

〔論 説〕

# The Centralised Core Executive vs Policy Communities

—Challenges and Problems of  
the Blair Government's Approach—<sup>1</sup>

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## 要旨

英国の伝統的国家構造の基本は議会主権であり、その主権を担う議会の信任する政府が政策運営を主導するものと理解されてきた。なかでも、首相や内閣、大臣には多くの関心が寄せられ、官僚制を含め、いずれのアクターが政策を主導しているのかが、ときにはゼロ・サム的關係を前提に、議論されてきた。

他方、英国では特に1970年代半ば以降、このような静的な政策決定メカニズムの理解には疑問も投げかけられるようになった。政策コミュニティー論あるいは政策ネットワーク論として知られる一連の研究の登場である。政策は実際にはマクロの政策決定メカニズムによってではなく、政策領域や争点ごとに多様なアクターの相互關係のなかで決せられているのではないか、というのがその主張であった。

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しかし、政策コミュニティあるいは政策ネットワークを強調する議論は、理論的にも現実政治的にも、政府全体の統合や調整への問いを惹起する。理論的には、執政府中枢（core executive）という概念が形成され、こうした研究課題への取り組みが本格化してきた。執政府中枢という概念を提示した研究者のひとりが政策ネットワーク論に取り組んできたロッド・ローズであったことは偶然ではない。

さらに現実政治では、断片化した政府を問題と捉え、これを強力に統合しようとしたのがブレア労働党政権であった。ブレア政権は、首相府、内閣府、財務省を司令塔とし、他の省庁をある種の執行機関と位置づけ、執政府中枢による介入とコントロールを強化した。だが、それは重大な弊害を伴う改革でもあった。

## 1. Westminster System vs Policy Communities

Britain has traditionally been considered as a typical Westminster system. In fact, the term ‘Westminster’ comes from where the British parliament locates itself. A Westminster system indicates a centralised majoritarian system, which is a macro-level model for a liberal democracy. It can also be described as a straightforward delegation model; the electorate elects and sacks members of the House of Commons (MPs) ; MPs effectively choose their prime minister and sack him/her at their discretion if they wish to do so; the prime minister chooses, moves and sacks ministers; and ministers usually take charge of particular government departments or, for a junior minister, part of them. Civil servants support their ministers, providing advice and information, and implement the ministers’ decisions. Therefore, although the Westminster system is a macro-level model of liberal democracy, it also presents a meso-level model for decision-making. Power was supposed to be centralised, and the prime minister and the ministers were the key to the understanding of decision-making in a Westminster system.

Indeed, the heated debate in the 1960s and 1970s was on whether the

British government moved from cabinet government to become prime-ministerial (Mackintosh, 1962; Crossman, 1963; Crossman, 1972; Jones, 1965; Brown, 1968a; Brown, 1968b; Norton, 1988). The relationships between the prime minister and the cabinet (and cabinet ministers) were taken effectively to be a zero-sum game; one wins and the other loses. The debate itself was almost futile, as the hypotheses were never tested rigorously. It became almost tautological, as participants emphasised observations, which suited their own arguments. However, the debate did draw attention to the centre of government and provided rich material for those interested in the subject.

By the late 1970s scholars started to take more sophisticated attitudes towards policy-making, owing to American academic influence and other disciplines, such as sociology. Anthony King (1975: 220) argued, 'it seems unwise to case one's entire analysis in a mold that assumes that conflict rather than collaboration is the *métier* of executive politics'. Relationships within the executive were not necessarily static, adversarial and zero-sum, but were more likely to be fluctuating, cooperative, goal-sharing and positive-sum (cf. Smith, 1999a).

Concepts such as sub-government, issue network, policy community, sub-central government, as well as policy network came out in the United States and Britain, and later in continental Europe. Rod Rhodes, one of the proponents of such concepts, argued that British politics could be better understood from the perspective of a differentiated state model rather than that of a unitary state (Rhodes, 1988). Fragmentation of the government, rather than centralisation, was strongly emphasised in such theses.

Politics was not all about Kings and Lords, nor prime ministers and ministers. The bulk of the policies was actually decided and implemented elsewhere. Party differences, it was argued, might not have even mattered, either (Rose, 1976 [1974]; Rose and Davies, 1994; Richardson and Jordan, 1979). Observers' attentions shifted away from the prime minister and ministers to these multiple, meso as well as micro-level policy communities<sup>2</sup>.

However, such a focus on policy communities naturally begged the normative/practical and theoretical questions over coordination and priority setting. How would a government coordinate policies and decisions within itself, and how could a democratically elected government take back the initiative in such matters, facing various policy communities?

This paper, first, clarifies the meaning of the ‘core executive’ as a concept, which shed light on coordination in government. Secondly, it looks into the nature and changing conditions of policy communities in British politics. Thirdly, this paper focuses on the attempt by the Blair government to centralise the core executive and the policy processes in the British government. It shows that the attempt derived from the sense of lack of power on the political leaders’ side. Admitting it to be a model of government, the paper ends with observations, which point to the problems of the centralisation and managerial approach of the Blair government.

## 2. Core Executive vs Policy Communities

It was no surprise that Rod Rhodes, one of the champions of the policy-network theory, developed the concept of the ‘core executive’ with others. Instead of using the conventional term, cabinet government, to grasp the ‘innermost centre of British central government’, Patrick Dunleavy and Rhodes proposed the term, core executive, for two reasons. First, cabinet government ‘mis-states the currently effective mechanisms for achieving coordination’ and ‘(A) t best it is contentious, and at worst seriously misleading to assert the primacy of the Cabinet’. Secondly, ‘the label “cabinet government” describes not just a particular pattern of coordination but also a normative ideal, a constitutional theory of how the very centre of the UK state should operate’ (Dunleavy and Rhodes, 1990: 3).

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2 Hereafter, for the sake of simplicity, this paper uses ‘policy community’ as a general term.

Later Rhodes (1995: 12) defined the core executive as; '*all those organisations and procedures which coordinate central government policies, and act as final arbiters of conflict between different parts of the government machine*' (original emphasis). He pointed out that his intention was to distinguish between the core executive and the executive by 'the issues of coordination and fragmentation in central government' (Rhodes, 1995: 12). Referring to Rhodes' own words, 'The term "core executive" directs attention to the extent and efficacy of, and the various mechanisms for, coordination' (Rhodes, 1995: 12).

Although the term 'executive' appeared to embrace the whole executive branch of the central government in Rhodes' argument, it concerned mainly 'the policy-making role of departments and their relationship to the core executive' (Rhodes, 1995: 12). Therefore, whichever way the executive was understood, it did not make sense to include all of the government departments into the core executive, as Martin J. Smith (1999a: 5) attempted, considering the implication of the concept. The departments often had strong relations with their policy clients, with which they constituted policy communities (Rhodes, 1988: 82). Hence, fragmentation was their key feature. The core executive attracted particular attention because it was supposed to let the executive, as a whole or in part, 'join up' in a concerted fashion. Crucial was the functional distinction of the core executive from the rest of the executive.

According to Dunleavy and Rhodes (1990: 4), the core executive as a concept 'does not prejudice the pattern of relations which empirical research will establish. Nor does it identify a normative ideal to which patterns of core executive activity should conform'. These features were vital to overcome the problems, created by the conventional concept, namely cabinet government. The core executive was to have a fluid pattern and, as Robert Elgie (2011: 70) put it, 'it is usually assumed that there is no dominant model of core executive politics'.

Because of these features, however, the concept of the core executive itself did not specify any particular pattern of coordination and

priority setting. In fact, if coordination did not exist for a particular issue or policy, it could in theory be argued that a core executive did not exist, either. Although Elgie himself proposed a typology to classify patterns of core executive politics (Elgie, 1997), the core executive was not a concept that generated hypotheses, and thus did not provide a theory to comprehend the features and functioning of its activities; it was an open question to be explored<sup>3</sup>.

### 3. Organised Interests vs Non-organised Interests

There was also a normative/practical question over coordination and priority setting. If the policy communities were so powerful and if issue networks were so open to pressure from outside groups, how would a democratically elected government realise its pledges and wills in the policy processes?

In the celebrated study of policy communities, J. J. Richardson and Grant Jordan (1979: 61) argued it had become difficult to differentiate groups, agencies and departments, in other words, distinguish the 'government' and the 'governed'. 'No longer do the assets of government markedly outweigh the assets of any given group or set of groups in a particular bargaining situation' (Richardson and Jordan, 1979: 172). The background to this understanding was the 'interventionist style of government' at the time;

Much of what the government aspires to 'control' is outside its direct influence and can be secured only, if at all, by groups. The government can manage its complex environment only through

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3 For Elgie, who looked back on the twenty years of core executive studies, 'The reason why the term is used so frequently in this way is that the concept of the core executive has no inherent explanatory power. It is a neutral term and was deliberately chosen to be so. It emphasizes that the full range of actors within the central government territory need to be included in any study of power in that context, but it does not tell us anything about the power of those actors themselves or the relations between them' (Elgie, 2011: 72).

the cooperation of mediating institutions - the groups (Richardson and Jordan, 1979: 171).

In a another book they argued '(t) he whole rationale of policy communities is that change is by agreement. Unless there is some particular crisis facing the policy community, then radical policy change is unlikely to be agreed' (Jordan and Richardson, 1987: 259). According to their observation, consultation and committees, the latter of which materialised consultation, was 'a manifestation of a Keynesian "fine tuning" democracy' (Richardson and Jordan, 1979: 188). When there were clear answers to the basic socio-economic problems, policies were (thought to be) less controversial and became more or less technical.

There were two intertwined issues to this way of policy-making, both of which had significant meanings to the understanding of liberal democracy and representation. Conventionally members of the public took part in politics in two ways<sup>4</sup>. One was through the ballot box and the other way was through participation in groups and movements. Policy communities drew particular attention to the latter way of representation. So long as policies were technical and less controversial, policy communities had a certain legitimacy to make policies, as they had the expertise, knowledge, and most of all, the densest interests in their respective policy area. However, consumers and members of the public, who did not or could not organise themselves into an association, had apparent difficulties in making their voices heard. Representation was arguably biased in favour of certain organised interests. Controversies and conflict of influences could be silenced, not necessarily by force, but by the collective action problem, which non-organised groups of certain shared interests usually faced (Dowding, 1991). Shared interests and threats to them did not always lead to the birth of associations or movements, as Richardson and Jordan (1979) and

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4 Other than the conventional ways to participate in politics, behaviour such as boycotting products has been seen as an alternative way to take part in politics (Stoker, 2006).

David Truman (1951) expected.

In the United States, for instance, Theodore Lowi was expressly critical of such strongly organised interest groups' excessive influence on public policy. Yet in the UK such criticisms against policy communities did not necessarily advance in the literature.

Criticism came instead from politicians. From the 1980s a different ideological paradigm started prevailing in government, as Keynesian "fine tuning" democracy' lost credibility and was thus waning. Neo-liberalism was spreading and the government ceased to wish to control the economy and run services directly by itself. The democratically elected government wanted to change policy directions and inevitably the way some interest groups took part in policy-making. Typically the powerful trade unions became effectively excluded from the policy processes. The Confederation of Business Industry (CBI), the counterpart of the trade unions, also, to a less extent, lost its influence, particularly after the prices and incomes policy was abandoned altogether.

The Conservative government, which came into power in 1979, changed the political and economic conditions for policy communities. Until the 1970s Britain was, according to Michael Moran (2003), run by a 'club government', which was a self-regulating system of each individual profession. The City, local governments, the National Health Service (NHS) and doctors, schools, and public utilities including telecommunications, electricity and gas were such examples. The professions and industries created an exclusive community, cooperating with the regulatory government departments. They were the basis for the policy communities. Their members were supposed to be 'good chaps' and the department officials were trusted to 'know the best'.

Deregulation and opening up the 'clubs' of professions and industries brought unknown new players into the game. Independent regulators were put in place to monitor and regulate respective industries. To take a few examples, Oftel (Office of Telecommunications) was set up in 1984 to regulate the telecommunications industry, while Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education, currently Office for Standards in

Education, Children's Services and Skills) came into place in 1992. The Office of the Gas and Electricity Markets (Ofgem) regulated companies, which run the gas and electricity networks. As for hospitals, league tables were published to show the ratings of hospitals in accordance with their performances.

The Conservative government adopted a neo-liberal - or New Right - perspective, which emphasised different forms of accountability such as markets and managerialism (Smith 1999b: 112). In 1988 the Ibbs Report, entitled *The Next Steps*, advocated a division in departments between policy advisers and those concerned with service delivery; this division took place rapidly. According to Smith, ' [departmental] Officials are seen as becoming more managerial and concerned with service delivery rather than policy-makers. ... Increasingly, policy advice is coming from think-tanks and from political advisers' (Smith, 1999b: 113). Just as the theory on policy communities started to evolve in the 1980s, the basic conditions for exclusive policy communities started to change<sup>5</sup>.

### Lacking Power at the Centre?

Having said that, the core executive was not centralised, and certainly not centralised around the prime minister in the 1980s and 1990s. The prime minister's intervention into policy-making was selective and limited. Departments, although with condition, enjoyed sufficient autonomy. As David Marsh, *et.al.* (2001: 102, 109) argued;

'The Prime Minister has tremendous authority but lacks suffi-

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5 Hay and Richards (2000) drew attention to network formation, evolution, transformation and termination. They argued 'Network termination (and network failure leading to termination) clearly completes the evolutionary cycle, often indicating a change in governmental priorities, or, indeed, a change in government. Accordingly, network termination is frequently associated with network formation elsewhere' (Hay and Richards, 2000: 9). As Hay and Richards contended, policy communities were certainly subject to changes in government and government priorities.

cient institutional mechanisms for detailed intervention in departmental policy-making. At the same time, while the Prime Minister can affect policy, s/he is unable to monitor policy development within departments, despite the growing roles of the Prime Minister's Office and the Cabinet Office'.

The problem of the old controversy over prime ministerial government was that it conceived power 'as an object located in an institution or an individual rather than something deriving from relationships and constantly changing' (Smith, 1999b: 111). Smith, one of the promoters of the 'core executive' as a concept, was right when he stated, 'Power - or the achievement of goals - does not reside with the Prime Minister or the Cabinet. If ministers, the Prime Minister or officials want to achieve policy goals they do not have to defeat other centres of power; instead, they need each other' (Smith, 1999b: 111).

Yet the issue was who needed whom more, and, as for the political leaders in government, how they could achieve their goals, and how they could change the interdependent relationships with other actors to do so.

Although the core executive in Britain was academically and arguably seen to have a structural bias in favour of prime ministerial dominance (or presidentialisation, to those who prefer this term) (cf. Foley, 1993; Foley, 2000), some practitioners longed for a stronger centre of government. Blair's chief of staff, Jonathan Powell (2011: 29) testified;

'Constitutional theorists opine about the untrammelled power of the British prime minister in Parliament, but it does not feel like that when you get there. A new prime minister pulls on the levers of power and nothing happens. That feeling of powerlessness goes on. ... The little secret of the British constitution is that the centre of government is not too powerful but too weak'.

The Labour government, which came into office in 1997, attempted to centralise the core executive to strengthen their control particularly in certain policy areas in order to overcome the weakness at the centre of government, and 'run from the centre and govern from the centre'<sup>6</sup>.

As one observer argued, ‘There is a sense in which the 1997 general election was a referendum on the future of the welfare state and the public services’ (King, 1998: 192). The Labour government made an explicit pledge to improve public services. Yet at the same time it promised to keep a tight control over its expenditure. The Labour government wished to avoid being associated with the ‘tax and spend’ characterisation, which Tony Blair and Gordon Brown considered as the fatal cause of the party’s defeat in the 1992 general election. To fulfill their pledge, and convince the public that they have, the Labour government needed to centralise not only the core executive but also the whole government.

Nonetheless, as Powell (2011: 45) recalled, this was not easy. For instance, although the prime minister’s office made every effort to deal with the fuel crisis in 2000 and the foot-and-mouth crisis in 2001, ‘we pulled on every lever and none of them was working’. Strong prime ministers might be able to intervene in policy areas of their concern, and possibly indicate the direction of the policies, yet the prime ministers’ resources, such as time, energy, expertise and manpower were limited as described above. More importantly, instructing ministers and civil servants was one thing, while obtaining the results of a policy was another. Hence, ‘delivery’ became a key word around the 2001 general election and, later on, almost an obsession. Michael Barber (2008: 47), one of Blair’s key staff, even noted, ‘In short, by 2000 it was clear to Blair that in relation to the public services - the reform of which has always been central to his mission - he had to deliver or die’.

Blair wanted a centralised government from the very beginning of his government. Blair (2011: 337) stressed in his memoirs;

‘Partly because much of the reform had to be driven from and through Number 10, I knew that we had to strengthen the centre of government considerably, and I made major changes. It is a feature of modern politics that nothing gets done if not driven

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6 Tony Blair, cited in Hennessy (2000: 476).

from the top. Once the framework is set, the departments know their direction and they know what they should do, but leaving it up to them to do it is highly risky, unless the individual ministers fully buy into the vision; and even then, they need to have the power of the centre behind them. / My impatience with the scale and ambition of our reform was now carved in granite. ... I needed to be able to solve the tricky questions of policy detail that added up to the general shape of the change; and I needed to track whether and how the change was being introduced’.

Blair (2011: 339) argued, ‘Increasingly, prime ministers are like CEOs or chairmen of major companies. They have to set a policy direction; they have to see it is followed; they have to get data on whether it is; they have to measure outcomes’.

Despite Blair’s wishes, Powell (2011: 29) was right when he stated, ‘In truth, political power does not reside in Number 10 but is instead widely diffused in the British elite, not just in government but outside of it as well. The only way a prime minister can govern is by persuading that elite, by building coalitions of support and by carrying his colleagues with him’.

Because of the lack of resources around the prime minister and because of the prime minister’s will to ‘govern from the centre’, the Blair government needed to strengthen the centre to change the power balances with ministers and government departments, to say the least.

### **Centralising the Core Executive under the Blair Government**

One crucial feature of the Blair government was that its centralised power was not a single-pointed pyramid with the prime minister at the apex. It was a duopoly of the prime minister and the chancellor of the exchequer. Hence, centralisation of the core executive was observed around both of them, which more than often ended in contradiction.

Centralisation under the prime minister was observed in three aspects; communications, policy ideas and monitoring/implementation. The press office within the prime minister’s office was to coordinate

and arguably control government presentation. This was made possible after the revision of the Ministerial Code required ministers to clear all major interviews, press releases and policy statements with the prime minister's office before they were released to the media (Fawcett and Rhodes, 2007: 82)<sup>7</sup>. They were to be in line with the overall strategy and message of the government. After the 2001 general election, the strategic communications unit was set up to strengthen this function within the prime minister's office<sup>8</sup>. Blair wanted to send out a clear and consistent message from the government under his strong control.

Secondly, the policy unit extended its involvement in policy-making in the individual departments, which was Blair's request at the first cabinet meeting. According to Dennis Kavanagh and Anthony Seldon, 'the implication was that they would lose standing with him if they did not' (Kavanagh and Seldon, 1999: 263). The policy directorate, which was created after the 2001 general election, combined the private office and the policy unit into one body, which included chief advisors on European affairs, and defence and foreign affairs<sup>9</sup>. In 2002 a new post of intelligence and security coordinator was created, who became the prime minister's principal adviser on security, intelligence and emer-

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7 From a different viewpoint, Powell (2011: 21), Blair's chief of staff, argued this special Order in Council 'always seemed to me entirely unnecessary. After all, political appointees in Number 10 had been managing civil servants for decades'. 'This Order in Council later came to take on a totally disproportionate significance in the media and was used as a political hammer with which to attack Tony [Blair]'.

8 From 2003, after Alastair Campbell left office, the director of communications and strategy within the prime minister's office was not given line management powers, and the function to overlook overall government media strategy and personnel was transferred to a newly created permanent secretary of government communications in the cabinet office (Fawcett and Rhodes, 2007: 82-3).

9 In 2005 the private office and the policy unit were separated. Although organisational rearrangement took place frequently during the Blair government, such descriptions shall be limited to the minimum in this paper.

gency-related matters (Fawcett and Rhodes, 2007: 82). These chief advisors also belonged to the cabinet office as head of the related cabinet secretariats at a permanent secretary level. The policy directorate's role was to make sure the departments were aware of the prime minister's agenda, which effectively allowed the prime minister's office to lead the policies (Smith, 2011: 173). As its special advisors oversaw and gave comments on policy proposals from departments, the prime minister's office developed capability to direct departments (Richards and Smith, 2004: 112).

New bodies were also created in the cabinet office. Amongst them, the performance and innovation unit and the forward strategy unit were merged to become the strategy unit in 2002 (TSO, 2002b: 74). The three roles of the strategy unit were (1) strategic reviews and policy advice on the prime minister's domestic policy priorities, (2) helping departments develop effective strategies and policies, and (3) identifying and disseminating thinking on emerging issues and challenges. Project teams were organised around five clusters; public service reform, home affairs, economy and infrastructure, welfare reform, and social justice and communities. The members were from the civil service, the private and voluntary sectors and the wider public sector (Fawcett and Rhodes, 2007: 83-4).

Monitoring and imposing implementation was also a significant function the cabinet office under Blair performed. The office of public service reform and the prime minister's delivery unit (PMDU) were both set in the cabinet office (Burch and Holliday, 2004: 9). Smith saw the PMDU as 'The most important development in terms of strengthening the centre' (Smith, 2011: 175). The PMDU, set up after the 2001 general election, focused on four departments, health, education, transport and the home office, concentrating on specific 'issues of real salience'.<sup>10</sup> Blair himself wanted the PMDU to narrow its focus. The targets were selected from the government's existing targets, most of them coming from the 2001 manifesto or the previous spending review (Barber, 2008: 49-50, 56). According to Michael Barber, the head of the

PMDU, he ensured that ‘the Prime Minister’s new priorities and the public service agreements (PSA) targets published in 2000 were brought into alignment. Indeed, the PSA targets became the basis of our work’ (Barber, 2008: 56)<sup>11</sup>. PSAs were set between the Treasury and the departments, as described below. Although these new bodies, namely the office for public service reform, the forward strategy unit, the strategy unit, and the PMDU were created within the cabinet office, their heads were given portfolios by the prime minister, and were to report directly to the prime minister via the cabinet secretary.

On the other hand, the Treasury, led by Brown, the chancellor of the exchequer, also played a crucial role in leading not only fiscal policy but also wider domestic policies. Some observers even argued, ‘In Bagehot’s term, the Prime Minister had become a “dignified” rather than “efficient” part of the Constitution in this sphere [economic policy]’, although Blair himself would have strongly disputed such a remark (Sinclair, 2007: 201; Blair, 2011: 114-5)<sup>12</sup>.

In 1998 Brown set up the comprehensive spending review, which was to link policy goals with policy tools directly, and to examine each expenditure programme of government departments (Burch and

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10 The priorities for the PMDU were heart disease mortality, cancer mortality, waiting lists, waiting times, accident and emergency for the Department of Health, literacy and numeracy at 11, math and English at 14, 5+ A\* -C GCSEs, truancy at the Department of Education, overall crime and breakdowns by type, likelihood of being a victim, offenders brought to justice at the Home Office, and road congestion and rail punctuality at the Department of Transport (Barber, 2008: 50).

11 The PMDU was eventually transferred from the cabinet office to the Treasury in 2003.

12 According to Blair (2011: 114 and 115), ‘In truth, too, as with the Bank of England independence, the broad framework on the economy, never mind anything else, was set by me’, ‘The reality was that the train, the tracks and the destination were constructed in close interaction with Gordon, and on lines I shaped or was comfortable with. The driver was then given considerable freedom to manage the service. Not until very late on did I ever really yield control of economic policy’.

Holliday, 2004: 6). It was a government-wide review. Following the comprehensive spending review, a three-year spending programme was drawn up, and individual government departments established their respective PSAs with the Treasury. The PSAs set the targets for the departments to improve public services in accordance with the provided resources. The cabinet committee on public services and public expenditure (PSX), chaired by Brown, was to monitor the PSAs between the Treasury and the departments (Hennessy, 2000: 492-3, 513). Spending reviews were implemented in 1998, 2000, 2002, 2004 and 2007 under the Labour government. They indicated plans to improve public services based on the PSAs. The Treasury also became heavily involved in public service reform through its efficiency programme (Fawcett and Rhodes, 2007: 96).

Moreover, the Treasury also became involved in policy through internal and independent policy reviews. They were sometimes published in partnership with other departments. The issues varied from those relating to young children and older people, crime (including drugs), the voluntary sector and local government finance and rural and regional policy, science, employment and benefits policy, foreign affairs, housing supply, economics of the climate change, transport, skills, land use, and health trends (Fawcett and Rhodes, 2007: 96). Paul Fawcett and Rod Rhodes (2007: 98) cited the words of Andrew Turnbull, a former cabinet secretary and a former Treasury permanent secretary;

[But] a lot of them are HMV - His Master's Voice - are really written to order. ... And that has changed the relationship between the Treasury and colleagues, and changed the way the Treasury works, making it a policy department.

As such, the Treasury intervened in departments not only through resource allocation but also with policy.

Relationships between cabinet ministers not only lost the collegiality - the sense of being equals - but also they became more and more hierarchical: the prime minister and the chancellor of the exchequer instructing other cabinet ministers; departments became subordinate to

the prime minister's office, the cabinet office and the Treasury during the Blair years. The core executive was centralised and the government became, to a certain extent, a two-tier system.

### Side Effects of Centralisation and the Managerial Style of Leadership

The Blair government's effort to make policy processes reflect the elected government's wills and priorities took shape as a centralised core executive and a managerial style of leadership. Yet it created strong side effects. It suffices to point out two of them.

First, ministers promoted by Blair and Brown started sounding like 'project heads or organization consultants'. Observing these ministers' speeches, Faucher-King and Le Galés (2010: 42) puzzlingly stated,

'we find no flourishes or grand fights of rhetoric, but concrete, specific commitments, costed objectives, a detailed knowledge of their brief, and constant reference to the constraints entailed by the competitiveness of an open, globalized economy. ... everything is codified in terms of performance indicators, aggregate objects formatted in accordance with the canons of the new public management, and a highly rationalist, depoliticized view of public action'.

In Christopher Foster's words, ministers' principal function became 'that of progress-chasers' (Foster, 2005: 204). The managerial style of leadership and tight control of the party, at least over those who were promoted, were likely to have suppressed talents and ideas of dynamism.

Secondly, departments and agencies were criticised to become addicted to a 'target culture'. Instead of running an autonomous organisation or community, in some organisations there were 'assumptions that monitoring, performance management or intervention was [*sic*] the responsibility of someone else' (The Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust Public Inquiry, 2013: 4). According to Robert Francis, chair of the public inquiry into the Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust, which caused 'one of the biggest scandals in the

history of the NHS'<sup>13</sup> (BBC),

'This failure was in part the consequence of allowing a focus on reaching national access targets, achieving financial balance and seeking foundation trust status to be at the cost of delivering acceptable standards of care' (The Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust Public Inquiry, 2013: 4).

Considering the BSE crisis, the policy community in agriculture had shown no better responses to this crisis for more than a decade (Grant, 2005). Indeed, there were multiple causes pointed out in this particular scandal over the Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust. Still, it could not be denied that centralisation and the managerial style of governance were strongly criticised as part of the problem.

The dilemma was obvious: between creating a strong centre to lead the way of the government, and dynamic cabinet ministers flourishing in government; a centralised core executive and a government to push through reforms, and an autonomous and (to a certain point) self-reflective policy community to gradually adapt to the changing world. 'Striking a balance' is easy as a concept, yet in reality it often came to a fatal end. More to the point, 'striking a balance' did not seem to be the real solution.

## Conclusion

This article argued that the 'core executive' was an important conceptual development, but it needed to specify some kind of causal relations or their patterns in order to make any theoretical progress. This paper detected a significant pattern with grave problems in the Blair government's core executive. The Blair government effectively aimed for a two-tier structure within government, although even such a structure did not deliver satisfactory results from public policies. The Blair government's challenge shows the difficulties in achieving a core executive, which would improve the policy processes.

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13 BBC NEWS, <http://www.bbc.com/news/health-21275826>.

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