second, what percentage of teachers employed by each district in the previous year continued to work for them in the current year (i.e., the inverse of the turnover rate)? Thus, one might say, they had measures for continuity at both the top and the bottom of the educational hierarchy. These measures of stability were then correlated with a performance measure of the percentage of students in each district who passed all the elements of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (reading, writing and mathematics). Data was collected over 5 years (1995–1999) and there were 507 usable responses (a response rate of 55 percent) yielding a total of 2,535 cases.

Both measures of stability were significantly correlated with educational performance, with the teacher turnover measure having slightly more influence (a maximum of 7.6 percent on a district's pass rate). There were also interesting findings concerning the interaction of these stability measures with other factors. Thus, for example, the effects of teacher stability appeared to be greatest when measures of management quality came out either very high or very low. By contrast the effects of teacher stability seemed to be less pronounced when educational managers practiced extensive interdistrict networking. O'Toole and Meier emphasize that stability is not all: other factors, particularly management quality, also influence educational outcomes. They also acknowledge that stability also has costs, and it would be possible to have too much of it. But they insist that both of the measured types of stability *do* have a positive influence, and they contrast this finding with the fact that 'stability just doesn't get much respect these days from management gurus' (ibid.: 61).

5.9 Concluding Discussion

As befits a chapter that seeks to broaden the scope, I have here chosen and analysed a wide range of material covering a very wide range of theoretical

approaches, policies, sectors and countries. Thus I have selected some work that was explicitly and intensively concerned with temporal factors (Carpenter 2001; O'Toole and Meier 2003; Sundström 2006) and others where the theoretical approach virtually ignored such influences (Bovens et al. 2001; Dunleavy et al. 2006). I have chosen a number of broad scope treatments of wide policy areas (healthcare, financial regulation, e-government, transportation) and some which focus on a narrower issue (performance management in central government, teachers in Texan schools, HIV and the blood supply). I have included studies that embrace a long list of differently structured and organized governing regimes—Canada, France, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, Sweden, the UK and the US. In every case the influence of temporal factors, and the constraints and opportunities delivered by the past, are clearly visible to those who look for them.

Now we can briefly re-examine these works, reverting to the simple classification introduced in Chapter 1, namely:

- Processes which simply take a long time.
- Contexts in which temporal sequence is crucial to outcome.
- Contexts in which cycling or alternation are typical.

We will also look at a further issue which was introduced in Chapter 2:

- Time tactics.

Examples of all four categories appear to be extensively present in the set of cases that have here been examined.

5.9.1 Processes which Simply Take a Long Time

These processes are abundant. Carpenter's account of the construction of coalitions that supported the relative autonomy of the US Department of Agriculture, the Post Office and several other (but by no means all) Federal agencies shows what painstaking, strategic yet also opportunistic work was required from agency leaders to build up the networks they eventually acquired. This work entailed both internal development (the acquisition of expertise and the creation of a cadre of long serving, experienced managers) and external (gaining first the attention and then the trust of other powerful actors or factions). Sundström's work on performance management in Sweden shows lengthy processes in a different light. Here it is not so much that it takes a very long time to develop perform-ance management (although some experts say it does—see Perrin 2006:

22) as that it apparently takes a very long time indeed for faith in rationalistic methods to diminish to the point at which techniques like performance management are actually abandoned. Evidence of failure or only limited success do not deter, but rather spur the proponents to advance yet another 'improved model'. Sundström's colleague, Brunsson, has written a whole book about why this is often so (Brunsson 2006). His main answer is that there is a 'solid cultural foundation' for belief in the future, change and progress—and in explicitly rational methods as the way forward. Reformers and their advisers, consultants and business schools: all can pursue their interests by emphasizing and invoking these cultural traits. Countervailing forces are poorly organized and have to work against the cultural grain. This line of argument is in interesting contrast to the common assumption in the change management literature (as referred to in Chapter 1) to the effect that 'culture' is usually conservative and resistant to change.

Tuohy's study of healthcare policies does not really focus on why some things just take a long time (indeed, her story is one where some big changes, such as Mrs Thatcher's imposition of an internal market on the British NHS, can be quite sudden). Rather she emphasizes how hard it can be to change from an existing path—as when President Clinton's reform proposals became just the latest overhaul of the US healthcare system to founder in heavy seas. The Bovens et al. collection also contains examples of rather long run processes. A whole set of chapters concern themselves with attempts by governments to strengthen control of the medical profession, but with the UK as a possible exception, all show a very long run, incremental trajectory, with no sudden or radical conquests of medical autonomy. Indeed, in some cases it is a change of generation—to newly trained, differently oriented doctors—that provides one of the keys for unlocking the policy space (Rico et al. 2001: 257). In their concluding reflections the editors of this policy compendium generalize the point about doctors to a much broader claim about the 'stickiness' of ideas: 'Ideas do appear to be useful in explaining stable policy regimes in which the ideas have been institutionalized over a period of time, but they appear somewhat less useful in explaining policy change' (Bovens et al. 2001: 650). Whilst it seems true that it usually takes time to change the ideas in enough decision makers' heads, this statement nevertheless partly misses an important point about successful policy change. That is that the battle tends to go to those who are prepared: those who have a previously worked-out set of ideas when the window/conjuncture/opportunity opens up (Kingdon 1995). Therefore it is worth keeping alternative

policy ideas at least in circulation, even if it seems that they cannot right now win the day. It ensures that, when a window opens, these ideas are *not* entirely novel within the relevant policy community. Hopefully, they will then offer an at least partly familiar alternative to the previous status quo.

O'Toole and Meier also have an interesting observation to make on the relationship between stability and change. They write that: 'the value of personnel stability might actually lie in part in the abilities of experienced, knowledgeable and widely respected people—both teachers and superintendents in the case of school districts—to initiate and implement some of the right kind of changes at the right time' (O'Toole and Meier 2003: 58).

5.9.2 Contexts in which Temporal Sequence is Crucial to Outcome

These contexts have not been so obvious in the cited studies, but they are there nonetheless. In the Bovens et al. volume, Wilsford's study of healthcare reform in France emphasizes that opportunities missed during the postwar policy window of 1945–50 came back to haunt the would be reformers of the 1970s and 1980s. 'Key decisions were made during this conjunctural moment that would affect the functioning and dysfunctioning of the system for many years to come' (Wilsford 2001: 185). Yet 'The actual coming together of the propitious conjuncture in itself is perhaps the most highly unpredictable element of all—both as to when it will occur (timing) and as to whether it will occur at all' (ibid.: 192). Whilst accepting the fact that conjunctures or 'windows' can not be precisely forecast, and that there are residual random elements, I see this statement as unduly defeatist. There are certain very general characteristics that can aid policymakers and others in the recognition of policy windows/conjunctures. Kingdon is also of this view, rejecting notions of complete randomness and specifying a number of criteria that frequently signal the opening of a window—'a change of administration, a renewal or imminent collapse of a major sector of the economy' (Kingdon 1995: 171). (For more on this see Chapter 7, section 7.2.2.) An example he gives is how the passage of the 1981 Federal revenue and expenditure bills impacted on Federal government agendas for the next decade or more. The Federal deficit and national debt soared. 'Whether this result was an intention of the original Reagan budgeters to put heavy pressure on domestic spending or a product of the venerable law of unanticipated consequences was not clear. But the result of a substantially more stringent budget constraint was unmistakable' (ibid.: 212).

Another sequencing issue which appears in some of the studies considered here is the slightly paradoxical one of a policy failure serving as a foundation for future policy success. This seems to operate mainly in the medium term—between three and ten years. After governments have failed to get a desired policy through they may well be in a better situation to succeed next time round. A number of processes contribute to this. First, and most obviously, the policymakers can learn from the previous failure, and adjust their messages and tactics. Second, there is a sense in which the policymaking system as a whole does not like to keep running up a particular policy hill just in order to march back down again. Executives and legislatures alike do not wish to be seen repeatedly failing to achieve something which they have publicly set out to achieve. And, third, the interest groups which were successful in defeating the proposal first time round may have used up their best ammunition, and may have been weakened or divided by round one of the struggle. Thus, in the Bovens et al. study the authors of both the German and the Dutch studies of policies to control the medical profession argue that previous failures contributed positively to the momentum of later reform attempts (Burau 2001: 203; Trappenburg and De Groot 2001: 233–5).

5.9.3 Contexts in which Cycling or Alternation are Typical

These contexts also make an appearance in several, but not all our cases. In Sundström's work, for example, there is definite evidence of cycling. Although his main story is of the steadfastness of the Swedish commitment to the forms of rationalistic performance management, there is a cycling subplot in the shape of the evaluations. There were many of these and, according to the author, they were remarkably similar in form and content. Later evaluators did not learn from earlier ones, but repeated the same pattern. 'Observations and formulations in evaluations from the 1970s are very similar to those in evaluations from the 1990s' (Sundström 2006: 413). Evaluations were confined to 'single-loop learning' and were therefore doomed to go on repeating themselves.

Kingdon is convinced that cycling is widespread, and that it helps make certain windows of opportunity predictable. He mentions electoral cycles (especially the significance of the 'honeymoon' periods often enjoyed by newly elected administrations) and also budgetary cycles, legislative cycles and swings of mass 'mood'. Successful policy entrepreneurs, in his account, organize themselves in advance, not only to take full advantage

of the predictable windows, but also to be ready to jump through any unpredictable windows which may suddenly fly open.

Dunleavy et al.'s e-governance study finds considerable evidence of cycling, although the authors do not use that term and are cautious to deny any 'automaticity about the processes involved' or any 'smooth or inevitable phasing from one stage of the cycle to another' (Dunleavy et al. 2006: 244). They prefer to stress the voluntary nature of the alternations, describing them as 'tacking'. They see governments alternating between NPM-type policies and digital era governance (DEG). Such 'tacking often involves very radical alterations of course, apparently partly going back in the same direction as previously travelled where the angle of change is a sharp one, but in fact over successive tacks showing a strong underlying direction of travel' (ibid.: 244). The doubt in this reader's mind was whether the evidence presented in the book actually showed anything quite as neat and self-consciously strategic as the tacking image suggests. Meanwhile, Dunleavy et al. also see, at least in some particular countries, a different kind of cycle, in which large and expensive IT systems are replaced at wide intervals, with a kind of partial paralysis on policy developments in between (because one cannot change the system). They refer to this as 'a five to ten year "big bang cycle" approach', and they regard it as largely pathological (ibid.: 27).

5.9.4 Time Tactics

Last but not least, we should return to the issue of 'time tactics', first raised in Chapter 2, sections 2. 2 and 2.4. In the study of Bovens et al., we see many examples of the shrewd or opportunistic use of time by policy-makers who introduce the more attractive features of a policy first, so as to 'get a foot in the door' for deeper and more controversial changes later, or who make incremental decisions over time rather than face up to a single big strategic decision that will provoke organized and focused opposition from adversely affected groups, or who simply approach time opportunistically, seizing on accidents or dramatic events or sudden weaknesses among the opposition to shoe-in policy solutions that they have had simmering on the back-burner for some time. In Germany, for example, political leaders were able to turn time constraints to their advantage in order to achieve a substantial medical reform which had previously eluded their predecessors:

...the prospect of rising health insurance premiums put the government under considerable pressure...it was evident that any deliberations of the governing coalition parties, the Christian and Liberal Democrats, were unlikely to begin before two state elections in April 1992. At the same time any reform would have to pass Parliament before the end of 1992 to avoid any disrupting overlaps with the electoral campaign. These two dates set the timetable for the policy process...

(Burau 2001: 204)

The 1993 *Gesundheitsstrukturgesetz* was achieved partly by excluding the representatives of the medical profession from crucial stages of the negotiations between the political parties. 'In part this reflected the tight timetable set by election dates but here the clever maneuvering of the minister of health also came into play' (Burau 2001: 215): in other words, time tactics.

'Crises' provide perhaps the most stark examples of time tactics. Writing of the HIV related blood supply crisis, Albæk (2001: 454) notes that:

crises do not exist in any objective sense, only in the eyes of the beholder. With reduced fatalism it has increasingly been strategically advantageous for policy stakeholders   policy makers, political parties, bureaucratic agencies, scientists, interest groups   to present certain social conditions or clusters of events as 'crises', that is, as something in need of prompt public action...Thus the notion of crisis opens up windows of opportunity for policy reforms and political and institutional change

He might have added that the policystakeholders are greatly aided and abetted in their work on the crisis production line by the mass media—for whom crises are not rare events but daily meat and drink. It would be hard to find a 'serious' English daily newspaper that did not review at least one 'crisis' per day. Crises attract attention, resources and, briefly at least, public opinion. Once invented and constructed they can provide the basis for rapid action. Temporality is of the essence of the concept of a crisis: it is something urgent and relatively short lived. The idea—for example—of a hundred-year crisis is thus a strange and contradictory one. So where urgent and threatening situations do in fact continue for many years (like the Israeli/Arab conflict, gun crime in the US or the misery in the Congo) they have to be divided up, for presentational purposes into a series of separate crises, each with its own name. Time tactics around crises are a subject for study in themselves. Yet even here, one should note that successful tacticians and policy entrepreneurs frequently use the crisis opportunity (which they to some extent may

have manufactured themselves) in order to advance 'solutions' that have actually been lying around for many years (Maesschalck 2002).

In the research reviewed we also see the workings of something which affects time tactics in various ways—the hindsight bias. This is especially visible in the case of the HIV/blood transfusion problems, where governments and health experts were obliged to make decisions (or non-decisions) at moments when 'AIDS in general and HIV and blood in particular were extremely ill-structured policy problems haunted by lack of knowledge and high uncertainty' (Albæk 2001: 463) but within a few years commentators were able to condemn their (retrospectively) mistaken guesses on the basis of much more complete and certain information. This problem goes far beyond the particular case: 'notoriously, as the original study of policy fiascoes showed, judgements about success and failure are highly sensitive to the moment when we make the judgement' (Moran 2001: 179). Historians have known this for a long time. The reputations of kings and generals are constantly being raised or lowered by new generations of historians, seeking new 'angles'. More recently evaluators have also absorbed this lesson, noting that certain programmes which may appear highly problematic after a couple of years (when most evaluations tend to be done) bed in and move up the learning curve to become relatively successful a few years later. Evaluators may express reservations about such rushes to judgement, but politicians increasing want their judgements *now*, and see proposals for later evaluations of 'mature' programmes as procrastination.

Kingdon's work, as indicated earlier, is awash with observations about time tactics, especially in the actions of policy entrepreneurs. Inter alia, he stresses the ways in which constitutional or other deeply institutionalized features (elections, budget cycles) structure the pattern of opportunities over time. To conclude, for the moment, this discussion of time tactics, it may be observed that the subject is intimately connected with the massive and subtle theoretical debates over rationality and *precommittment*. Precommittment is a process by which, like Ulysses as he voyaged past the sirens, actors attempt to bind their future conduct for fear that they will be tempted to do something in the future which at present it seems unwise to do. One of the most intriguing theoretical works on this topic is Elster's seminal *Ulysses and the Sirens* (1984), and in that book the importance of constitutions and constituent assemblies as instruments of political precommittment is acknowledged.

In conclusion, therefore, we can say that this chapter has surveyed a wide range of evidence, from different times, different policy sectors and

different states, almost all of which shows the importance of temporal factors, even where such a focus was only incidental to the main purposes of the study. The pervasive influence of temporal factors in public policy and management, first proposed in Chapter 1, is confirmed by this review. Equally, the theoretical usefulness of a number of the 'timeships' introduced in Chapter 2 is supported. A number of these studies have made explicit use of the path dependency framework, some have used a conventional historical narrative, a few have noted cycling and one or two have commented on cognitive processes and 'time tactics'—not only those of state decision makers and experts, but also those of professional associations, labour unions and the broader public. (I have not, however, found a major policy study which uses evolutionary organization theory.) All of the above mentioned perspectives have added illumination and deepened understanding, though none—as their users would be the first to admit—provides a general theory of policy development over time. Collectively, they at least give us a sense of certain broadly common temporal patterns and sequences, forms which may have a number of different mechanisms behind them but which, in broad outline, are recognizable to policy practitioners and academics alike, and which may serve as orienting devices amidst the on-going flux of policymaking and management. In the next chapter we try to sum up these widely recognized patterns, and look briefly at research opportunities for the future.

6

A Toolkit for Time?

World time is established by an international clock authority, the Bureau International de l'Heure in Paris, on the basis of readings which come from the largest measuring laboratories in the world. At intervals of about one and a half years, so called leap seconds are inserted into the co ordinated universal time, of the UTC, to prevent deviations of more than 0.7 seconds from navigational time arising.

(Nowotny 1994: 17)

Physicists sometimes say that they measure time. They use mathemat ical formulae in which the measure of time appears as a specific quan tum. But time can be neither seen nor felt, neither heard nor tasted nor smelt . . . How can something be measured that is not perceptible to the senses?

(Elias 1992: 1)

6.1 Introduction

At the beginning of this book, I disavowed any intention of constructing a singular 'theory of time', and that resolve persists. Chapter 2's survey of timeships revealed no overall 'winner', although it did suggest that certain existing approaches could profitably be combined with others—for certain kinds of purpose—while others could not (see especially Chapter 2, section 2.7). In Chapters 3 to 5 we have seen the various theories and approaches in use, first on the Brighton and Leuven cases and subsequently on a wide range of other empirical material. We have now reached the point at which our search for, and exercise of, the selected theories and concepts can be (provisionally) summarized.

Looking for a useful form for such a conclusion, I came to the view that some re-examination of the conceptual toolkit could help consolidate the earlier chapters. Such a conceptual synthesis would not amount to a full-blown explanatory theory, but could nevertheless perform a number of useful functions. It could provide an organizing heuristic—a way of framing and ordering typical temporal issues. Since theories and concepts do not have one for one correspondence, a discussion of conceptual tools and the possible combinations of conceptual tools would have implications not just for one, but for most if not all the theories introduced and exercised in previous chapters. It could also point to certain requirements of methods. And it could indicate certain research opportunities. What will be done here will be brief. I will not introduce much new empirical material, and I will not attempt to summarize all the intricacies of the various interactions between concepts and evidence (which should have already received a decent airing in the preceding chapters). I will simply try to draw together a 'time toolkit' that I argue has significant promise for future research in public policy and management.

6.2 The Time Toolkit

The elements of this conceptual toolkit are familiar from the earlier chapters. They are:

1. *The concept of duration*. Quite simply, how long do things take? We have seen many examples of important processes and activities in public affairs that simply take a long time—years or even decades—to complete. Against this, some processes are quickly over—such as windows of opportunity or media 'feeding frenzies'.

2. *The concept of paths/arrows*. Here the basic idea is that some form of selection is taking place, and that the selection subsequently results in a trend. Activities will continue down a recognizable path for a substantial period of time. Further, yesterday's fork in the road determined, algorithmically, which remaining set of turns were available for choice, and which are no longer available. If we turned north at the major north/south intersection, our remaining choices are a series of forks that offer varieties of north—we can no longer move south. This concept can be given an impersonal, evolutionary colouring (natural selection) or it can be made more actor oriented with notions of decision makers who choose strategy A (perhaps proportional representation

as the electoral system) rather than strategy B (a 'first past the post' majoritarian system).

3. *The concept of punctuations/windows of opportunity.* In many ways this is the complement to the concept of a path/arrow. It is the moment when direction changes, radical decisions momentarily break the incrementalist mode, inertia is overcome, policymakers shake themselves free of old equilibria. Paradoxically, however, it is the beginning of a new path, the firing of a new arrow. It is also, at least according to most of those who use a Kingdonian or path dependency framework, a time of coincidences and couplings, when different streams or factors can be (temporarily) brought together to forge change. Thus, like the concept of a path, a punctuation can be treated in an impersonal, structural kind of way (punctuations just happen, they come from outside) or in a more agency oriented way (windows of opportunity can often be anticipated, even amplified, by clever policy entrepreneurs).

4. *The concept of cycles/alternations/'tacking'.* One saying popular among long serving officials in Anglophone countries is, 'What goes around, comes around'. Just as we have seen many processes that take a long time, we have also encountered many which seem to cycle, or oscillate, between boundaries. Centralization to decentralization, generous spending to cutbacks, punishment in prisons to rehabilitation, community policing for public order versus high-tech policing focused on 'big crime'. As with the two previous concepts of paths and punctuations, this phenomenon can be treated as some kind of structural, evolutionary process, or it can be regarded as the product of key actors consciously trying to reach some destination by 'tacking' like a sailing ship.

5. *The concept of causal mechanisms.* This idea—most prominent in the path dependency literature but also more broadly present—arises from the wish to 'get behind' patterns of paths, punctuations and cycles in order to explain in more details *why* those particular patterns occurred in a given set of circumstances. What medium and micro level processes 'produce' or sustain an arrow or a cycle?

6. *The concept of multiple 'times'.* In a way this is a meta concept, embracing each of the previous five. Thus a path or punctuation in clocktime would not necessarily appear as such in personal time. And the very idea of paths or cycles in a context of electronic instantaneity may appear problematic. In short, all the previous concepts have to be at least adjusted according to which time perspective they are being

viewed within or is being constructed around them. The fundamental point is that perceived patterns (i.e., concepts 1 to 4 above) are relative to temporal perspective, and may shift as that perspective shifts.

If these are the main conceptual tools, how can they be used, individually or more usually in combination, to enable analyses of public policymaking and management which are sensitive to the significance of temporal factors?

6.3 Combining Tools

The above six conceptual tools can be grouped and arranged in relation to one another. Three of them—paths, punctuations and cycles—can be put together as a set. They are *patterns* in events (or sometimes in the flow of ideas). A fourth example of a pattern would be the S-shaped diffusion curve, characteristic for innovations and referred to in Chapters 1 and 4. These patterns can exist together, and can 'nest' in different ways at different levels. Thus public management policies can cycle between centralization and decentralization, while all the time following a path towards greater productivity (see again Figure 2.3). Or again, a public service can move steadily down a path towards greater professionalism and qualification while internally flip-flopping between opposed administrative doctrines (Hood and Jackson 1991). In this latter case the path appears to contain the cycle. But the cycle can also seem to contain the path, as, for example, when budgetary cycles determine the varying pace of a nonetheless relentless shift towards e-government, or when police policies oscillate between an emphasis on public order, and an emphasis on fighting organized crime, while all the time police officers are becoming more professional in their handling of both.

One suggestion of this book has been that such patterns are sufficiently common in the fields of public policy and management as to make them always worth looking for. That is not to say that any one of them, still less all of them, are *always* present. There is inevitably a judgement to be made about the clarity and stability of a suspected pattern, and the temptation to impose patterns where there are only whispy hints of such should be avoided. Sometimes such pattern recognition can be greatly assisted by statistical analysis, at other times such techniques are not necessary (many societies were able to build seasonal cycles into their cultures without the aid of time series analysis!).

The concept of a mechanism stands somewhat apart from these patterns. It is what lies behind them, what explains them, at least on a micro level. In the cycle from centralization to decentralization, for example, we have seen that one mechanism may be the cognitive process which makes the grass on the other side seem greener. Over time the disadvantages of the system one currently has (centralized, let us say) become a matter of public concern, while the advantages of the 'other side' (decentralization) gleam with attraction. The advantages of the existing, centralized system are by now taken for granted (and therefore it is hard for politicians or bureaucratic leaders to claim much credit for them). The disadvantages of the decentralized alternative are not (yet) enquired into too closely, so dazzling are its alleged advantages.

In the case of the Brighton and Leuven hospitals we saw that one quite banal yet very important mechanism was the planning and resource allocation system. The NHS version of this system made it very hard for Brighton to present itself as a special case—it was always in competition with the rest of the NHS, in a game whose rules it could not much influence. By contrast there was no such strong, national mechanism operating in Leuven, which left decisions more open to political bargaining and professional lobbying. (Note that the NHS planning mechanism was itself the product of previous political decisions at the national level concerning the allocation of hospital expenditures—'mechanisms' should be understood as processes that can be deliberately constructed as well as processes, such as cognitive functioning or the greying of the population, which are 'given'.)

Mechanisms are a key concept, but one that has received only limited exploration within specifically temporal approaches. On the face of it, it appears that there could be an infinity of different mechanisms. That state of affairs may be acceptable for a historian of limited theoretical ambition, but more systematically oriented social scientists will want some grouping/classification of mechanisms so that theories can be built around the different properties or effects of the different classes. Economic mechanisms are perhaps the most obvious, and most researched. On the basis of the studies we have reviewed in this book we should add at least cultural and institutional mechanisms, and quite possibly cognitive mechanisms also. Things can be kept on path by a set of strong civil service norms in favour of consultation and consensus (cultural) or by the existence of a tight financial planning procedure, backed up by the authority of a Ministry of Finance (institutional) or by our on-going mental efforts to fulfil our own prophecies, take comfort in our hindsighted wisdom and

reduce psychological dissonance (cognitive). Within each of these four categories (economic/cultural/institutional/cognitive) many diverse and particular mechanisms may operate, but the categorization serves, if nothing else, as a check list to remind the researcher to look in each category, and not stop as soon as a (say) economic mechanism is identified. Another aspect of mechanisms which has received surprisingly little sustained analysis is their distinctive *trajectories*. Contrary to the first impression created by the use of expressions such as 'positive feedack', few, if any, mechanisms are constant and unendingly self-reinforcing. More commonly, as we saw in Chapter 4, they have a particular pattern over time—steeply rising at first and then levelling off; slowly increasing and then accelerating (as in the 'S' curve of innovations) and so on. Thus—and this is a crucial insight that takes us back to the different models of change explored in Chapter 2—*path dependencies may well have limited durations even without dramatic, external 'punctuations'*. They may decay because the mechanisms reinforcing them have a limited shelf life—long enough to justify the use of the path concept, but not immortal. It is therefore desirable, once the key mechanisms have been identified, both to theorize their trajectory and, as part of that, to model their likely *duration*—weeks, months or years? Indeed, probable life-span may afford one useful way of classifying feedback mechanisms.

All of which brings us back to the first concept—*duration*. This is so protean as sometimes to render it almost invisible. Yet it is crucial, and not necessarily as simple as it first appears. A great deal of public management research is focused on 'what's hot and what's not'—on how very recent headline reforms seem to be doing. In 2004, together with two colleagues, I had the sobering experience of trying to find out how prize winning public service quality improvement projects were getting along two or three years after they had been showcased at earlier European quality conferences. We rang around and emailed, and mainly received very vague responses. Folk at the host organizations had never heard of them, or thought the key personnel had moved on, or had the impression that 'all that' was 'over' now. This is by no means an unusual experience in public management research—by the time we academics are earnestly debating a certain initiative in the columns of our scientific journals the initiative itself has been abandoned, transmogrified into something else or has just quietly wasted away. Equally, those climbing on board the next bandwagon may be blissfully unaware that in essence their shining new vehicle closely resembles an old banger that was run ten or 20 years ago (especially if they are the kind of young whizz kids, consultants and policy

wonks increasingly favoured by certain policy regimes—Wolf 2004). They are in a cycle, but because of short institutional memories and future oriented pressures they do not realize it (and are unlikely to be terribly grateful if some passing administrative historian reminds them—for example, Barber's book on Prime Minister Blair's Delivery Unit positively fizzes with impatience for the future and says almost nothing of the past—Barber 2007). A further clear example was Sunström's research into four decades of performance management reform in Sweden (Chapter 5, section 5.3). Nor is the careful measurement of duration valuable only because it reveals how *long* certain developments take. Duration is equally important when reviewing very short episodes such as media storms (see Hood et al. 2007, where media treatments and politicians' responses are measured day by day during crises over failures in public examination systems). Thus, just measuring the duration of items on the agenda already tells a great deal, and, with honourable exceptions (such as Baumgartner and Jones or historians such as Carpenter) it is little attended to in our subject field. On the whole historians tend to be more attentive to such issues than social scientists.

Duration is, of course, closely related not only to the concept of mechanisms but also to the three 'pattern' concepts of paths, punctuations and cycles. It matters a lot how long the gap between punctuations is, and how long the cycle from A to B and then back to a new form of A actually takes. Both very rapid cycling and very short intervals between punctuations are inimical to good government. They degrade loyalty and trust, heighten insecurity, drive selfish and secretive self-protecting behaviours, promote cynicism and scepticism and generally render decent operational performance extremely hard to maintain (Moran 2003; Wolf 2004; Pollitt 2007). The kind of long term policymaking and programming identified in Chapter 1, section 1.4 (handling generational change or global warming, training professional cadres, contracting for complex high-tech projects in defence and e-government and so on) are immediate casualties. Organizational learning becomes unlikely (and goes unrewarded). As Lindblom observed half a century ago, experience can often be more effectively accumulated within a process that moves forwards only incrementally (Lindblom 1959, 1979). Measuring the duration of paths and cycles can therefore be highly informative about the health of the system. Very long paths and few punctuations may signal policy and institutional paralysis while very fast cycles and frequent punctuations indicate hyper-innovation, disorientation and *anomie*. Comparing the duration and amplitude

of sectoral policy and management cycles between countries is thus a very promising idea, and the small number of attempts we have already seen suggest that more attention could be profitably devoted to this kind of research (Bovens et al. 2001; Hood et al. 2004; Pollitt et al. 2004; Dunleavy et al. 2006).

Finally, there is the meta concept of *multiple times*. This is a tricky idea to handle (not least because it appears to destabilize all our other concepts) but it is potentially also a very fruitful one. (I say 'potentially' because very little empirical work yet seems to have been undertaken using this concept.) Elias gives us some useful advice to direct our attention: 'Time measuring or synchronization is a human activity with quite specific objectives, not merely a relationship but a capacity for establishing relationships. The question is: Who in this case relates what, and to what end?' (1992: 46). Thus an exploration of multiple time perspectives might start from a basic description of situations in which time perspectives appear to be either changing, or in conflict with one another (or both). We can then ask who appear to be the perpetrators of the time change, and who its subjects (or victims)? What are the purposes of those who state that the change is necessary or desirable, and, equally, what are the aims of those who oppose the new formulation? Such disjunctures and tensions do not have to be as dramatic as the French revolutionary calendar or Pol Pot's 'Year Zero', with which this book began. It may be something as humdrum as the insistence by Blair's government on a 'reading hour' in all state primary schools, along with detailed guidance on how this hour was to be used. Or it could be the idea (recently adopted in many public sector organizations, in a number of countries) that top officials must not remain in one post for more than a limited number of years. Who is advocating this doctrine that long experience in one post is a bad thing, and who is resisting it? On what evidence is it based? What new elements are introduced when an executive politician knows that his senior advisers are no longer there in perpetuity, but will soon have to move on, and where, on their side of the relationship, the advisers themselves would be prudent always to keep half an eye on where to go next?

Deployed in combination, the concepts discussed in this section can provide a powerful framework for, first, pattern tracing and, second (and more difficult) pattern explanation. They can be used in a 'nested' manner at different levels of analysis—for examining policies and programmes right down to the analysis of specific work processes (Lee and Liebenau 2002: 134).

6.4 Methods

What methods can be deployed effectively to research the applicability and usefulness of the six 'time toolkit' concepts? There is no suggestion here that there is some separate set of scholarly methods, existing uniquely for use in research where time is central. Nor can we make simple pairings of a particular method for each of our key concepts (still less of a particular method to just one theory). Rather it is a matter of dipping into the general social science armamentarium to pick out certain items which seem to suit the particular questions raised in this book. My selection comprises the following:

- Establishing basic chronologies.
- Documentary analysis.
- Narrative analysis.
- Building and using statistical time series.
- Social–psychological and cultural–anthropological methods for describing subjectively held perspectives on time.

Before going any further, however, it should be made absolutely clear that the aim here is *not* to offer instruction on how to use these methods. There is no space for that, even if the author possessed the competences. All that is to be attempted is very briefly to indicate what some of the relevant methods might be and do. It is written from the perspective of the academic consumer of the products of such methods, not that of the producer. The shelves of many university libraries groan under 'how to do it' texts on social science methods, many of which are excellent, and these should be consulted by those who wish actually to practice any of these arts. For convenience, a few of them are referenced here, but these are merely 'starters' to the wider literature.

6.4.1 Establishing Basic Chronologies

As a journal editor myself, I am frequently dismayed by the failure of authors who are describing series of events to establish *basic chronologies*. (*Mea culpa* on occasions—especially when the subject is one I am very familiar with and it is therefore hard to place myself in the shoes of a reader who may not even know who the prime minister before Margaret Thatcher was.) Doubtless those trained as social scientists are more prone to this omission than those trained as historians. Chronologies should

show the appearance, sequence and duration of key events, without which no discussion of paths, punctuations or cycles can properly begin.

Accurate chronologies are equally necessary whether one is dealing with the short or long term. In their investigation of public exam fiascoes Hood et al. (2007) provide a record of the number and content of relevant newspaper articles for each day over a period of more than a hundred days. Somewhere near the other extreme we have Sabatier's (1999) claim that major policy cycles typically last 20–30 years, based on his reading of specific policy histories.

6.4.2 Documentary Analysis

Documents are a prime route into the past, reaching back further and wider than surveys, interviews, or even statistical time series usually can. Generations of historians have debated and refined the rules for treating documents as sources for reliable historical information, for both ancient and recent periods. 'What is at issue . . . is how historians use documents, not to establish discrete facts, but as evidence for establishing the larger patterns that connect them' (Evans 2000: 69–70). Contrary to the easy accusations of some postmodernists, good historians have always taken a forensic attitude to sources. They want to know who wrote the document, under what circumstances and for what purposes (although they do not assume that these purposes were those the document necessarily served). They want to know whether the author was in a position to report accurately on the matter at hand, and whether they were likely to have been motivated to report accurately or to give the account a particular twist. They want to know how far there is external corroboration for what the document contains. If the document comes from an archive or collection, they want to know what the practices of the archivists were—what did they save and what did they throw away, what were their criteria for importance and value? Social scientists can sometimes be a little sloppy in these respects, but most standard works on social science research methods do say something about documents, even if they are demoted to the category of 'additional methods' (Robson 2002: 348–62).

6.4.3 Narrative Analysis

Narrative analysis has become a location for considerable and rather sophisticated methodological innovation. For example, literary theorists have devised a range of techniques which they use to deconstruct/decode

narratives. 'In narrative thinking, temporality is a central feature. We take for granted that locating things in time is the way to think about them' (Clandinin and Connelly 2000: 29). Others have created quantitative methods for analysing narrative structures (Bearman et al. 1999). Some of these methods are aimed primarily at the analysis of novels or plays or other literary works, but some are intended for, or capable of, use in the field of public policy and management. For example, Franzosi's playful and learned book, *From Words to Numbers*, uses a combination of story grammars, relational computer data models and network analysis to interrogate narrative texts:

It is possible to perform quantitative analyses on data that are fundamentally qualitative in nature, in other words, *it is possible to go from words to numbers*. And ever more tools are becoming available to work on the numbers. Some of these tools are especially well suited to deal with the kind of numbers produced by a quantitative, story grammar approach to narrative, in particular the detailed information on time and space. Thus, knowledge of the timing and duration of each microaction and macroaction lends itself to the application of event history analysis . . .

(Franzosi 2004: 117, original italics)

On the qualitative side of the academic community, Czarniawska looks at three 'stories' about Swedish public administration, acting as a kind of literary critic and deploying technical concepts that might be used by a literary theorist (Czarniawska 1997). Roe (1994) argues for the theoretical and practical advantages of what he terms 'narrative policy analysis', which he sees as one useful way of addressing highly polarized policy conflicts such as those over animal rights or certain environmental dangers. Gysen et al. (2006) recommend a method for evaluating environmental policies which they dub 'The *modus narrandi*'. Clandinin and Connelly (2000: 185) advocate a highly personal and subjective approach which is supposed to avoid 'reductionism' and 'formalism' and to steer clear of naive notions of causality in order to achieve 'an explanatory, invitational quality' characterized by 'authenticity', 'adequacy' and 'plausibility' (though none of these appealing notions are operationalized in a way that would satisfy a 'formalist'). It is hard to see how this kind of approach could be applied on a large scale, although it may well have something to offer when used on a micro scale (one of their most used examples is a piece of work with two teachers at a local Toronto school). It is also prudent to take into account D.C. Phillips caustic criticisms of narrative theorists (like Clandinin and Connelly) who substitute the notion of 'plausibility' for

the notions of 'truth' or accuracy (Phillips 2000: 61–83). In contrast to such a highly inductive and hermeneutic approach, Büthe (2002: 490) cogently advances the case for modelling historical narratives, whether qualitatively or quantitatively: 'To be useful as a test of a deductively sound model, a narrative should be structured by the model in that the presentation of empirical information follows the model's identification of actors, their preferences, etc, so as to minimize the ad hoc character of the empirical account'.

6.4.4 Statistical Time Series

I distinguish between *building* and *using* time series because the labour of actually constructing them is often so great (see the remarks in Chapter 2, section 2.7, on Baumgartner and Jones' massive achievement). It is so much nicer if some kindly public authority has already recorded and stored longitudinal data in more or less the form you want it, but, alas, that is frequently not the case. If, for example, the analyst wants to use the standard Box-Jenkins 'ARIMA' model then the advice from statisticians is that s/he will need 50 or more regularly spaced observations for the technique to be reliable.

Separating an underlying, systematic pattern from random noise (error) is a complex business. Error may be 'signal error' (random fluctuations in the variables being measured) or 'measurement error' (the reporting or measuring procedures themselves are less than 100 percent accurate). Statisticians have developed a range of techniques for dealing with a range of different kinds of problem (Diggle 1990; Bijleveld and Van der Kamp 1998; StatSoft 2007). However, policy and management scholars seem to have used time series surprisingly rarely, although the few who have done so seem to obtain highly interesting results (e.g., Jennings 2007). When interviewing one of the fathers of performance measurement in the UK National Health Service in 2006, a member of a research team of which I was part elicited the following remark concerning a quarter century of performance indicator development: 'And we were doing time series—it's very important and very underused by the DoH [Department of Health]. With long time series, I had one of 30 years for some data, you'd find a hospital that was well-staffed would remain so for many years—sometimes for a century!' (interview, 2006).

A similar sentiment is expressed by the father of innovation diffusion research, Everett Rogers:

Diffusion studies ideally should rely on 'moving pictures' of behavior, rather than 'snapshots', because of the need to trace the sequential flow of an innovation as it spreads through a social system. Diffusion researchers have mainly relied, however, upon one shot surveys of their respondents

(Rogers 2003: 127)

To improve, Rogers argues, researchers should make more use of field experiments, longitudinal panel studies, archival records and/or case studies which use data from multiple respondents which can be used to triangulate each other's accounts.

There are some possible snags here. The statistical techniques involved in time series analysis can become quite sophisticated—well beyond the comprehension of most politicians and senior civil servants (and beyond that of many social scientists too):

When data are gathered repeatedly, the data constitute a data *box*: subjects (a first axis) are observed on variables (the second axis) over successive time points or occasions (the third axis). This complicates matters further, as most statistical techniques have been designed to analyse a data *matrix* [i.e. a two dimesional space]

(Bijleveld and Van der Kamp 1998: 4, original italics)

There is therefore an issue about what the figures that come out at the end actually *mean*. Nevertheless, assuming that other statistical experts are available to check that the underlying equations have been correctly handled, a good time series analysis can separate out underlying patterns over time from the enveloping 'noise', and present them for the consideration of the less statistically gifted.

6.4.5 Social Psychological and Cultural Anthropological Methods for Describing Subjectively Held Perspectives on Time

Nowotny is full of fascinating ideas but very short on measurement. Hofstede, on the other hand, is very much preoccupied with measuring different dimensions of culture, but sometimes rather terse in following through to their organizational implications. In the second edition of his well known *Culture's Consequences* (2001) he adds a fifth dimension to the four he began with, and his new dimension is long versus short term orientation. He cites a number of surveys which indicate that different cultures in different parts of the world exhibit different time orientations. In particular, East Asian countries score much higher than Western

countries in terms of possessing a long term orientation. This orientation gives greater emphasis to values such as education, frugality and persistence, and less to the importance of leisure time or quick results (Hofstede 2001: 351–72). The many surveys cited by Hofstede produce fascinating information but, synchronic as they are, what they cannot do is tell us how these cultural features may be changing over time. (For example, is rapid economic growth and 'Westernization' altering the East Asian orientation to the long term?) As indicated above, what is needed for this is some sort of time series.

A great deal (but certainly not all) psychological research employs much 'harder', more natural science-like methods than most work in the fields of policymaking and public management. This may well produce more coherent, tightly controlled analyses but the knowledge thereby generated may be less intelligible, less robust and ultimately less feasible for public policymakers than knowledge acquired by 'softer', more intuitive means (see Hammond 1996: esp. ch. 9). According to Hammond, existing psychological research implies that decision makers alternate between modes of thinking which stress logic and consistency (*coherence* theory) and those which emphasize accurate *correspondence* of judgements with known facts. Over time, the relative contribution to judgements of intuition and analysis change, as decision makers shift along a 'cognitive continuum', often in response to previous perceived failures in judgement. All this has deep implications for our abilities to learn from experience and from research. Two particular aspects that Hammond picks out would seem to have high relevance for the study of public policy and management. The first is application of psychological decision theory to narrative, as a means of making sense of evidence. On the basis of studies of juries arriving at judgements Hammond suggests that: 'the predominant decision-making process involves the creation of a coherent story' (p. 200). The second is the study of the conditions under which apparent failures of judgement will lead decision makers to shift to new ways of thinking about problems—shifts during which 'cognition oscillates between analysis and intuition' (p. 201).

6.5 Research Opportunities

Finally, where does the above discussion leave us in terms of identifying promising research opportunities for the future? Arguably, it offers an embarrassment of riches. There are a range of sturdy concepts and a set

of methods (some quite new) which can be used for operationalizing and investigating those concepts. In practice, however, these have as yet been seldom deployed within the field of public policy and management. Some of them do require the learning of new techniques, and, furthermore, the application of some (e.g., the quantified modelling of narratives) depend on a great deal of time consuming hard work, but whoever said that academic progress was going to be easy? This is, in short, an argument for doing what public administration and public policy scholars have often successfully done in the past: peered over the walls into neighbouring fields of academic endeavour and borrowed any useful looking equipment.

It may be useful to put a little flesh on this optimistic skeleton by concluding with some illustrative research projects. They do not add up to a coherent single research programme, partly because I have tried to cover a good range of the very varied approaches described in Chapter 2. Rather they constitute a mélange of possibilities, designed to illustrate but by no means exhaust the potential of the time dimension. Such possibilities include the following:

- A test of whether the alleged difference in time perspectives between different cultures does indeed have effects on policies. This could involve, for example, comparisons of policymaking in chosen sectors in a Western and a Southeast Asian government. Surveys of civil servants in the relevant sectors could be used to establish the nature and degree of difference in time orientation (if any). This could be followed up with structured interviews of officials responsible for (say) foreign policy, pensions policy and environmental policy. According to Hofstede we would expect to find the Southeast Asian officials would have longer time perspectives. But do they, and, if they do, how does this feed into policymaking?

- Any number of policy and management histories. The small number of true administrative historians now operating leaves vast tracts of recent 'public sector time' largely uncharted. How useful it would be, for example, to have good analytical histories of the development of computers in government or the role of international organizations such as the OECD and the World Bank in forming and propagating models and techniques of public management. Even the necessarily more limited efforts of masters students, writing their theses, show what can be unearthed in these and many other topics of interest. Of particular interest would be policy histories designed to investigate the suggestion of Sabatier (1999) and others that major policies typically

exhibit a cycle of several decades. Such investigations could also attempt to identify and model the trajectories of the underlying mechanisms propelling the turn of the cycle.

- A study of generational change in the civil service. One hypothesis might be that each generation has its own professional socialization (including formal training) and develops its own assumptions about the nature of a civil service career. These are subsequently difficult to change, so that later waves of reform will be largely seen by each generation from the perspective of their original, early socialization. Different age groups within one or more national civil service(s) would be surveyed to establish the prevalence of particular values, assumptions and priorities. This would be backed up by in-depth interviews of a structured sample of individuals with a view to eliciting their career narratives—what were the key influences, events (etc.) in shaping their attitudes and practices? What meanings do they and did they give to contemporary developments? Such a study would be even more interesting if it could simultaneously test a rival hypothesis—say that the typical civil servant was 'a feather to each wind that blows', simply following the latest fashion until it changed, with few deep internal beliefs or values to keep them on a particular path.

- An investigation of the prevalence of particular patterns in policymaking over time—cycles, 'tacking', punctuations, etc. At a basic level there would be the descriptive aim of establishing the presence (or absence) and frequency of such patterns. But beyond this a variety of hypotheses could be tested. For example, Light's suggestion is that the cycling between different management models in the US federal government occurs because no one really knows how to organize the government most effectively (Light 1997). To put it more technically, there is high uncertainty about the production function in matters concerning the machinery of government. This could perhaps be tested by comparing the patterns of policymaking with respect to highly uncertain functions (e.g., machinery of government, healthcare reform) with those where the function is apparently better understood (e.g., payment of social security benefits, land use planning). If Light is correct one might expect more cycles and more rapid cycles in the former than the latter.

- The use of time series analysis to compare key features of particular services over long periods of time. For example, the function of registering births and deaths is one of the oldest and most fundamental in

the modern state. In a number of countries records of the numbers of registrations and the numbers and positions of staff in the service go back more than a century. Thus one could seek to relate changes in the numbers of registrations handled to changes in (a) staff numbers; (b) the technology of registration; and (c) policy changes (such as the state's wish to collect more detailed information about the cause of death or the identity of the father in cases of births to unmarried women). Would there be a regular relationship between the number of registrations and one or more of these variables, or would correlations be low? Would there be similar or different patterns to these relationships over time and between different countries? Similar studies could be undertaken in respect of other services with firm statistical records stretching back over decades, such as prisons or immigration (Jennings has made a good start here—see his 2007).

- A study of 'time tactics', designed initially to classify moves and countermoves, and the conditions under which each tactic is more likely to be deployed. The briefest of indications of what such a classification might be like is given in the next chapter, but far more could be done to develop this into a theoretically driven model, possibly using game theory, or, alternatively, elements drawn from the cognitive psychology of decision making.

- A detailed psychological study of how, over time, policymakers use evidence to assemble coherent pictures of both the problems and the solutions to which they give their attention. This would, of course, require unusual degrees of access to the policy process, but it is not beyond the bounds of possibility, especially if suitable techniques for anonymization and confidentiality could be devised.

7

Wider Implications for Governments

History is the best antidote to delusions of omnipotence and omnisci
ence. Self knowledge is the indispensable prelude to self control, for
the nation as well as for the individual, and history should forever
remind us of the limits of our passing perspectives.

(Schlesinger Jnr. 2007: 6)

I think that we may have been too reluctant to say 'No, Minister, this is
too difficult, we can't do all this, you've got to take it a little more
slowly'.

(Lord Butler, reflecting on his time as Cabinet Secretary
to Prime Minister Blair in the 1990s, BBC 2007a)

When to the sessions of sweet silent thought
I summon up remembrance of things past
I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought
And with old woes new wail my dear time's waste.

(Shakespeare, Sonnets, 30)

7.1 Introduction

To offer public advice to politicians and public servants is a perilous task
for anyone, and perhaps especially for academics. It doesn't stop us, of
course. Some (varying) mixture of public service ethics, overconfidence in
our own expertise, exasperation with the apparent wrong-headedness of
other advisers and a straightforward appetite for fees and grants propels
many professors into the advisory role. Here we can be ridiculed by poli-
ticians (occasionally), ignored by those to whom we tender our wisdom
(frequently) and 'steered' by civil servants (sometimes a useful exercise,
often deeply frustrating and constraining). Additionally, however, we

must also expect the lash of ridicule from our academic colleagues. The latter lose few opportunities to point out how unscholarly and oversimplified our advice has been (sometimes they are lambasting the same texts which the civil servants have already told us are hopelessly complicated and 'academic').

Yet, if a thick skin can be acquired, there is much that an academic perspective may have to offer. It can help reset and reframe policy agendas; it can clarify concepts; it can question false assumptions (especially currently fashionable ones); it can suggest how decisions could be structured; it can point to the key data and recommend how they can be best collected and it can offer relevant, mid-range, contextualized generalizations that may be more firmly based than those generated by the current generation of young gun policy analysts, who usually lack the kind of 'deep background' which extended academic careers tend to deliver (Pollitt 2006b). Sometimes academics can even moderate discussions or act as confidantes to top decision makers. Very occasionally—and not always with pleasing results—academics actually *become* political executives: President Woodrow Wilson and Henry Kissinger are among the names that spring to mind.

So, in the particular case of this book, we must finally face the question of what, on the basis of the analyses in the preceding chapters, can be said to practitioners? Then there is always the further question of *how* it should be said to practitioners? Long paragraphs of detailed argument do not constitute a presentational format they usually have either the time or the patience to absorb. This last chapter is therefore organized in a different way from the earlier parts of the book. It is broken down into a series of specific questions, and to each there is a more or less staccato response. In an ideal world the practitioner reader would track back to earlier chapters to find the founding arguments and evidence for what is being claimed here (and to absorb the nuances which attend that particular issue or topic) but in the real world this desirable step will no doubt often be skipped. At the same time, I have found it impossible to avoid succumbing to the academic practice of referencing some of my points, though the text should be perfectly understandable without chasing down each and every source.

Moving now to the substance, I will focus on two broad questions:

- Why should policymakers concern themselves with the past?
- What do policymakers need to know about time?

7.2 Why Should Policymakers Concern Themselves with the Past?

7.2.1 Because There Are Very Often Elements of the Past Which Constrain What can be Done in the Future. To Ignore These is Simply to be Unrealistic, and to Invite Grandiose—Or Perhaps Just Modest—Failures

The motto might be—govern *with* the past, not *against* it. This book has been full of examples of the kind of constraints which the past may impose: healthcare reformers who think they can make radical changes in the ways in which doctors practice; crime programmes that assume finger tip control of police operations; IT enthusiasts who believe that one can jump from huge 'legacy systems' straight to the latest advanced technology in a relatively short space of time, only to be dismayed as implementation stretches out, costs rise and desk staff encounter repeated problems with the software. 'Even though the past is over, it is capable of stipulating, via long-term historical processes, the marginal conditions within which the present takes place' (Nowotny 1994: 58).

Denis Healey was one of the most robust, intellectually powerful and cosmopolitan ministers to serve in British government in the second half of the twentieth century. In his splendid autobiography (1989, significantly entitled, *The Time of My Life*) he recalls his experience as Secretary of State for Defence during the 1960s:

> . . . an operation of this nature on this scale means that there is always ten years' work in the pipeline. So I could not make major changes in equipment without wasting vast sums of money already spent, and incurring big cancellation charges. And changes of political commitments had to be negotiated with the governments concerned.
>
> (Healey 1989: 256)

More recently Charles Tenet, Director of the CIA from 1997 until 2004, expressed himself clearly, and perhaps a trifle ruefully: 'Relying on secrets by themselves, divorced from deep knowledge of cultural mind-sets and history, will only take you so far' (Tenet 2007: 46). A little more attention to the history and cultures of the Middle East might indeed have dampened the optimism of the Americans and British leaders and some of their advisers concerning what was likely to happen *after* military victory in Iraq had been secured.

7.2.2 Because a Thorough Analytic Understanding of the Status Quo, and its Roots in the Past, is One of the Sounder Bases for Identifying 'Windows of Opportunity' for Radical/Transformational Change

In a way this is the opposite—or at least the complement—to the first reason. The argument is that it is only when one understands the mechanisms that are keeping everything more or less on path/business as usual that one can form a realistic assessment of how novel some new set of circumstances may be, and therefore what the chances are for a 'transformational' breakthrough or radical policy innovation. If the usual mechanisms of reinforcement and positive feed back are significantly weakened, and there appears to be a new situation out there, then a window may be opening. At the end of her study of healthcare reform in Canada, the US and the UK, Carolyn Tuohy wrote that the 'strategic lessons' of her study for policymakers were essentially twofold:

> The first message is that windows of opportunity for major structural and institutional change   shifting the balance of power across the state, the medical profession, and private finance or for changing the mix of hierarchical, market oriented, or collegial instruments   are rare. [The second is that . . .] policymakers need to have proposals carefully worked out beforehand in order to take advantage of open windows
>
> (Tuohy 1999: 263 4)

But how should 'windows of opportunity' be recognized? This answer appears to have several parts. First, there is usually some major threat or pressure external to the policy system under consideration. A fiscal crisis means that customary incremental growth can no longer be afforded. A legitimacy crisis means that an existing political institution has lost its power to act. A technological advance has rendered the usual way of doing business antiquated and burdensome. An external threat from another state or group is challenging the government's capacity to protect its citizens. But, second, there needs, as said, to be an alternative plan already in circulation—something not wholly unfamiliar to the minds of the policy elite. And, third, 'can the necessary authority be mobilized within the political system?' (Tuohy 1999: 264; see also Kingdon 1995: 165). Without that authority (the composition of which will vary from one type of political system to another) the opportunity will be passed up or bungled (as happened, for example, with President Clinton's 1990s attempt at healthcare reform). Assembling that authority is, of course, a prime task of reforming politicians, although they will normally need allies from outside the immediately political sphere. Tuohy sums it up as

follows: 'This is a counsel, then, of ongoing prudence and periodic bold-ness' (ibid.: 264).

7.2.3 Because There Are Often Elements of the Past That Can Be Drawn Upon as Sources of Support and Legitimation for New or Existing Policies, Programmes and Organizations

'Go with the flow'. This is partly a rhetorical point, partly a more substan-tive one. Legitimation is at the heart of the issue. Rhetorically, the past serves as a rich seam of positive and negative images—for the British, the 'Dunkirk spirit' versus 'appeasement'. For the Finns, the 'Winter war' (positive), for the Germans, the Nazi period (negative). For the Americans, the founding fathers and a variety of 'frontier' images, often largely myth-ical. Clever politicians are forever striving to make rhetorical connections between their latest proposals and aspects of these national stories.

More substantively, certain organizations and institutions—and even individuals—have, for good or weak reasons, acquired over time a high legitimacy with large sections of the population. Therefore they can serve as resources in support of new policies and programmes. At its crudest, a new programme may be publicly endorsed by a sports hero or trusted elder statesman or (more recently) a familiar, avuncular TV newsreader. Or new tasks may be allocated to high status organizations such as the *Grands Corps* (France); the Cabinet Office (UK) or the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (Canada) rather than being given to new or lower status organiza-tions. Thus the new programme shares the 'afterglow' of prestige associ-ated with its host organization.

In the Blair New Labour administrations of 1997–2007 historical refer-ences were at first not much in evidence. But, according to a Downing Street speechwriter, by 2006, things had changed:

History started to come in because we were at a particular point in the political cycle . . . We wanted to be able to survey what government had done and beyond that, how things have changed over a longer cycle . . . The questions confronting government at the end of the twentieth century are different to societies before success brings its own problems . . . and there are trends of which government is a part, but not the central player . . .

(quoted in Berridge 2007b: 17)

Despite this, however, Berridge's report suggests that the Blair administra-tion made little if any use of professional historians. History was used in policymaking, but in an ad hoc and often amateurish way.

It is not only *new* policies which can be legitimized by reference to the (sometimes distant) past. This ploy also serves for existing policies which may be under pressure. A battle over EU member state voting arrangements in the middle of 2007 gave rise to the following remarkable argument from the Polish prime minister, as he sought to defend the status quo Polish allocation of votes, which was in excess of what a proposed new voting formula, based on present population, would justify: 'We are demanding only one thing, that we get back what was taken from us . . . If Poland had not had to live through the years of 1939–45, Poland would be today looking at demographics of a country of 66M' (quoted in the *Financial Times*, 2007: 1; according to the 2002 census, Poland's actual inhabitants numbered 38M).

7.2.4 Because There Are Often Some Elements in the Previous Regime Which are Valuable and Hard to Replace, But Which May Be Fragile in the Sense That New Policies, Programmes or Organizations May Inadvertently Undermine and Destroy Them

At the macro level, countries which happen to enjoy relatively high levels of public trust in the civil service and public services should think very hard before launching programmes which compromise or undermine that reputation. If damaged, it will not easily be rebuilt. Thus the Danes (and to a significant extent all the other Nordic states) seem to have taken heed of their privileged position as the best trusted, least corrupt regimes in the developed world (Kettl et al. 2004). They have not been rushing to downsize, contract out, privatize and cast aspersions on the general competence of their public sector organizations, although they have been perfectly willing to use NPM methods and techniques selectively and cautiously, where the particular circumstances seem most favourable (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004).

Another, perhaps less obvious example comes from the *Digital Era Governance* study discussed in Chapter 5 (Dunleavy et al. 2006). In some countries the central units responsible for advising on large scale IT projects were run down or completely disbanded ('total outsourcing'). After all, expert advice could be purchased from outside government, and such contracting out was absolutely in line with the then current public management policies. After a while, however, these countries found it necessary to begin to reconstruct these central capacities, because the experience of being entirely dependent on bought-in advice for such huge long term investments was so dismal.

7.2.5 Because There Are Very Often Elements of the Past that Prefigure the Proposed New Policy/Programme/Organizations and Experience Which May Yield Suitably Contextualized 'Lessons' About Aspects of the New Initiative

As the saying goes, 'there's nothing new under the sun'. Performance pay for teachers? It was tried in the nineteenth century. Allocating public service delivery to autonomous agencies and boards? Ditto. Close measurement of staff performance? This was at the root of the 'scientific management' preached by F.W. Taylor and others at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. Public participation in public services? There was a wave of attempts to achieve this on both sides of the Atlantic in the mid- and late 1960s, and on into the 1970s. Performance budgeting? Attempts were made in the US Federal government soon after the Second World War, and then again, and again, over the succeeding decades. And we have seen what a long history ideas of performance management have also had in Sweden (Chapter 5). So, in fact, it is not usually necessary to go back 100, or even 50 years to find precedents—there is often much to be learned from the twists and turns of policy over the previous 20 years. Unfortunately, increased rates of change of both staff and organizations often mean that there is no one around who remembers the experiences of even five years ago, or knows where to look for information on these already 'ancient' and forgotten happenings (Pollitt 2000). So, wheels are re-invented and mistakes are repeated.

In the UK and a number of other countries the last decade has witnessed a great deal of rhetoric in favour of 'evidence-based policymaking'. History, however, has seldom been counted as 'evidence'. Reporting on recent health policymaking in the UK Virginia Berridge observed that:

Politicians now pay much lip service to evidence based policy making. Arguably they could involve history and its debates and interpretations more fully in the process of policy development. The invocation of Bevan [which she had shown was a regular feature of politician's speeches   Bevan was the minister who founded the National Health Service] would benefit from discussion of the system he displaced through his nationalization of the hospitals

(Berridge 2007a: 6, see also 2007b)

Further, I am reminded of an interview I once conducted with a man who had been a senior British civil servant involved with the Anglo-French Concorde supersonic airliner project. During the 1960s the research and

development cost of this project soared ever higher, while its commercial prospects remained gloomy. There were a number of points in time when cancellation was on the cards. At one such meeting, my interviewee told me, a discussion was held about the rocketing R&D estimates. The main estimates had been compiled by identifying all the components and other inputs, getting experts to cost them, and then adding up the total. And this total was going up rather fast. However, one British official had tried another approach. He had examined the *histories* of a number of other high technology aerospace projects and how their estimates had changed over the different stages of their lives. Considering where Concorde was now, he offered an estimate of what the final R&D costs were likely to be, if Concorde turned out to be an 'average' high-tech aerospace project. This estimate was amazingly high—much higher even than the figures generated by the bit by bit conventional method of forecasting. However, this historical approach was dismissed as 'too hypothetical'. The project continued. The only estimate that turned out to be anywhere near the actual final R&D cost was, of course, the 'hypothetical'/historical one. (It is ironic that the one estimate based on track records rather than forecasts was the one deemed 'hypothetical', but then the capacity of enthusiasts to believe that *their* project is special and *new* is almost infinite.)

One curious aspect of recent practice in a number of advanced Western states is the way in which the business of recording the past of one's own organization has fallen into decay at precisely the same time that politicians and 'policy wonks' scour other sectors or countries for examples of 'best practice' (Pollitt 2003b). Yet in many ways analytical logic would point the other way. Policies and practices are frequently very sensitive to contexts (Fukuyama 2004: 58). Thus it may be easier to learn reliable lessons from the past of one's own organization or sector (where many contextual features will remain reasonably constant) than from other jurisdictions, however 'advanced' or exotic. Even the humble official departmental history (Whitehall discontinued its series many years ago) may serve as a hunting ground for 'what happened last time we tried something like this?'

Organizational and policy histories may well reveal both arrows (hospital patients on average get sicker every decade, and this has considerable consequences for policy) and cycles (government departments decentralize and then recentralize, as several national studies cited earlier in the book revealed). It ought to be useful for policymakers to be aware of both types of trajectory and to try to see whereabouts they seem to be—and are likely to be when the new policy has bedded in.

In practical terms one might ask a few pointed questions:

- When policy proposals are approaching maturity within the organization, is there a person or unit who is charged with routinely scanning the organization's history to see if elements in the policy have been tried before—say within the past three decades—and, if so, what happened then?
- More generally, does the unit/agency/department have a regular system for recording and archiving each policy initiative/organizational reform? Does this system make retrieval easy, and have steps been taken to make policy staff aware of its existence and to incentivize them to use it? (In the late 1990s I was once conducted round a huge paper archive of evaluations of European Union development aid projects. The responsible official told me it was hardly ever consulted by the policy desks.) Such records obviously need to include not just a dull record of what was done, but a close analysis of what mechanisms and impacts—or perhaps more than one analysis in cases where the impacts of the policy turned out to be contested and controversial. There is endless advice available about how to conduct such assessments/evaluations. Scanning the past (first bullet point above) isn't terribly effective if that past has not been adequately recorded.
- More generally still, does the organization have a culture which honours the past and respects and consults the 'old hands', or is it so oriented towards innovation, 'vision' and the future that it de facto ignores or scorns the past (and those associated with it)?

7.2.6 Because Policymakers Are Often Drawing Historical Analogies Anyway, and May Be Doing So in Shallow or Misguided Ways

Thus two American experts concluded that, despite a basically short term and future oriented stance: 'Yet we also saw that despite themselves Washington decision-makers actually used history in their decisions, at least for advocacy or for comfort, whether they knew any or not' (May and Neustadt 1986: xii). Famously, British Prime Minister Anthony Eden convinced himself that Egyptian President Anwar Nasser was a new 'Hitler', and made this a central plank in his disastrous decision to conspire with the French and the Israelis so as to take military action to 'recapture' the Suez Canal. He was determined to avoid 'appeasement', which, after the 1930s, had become a dirty word in British politics. There are many, many other examples of perceived historical precedents influencing the

decisions of political leaders. A faintly amusing example is recounted by Bill Clinton in his autobiography. Early in his first presidency he is trying to remove the ban on gay people serving in the American armed forces. In a discussion with members of the Senate Armed Services Committee, he encounters strong opposition, especially from Senator Robert Byrd: 'He believed that homosexuality was a sin . . . and asserted that one reason the Roman Empire fell was the acceptance of pervasive homosexual conduct in the Roman legions . . . ' (Clinton 2005: 484). Thus the lesson is: since policymakers are going to invent historical precedents and analogies anyway, why not take what steps you can to see that models of the past are both reasonably accurate and relevant to the decision at hand?

7.3 What Do Policymakers Need to Know About Time?

Once more the material will be organized into questions and short responses.

7.3.1 How Can a New Policy Proposal Be Analysed So That Temporal Aspects Are Taken Properly Into Account?

There are any number of ways of doing this (and trying more than one, simultaneously, may be a sensible precaution). These include:

- One is simply to get hold of a competent historian who specializes in that sector/organization/policy field and ask him/her to write a short piece (or speak to a brief) locating the proposed reform among its predecessors. This historical analysis should draw particular attention to those aspects that appear to be genuinely novel, and those that have been tried before. It is slightly chilling to read the Director of the US Central Intelligence Agency—in no way a historian—say of his role in the daily intelligence briefing of the American President that, 'Since I had been around for while, I could often give some of the historical underpinnings for why other governments were acting as they were' (Tenet 2007: 32).
- A second is to make sure that those who will have to carry out the new policy or programme on the ground have a strong voice in advising what kind of timescale will be necessary. For decision makers to rely, mainly or entirely, on estimates provided by the policy innovators/ originators/enthusiasts themselves is to risk an overly optimistic bias.

Many biographies and autobiographies by successful political leaders show how they found ways, while at the top, to maintain at least some lines of advice from the 'shopfloor'—from outside the inner elite circle (e.g., Healey 1989).

- There are other, more managerial/technical aids to analysis. These include one of the oldest of the 'modern' management techniques—the PERT (Program Evaluation and Review Technique) network chart. This is particularly suitable for planning and managing large, complex projects which include novel elements or activities. It was originally invented by Booz Allen Hamilton consultants working on a US Navy contract for Polaris nuclear submarines in 1958. It locates the critical path from the beginning to the end of the project and estimates the time required for each constituent activity/task. It includes a fascinating formula, based on previous experiences, for estimating the expected time for completing any activity (see Figure 7.1). Many organisations have developed their own patented versions of PERT, and the basic idea of such contingency planning tool is very widely used.

This subsection concludes with an important caveat. More often than not expert advice on temporal aspects will come in a less than precise form. There are no 'seven steps to temporal analysis' and few occasions on which the analyst will be able to say, 'Minister, if you do this the Past will be with you and the new policy will succeed, but if you do that you are bound to fail'. Far more common will be a nuanced judgement, a statement of probable tendency, an identification of only partly quantifiable risks and opportunities. Richard Evans described this kind of

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T_E $(O + 4M + P)/6$

where:

T_E Expected time (the best estimate of the time necessary to complete a specified activity/task).

O   Optimistic time (the minimum possible time for completing the activity/task, assuming everything goes better than usual).

M   Most likely time (the best estimate of the time to complete the activity/task, assuming everything goes as usual).

P   Pessimistic time (the maximum possible time to complete the activity/task, assuming everything goes wrong   short of a major catastrophe).

Figure 7.1   Calculating expected time in a PERT network

knowledge with specific respect to the discipline of history, but it applies more broadly, to all the approaches to the past which have been discussed within these covers:

It can identify, or posit with a high degree of plausibility, patterns, trends and structures in the human past. In these respects it can legitimately be regarded as scientific. But history cannot create laws with predictive power... All those who thought, or claimed, that they had discovered laws in history, from Marx and Engels to Toynbee and Buckle, were wrong...

(Evans 2000: 52)

7.3.2 How Can New Organizations and Programmes Be Designed in Ways That Make Them More 'Sustainable'?

There has been widespread and growing concern that the pace of reform in a number of countries has accelerated up to and beyond the point at which confusion, demoralization and widespread cynicism set in (Light 1997: 223; Pollitt 2007). One reform is hardly in place before the next one comes along. Transitional and transactional costs spiral upwards, and organizations lose focus on the bread and butter of daily service provision. Experience and accumulated know-how is dispersed, wasted or completely lost.

One approach might be to think in terms of designing long lasting organizations to sustain long lasting policies. Such organizations would have design features that would encourage them to take the long view, and to 'husband' their particular programme. Curiously, academic writing has had very little to say about this idea. As we saw in Chapters 2 and 4, there are studies of rates of organizational mortality, but most of them seem to be more concerned with establishing the relative *rates* of mortality in different sectors and periods than with isolating the features that lead to a long life in a particular organization. Kaufman (1991) actually suggests that survival is a random event, and that specific polices and/or the actions of leaders probably have little effect. In business studies one exception to the general neglect of the long term was Collins and Porras' book, *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies* (2002). The conclusions they came to were interesting but very general: to survive a company had to define and preserve core values and purposes while being very willing to change specific goals, strategies operating practices and cultures. Having wonderful product ideas or great leaders could certainly help, but these things did not distinguish the long lasting corporations from the casualties. Collins and Porras thought these findings could also be applied in

government and non-profit settings, although they did not conduct any research to test this huge extension of domain. There seem to be no equivalent analyses for the public sector, and the *Built to Last* research itself has some quite strong methodological limitations, including a failure to explore the 'false negatives', in other words, the number of visionary companies with all the elements specified for long life that nevertheless experienced only short lives.

A different kind of answer to the question of sustainability is, quite simply, the law. In most political systems laws are rather more durable than individual organizations—especially where the constitution makes provision for foundational types of law which are exceptionally difficult to change (e.g., constitutional amendments in the US). In his classic, *The Concept of Law*, Hart observed that there were 'two salient features of most legal systems: the *continuity* of the authority to make law possessed by a succession of different legislators and the *persistence* of laws long after the maker and those who rendered him habitual obedience have perished' (Hart 1994: 51, original italics). In this context, however, we should note the growth, over recent decades of the volumes and proportions of secondary legislation and 'soft law'. These categories of rule making imply greater flexibility but also lesser durability. If a policy or programme is for the long term the argument for embedding it in primary legislation, or even foundational/constitutional law, would seem, *prima facie*, to be a strong one.

7.3.3 How Can Useful Organizational Memory Be Preserved?

The short answer is: by stopping doing the things which destroy it! In 2006/07 the UK Home Office became a byword for all that was incompetent in the UK civil service. Confusion followed cock-up across British TV screens and newspaper front pages—in prisons, immigration, asylum and elsewhere. Whilst many factors contributed (including a media feeding frenzy, egged on by politicians for their own ends) one element was almost certainly the extreme lack of continuity at the 'top of the office'. After the arrival of the New Labour administration in 1997, the Home Office was expected to cope with a tidal wave of new legislation. While this was going on the leadership was subject to constant change. Here is the view of Lord Turnbull, Secretary to the Blair Cabinet at the time:

You look at the Home Office over the years, how many Secretaries of State has it had, how many junior ministers has it had? Some departments, notably the

Treasury, have benefited from ministers who have stayed there long enough to build up a sense of purpose and that is actually beneficial. But if things are changing constantly, the sense of building a team in the department is very difficult

<div align="right">(BBC 2007b: 3; for a US example, see Tenet 2007: 14)</div>

And here is a professor of management studies, who is reflecting on an extended period of working closely with three British ministries:

Policies that were tried and trashed a while back resurface, gleaming and newly hatched. Yet not only the ministers but the civil servants are completely unaware of this fact. Many civil service departments have no institutional memory. Those responsible for turning ideas into detailed policies are often young and new to their area. Indeed, if they do not move fast, they start to worry. Rapid changes in responsibilities and ministries are the key to a successful career. Moreover, their predecessors leave nothing behind from which they can learn. Ministers behave much the same way

<div align="right">(Wolf 2004: 13)</div>

Such turmoil is not entirely new. When, in 1964, Denis Healey began his six years as Secretary of State for Defence, he reflected on his immediate predecessors:

Conservative premiers had appointed nine different defence ministers over their thirteen years in office; they seemed to regard Defence as a convenient place to park colleagues temporarily, on their way up or down the government ladder. So there was little incentive for an ambitious politician to take difficult decisions during his months at the Ministry of Defence

<div align="right">(Healey 1989: 257)</div>

But it is not only frenetic change at the top that disrupts. If you want to ensure that an organization fails to learn from both its past successes and its failures, then here is a reliable recipe:

- Rotate operational staff rapidly. Hire as many as possible in on short term contracts (and don't monitor too closely what they do with the records when they leave).
- Change the IT system frequently, but don't enquire too closely into how the old archives can be translated into the new archives (and don't train or reward staff to use the new archive or retrieve the old).
- Restructure the organization at least once every two years.
- Raise and reward 'management' skills and positions above all other kinds of jobs. One of the weaknesses Tenet found when he became Director of the CIA was that, 'in order to get promoted, analysts who

had spent years becoming world-class experts in some critical issue or geographic region had to drop their area of interest and become managers' (Tenet 2007: 15).

- Adopt every new management fad that comes along, and create an atmosphere in the organization that rewards those who talk about the future (visions, plans, goals, transformations) and penalises those who talk about the past ('old-fashioned', 'dinosaurs', 'heads in the sand', irrelevant now that we have our new vision/plan/structure/information system). As the Swedish organization theorist Niels Brunnson wrote, it is important that 'the actors should somehow have forgotten how difficult it was to implement their previous reforms, so that they are willing to try again' (Brunsson 1989: 226).

If you can do each of these four things at the same time, success is virtually guaranteed; and unfortunately, the British central government seems to have been uniquely well equipped to do just this (Pollitt 2007).

If, on the other hand, you happen to want to preserve and use the organizational memory, then look again at the bullet points in section 7.2.5 above. It needs to be someone's special business to look for and feed in relevant precedents and examples—particularly from this organisation and its close neighbours. These inputs should enter the policymaking process at a strategically early stage, before the main players have hardened their preferences and positions. And probably this 'someone' will need some kind of rule-based 'protection'—a licence to be sceptical and to confront current policy and managerial orthodoxies with evidence of what happened last time the wheel went round. Of course top policymakers will retain the right to reject such evidence from the past, but in a robust system of decision making they should not be permitted to avoid it altogether.

7.3.4 We Live in a Period When Much Stress is Being Laid on the Need for Public Sector 'Innovation'. Does That Have a Temporal Dimension Too?

Innovation definitely has a strong temporal dimension. After all, if innovation means 'new ideas' then that implies these did not exist in the past (or, at least, not in quite the same form). More significantly, there is a close connection between innovation, on the one hand, and one's time perspective on the other:

Public organizations with short time horizons are highly resistant to innovation. Governments with very small majorities, ministers and officials with short

job tenures, and organizational cultures focused on tomorrow's news coverage, are more likely to echo Groucho Marx's famous question: 'What's posterity ever done for me?'

<div align="right">(Mulgan 2007: 13)</div>

In his report on public sector innovation Mulgan goes on to connect innovation to four different time horizons—short term, medium term, longer term and the 'generational horizon' (see Table 7.1). He refers to these as 'four horizons of effective leadership' (2007: 14).

In keeping with the arguments made earlier in this book (and this chapter), however, I would like to add a *past* dimension to Mulgan's future gazing leadership. Therefore I have added four matching perspectives on the past to give an additional, right-hand column to Table 7.1. Innovation hunters need to learn from what has gone before as well as what is promised by the innovators of the day. The clever young economists who put forward an innovatory property tax certainly need their theories and models and predictive estimates, but those who carry the responsibility

Table 7.1 Time Horizons for Effective Leadership

Future Orientation	Type of Innovation	Example(s)	Past Orientation
'*Generational*' (20 years plus).	Radical/ broadscope/ visionary.	Climate change; pensions policy.	*Very long term* (past civilizations, empires, technologies).
Long term (3 20 years).	Policy/strategic.	Constitutional change; new high speed train line/nuclear submarine programme.	*Long term* (parallels and precedents over the past century).
Medium term (1 3 years).	Incremental.	Improving existing programmes, e.g., higher environmental standards, better schools.	*Medium term* (learning from relevant policies and programmes here and elsewhere over the past 5 20 years).
Short term (days, weeks, months).	Tactical.	Dealing with an airport workers' strike; dealing with media reports of police corruption.	*Recent past* (take the initiative but also remind people of the longer perspective).

Source: Partly adapted from Mulgan 2007: 13–14.

of making decisions about these attractive and 'revolutionary' proposals also need to know something of (in, say, the UK case) the administrative and political histories of the poll tax and the 'rates'. The strategists who propose to send a UN peacekeeping force as a radical break in the tragic upward spiral of ethnic conflict in country X should have their apparently decisive proposal closely checked out against the experience with previous peacekeeping missions, and especially against the kinds of predictions made by their respective advocates immediately prior to the decision to commit (i.e., to advisers who were then in the same time position relative to intervention as these advisers are in now).

It should not be assumed that such past comparisons will always point towards caution and restraint. Far from it—they may equally point to the advantage of early decisive action.

In short, there is no necessary contradiction between looking backward and looking forward. On the contrary, the two are mutually complementary and supportive. The question politicians and senior public servants need to ask themselves is whether, within their usual decision processes and organizational network, they have all the eight 'future orientation' and 'past orientation' cells in Table 7.1 adequately covered? Are there competent advisers regularly available to speak to each time perspective, forward and back, according to the particular case? (That is, one case may have very little long term content or implication, whereas the next may be primarily long term or even generational.) Even if such advisers are available, are they actually used and listened to? If the answer is that X has been around a long time and can cover the ancient history as well as the current tactics, then the suspicion arises that the arrangements may well be inadequate. It is extremely difficult for one person, however knowledgable, to cover all the different perspectives simultaneously. Most commonly, the short term tactics drive out the long term considerations. And someone who has simply been in the organization for a long time may well not have acquired either the detachment and analytic rigour of a professional historian or the nose for how longs thing will really take possessed by seasoned operational staff. Arguably, the different time perspectives need their own advocates, not a single synthesizer. (One implication of this line of argument is that decision procedures become 'flatter'/less hierarchical, because of the need to bring operational level staff and outside experts into the team of advisers. The idea of a single synthesizer—a key policy aide who draws

everything together in a single, seamless flow of advice begins to look overambitious, if not downright dangerous.)

7.3.5 What Are the 'Time Tactics' That Have Been Referred To at Various Places in the Earlier Chapters?

These were first mentioned in Chapter 2, in connection with Nowotny's work (section 2.4), and have cropped up in various other places since. Time tactics are in fact a very old aspect of practitioner knowledge, and Machiavelli is just one of the better known examples of an early guru on such matters. For example, in *The Prince* he warns rulers against relying too much on their subjects' loyalties where these are based on past triumphs: '. . . men are won over by the present far more than by the past; and when they decide that what is being done here and now is good, they content themselves with that and do not go looking for anything else' (Machiavelli [1516] 2003: 77). Thus he usually counsels boldness in the present, rather than circumspection. Yet he is equally insistent that rulers must adapt to the mood of the moment: 'one who adapts his policy to the times prospers, and likewise the one whose policies clashes with the times does not' (ibid.: 80).

Such ideas about time ploys seem curiously underdeveloped by academics in modern times. Thus there is no standard text or authoritative source to which the reader (practitioner or academic) can be referred. All that can be done is to accumulate, combine and tabulate some of the tactics which have been mentioned in the literature reviewed between these covers. Such an exercise yields the list shown in Table 7.2, below.

7.3.6 What Are the Pay-Offs for Giving More Attention to the Temporal Dimension?

Some of these are rather saintly, others more practical. They follow from the discussions in previous sections of this chapter, and therefore include:

- Avoiding predictable failures and blunders.
- Crafting more robust policies and programmes.
- Increasing the probability of a workable, realistically planned implementation.
- Enhancing the perceived legitimacy of new policies and programmes.
- Avoiding the unintentional reduction of existing achievements, competences and capacities.

Table 7.2 Time Tactics: A Selection

Tactic	Comment
1. Delaying, keep waiting.	Can be used by both the more and the less powerful. Especially effective when operational staff who cannot be substituted (e.g., the armed services, the healthcare professions) claim they need more time hard to challenge them and politically risky to give them direct orders in case things do go badly wrong. But also used by political leaders who may set up a committee or an inquiry in order to 'kick the ball into the long grass' and defuse current criticism.
2. Speeding up.	'Strike while the iron is hot'. May entail first creating a sense of urgency or crisis, which enables the key actors to by-pass traditional/normal processes of consultation and review.
3. Fixing deadlines.	A popular feature of 'roadmaps' and other solutions to complex problems. To some extent a counter tactic to no.1 above: 'OK, I accept you can't do it straight away, but you must do it by 1st July'. Deadlines are usually a tactic imposed by the more powerful rather than the less powerful actor. They are in routine use in international settings, e.g., the EU and the UN.
4. Making promises.	'If you do this now, I will do that within the next year'. This may be a way of obtaining present benefits while hoping that circumstances will change sufficiently over time that the promise will never have to be 100 percent fulfilled. Contracts are, of course, a standard way of attempting to tie down promises within a framework of legal adjudication and penalties.
5. Seizing a moment of weakness among the opposition.	When your enemies are divided, bring forward your carefully prepared plans: political *blitzkrieg*.
6. Saving the announcement of bad news until a time when there is some other, vivid, event that will distract attention from it.	A notorious example was when a press officer in the Blair administration suggested releasing unpopular government news in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington.
7. Agreeing when to act in the future.	An advanced version of fixing deadlines (no. 3 above) and making promises (no. 4 above). 'If you announce this now I will make a supporting statement tomorrow', or 'we both agree to do this before the end of the year'. The advantage over nos. 3 and 4 is that this tactic is agreed between the two or more parties. However, by the same token, the parties may tacitly agree later to slacken up on implementation (as has appeared to be the case with, e.g., some development aid agreements).
8. Claiming to be new and the only way forward.	This is a common rhetorical tactic. Mrs Thatcher was one of its most able practitioners, with her combination of 'there is no turning back' and 'there is no alternative'. It is a time tactic in the sense that it claims an impersonal future imperative. 'Globalization' and 'new technology' are currently two forces frequently appealed to as external and unstoppable.

(*Continued*)

Table 7.2 (*Continued*)

Tactic	Comment
9. Claiming to be returning to the traditional, good old ways/days.	The opposite rhetorical tactic to no. 8. Especially useful when there is a mood of disillusionment with recent reforms/events. The good old ways/days are usually mythical, but that is of secondary importance they spell what is known, familiar, comfortable. A really clever politician may be able to combine nos. 8 and 9, arguing that the traditional solution is the only way forward!
10. Claiming it is too late to do any more.	'It is time to move on' has become a very popular political saying in recent years, as has, 'We should draw a line under this now'. These are claims that the topic at hand has been exhausted. It tends to be the powerful who make such claims, when faced with embarrassing revelations. They should not automatically be believed!

- Reducing the chances of falling prey to misleading and unexamined historical stereotypes/precedents (i.e., the 'Suez syndrome').
- (Perhaps) increasing the chances that one will subsequently be perceived as 'statesmanlike' rather than short-sighted and naive.

None of these pay-offs are automatic. Attention to the temporal dimension merely makes them a bit more likely.

On the other hand, such attention is remarkably cheap. The most expensive item suggested in this chapter thus far has been a database of studies of previous policies, and in government terms that is peanuts. The only way in which paying more systematic attention to time is costly is in time itself. It must be admitted that the kinds of suggestions advanced above insert additional stages and players into the policymaking process—a process in which time can often seem very short to hard-pressed political leaders and senior managers. 'Marry in haste, repent at leisure' might be the relevant riposte here, but it can also be a difficult counsel to follow in the heat of the political fray.

8

After All

As a personal policy, I suggest that thinking directly about the future or the past should occupy no more than ten per cent of your time a day

(Adair 1982: 57)

Time folds, he said, meaning that as time goes on and on it buckles, in the extreme heat, in the extreme cold, and what is long past becomes closer

(Atwood 2006: 147)

The end crowns all,
And that old common arbitrator, Time,
Will one day end it

(Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, III, iv, 223)

8.1 The Nature of the Enterprise

'Write your conclusions first!' is a piece of counterintuitive advice which social science professors not infrequently offer to their doctoral students as the latter embark on their first really long pieces of writing. Well, I did. Mine have long since been consigned to the bin. The following text bears small relation to what I thought I would be writing when (in subjective time, half a lifetime ago: in clock time, much less) I first had the idea for this book. That may mean that I didn't have sharp goals, a clear plan, a well thought out set of hypotheses. Unscientific, woolly, meandering. Or (my preferred interpretation, as you may guess) it may mean that this was a voyage of discovery in which both route and destination were revised in the light of new ideas and information. (That, too, is what we say to our doctoral students.)

The voyage metaphor (with which I began the book) is much used and abused. I cannot equal the likes of Roberto Franzosi, whose book on narrative, data and the social sciences—highly relevant to our present concerns—ends with an extended firework display of learned references to voyages, but I will press on just a little further with my own journey (Franzosi 2004: 324–34). Like so many other travellers, both 'real world' and academic, what I discover is not a particular destination but rather the highs and lows of the process of travelling itself. 'The further one travels, the more one learns', as Christopher Columbus put it (Columbus 1969: 24).

What sort of voyage has this been? Definitely not a business trip. More a pleasure cruise, although, like many such, not uniformly pleasurable. Ironically, it is a trip I could never have made if my employers had not gifted me a large slice of time. Wide ranging books such as this require an immense amount of background reading, much of which leads to more reading, and so on. I am very conscious that most of my academic colleagues are far more closely tied to teaching schedules and/or research contracts than I currently am. They are on business trips in which they have to steer their ships into port by the deadline and then unload the cargo, as specified in the manifest. I have had the privilege of cruising, inquisitively.

For the most part this cruise has proceeded at quite high speed—skimming over the surface like a clipper. It has not been an occasion for pausing to lower the diving bell into the depths—an omission that will doubtless provoke criticism from experts in various techniques and theories that I have failed to explore with the profundity that they deserve. But then that has never been the purpose of the voyage—I have been trying to sketch a map of broad seas, not explore local habitats or raise sunken treasure. This strategy has been founded on the belief set out in the preface and in Chapter 1—that most mainstream public policy and public management writing effectively ignores or underestimates temporal factors, and that therefore we need to travel widely if we are to find out what the range of possibilities for tackling these issues may be. Of course, we can never travel widely enough—there are certainly interesting places which I have failed to visit.

8.2 The Future of the Past

One way of expressing the main conclusion would be to say that, despite the decontextualizing forces in contemporary social science, despite Internet instantaneity, despite the 24/7, event focused nature of the mass

media and the impact of that upon politics, and despite a range of other narrowing influences referred to in these pages, the past nevertheless still has a strong future. To some extent it *will* exert its influences, whether we like it or not. However, we can make things much easier for ourselves if we actively learn to live with the past, and with the way many of the important actions we take now may carry both consequences and requirements which stretch far into the future. In short, we can recognize the reality of long linkages over time, and adapt our policies and institutions to allow for them, or we can blunder forwards without either rearview mirrors or forward vision much beyond the end of the ship's prow.

What this book has shown is that *strong temporal patterns are present in a great deal of policymaking and public management.* These are, at a minimum, those patterns summarized in Chapter 6—paths/arrows, punctuations/ windows and cycles/tacking. This does not mean that such patterns are present everywhere at every time. Such universality would in any case be an unexpected outcome, and one that is quite unnecessary in terms of establishing the importance of a temporal perspective. Nor does it mean that we can offer a neat account of the mechanisms driving these patterns. The mechanisms may well be more various and numerous than the patterns—the mechanisms are perhaps the least tidy, most contested element of the academic debate over time. It seems entirely possible that we may be seeing a form of isomorphism, where different mechanisms can produce similar patterns. Thus, for example, a cyclical movement between centralization and decentralization in a particular sector may be triggered by political disaffection with the status quo or by changing technologies of coordination and control or by fashions in management doctrines (or by any combination of the three).

Not only are strong patterns often present, but they have significant practical consequences. What stage you are at in a cycle, how far you are down a path—these temporal locations will make some courses of action easier and others much more difficult. This may often be instinctively understood by shrewd politicians and public managers (viz. Kingdon's policy agenda literature), but it is certainly not always understood, and lack of awareness can lead to a wastage of energy and political capital, and/ or to actual policy and management failure. Certain kinds of organizational arrangement can raise or lower this awareness. The kind of hectic, serial, 'hypermodern' changes we have seen recently in a few countries lowers it. Maintaining organizations which have well ordered, well publicized and regularly used memories (both in terms of software and 'humanware') raises it.

Taking the temporal dimension seriously cannot be achieved in a purely formulaic way, even if some of the relevant and useful techniques may themselves be highly formal (time series analysis, PERT charts). Framing issues and interpreting evidence are crucial and inescapable parts of the processes of analysis and decision. There is no 'one best theory' or 'one best technique', and frequently a multiple or combined approach may be the most illuminating. The kinds of overall answers to be expected from such analysis are rarely certain and precise, although considerable precision may be achieved in particular parts of the process (e.g., measuring the duration of specific tasks or the rates at which sociodemographic variables have changed over a given period). Yet it is far better to have approximate answers to the really important questions than only precise answers to less important ones: important questions such as, 'Will this work?', 'How long will this take?' or, 'What is the best time to try?' Each of these involves looking to both the future *and* the past.

8.3 The Pace of the Present

Finally, it may be appropriate to return to an idea that was floated right at the beginning of this book. It is a commonplace, indeed almost an unchallenged observation on our present predicament. It is that everything moves faster now than it used to. Rates of change—organizational, technological, social—are increasing. People employed in government and the public services experience relentless time pressures. As a Dutch permanent secretary put it: 'And the drive to think we have to do it faster, the acceleration of it all, wanting to have and do everything within this life . . . it all has to be shortened and fast and accelerating' (quoted in Sabelis 2002: 100).

In the light of the concerns of this book, what are we to make of this maelstrom? Certainly it brings large benefits, but also heavy costs. On the profit side new programmes can be launched more swiftly and, if they do good, those benefits reach citizens faster. In many jurisdictions (but certainly not all) long waits for basic public services have become rarer and those that remain are under great critical pressure. It is easier than it used to be to change obsolete procedures and organizations, and often somewhat easier to get rid of incompetents, both politicians and appointed officials. (Unfortunately, by the same token, it becomes easier to get rid of 'inconvenients', who may not be incompetent at all, but merely the representatives of unwelcome points of view.) Emergencies can now be dealt with at impressive speed (*can* be—not necessarily *will* be—as the

Katrina example in Chapter 1 showed). Communications are orders of magnitude faster than they were even two or three decades ago (which itself accounts for much of the pressure). Information is more abundantly and rapidly available, which should be good for democracy, in many different ways.

The costs are perhaps less obvious, but no less real. Staff 'burn out'. Experience is lost and organizational memories dwindle. Time compression can be the enemy of creativity and even, on occasion, humanity. Both the staff and the users of public services are constantly having to come to terms with new procedures, requirements, names, logos—and some of them never successfully or completely grasp these novelties. Robustness may be sacrificed for efficiency. Wheels are re-invented (and they are sometimes as square as the previous design). Policy consistency and coherence over time may decline. Loyalty and trust become harder to cultivate—at all levels of the system.

These may be some of the gains and losses, but how should we conceptualize this process of ever-growing time intensity? Does it, for example, mean that the past is of dwindling significance—that the 'expanded present' (accompanied, possibly, by an 'expanded future') is now all-important? If we no longer think so much about the past (or even know so much about the past) then does its net influence necessarily diminish? *Time, Policy, Management* may not have furnished conclusive answers to these enormous questions, but it has at least suggested some ways of thinking about them.

To start with, we should ask who is supporting, aiding and abetting the collective speeding-up? As Elias would put it, what is its purpose? And who is resisting the process, and why? To treat it as something entirely exogenous, forced upon us by technological change or some such impersonal force would be, according to the arguments developed in earlier chapters, a serious error. So, what is being better synchronized with what, thanks to the truncated timescales of contemporary governance? How far down and across our public services has the 'new urgency' spread? Is it mainly concentrated in the upper echelons or has it permeated all the way down to the 'street bureaucrats'? Is the pattern of intensity, by level and by sector, roughly the same in all advanced countries or is official life more hectic in the UK and the US than in Germany or Italy? How far can it go—when some people in the public sector are already regularly working 75-hour weeks or more, constantly either in front of a screen or at meetings, what further intensification can be possible? More broadly, who lives within this new time-world, and who lives outside it? Is it populated mainly by young, upwardly mobile professionals ('yuppies'—a recent

term but one that, in the rush, has already largely gone out of use)? Does it exclude the most rapidly growing section of the population in many advanced societies—the elderly? If so, in what kind of timewarp do they live, and how is that related to the rush and tumble of current policy-making? Certainly we live in societies where many types of government statement reinforce the assumptions that to be busy is good and, by implication, *not* to be busy is embarrassing, if not shameful.

In one important case, we can offer an answer rather than a question. Even in those countries and contexts where policymaking is most pressur-ized, where public organizations change at hypermodern speeds and where electronic instaneity is the order of the day—even in those places the influence of the past will remain enormous. The basic argument which derives the irrelevance of the past from the postulate of accelerating change is itself suspect. If a cinema film is being projected faster and faster, the search for explanation still draws us to examine the projector and what the projectionist is doing to it, i.e., to the background circumstances producing the phenomenon of speed. Furthermore, the sequences of plot and action, though compressed, remain vital to the meanings of the film. To put it more directly, the arguments and evidence assembled in the earlier chapters strongly suggest that while we can try to ignore the past, it will not let us alone. In concrete terms, the majority of laws, policies, people and buildings will continue to come from the past, often from the quite distant past. They will have been formed and influenced by past circumstances and, while these earlier influences can often be over-lain or suppressed, they can seldom be entirely eliminated. It is extremely difficult to avoid time's arrows, or to suddenly jump off its cycles. The past inevitably constrains the range of present options in a myriad ways, and, more positively, it also shapes future opportunities. One of these ways is by influencing our time perspectives themselves, including our knowledge of the varying fates of previous innovations and our understanding of the time perspectives and time tactics of the others with whom we work and live. The central case of this book is that, of late, many of us—academics, policymakers and public managers—each have failed to pay enough at-tention to these processes that act over time. We have become unrealis-tically impatient and energetically clumsy in our handling of time. Yet we already possess the tools to do much better. We are certainly sophisticated enough not to have to believe that extreme time compression is the inevitable, universal or only way forward.

8.4 Finally

Last of all, a contrasting pair of temporal truths: the first is from a sixteenth century French proverb; the second originates in the King James bible's version of the gospel according to St Matthew, and was modified to become the title of George Harrison's 1970 triple LP:

Tout vient à celui qui sait attendre

and yet:

All things must pass.

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