Northumbria Research Link

The Implementation of a Strategic State in a Small Country Setting - the case of

the 'Scottish Approach'

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Abstract:

This article is a case study of the establishment of the Scottish Approach to Public Services. This strategic approach to public services was developed through three key activities: reorganisation of the Scottish Government; creation of Scotland Performs and the National Performance Framework; and significant investment in leadership development.

The research comprised of 11 elite interviews with both current and former civil servants within the Scottish Government. Interviews sought to develop an understanding of the nature and rationale for the Scottish Approach, to explore implementation of the Scottish Approach, and to posit what lasting impact may result from this form of Strategic State in Scotland.

The findings demonstrate the extent to which strategy as practice has become normalised throughout the Scottish Government, particularly through a focus on adaptive leadership as a form of distributed leadership, which supports the idea of strategy practitioners at all levels in the organisation. This corroborates earlier research which has highlighted the value of adopting more strategic approaches to public administration and management.

Introduction

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Conceptualisations of public service design and delivery have evolved significantly from the ideas of 'Traditional Public Management' (TPA) to New Public Management (NPM) and now to New Public Governance (NPG). These conceptual changes reflect a shifting policy focus from direct design and delivery (TPA) to direct design but with multi-faceted approaches to delivery (NPM) and now, arguably, to multi-faceted approaches to design and delivery which requires a greater focus on governance (NPG). Within this changing landscape the role of the public official has also evolved, from one based on professional ethics and administrative responsibility to one based more on entrepreneurial thinking, network governance and distributed leadership.

At the same time notions of strategy have evolved significantly from a focus on strategic planning (Chandler, 1962; Porter, 1980) to considering strategy as something that emerges over time (Mintzberg, 1987) and more recently (particularly since 2000) strategy as something that is done (Whittington, 1996, 2006). The Strategy in Practice literature emphasises the role of strategy practices, strategy practitioners and strategy praxis (Whittington, 2006). Likewise leadership theory has undergone a similar 'practice turn' by exploring ideas of distributed leadership and leadership as practice (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003a, 2003b; Carroll *et al.*, 2008).

The purpose of this article is to explore the implementation of the Scottish Approach as a form of Strategic State. In doing so the focus is on the internal structures and mechanisms of government. For reasons further explained below this paper cannot fully attest to any direct consequences for delivery outcomes. The study is based on interviews with 11 civil servants who had all been affected by the development of the Scottish Approach. Fieldwork spanning 10

months involved in-depth interviews and the eventual collection of over 65,500 words of primary

data. It is found that the development of the Scottish Approach did represent the development of

a more strategic form of government. Importantly many of the changes which took place can be

seen as embedding a culture of distributed leadership and strategy as practice.

Yet the concepts of distributed leadership and strategy as practice have not been widely

discussed within the public administration literature. Similarly former studies of the 'Scottish

Approach' have predominantly viewed this from the perspective of policy and policymaking

(Cairney, 2014, 2017 and Cairney *et al*. 2016) as opposed to from a broader public

administration or management standpoint. As such this research will contribute to this debate by

considering in-depth qualitative data on how changes within the Scottish Government (2007-

2017) demonstrated strategy as practice within a public administration setting. In doing so it will

also point to the development of the Scottish Approach as representing the establishment of a

form of Strategic State in Scotland.

Background to the Scottish Approach to Policy

Scottish Government officials, under the leadership of Sir John Elvidge (Permanent Secretary

2003-2010), undertook significant work in the lead up to the 2007 Scottish Parliament elections

to consider the shape, structure and leadership practices within the civil service in Scotland.

Following the election of the first minority SNP administration these proposals were endorsed by

Ministers and so work continued on development of the National Performance Framework,

restructuring of the Scottish Government and significant investment in adaptive leadership

training for senior leaders. These initiatives were instrumental in the development of what became known as the "Scottish Approach" (Elvidge, 2011; Housden, 2014).

The development and nature of the Scottish Approach to Policymaking has been given significant attention elsewhere (see Cairney 2014; Cairney *et al*. 2016; Coutts and Brotchie, 2017; Ferguson, 2015; Lloyd, 2017; Scottish Government 2013 and 2017). There are some subtle differences in how this has been described but the key features, as set out by the Scottish Government (2017) are 1) Participation and Co-production; 2) Assets-based Approaches; and 3) Improvement Methodology (see also Ferguson, 2015).

Yet whilst the features of the Scottish Approach have been widely discussed, particularly in relation to the policymaking process (Cairney 2014; Cairney *et al*. 2016), there has been considerably less consideration given as to how the Scottish Approach has influenced management and leadership practice.

The Strategic State

The use of strategic management tools and techniques have become ubiquitous within government and this can be seen as part of a broader trend towards the increasing use of business practices in government (George and Desmidt, 2014 and Bryson *et al*., 2010). This has lead to growing interest in the idea of the Strategic State (Joyce and Drumaux, 2014). The Strategic State is described as a set of capabilities around the creation and delivery of an effective strategy at a country-wide level. A number of OECD reports have explored issues around the concept of moving towards a strategic state in Finland, Slovenia and Poland (OECD, 2010, 2012, 2013).

Whilst these reports each suggest some key attributes of the strategic state they do not prescribe a specific set of measures required to establish a strategic state. However, they do define the strategic state as "a government that can articulate a broadly supported long-term vision for the country, identify emerging and longer term needs correctly, prioritise objectives, identify medium- and short-term deliverables, assess and manage risk, strengthen efficiencies in policy design and service delivery to meet these needs effectively, and mobilise actors and leverage resources across society to achieve integrated, coherent policy outcomes in support of the vision" (OECD, 2013: 58). As noted by Joyce and Drumaux (2014) there is not necessarily one type of strategic state but countries and governments may find their own path in developing strategic capabilities that work within the national context.

Methodology

The research design was qualitative which is appropriate in exploring the underlying concepts, meanings and behaviours that cannot be measured by numbers or quantity (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Phillimore and Goodson, 2004). Qualitative research methods therefore are vital for sciences that study human behaviour (Kothari, 2009). A key challenge of qualitative methods is that data collection and analysis can be hugely time consuming. As such they often involve fewer participants than quantitative research would, and so may not have the same claims to representativeness (Silverman, 2009; Robson, 2011). Since qualitative research is about the individual and understanding their views, qualitative research produces masses of rich data. The benefit of doing so is that in being immersed in the participants' experiences, the researcher strengthens the likelihood of understanding their perceptions correctly (Anderson, 2013).

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The Scottish Government and Scottish Approach was taken as a unique case study (Yin, 2009) which illustrated the development of a Strategic State. This research involved interviews with eleven civil servants from the Scottish Government up to and including Permanent Secretary level. In-depth interviews lasting between 45 minutes to over 90 minutes took place. All those interviewed had been involved in the development of the Scottish Approach whether in the very early stages of development (pre-2008), during the process of development itself (2008-2009), in the years after the development of the Scottish Approach (2008-present) or throughout this entire timeline. At the time of interview some participants were no longer employed by the Scottish Government whilst others were. All interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed and anonymized. Given the nature of the research and the requirements of confidentiality no identifying details will be provided (such as job title, age, department or period of service). Synonyms have been used for all participants which can only be used to identify a gender. It is noted that 8 of the 11 civil servants interviewed were male. This is largely reflective of the gender split of senior management during the time of the development of the Scottish Approach.

After initial participants were purposefully selected, snowball sampling was applied to find additional participants. The primary benefit of using snowball sampling in this context was to gain access to a fairly hard-to-reach group all of whom were key actors and relevant to the study (Blaxter *et al*., 2006). This data was supplemented by a considerable amount of publicly available policy documents and consultancy reports which have been published since 2007. The fieldwork, including the planning and completion of interviews, took place over ten months from August 2015 to June 2016 and transcription of the interviews was completed in July 2017.

Scottish Approach and Strategic Practices

Strategic practices are "shared routines of behaviour, industry traditions, norms, procedures for thinking, acting and using 'things'" (Whittington, 2006: 619). Significantly, as part of the development of the Scottish Approach many of the standard working practices, routines and procedures were changed. This was largely due to a recognition that the traditional models of working, based largely on the Westminster model of government, were not being effective. As Eric explains,

> "*the new public management approach led us naturally to focus on incremental improvements at the easiest end of the spectrum… But we were making no recognisable impact on the outcomes for a very substantial proportion of young people...Of course, public management was not just a UK orthodoxy, it was a more or less universal orthodoxy in the public policy world*".

Underpinning this then was the recognition of the need for a more strategic approach to government. As Colin notes,

> "*we needed to stop micromanaging particular aspects of policy and delivery again to be more strategic, enabling space and to give leadership to the public sector in Scotland.*"

Thus the need for a more strategic form of government had started to develop alongside devolution and during the first coalition governments (1999-2003 and 2003-2007).

As part of this early thinking the Scottish Approach included a long-term vision; the establishment of a whole of government approach; organisational integration with removal of traditional silo structures and ways of working; establishment of the sense of a shared purpose and shared accountability across all public institutions; and greater public engagement and

community empowerment. These elements all reflect aspects of what has been described

elsewhere as the Strategic State (OECD, 2010, 2012, 2013) such as a a long-term vision and and

mobilisation of actors and resources across society to achieve outcomes (OECD, 2013).

The long-term vision set out by the Scottish Approach was in the form of a strategic purpose for

the Scottish Government. This was first set out in the Spending Review 2007, "to focus

government and public services on creating a more successful country, with opportunities for all

of Scotland to flourish, through increasing sustainable economic growth" and has remained

unchanged since. Underneath this strategic purpose was a series of five strategic objectives:

Wealthier and Fairer; Safer and Stronger; Smarter; Greener; and Healthier. Naturally debates

may be had around the relative weighting of each of these objectives over time and the extent to

which they have changed since 2007. However, this broad vision set a strategic focus for the

Scottish Government which had not previously been present. It also acted as a set of guiding

principles underneath which there was a number of more prosaic changes.

The first SNP administration (2007-11) also established a whole of government approach by

firstly reducing the size of the Ministerial team (in part a consequence of being a minority

administration). Within the civil service a Strategic Board was formed to provide support to the

cabinet. Its membership comprised the Permanent Secretary, five Directors-General (each

leading on a strategic objective) and others.

The implementation of the Scottish Approach also involved organisational integration with

removal of traditional silo structures and ways of working. Consequently below the level of the

Strategic Board (which in effect replaced the traditional 'Head of Department' role) lay a number of directorates. This represented a significant change in the strategic practices of the Scottish Government. The drive behind this change was in part,

> "*recognizing that the key policy problems didn't reside in individual silos but cut across a number of areas*" (Karen).

Therefore Heads of Department were replaced by Directors-General who sat on the Strategic Board and who were each responsible for a strategic objective. This meant that this senior level of the organisation no longer had direct line management responsibilities and were expected to work at a strategic level. As explained in the 'Civil Service Capabilities' report, this meant that Directors-General,

> "*now had a compelling reason to understand Scottish Government holistically, taking an interest beyond their own directorate. It also put them far more directly in touch with the local implications of actions from the centre, an awareness that they could then apply to their own policy making*" (Kidson, 2013: 19)

This process was initiated by the Permanent Secretary at the time, Sir John Elvidge (2003-2010). As Geoff points out the culture at the time was fairly traditional and mirrored the Westminster model. Indeed Geoff describes the Scottish Executive as a mini-Whitehall and stresses that after five years of devolution it was becoming increasingly apparent that, within a country of the small size of Scotland, Government could be done better. Geoff explains,

> "*it was that kind of silo approach, people regarded they were doing what they were doing because that was what they did. And John's* [Sir John Elvidge] *initial change management programme back in 2003 started to move thinking towards outcomes and*

> *working with stakeholders. He then started to engage with ministers around outcomes and trying to get almost a compact with ministers, here are the expectations that you can expect from the Civil Service, and in return here's what we would like to get from you ministers in return*".

Under the Scottish Budget Spending Review 2007, the National Performance Framework was introduced. It is argued that this framework represented a more strategic shared 'project' direction (Arnott and Ozga, 2010). This new National Performance Framework was based on the model of Virginia Performs and was to provide an overview of the performance of the Scottish Government against each of its five strategic objectives. The associated website – Scotland Performs – was launched in June 2008 to present information on how Scotland was performing against the indicators and targets outlined in the NPF.

The Scottish Approach also established the sense of a shared purpose and shared accountability across all public institutions. Again this reflects the nature of the Strategic State, as is noted by George and Desmidt (2014), different elements of the Strategic State may be executed at different levels of government (e.g. national vs local). This is particularly significant in the context of multi-level governance and should also include other actors such as social enterprises, charitable bodies, private companies and associated agencies involved in public service design and delivery. Arguably the most significant development of the Scottish Approach was the inclusion of public bodies, and even parts of the Third Sector, within the National Performance Framework. So, for example, all 32 local authorities in Scotland are aligned with the priorities of the Scottish Government. As stated by the Scottish Government,

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> "*As part of the new relationship, local government will be expected to contribute to the delivery of the national Strategic Objectives, outcomes, indicators and targets, and in this way to support the Scottish Government in the delivery of its overarching Purpose*"
>
> (Scottish Government, 2007).

This alignment came about through the agreement of a Local Government Concordat whereby the Scottish Government removed the ring-fencing of funding and consequently streamlined reporting requirements in exchange for all 32 local authorities agreeing to freeze council tax rates and sign up to the National Performance Framework. Similarly the National Performance Framework has been extended to Community Planning Partnerships that include Police Scotland, Health Boards, Enterprise Networks, the Fire and Rescue Service and Regional Transport Partnerships.

Consequently all local authorities (and indeed all public bodies) have a signed 'Single Outcome Agreement' with the Scottish Government that demonstrates how their activities will contribute towards the achievement of the national indicators. This is, at least in principle, evidenced through a Theory-Based Evaluation Methodology (Weiss, 1998) that uses Logic-Modelling to assess how individual activities and outputs will contribute towards the national indicators and outcomes.

In terms of greater public engagement and community empowerment the Scottish Approach was facilitated in part through an expectation of reaching out to communities. This involved both civil servants and politicians as explained by Iris,

> "*One big practical thing, in a way, is even the travelling Cabinets, so the Cabinets going around the country, and that, in a way, is kind of a manifestation of that where they will hold town hall events, and people get chance to talk to the Cabinet and ask questions, et cetera, so I think that's the Cabinet engaging in that, but certainly the expectations from ministers are that civil servants will equally be out there talking to people in terms of...and engaging and getting a real steer from them about what services they need and how they want them delivered, you know?*".

This point was reinforced by Jane who argued that:

> "*actually you need to be able to understand the ways in which the levers that you might have to use as government can affect change, and I think partly what the Scottish approach is trying to say is most of the change that you're going to affect needs to be done actually in a way that marshals the assets of the community that's already there*".

More recently the commitment to public engagement and participation has been placed on a statutory footing through the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act (2015). It has been noted elsewhere that this again is markedly different from the nature of the localism agenda in England (Rolfe, 2015).

Research on the nature and effect of community empowerment in Scotland has focused primarily on activities surrounding the development and principles of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act (2015) (Carley, 2006; Sinclair, 2008; Lawson and Kearns, 2010; Rolfe, 2015 and Elliott et al., 2018). To date there has not been a study of how greater community empowerment might form part of a Strategic State or any nation-wide study of how community empowerment has contributed to outcomes as it is, as yet, too early to tell what impact community

empowerment will have on national outcomes. However, this research shows that there is clearly

a strategic intent in developing a whole-of-Scotland approach to public service delivery which is

in line with the concept of the Strategic State.

Scottish Approach and Strategic Practitioners

Strategic practitioners are "those who do the work of making, shaping and executing strategies"

(Whittington, 2006: 619). In terms of the Scottish Approach the development of the overarching

building blocks of the Strategic Board, National Performance Framework, cross-cutting

directorates and community empowerment there was clearly a shift towards greater levels of

delegated authority within the Scottish Government and greater empowerment outwith the

government.

Undoubtedly these changes to organisational structure led to some change in the nature and

behaviours of strategic practitioners. Yet this was not seen as a *fait accompli*. As noted by Iris,

> "*we still are quite hierarchical and a number of people have been here for a long time*
>
> *and are quite comfortable with that structure but I think more and more of what we have*
>
> *seen over the last few years is a much more networked, flexible matrix managed*
>
> *approach to projects and things, so much more project management approach, and*
>
> *people involved in a project who need to be involved*".

Whilst the Scottish Approach has sought to devolve greater authority to directorates and to

communities the actual establishment of the Scottish Approach was strongly led by Sir John

Elvidge and others within the senior management of the Scottish Government prior to election of

the SNP. As Karen highlighted work was well under way in the development of the National

Performance Framework prior to the 2007 election.

> "*For 4-5 years there had been a strong move of emphasising the benefit of an outcomes-based approach. The SNP had already done a first cut* [of the strategic objectives] *and then we worked with them to help them come to an agreed text*." (Karen).

Much of this groundwork was led by Sir John Elvidge as Harry highlights,

> "*So I think that when John Elvidge permanent sec he gradually developed a narrative which was not really about command and control which had been largely the previous model*".

Of course the role of Sir John was particularly significant in the Scottish context as the Public

Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act 2000 had previously made the Permanent Secretary

the principal accountable officer for the entire Scottish Government budget. Therefore Sir John

had a level of power and authority within the civil service that is unusual in other government

executives. Whilst in other government executives there may be a number of Permanent

Secretaries in Scotland there is only one and they are Chief Policy Advisor and responsible for

career management of Senior Civil Servants as well as principal accountable officer for the

budget.

Yet many research participants stressed that, whilst there may have been some resistance at first,

the development of the Scottish Approach was embraced by many within the Scottish

Government. Even some who were typically sceptic could see the potential benefits of a more

strategic form of government. For example Brian notes that,

> "*People got it. They saw, yeah, that is strategic direction. We've got a sense of where this lot are going and we can work with them. Palpable actually at the time. And I think quite a lot of us dyed in the wool civil servants were quite surprised at ourselves. I can remember going to some conference and I was talking at it, and I was talking about how actually the civil service felt energised by this…But I was saying that and that was coming from the heart. I wasn't just sucking up to the ministers or anything like that. There was that sense. Here's some people that have got a sense of direction, they're saying that the public pound, where it is spent ought to be directed towards proper purposes*".

In this sense the election of the minority SNP administration in 2007 was seen to represent a significant shift in mind-set from the previous Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition governments. As Arthur explains,

> "*after that last election, what we got was simply a bunch of manifesto ideas from Labour and the Lib Dems cobbled together and stuck together in a document. So much so that the programmes were given 450-odd targets, supposedly. What I…and I used to tear my hair out at this. I use to think, why can't I get them to do some strategic planning?*".

There is a clear sense that whilst the leadership of Sir John provided much of the impetus behind the reforms nonetheless this could not have progressed in the way it did without also Political Leadership. As Geoff explains,

> "*political resistance to this was, we're here to win elections and stay in power, we're not here to talk about this poncey outcome based nonsense, so you civil servants know your*

> *place. But then with the move towards minority government that was actually a very good opportunity to say to an incoming administration who had thought quite hard about how they wanted to be in government, here's an opportunity to do things different, send a powerful new message and at the same time promote a step change in how the Civil Service regards itself*".

Others commented on how the SNP were themselves more strategic in their thinking than parties who had previously been in government. For example Eric explains, "*emphasising a long-term strategic vision was at the heart of their* [SNP] *political thinking*". Again Arthur stated,

> "*Political leadership is very important. I think that's been the single most important thing for the SNP and underlies their success. I mean their successes electorally, is that the way under Salmond's iron fist they pull together and with very much a single agenda*".

Specifically within the SNP, John Swinney, was frequently noted as being a key advocate of the development of the Scottish Approach. Douglas notes that

> "*John Swinney was the most important person and has remained so, and his part in this story should never be under-written. He's the keeper of the flame in all this, and a really important authorising environment for it, if you like*".

In this sense Colin and others described the partnership between Sir John and John Swinney as a 'meeting of minds' and a shared vision of creating a Strategic State. Colin noted,

> "*John Elvidge used that opportunity to make his pitch about the way the organisation should evolve and what that meant for the governance of Scotland and how we needed to take the strategic approach, and he sat down with a Cabinet Minister, Mr Swinney, who was exactly of that mind, who wasn't interested in micromanaging Scotland, what he*

wanted was to develop the government and governance of Scotland in the pursuit of strategic aims."

Yet with the retirement of Sir John Elvidge the Scottish Approach continued to develop under the new Permanent Secretary, Sir Peter Housden (2010-2015). As Iris notes,

"[Sir Peter] *was very good in terms of leadership about the Scottish Leaders Forum, et cetera, trying to get the key people from around the Scotland public sector to get in one room and say...not just public sector, sorry, third sector, you know, basically what are we going to do about some of the really knotty issues,*".

Jane noted how,

"*I think the transition from John's leadership to Peter's leadership actually helped grow that further...internally I think he did reinforce things like all our directors get together every Thursday morning for 45 minutes and actually having all of your directors in one room every week is just such a powerful way of creating a sense of organisation identity, which you couldn't do in bigger structures*".

Embedding the culture of shared accountability and delegated authority was supported through significant investment in learning and development activities. As Harry explains,

"*early, looking back on it we took a bit of an unseen risk really in bringing Ron Heifetz from Harvard to a one day event with all of the top management, John Elvidge more or less made them all turn up... And he ran a master class for adaptive leadership...But the interesting thing was that the perm sec was there the whole time, he was never on his*

phone, he was actively involved…But it sat alongside another thing, …which was Mark Moore's two day thing … And what we worked out very quickly was that the combination of the adaptive leadership behavioural stuff and the public value strategic management thinking, it was a brilliant combination of...well, it was intellectually challenging, Harvard level stuff".

It is clear here that significant steps were taken to ensure that the Strategic State crystalised and would remain a part of the organisational culture over time.

The importance of leadership development activities in shaping the new culture and working practices was also picked up on by Geoff who noted that,

"*So you'd go down to not luxurious but a decent hotel where there was a bar and you could actually have a beer and talk about what Mark Moore's had been saying that day. And so it was a big investment, it couldn't happen now, you'd be pilloried for spending tax payers' money on Civil Service jollies and all that nonsense, but it did mean that in a relatively short space of time you had the whole of the Senior Management Cadre using a standard lexicon and some would say, well, let's go on the balcony with this, you'd know what you meant*".

Scottish Approach and Strategic Praxis

Praxis is described as micro-level activities. It encompasses "the routine and non-routine, the formal and the informal, activities at the corporate centre and activities at the organizational periphery" (Whittington, 2006: 619).

Karen discussed how the structures and practices had informed a new strategic praxis from the perspective of the impact of the new structure when considering the performance of civil servants, so that,

> "*when we get around as a senior team including with the DGs and the directorates they would be saying 'are they* [the civil servant] *contributing to the key themes?'. So when we start seeing things come to the more hard edge of pay and promotion it is no longer enough to do your own role to a high level but you must be contributing to cross cutting work*"

The significance of strategy praxis was highlighted by Jane,

> "*one of the things that we've thought about quite a lot is sort of above and below the waterline stuff, culture eats strategy for breakfast, so actually it's all very well having our strategy of how we want the organisation to operate but actually we need to be thinking below the waterline in the way culturally things get really forced or patterns occur which might actually prevent change from moving forward*".

How organisational leaders modelled behaviours of adaptive leadership undoubtedly helped in embedding new organisational ways of working. For example, Harry notes how,

> "*he* [Sir John Elvidge] *resisted and got them* [Senior Civil Servants] *to resist the tendency to turn every problem into a set of action plans for their department, in that they could implement and constantly the only way we will resolve this or make progress because of these wicked problems. And that language was widely used, adaptive, wicked problems.*

> *The only way we make progress with this is if we collaborate, partner, share resources, expertise, help each other*".

As highlighted by Karen in the earlier quote this fed through into all aspects of behaviour and activities within the Scottish Government in a way that was highly distinctive to the traditional Westminster model. As Harry states,

> "*although the natural stance of a lot of senior Civil Servants, certainly UK Civil Servants and you see it in Whitehall a lot still, is highly competitive in career terms…In the Scotland Government, although I'm sure that still existed, the basis of competition now became how good a partner am I, how well do I collaborate, am I generous with my resources, do I consult, involve, collaborate, co-create, whatever?*".

Lessons and Further Research

Since its implementation the Scottish Approach has garnered significant interest. At the same time the Scottish Government have been keen to promote Scotland and the Scottish Approach as distinctive from UK Government. This has become particularly politicised following the EU Referendum result which saw the Scottish electorate vote to remain within the EU whilst the majority of the UK electorate as a whole voted to leave.

Consequently the Scottish Government have sought to develop closer ties with Arctic Circle nations, including Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Iceland and Estonia, through hosting an Arctic Circle Forum (Scottish Government, 2017b) and through participation at the Arctic Circle Assembly.

The Scottish Government also continue to be a member of the British-Irish Council and the

Scottish Approach has received significant interest from the Northern Ireland Executive. As was

noted in the interview with Douglas,

"*the new Northern Ireland administration, under Arlene Foster and Martin McGuinness,*

have adopted an outcomes framework. So their programme for government has just been

published in a consultation, and advised by John Elvidge is framed in that way".

Geoff also pointed to an example of the Scottish Approach being used elsewhere,

"*the Scottish model of procurement, which is a very particular approach around building*

sustainability in and looking to value beyond savings, how do you deliver your economic

benefit? That's actually got quite a lot of resonance now, that's being adopted in New

Zealand, the World Bank's taking it on and is using it as part of their reconstruction work

in South East Europe. It's being taken on in some quite much larger economies than

Scotland as an example of how you can do government differently".

It is also important to highlight that the election of a minority SNP administration in 2007 was a

pivotal aspect in making the Scottish Approach happen. As Harry explains,

"*I think there's probably a lesson for leaders in something like being ready, what have*

you got ready that was even spotting the opportunity and having your antenna out to take

advantage of a thing…I don't know who said it but the idea that strategy is lurking with

intent… I guess it's that strategy is the thing you notice when you look backwards from

> *where you are…This sort of emergent idea, that lurking with...what is my intent, how do I*
>
> *lurk strategically?*".

Many highlight the extent to which the development of the Scottish Approach represented the

establishment of a very distinct approach to government compared with the traditional

Westminster model. As Geoff highlighted,

> "*And taking on really huge new challenges like the independence referendum it meant the*
>
> *system had that flexibility. And it also meant that we delivered, I think, far, far better*
>
> *government in terms of the Civil Service product, leave aside the politics of it, as an*
>
> *efficient Civil Service the Scottish government was streets ahead of anything that was*
>
> *happening down in Whitehall. And I was really struck during that period of the gulf*
>
> *between where I was and my colleagues were up in St Andrew's House, Victoria Quay, of*
>
> *what I was seeing happening to my counterparts down in London*".

Similarly Douglas noted that the Scottish Government represented

> "*the antithesis of everything that went on in Whitehall. So, it* [the Scottish Government]
>
> *was strategic, intense, it was collaborative, by its very nature, it was empowering and*
>
> *enabling wider forces in the community*".

This was particularly significant in preparations for the Scottish Independence campaign of

2014. As Geoff describes, "*I think that really illustrated how capable and flexible the Civil*

Service was in Scotland. And if you saw how Whitehall departments were behaving and

responding in very much a traditional silo based approach of, we communicate when we need to,

little joining up across Whitehall. And you compare that with the agility that the civil servants in

Scotland showed both in the run up to the referendum but also in the aftermath of it where the whole organisation turned on a pin from having served ministers in preparing plans for how you move Scotland towards being an independent body, whether or not you regard that as a good thing, that was irrelevant, it was the job of the Civil Service to prepare for that.".

Conclusions

George and Desmidt (2014: 168) note that "one of the key issues in contemporary public policy and management is the rise of the Strategic State (OECD, 2013; Paquet, 2001)". It is recognised that there remains a lack of empirical studies of the Strategic State. This research aims to close this gap by presenting the context and background to implementation of a Strategic State in a small country setting. Using strategy-as-practice as a framework it is demonstrated how practice, practitioners and praxis were used in development of the Scottish Approach and how this represented the implementation of a Strategic State.

Over the period 2007-2017 the Scottish Government undertook a number of significant reforms to establish what become known as the 'Scottish Approach'. This was instigated through the reorganisation of the internal structures (establishment of a Strategic Board and Directors-General); the implementation of a National Performance Framework (which all public bodies feed in to via Single Outcome Agreements) and significant investment in leadership development (centred around adaptive leadership and public value). In doing so the Scottish Government became notably more strategic in its ways of working.

In particular it is recognised that, in line with ideas of the Strategic State, there is a greater strategic focus following the establishment of a strategic purpose with five underpinning strategic objectives. Each of these objectives has a champion in the form of a Director-General and progress is reported to the Strategic Board.

The nature of strategic practitioners has also changed as there are greater expectations on directors who work within cross-cutting directorates to support achievement of the strategic objectives. Again it is expected that there will be integrated working across public, third sector and private sector and the role of the Local Government Concordat and Single Outcome Agreements helps to facilitate that close partnership working.

There are key lessons to be learned here, particularly for small countries, in how strategic thinking can be fostered within government settings. Clearly having the right organisational structure helps to facilitate that thinking and behaviour but there is also a need for strong administrative leadership; political support; investment in leadership development throughout the organisation and a long-term emphasis on culture change.

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