

Norman Flynn

While my Curriculum Vitae sets out the event of my career, I would like to explain the logic behind some of the events.

I graduated in Economics from Sussex University and went into the Planning Department of the Greater London Council, during the era when some of us believed in the value of planning. I proceeded to Durham County in the same occupation and the same belief and took an MA in Economics at Newcastle, part-time by thesis only. The thesis was on regional economic development.

From there I went to Birmingham School of Planning as a lecturer in economics and started working on community development, becoming editor of a community newspaper (well, we said it was a community paper) and involved in community initiatives in relation to inner city redevelopment, while living in Handsworth, part of Birmingham's inner north. Hence to Birmingham University to a post in the Institute of Local Government Studies, again teaching economics but increasingly involved in local government matters, from a management point of view. My work there had three strands: I continued to research on regional economic development and was involved in a major ESRC project on the West Midlands and the decline of manufacturing. The book of the project, 'Inside the Rust Belt', was innovative in several ways, including its focus on individual companies and how their decisions affected the regional economy. Another was the behaviour of local authority managers in the increasingly competitive environment brought about by compulsory competitive tendering. I became something of a national expert, with my late colleague Kieron Walsh, publishing widely in the professional press as well as the academic journals, and undertaking extensive advisory work. As a result of this I was later made a Freeman of the City of London in recognition of my work in the field.

A third strand of work was on the structure of local government, and specifically the abolition of the GLC, my first employer. With two colleagues we produced a book 'Abolition or Reform?', published by Allen and Unwin, as a contribution to the debate on the future of the GLC, a debate which ended, of course, with the GLC being abolished by Margaret Thatcher. That phase was my introduction to the world of lobbying, especially in the Lords.

During that period I was introduced to our sister department, International Development. Teaching at Birmingham brought me into contact with executive students from governments in developing countries and stimulated an interest in Africa. My first assignment in Africa was a teaching programme for the ODA in Morogoro, Tanzania, for all Town Economists and Town Treasurers.

From Birmingham I moved to London Business School to work with Andrew (later Sir Andrew, Chief Accountant to the UK Government) Likierman, developing public sector work at the School. I developed a public sector stream on the MBA, specifically for serving public servants from the UK. I also designed and ran the Public Sector Management Programme, the first executive programme for the public sector at a UK business school. This programme was taken up as fast track education for senior civil servants and other public officials and NGO executives to obtain a business understanding to cope with the management pressures being put on them by the Thatcher and Major administrations. The alumni consists of many significant figures, among whom Valerie Amos, now Baroness Amos, leader of the House of Lords.

I was made Director of the Institute of Public Sector Management, a research grouping. My own research was concerned with performance management in the public sector and more specifically with managerial performance in community care, the new competitive

environment set up for the provision of community care by the government. We had a large Rowntree Foundation grant (£70,000) to look at the community care market and I again became something of an expert, being asked to advise the Department of Health, the Association of Directors of Social Services as well as the associations of private care home providers and private home-care providers and various charities in the sector, including Mind, Age Concern, National Children's Homes. One Director of Social Services said in Community Care magazine that I had 'single-handedly transformed a misguided ideological policy into a useful instrument for social care.' This work also produced several publications, some academic and some published as guidance by the Department of Health. They funded this writing and additional research with a grant. The Rowntree monograph 'The Market for Care' by myself and my research assistant, Richard Common sold 3000 copies in three months and was the best seller yet of the Foundation's publications.

The work on markets for care also took me to Bolivia to advise on market-style health policy reforms for the Colegio Medico, the Bolivian doctor's union, and to Sweden to advise the Stockholm County Council on similar issues, as well as speaking engagements in other European countries eager to learn about UK experience. Simultaneously we obtained a grant (£50,000) from the Leverhulme Trust to investigate the operation of markets and 'quasi-markets' in the public sector.

The other trend in management that we investigated was the idea that decentralisation of management authority would lead to greater efficiency. The ESRC gave us a grant (£75,000) to test this proposition in the Police service, London Transport, Executive Agencies and Education authorities. The work on markets and the work on decentralisation resulted in a book: 'Managing Public Services: Competition and Decentralisation' by Common, Flynn and Mellon, published by Butterworth Heinemann.

I also felt ready to publish a single-author book on what I had learned from the various research projects and my experience as advisor and teacher. To assist the research (as well as give bursaries to MBA students from local authorities) I obtained a grant of £70,000 from the Porter Foundation. The first edition of 'Public Sector Management' was published in 1990 and quickly became a standard work. It was the first book of that title, and the first to take a critical stance on all the management reforms that had been introduced since 1979. The book is now in its fourth edition, with Financial Times-Pearson and is still widely used. A fifth ed. is planned for 2006.

A change of management at LBS reduced their desire to focus on the public sector. They wanted to become a global business school and my focus specifically on the UK public sector did not fit. So I took my Public Sector Management Programme, along with all the research grants, to LSE. On reflection this was probably what civil servants call 'bold and imaginative' (i.e. reckless) but I wanted to preserve the programme and LSE were quite receptive to the approach under the then new Director, John Ashworth.

As well as teaching my programme at LSE, and contributing to MSc teaching in the Social Administration Department, I had a large grant from the then Department of Environment, evaluating the current urban regeneration initiatives. Funding for this amounted to £225,000 over five years. Unfortunately, from a publication point of view many of the findings were not in line with government preconceptions of how the policy was supposed to work. We believed that the work had some influence on future policies on area regeneration. Certainly it had an immediate impact on our main area of study, Harlesden City Challenge because we did formative evaluation, enabling the managing director and the Board to improve their policies and practices as the work progressed.

The major published research from my time at LSE was a comparative study of public sector management in seven European countries, a project that I carried out jointly with my colleague Franz Strehl who then ran the Institut für Verwaltungsmanagement at the

University of Innsbrück. (Franz later became Rektor of Johannes Kepler at Linz.) To facilitate the work, Franz made me a visiting professor at Innsbruck, and he regularly came to teach on my programme. This project produced 'Public Sector Management in Europe', published by Prentice Hall, again the first of its kind and for a long time a study widely cited by other comparative researchers. Among other things this book helped stop the trend of assuming that the 'business model', promoted by the Public Choice School, was the only way to manage the public sector. Being able to demonstrate that Switzerland, Austria, Germany and so on could have successful public sectors without the managerial jargon and neo-liberal practices being pursued in the US and the UK ran counter to the conservative conventional wisdom.

In 1995 I was approached to teach on a programme in China, sponsored by the Swiss government. The content of the programme was somewhat similar to my own in London, and the course director, Professor Raymond Saner from University of Geneva, was keen to bring a comparative perspective to China. Raymond had seen drafts of the European book. I can honestly say that my sessions in China completely changed my perspective on the world. The students were senior Party people from SOEs and Ministries from all Provinces in China. My first exposure to familism, to expressive ties, to attitudes to hierarchy in a clientelist environment, and all this in a country that I had naively believed to be communist, challenged my Euro-centric world view. I also discovered that steel plants in China had Professors of philosophy, one of whom was in one of my classes.

Two other missions contributed to my development at this time. I was approached by the UN in February 1995 to go to Sarajevo. The siege was still in place but there was (supposed to be) a cease-fire after the Washington Agreement. The mission was to talk to the Bosnians and the Croats and the Serbs to see what kind of constitution might be feasible for the three entities and what sort of administration could be put in place under such an arrangement. In the event the mission was premature (the arrangements are still not satisfactory in 2005, under the Dayton agreement) and the cease-fire was only loosely in place. I learned a lot: the UN was not what I thought it might have been; the French army have safe armoured cars and pick up stray UN employees; being under shell-fire changes one's attitude to life. Later that year I was in Slovenia. The same Swiss government department that had funded the work in China was helping set up a new Institute of Public Administration in Ljubjana and I was invited to help design the programme and then go and deliver some of the material. In the event I found myself giving the first lecture of the newly founded Institute in a converted fire station in Ljubjana old town. In a way, I felt that this was the first occasion on which I felt qualified and experienced enough to be doing what I was doing in a setting other than the very familiar United Kingdom. My trip to Tanzania a decade before had been a travesty: the students were wiser, better educated and more experienced than me: I was a condition of an aid programme. This time I finally felt that I had something to offer to a non-UK group of bright people who were about to be in charge of the Slovenian public sector. Hearteningly, so did they. I was invited back this year to address a conference for the Ministry of Public Administration, attended by the now very important alumni from 1995.

When I was approached in early 1996 by Anthony Cheung from the City University of Hong Kong to apply for the Chair in Public Management in his department, part of my reaction was coloured by that exposure to China and the desire to learn more. Their approach to me was mainly based on the books on UK and Europe and reports of our work for the Chinese government. So, in October 1996 I took the Chair and proceeded to set up a comparative research centre, which is now called Governance in Asia Research Centre. My main task in Hong Kong was to establish the centre, by encouraging the colleagues to co-operate to produce work that did more than contribute to their own careers (an up-hill task in a fiercely competitive and bureaucratic environment) and to help shape the research agenda. In my two years there I had some success. There was the beginning of some collaborative research (on result was the edited book I did with Linda Wong, written mostly by the junior

colleagues, 'The Market and Social Policy in China', published by Palgrave). There was also a significant study (Hong Kong Government Research grant of HK\$500,000) of the effects of education reform, which I directed. I also raised Government research grants to start the research centre (HK\$500,000) and other smaller grants for start-up projects. One, on the use of subventions to NGOs as a mechanism for providing public services was influential in changing practices in social services in Hong Kong.

To establish the profile of the centre I organised a big international conference in June 1998 on comparative government in Asia, attracting papers from 34 countries. The Centre continues to organise major conferences.

For my personal research I made a study of the relationship between business, government and society, after reading (under guidance from my Chinese colleagues) Confucius, Han Fei Tse, Fei Hsoi Tung, Michael Bond, Julia Tao etc. The study, financed by a Hong Kong University Grants Committee personal grant, took me to Singapore, Japan, China, Malaysia, the Philippines. As luck would have it the 1997 Asian financial crisis struck while I was writing up the work and there was the opportunity (or the danger) of commenting on the crisis, the likely impact of the crisis on clientilist relationships and on the specific Asian form of state-government-society relationships I was studying. The result was my book 'Miracle to Meltdown in Asia: Business, Government and Society' published by Oxford in 1999 and translated into Chinese in 2000. Despite being tied to a specific crisis, the book explained the specifics of the mode of production and control in clientilist-based societies and the results of the exposure to world capital markets on those relationships.

During my time in Hong Kong I also ran a series of executive seminars for the local public service and was asked to advise two departments, Police and Fire, on performance management.

I returned to the UK in 1998 and went back to running the PSMP at LSE. The Scottish Parliament Finance Committee wanted advice on outcome budgeting and the relationship between the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Executive as both were trying to define their roles after devolution. I conducted research in all the main departments on Scotland to assess their potential for outcome-based budgeting and conducted a comparative study, mainly from work I had already done, of Australian States, US State and federal practice, Singapore, Sweden, England and Netherlands. The parliament published the study 'Towards Outcome Budgeting' in 2002.

The intellectual challenge of taking on the task of Programme Director at SOAS has been to write and commission courses that are rigorous, challenging, critical and comparative without being obviously Euro or Western-centric. They have to be relevant for a student body in responsible positions in jurisdictions as diverse as San Francisco court service and the UN mission to Kosovo, or for MEC members of Provincial Governments in South Africa and officers in the Swiss Army (I could go on with a very diverse list). There is an orthodoxy about matters of public policy and management, emanating from the Bretton Woods institutions and certain powerful governments. Our courses must enable students to challenge that orthodoxy, but not by offering an equally orthodox critique. Since joining SOAS I have been a member of a Catalyst seminar producing policy material prior to the 2005 election. This work may result in one publication by myself 'Performance Management and Public Satisfaction in the United Kingdom' on the paradox of better managerial performance and lower public satisfaction with public services. The article is currently in review. I have also been working on fiscal and social policy in the light of the Growth and Stability Pact, part of the Treaty of Maastricht and have produced a paper on fiscal and social policy and economic performance in the UK, France and Germany and am writing a fifth edition of 'Public Sector Management' for publication in 2006.

I have played a normal role as a member of the academic community, acting as external examiner for PhDs, reviewing for journals (Public Management Review, International Journal of Public Sector Management) and reviewing book proposals for publishers, reviewing research grant applications for the ESRC, book reviews (Asian Management Journal, Political Quarterly) as well as reading drafts for colleagues. I am a member of the European Group on Public Administration, the European branch of the International Association of Administrative Sciences. I gave a paper at the 2004 conference. I was a member of the expert panel for John Clarke's ESRC project on the Citizen-Consumer at the Open University, concluded in 2005.

As part of the educational mission, which we pursue mostly through distance learning, Professor Harris asked me to take an interest in Public Management in South Africa, a country in which CeFiMS and SOAS has a long-standing interest and no small influence. I have established a relationship with Eastern Cape provincial government and have twice visited to meet students and deliver policy-related seminars based on the contents of the MSc courses. This work developed into more generally available seminars in 2006, spreading to Gauteng and Western Cape. In 2005 I also met partners and students in the Caribbean, and in Bruxelles.



Norman Flynn

nf17@soas.ac.uk +44 (0) 2078984091 +44 (0) 7775 943472