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## **From ADHD-government to focus and flexibility**

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### **Abstract**

*Public policy and administration are confronted with many demands which often pose incompatible dilemmas. They should attain short term goals, be effective on the long run, have democratic processes and are efficient. The still unanswered question in public administration is how to reconcile such mutual conflicting demands. This paper argues that looking at the way governments actually deal with the dilemmas may provide the answer. Some governments have found a pragmatic answer, which might well have theoretical consequences. These governments cannot solve all problems simultaneously, so they try to answer to the different demands sequentially. This paper argues that this is a sensible, though pragmatic solution to the protracted theoretical debate about reconciling the dilemmas.*

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## 1. Good governments, bad experts

National governments have many tasks and have to weigh-of many interests and values when responding to the request to allocating goods and services in an authoritative way. When talking with civil servants and politicians, the first thing they say is that they are 'busy, busy, busy'. This is self-evident when we look at all the structural and wicked problems they are confronted with, the minimal resources available to them, and the often inherently conflicting demands they have to cope with. Asking advisors, gurus and experts what to do often does not help much. They point at the complexity of contemporary life. But instead of helping to diminish this complexity, these overpaid hirelings are likely to tell the public sector that it has to take even many more things into account, because the world witnesses an increasing complexity.

In the last decade of the previous century all-encompassing prescriptions, like Total Quality Management became fashionable. Governments were urged to comply with an almost infinite number of demands. More recently adages like 'Good Governance' and 'Smart governance' saw the light, with an equally impossible multiplicity of demands placed on the public sector. SMART, being an acronym for Simple, Moral, Accountable, Responsive and Transparent, urged governments to fulfil all five demands simultaneously, because the public sector is expected to be and needs to be a five-legged sheep. At first sight this seems to make sense, but do we really want this?

It is self-evident that five-legged sheep are aberrations that don't survive in one piece. Such animals are physically disabled and unable to function properly. Extending the analogy to the public sector we see similar consequences of trying to be such a five-legged sheep: Straitforwardness becomes *Inert*; Morality changes into *Despondent*; being *Incapacitated* for work and *Overspending* are likely to replace Responsiveness; *Taciturn* behaviour becomes more probable than transparency; and accountability quickly transforms into *Self-containment*. Like genius and insanity are according to some psychologists not so far apart, neither are SMART governments and 'IDIOTS' (Inert, Despondent, Incapacitated, Overspending, Taciturn, and Self-contained). The reason being that governments that tend to act upon all the recommendations degenerate into hyperventilating ADHD governments, that is Attention Deficit and Hyperactive Disorderly Governments who hardly have time to catch their breath.

Now that the tone is set and the attention of the reader hopefully attracted, the contents of this paper can be argued. That will not be, as perhaps might be expected from this introduction a lamentation about the public sector. Far from it. It rather argues in favour of public policies and praises governments that succeed in bringing about desired changes in societies. That success was, however, not accomplished by listening to management gurus, the tyranny of experts (Chafetz, 1996) and akin people who are perfectly focused themselves, namely on making money by providing standard solutions (Brint, 1994), but nevertheless urge their clients to disperse their attention over a myriad of seemingly important dimensions involved in policymaking processes.

## **2. How to recognise ADHD government?**

In psychological research ADHD is recognised by a combination of restlessness, starting a lot of things, but finishing nothing, whims, overspending, distraction, chaotic behaviour, absent-mindedness, despair, malfunctioning, problems with listening, daydreaming, lacking overview, co-ordination problems, being high-pressured and jumpy, showing inferior performance, and fuzziness, The same phenomena can be seen in public organisations (Hogwood & Peters, 1985).

Especially when countries experience many severe problems and the pressure to improve all those things at the same time this illness can be seen. For instance, developing countries are sometimes faced with failing health services, lack of decent housing, insufficient education and abundance of poverty, without having enough financial means to tackle these often impel governments to bite of more than they can chew. On top of this, these countries often lack the necessary institutions to act adequately and are short of a properly functioning administrative system (World Bank, 2002). When going for assistance to international organisations like the World Bank and the IMF, these governments are urged in the direction of so-called good governance. They are told to adapt in order to fulfil all the modern principles of accountability, responsiveness and transparency, to balance their budgets and at the same time to tackle all their societal problems. The limited resources and the abundance of problems and recommendations taken together often result in conflicting demands put on governments and an impossibility to fulfil them all.

This is all the more problematic, because as we will argue, the OECD countries themselves did not follow this path. Although the problems in those countries were not so long ago almost as urgent as they are nowadays in the developing countries, they did not try to solve them all at once. In previous research it was argued for a small West-European country – the Netherlands - situated in Western Europe between the North Sea, Germany and Belgium, that it recovered from the severe poverty it experienced just after the second world war, and became one of the most affluent countries of the world in 2000, by taking the alternative route of developing step by step, by tackling one problem at the time, focussing on a few problems and inevitably to neglect others temporarily (De Vries, 1999, 2000, 2002, 2004). It is argued that this focus and the subsequently one-sided policies resulted in the achieving the goals. Only when these goals were achieved, flexibility was in order. The goals changed and the next problem was tackled.

### **3. The need to focus**

This paper argues that successful governments possess an inherent intelligence that consists of focus and flexibility. Partly this is the case, because for as long as they existed they had to focus, and partly, because the alternative of constantly weighing of every aspect, every plus and minus, necessarily fails.

Governments have to focus, because the laws of economic scarcity tells us that the means available are always less than the resources needed to develop all-embracing solutions for wicked problems. Recently, this problem of lacking resources even aggravated, because of tendencies towards globalisation and the dominance of neo-liberal ideology. These developments urged many governments to lower their taxes, and to downsize their bureaucracy in order to attract international investments. This reduced the available means, in terms of money and personnel even further. However, the remaining public managers and policy makers are still expected to answer to the persistent societal and organisational needs.

The suggestion that not to focus is doomed to fail, results from the answer to the question whether a well-balanced policy is a preferable policy (normative) and whether

that is in practice the answer that intelligent governments give to the problems they encounter (descriptive).

When asked to scholars in public administration, administrators and politicians, it is distinctive for the public sector that it weighs of multiple interests and balances them. To be balanced is the most important quality of public policy (c.f. Raadschelders, 2003).

Although this seems at first sight to be an adequate recommendation, the implicit implication is often that these interests have to be balanced simultaneously. This paper disputes this implication. Given the restricted means governments have at their disposal and the impossibility to satisfy all demands simultaneously, the alternative is to satisfy the multitude of demands one after another. The succession of one-sided policies will result in successful policies in the long run.

The central point addressed in this paper is that looking at policy processes from this perspective results in a comprehensive explanation of policy processes that occur in practice, while taking only a limited number of factors into account. Previously this viewpoint was formalised, and situated within classic economical, sociological and cultural theories (De Vries, 2000).

#### **4. Distinguishing periods**

To say the policies often are one-sided, that governments can focus and that corrections take place periodically in which demands out of the administration and out of politics make for successful policies, assumes that within such states periods can be distinguished in which such a focus is seen in all policy areas. Irrespective whether it concerns tax-policies, housing policies or health policies, to name only three, it is expected that the same focus dominates the new policies in such se fields during certain periods of time. That such similarities are seen in new policies to be developed is part of the argument and can be explained by many factors. The central point in that argument is that policies and especially successful policies tend to be copied by other policy makers and organisations. There are several factors accelerating such mimesis.

One can think of factors at the *macro-level*, like cultural dynamics, the economic climate and political developments, urging governments to change their focus. At the *meso-level*, one can think of departmental/organisational developments, learning

processes, the role of (international) conferences, and interactions between policy makers, that promote the same solutions in specific periods. At the *micro-level* the appearance of so-called policy-champions, frontrunners might be important. These are influential actors, sometimes associated to universities, who know how to get attention for neglected problems. Sometimes experts act as standard-setters. Thirdly, one can think of the influence of public opinion, and (mass) protest, voiced in demonstrations, parliamentary elections or the media. Parliamentary elections induce regular succession and enhance flexibility, because of the rejuvenation and cohort replacement of decision-makers.

Theories and research into so-called policy diffusion (Walker, 1969; Sabatier, 1999) show how certain solutions disperse over states and over policy areas. Sometimes such policy diffusion takes place at random, sometimes geographical, personal or political factors are at stake (Sabatier, 1999). In other cases it is the consequence of new policy ideas at the national level which drip down to each and every policy field. The research into periods in which different policy areas follow similar routes is partly a quest after the dominant factors behind such policy diffusion.

## **5. The necessity of flexibility**

Many readers will immediately object, by pointing to the criticism governments will unavoidably encounter and will dispute the tenability of the argument that what happens in the practice of public policymaking might also be preferred. Too many policies are criticised for being unable to achieve the goals in the short term, ineffective in the long term, undemocratic, or lacking efficiency. Policies are only legitimate and rational if they result in an efficient allocation of goods or services, if they are effective on the long term, when they succeed in quickly achieving the main goals, and the policy process was democratic. Since there are in practice hardly any public policies that balance these sometimes inherently conflicting demands, one can only be critical about them. The periodic criticism encountered by many governments on nearly all their policies, shows that their policies too often fail. Therefore isn't it preposterous even to suggest that such a positive stand in general is possible?

At first sight there are two ways to react to this rebuttal. The first is to deny that the public is critical toward public policies. The second is that the public is critical, but that this criticism is unjustified. However, we follow neither of these lines. We see the periodic occurrence of public protest as supportive to our argument, because, in pointing to these urgent problems, societal groups urge governments to address and to focus on finding a solution for these specific problems. Such discontent often addresses those facets of policy making which were neglected for the longest period of time. A smart policy, unlike the acronym-SMART-policies, will be responsive to these demands and shift attention to these urgent problems, temporarily neglecting those areas on which the focus was directed previously. Hence, public protest can be seen as a catalyst that impels governments to focus and flexibility.

## **6. Dilemmas in public policy**

Where do governments focus on? Is it possible to identify the crucial dimensions of policymaking and to characterise them in terms of a focus on one of these dimensions? This brings us to the essentials of policies and the functions of governments. Based on sociological theory (Parsons & Smelzer, 1957) it is assumed that every social system has to fulfil four functions in order to survive. First it has to adapt to its environment, secondly it has to have some degree of goal-achievement, thirdly, it has to take care of a certain level of integration within the social, and fourthly system it has to address the latent, structural problems in society. This is known as the AGIL scheme.

Departing from this theory, one can put similar demands on public policymaking processes. First, such policies have to achieve the goals for which they were developed. Public policies can be seen as answers to societal problems, and the least one would expect is that they remove, resolve or regulate these problems. If the problem of criminal behaviour results in a policy, it expected that this policy at least reduces the problem. This is the problem of *goal-achievement* in the short term. In the long term such policies have to be *effective* in addressing the latent underlying causes of delinquency. Preferably it aims not only at repression, but also at prevention. Furthermore, in the long term the policy can have side-effects, and it would be preferable if the policy makers anticipated these effects. In the third place public



policies have to provide an *efficient* solution to the problems addressed. The policies have to be adapted to the boundary conditions, and the financial limitations imposed on the process. Fourthly, the public should be involved in public policy processes.

*Democratic policy processes* are necessary in order, among other reasons, to make such policies legitimate, to increase the available information and to increase the probability that policies are feasible and rational.

Although it seems self-evident that public policies have to satisfy these demands, and in as far as they pose dilemmas, try to balance these demands, the implicit consequence thereof is that in the day-to-day practice this approach too often results in half-hearted policies, that are insufficient in every respect. It are such policies that result in ADHD-government. It was already pointed out the "iron law" of Robert Michels, that democracy and large scale organisation are incompatible. Any large organisation is faced with co-ordination problems that can be solved only by creating a bureaucracy, which is hierarchically organised to achieve efficiency and that recognise that decisions that cannot be made by large numbers of people in an efficient manner.

Later Dwight Waldo in his famous book 'The administrative state' (Waldo, 1948) similarly posed that there exists a basic dilemma in the science of public administration, with regard to the reconciliation of efficiency and democracy. According to him administrative scholars had until then accepted efficiency as their central principle, and took democratic processes to be the realm of political science. Waldo argued, however, that administration and the emphasis on efficiency is itself political. Partly because democracy is often at odds with efficiency, the problem for public administration is to reconcile values like democracy, equity, and consensus with the demands of authority, needed to increase efficiency. This implied a crucial question, namely how to construct a theory, that accommodates the hierarchical and authoritarian nature of the bureaucracy and the seemingly contradictory egalitarian inefficient ideals of democracy (Frederickson & Smith, 2003: 48).

A similar dilemma, already posed by Max Weber, in his classic 'Politik als Beruf' relates to the reconciliation of the need of goal-achievement in the short run and effectiveness in the long run. Where politicians are often said to have a short term angle based on the electoral cycle and their desire to be re-elected, the bureaucracy is expected to have a long-term perspective, because they stay in office for life and have to

look beyond the next elections. Often the two perspectives are incompatible, implying that to try to be effective in the long run can go at the expense of short-term goal achievement and vice versa. When you want it all tomorrow, it might well imply you get into trouble the day after. And when you want to arrange things effectively in the long run, it often implies that you have to abstain from quick results.

However, these are only two of the many dilemmas. The dilemmas are also crosscutting. The aim for long term effectiveness, is also incompatible with democracy and efficiency is often incompatible with goal-achievement. Stressing efficiency does not only mean the aim to achieve the maximum with a given amount of means, it can, and in practice does, often imply that one reduces the means and lowers the goals, in order to achieve a fixed or lowered, goal with a minimum of resources. This can be seen, for instance, in the dominance of the New Public Management approach and the subsequent retreat of government. When the aim for efficiency is put into practice in this latter meaning, and the goals are limited in order to reduce the utilisation of lacking resources even further, this goes at the expense of goal-achievement as such.

As to the dilemma between effectiveness and democracy, one can point at the features of long-term effectiveness, to be achieved only by setting standards, and the authoritatively enshrining of developments in the long term, which is often incompatible with the changing moods, wishes and needs of and among citizens and hence the possibilities to negotiate, deliberate and reconsider the decisions. Seen from this perspective, governments are faced with four demands, being mutual dilemmas and being difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile. The dilemmas result from the incompatibility of the administrative and political predilections in terms of process design and desired results.

	<b>Political Perspective</b>	<b>Administrative Perspective</b>
<b>Results oriented</b>	Short term goal achievement	Long term effectiveness
<b>Process oriented</b>	Democratic Procedures	Efficiency

**Table 1.** *Dilemmas in public policy making*

This paper argues that if these are indeed dilemmas it is fruitless to try to reconcile them, and impossible to combine them, but through time. Time seems the crucial factor. If it cannot be done all at once, it has to be done step by step. It can be argued on the basis of a longitudinal analysis that this is exactly what policy makers in most countries do. Their policies are one-sided, focussing on one of the four demands. It is the necessary and pragmatic answer to the incompatibility of the dilemmas. In our view, what distinguishes countries with successful policymaking processes from those countries that fail to succeed, is that the former do focus and periodically shift their attention. The latter being necessary to correct for the failure to meet other demands than those temporarily stressed.

## **7. A flexible starting point**

Based on these dilemmas it can be argued that balancing different values sequentially is superior to balancing those values simultaneously. The question arising is whether there is a specific order in the prioritisation, and which value has to be addressed first.

As to the latter question we don't want to give an answer. This might well differ for different countries and in different situations. In other words, this is contingent on the specific situation. It depends on the urgency of the different problems, which in their turn are determined by the neglect thereof or external circumstances. For instance, after a war or other events creating extreme shortage or in which facilities and infrastructure are destroyed, or after a period in which government retreated from society for a long period of time, neglecting the solution for new and pressing problems, the urgency of those problems are likely to induce short term reconstruction policies. In the case of the Europe just after WW II, this is indeed the way the governments proceeded. The present-day situation in large parts of Africa, might call for a similar path to proceed.

If in a country, however, short-term goal-achievement was the dominant value for a long time and when it succeeded in resolving the most severe problems, it is likely that the policymakers start to reflect on the outcomes thereof and to move the horizon further to the future. One may recognise the problems resulting from the quick fix, ad hoc policies being dominant in the previous period and start to plan for long term solutions. This may well be the case in Europe in the first decade of the new millennium.

The problems caused by greying of its societies, the problems of the large cities and the necessity of rethinking the welfare state all conceived to be long term problems, induce its governments to new policies. These seem to go in the direction of policies in which, for instance, the abundant use of social welfare is diminished by restricting social security programs and removing costly regulations, full of exceptions for people in special circumstances, that is standardising and reorganising the state in order to be viable in the long run.

When a country has experienced prolonged policies stressing long-term planning, and face the limits thereof, it might be conspicuous to start emphasising processes of democratisation, because inherent to such long range planning is often a process of standardisation based on technical expertise, in which the variation between societal groups is neglected. In other words, such 'technocratic' periods, are likely to be in need of correction in the direction of more democratic processes. The arduous situation in formerly communist countries in the 1980s and in Indonesia in the 1990s might well be explained by their rigidity, making it impossible to change the emphasis from continuous planning to creating democratic policy processes.

When processes of democratisation have dominated the political scene for a long time, it is likely that the attention for efficiency is increasingly neglected, thus creating the need to make the democratic character of policy processes secondary to the administrative need to increase efficiency. This shift can be seen in the Western world at the end of the 1970s and especially the 1980s. The severe financial situation, partly a consequence of the idea, dominant in the 1970s that the sky is the limit, urged governments in all developed countries to withdraw and to concentrate on their core-business.

Therefore, the answer to the question where to focus on, depends on the severity of the problems, being a function of the protracted neglect thereof, which may well be different for different (groups of) countries.

## **8. A fixed order in consecutive focus**

This flexible starting point does not imply, however, that the consecutive order to follow the demands is flexible also. Empirical analysis of the development in focus in

the speeches of politicians during the period 1815-1965 (Namenwirth, 1973), case studies in the policymaking process in the Netherlands for the period 1950-2000 (De Vries, 2000, 2002, 2004) and comparative analysis into policy processes in the European Union as whole (De Vries, 1999), suggest that a specific order of attention might be expected. From these studies the recurring order seems to be that at first short term goal-achievement is sought for. When this is accomplished, often after about 10-12 years, the attention shifts to more attention for long term planning. The dilemma between the two has been explicated above. It seems that emphasising short-term goal achievement does not so much go at the expense of efficiency or democracy as it goes at the expense of reducing the latent long term problems in society. The policies aimed at short term goal-achievement are often somewhat ad hoc, output oriented, often not very well thought-out and often resulting in negative side-effects, not taken into account. It is the quick-fix, often resulting in rapidly changing policies, from an adage, is there a problem today, than we will provide the solution tomorrow, forgetting that this might result in a new problem the day after tomorrow. Although this may be effective in getting things done at the beginning, the criticism will mount when this goes on for too long. In our distinction the resulting shift is first of all a shift from a politics centred, results oriented approach to an administrative correction thereof, removing its inherent drawbacks.

It seems to be the inherent side-effect of long term planning that it is based on expertise, with the economic, organisational and technical experts behaving especially as standard-setters. The resulting administrative standardisation, with the aim of structuring the policies, will seem very effective at the beginning, because it takes away the drawbacks that became so visible at the end of the previous period. However, over time the standardisation is likely to result in a one-dimensionality, that becomes increasingly restrictive in the multidimensional society. It are the increasingly narrow boundaries, within which people have to behave, that call after some time for more variation, freedom and “democracy”. It is likely that people have not yet forgotten the previous period in which ad hoc policies dominated and which resulted in the drawbacks, but the drawbacks of the dominance of standardisation in the period at hand are increasingly felt. Hence there will not be a return to short-term goal achievement, although this is also neglected. It is not the most pressing problem at the time, nor the

problem that is neglected the longest. Instead, the correction comes from the other sphere in terms of politics and administration, this time from politics. The need is increasingly felt to replace the dominance of experts and administrative criteria by political factors. Furthermore there is a shift from a predilection on outcomes to a quest to alter the policy process, that is the way policy processes are designed and the extent to which people are allowed to participate in and influence those processes.

The inherent side-effect of stressing democracy is, that it is most likely to go at the expense of efficient processes and outcomes. Waldo once called democracy the least efficient system (Waldo, 1948). When the democratic features of policy processes are predominant, it is likely that they also become costly and have to be corrected after some time, by a tendency toward efficiency. A system going for more and more democracy is likely to get into financial problems. After some time it probably cannot afford this inefficiency anymore and is bound to shift and to give more attention to its efficiency.

This focus on efficiency, may at first have the expected effects, for instance, by stressing optimal outcomes given fixed resources. When that is achieved, however, the idea about new policies with a fixation on efficiency can change toward a preponderance to try to achieve fixed results against minimum investments. After all, that is where the surplus value of efficiency is to be found when the policies are already cost-efficient. That implies that the only additive pay-off is to be found in reducing investments, although they are cost-efficient, in order to achieve allocative efficiency. This might well result in a neglect of societal problems and an internal orientation of increasing efficiency by reducing the available resources. After a long period of emphasising efficiency it becomes likely that the problems not addressed anymore become pressing again. Because the added value of more efficiency measures dwindles, after it has been stressed for a long time, it is probable that that the emphasis thereon is replaced by prudent steps to develop new policies to address the most urgent problems (short term goal-achievement). The administrative emphasis on efficiency is corrected again by a political response aimed at goal-achievement.

<b>Sequence of dominant values in public policies in Europe</b>	
<u><i>Dominant goal</i></u>	<u><i>Focus on</i></u>
Short term goal achievement	results /output
Long term planning	results /outcomes
Participation and democracy	process /openness
Efficiency	process /input-output

**Table 2.** *The fixed sequence in dominant values*

Hence, we expect a fixed order in the aspects stressed and the way the dilemmas are dealt with. This order goes successively from goal-achievement, through long term planning, to stressing democracy and afterwards efficiency. These shifts are induced by two factors: the periodical mutual corrections by the political and administrative spheres to the dominance of the other sphere and the periodical change in focus from results to process and vice versa. This is visualised in table 2.

## 9. The advantages of sequential optimisation

The most important advantage of sequential optimisation, is that it avoids the ADHD symptoms characterising some governments. It implies focus and flexibility, which might be much more efficient, effective, democratic and able to achieve goals than trying to accomplish all this simultaneously. This releases governments from the strain caused by the impossibility to get it all at once, and makes successful policies (in terms of the one-sided goals) more feasibly.

Secondly, it avoids the consequences of the dilemmas in the multiple demands placed on policies. When trying to weigh-off the dilemmas in order to get an optimum in all four, often results in half-hearted policies resulting in insufficient results in every respect. One might compare it to a student who is faced with multiple tasks and lacks the time to fulfil them all in time. It might be wise to concentrate on part of the tasks in order to fulfil these with good results. A student who keeps on dividing his/her concentration on all subjects is also likely to fail in all. If the student is a genius, (s)he might try to accomplish it all simultaneously and successfully. When returning to

governments, however, we wonder how many governments exist that are of such genius. Given the theoretical and pragmatic limitations governments are faced with, it is preferable to set out for sequential optimising.

Of course it is not always appreciated to neglect part of the problems or demands. However, this is still better than to be criticised on all of them, because one fails to accomplish any of them. Furthermore, this criticism can be used as a catalyst to become flexibility and to change the focus of new policies when this is needed.

Thirdly, this so-called relative attention paradigm might be a fruitful way to analyse and understand long term policy change, able not only to understand the specifics of policies in a certain period, but also able to explain policy diffusion and to predict the nature of policy change. Previous analyses on long term policy change in the Netherlands and Europe showed that the model is quite powerful in this respect (De Vries, 1999, 2000, 2002, 2004).

## **10. The ambiguity of terms**

The sequence in attention as found in European countries does not have to be a universal sequence. When the four dominant values are materialised differently, or when the approach to achieve the four values varies, this might also affect the sequence. Efficiency, planning, goal-achievement and democratisation as such are ambiguous terms with multiple possibilities to materialise. Furthermore, in one way or the other, they always play a role in public policies. A policy without an input, process, output or outcome is inconceivable. With regard to planning, at least four different meanings can be distinguished. (Van den Heuvel, 1994). Technical or project planning at an operational level, historical-political planning in which planning is related to control; system-functional planning emphasising the goal-means relations; and fourthly institutional planning, in which planning is done by organisations and institutions being themselves simultaneously the object of planning. In this paper planning is interpreted as strategic planning in order to design society for the long term and to provide a solution for the structural latent problems, such as the policies in the 1950s to design the welfare state. In terms of Talcott Parsons it relates to 'latent pattern maintenance', and in the system model of Easton to the 'outcomes' of the authoritative allocation of



values and services. In policy terms it is associated with the effectiveness on the long term.

The same goes for 'efficiency'. Nowadays this term is also defined in multiple ways. Distinguished are cost-efficiency, that is, to achieve a maximum of goals given fixed means. A second form is allocative efficiency, that is, the idea that overproduction should be diminished. Although the goal-means relation might be efficient, the question can also be whether the volume of goals is not too large. One may think of the discussions taking place at the beginning of the 1990s about governments' core business. Even though the public sector might work cost-efficient, one questioned whether this was efficient regarding allocation and whether the service provision by the public sector should be done at all. In terms of the theory of Talcott Parsons this relates to adaptive upgrading of the steering of a social system, and in terms of Easton this relates to the reduction of inputs. A third interpretation of efficiency arose, when scholars began to talk about x-efficiency, pointing to the possible unintended and unaccounted effects of production in the long run. For instance, regarding externalities like safety and pollution. In this conception efficiency becomes part of long term planning.

With regard to democracy, participation, and interactive policy making also several interpretations are possible. When a government authoritatively tells the citizens what they are allowed and not allowed to do, there still is interaction between both. When government sees its citizens as clients, this still is regarded as interactive policy making and when government sees societal organisations as partners with whom it wants to accomplish something, it is also interactive policymaking. When a government discusses its policies beforehand with interest groups, in order to reconcile opposite interests, one speaks of direct democracy and influence of the 'citoyen' in the policy process. The underlying values, namely power(dis)parity, and the assumption of congruence or antagonism in interests are very different (De Vries, 2004). Hence, the terms in themselves do not always have the same implication nor materialisation in the policy process.

As to the attention for goal-achievement, the same problems occur. One can interpret this in many ways. With Namewirth (1973) we interpret goal-achievement in terms of output-orientation, that is, the concentration on the direct, short-term goals of policies, and not on the outcomes. Therefore, it is only in a specific way of materialising the

different aspects that the fixed ordering is expected. This specification is given above in table 2. It shows the sequence in the dominant value behind public policy making processes as found in European countries since the second world war. This sequence may well be an artefact of the specific way in which they materialised the values.

## **11. Conclusion**

This paper suggested that governments that want it all often end up with nothing. They turn into ADHD governments with all the pathological consequences that people suffering from this disease also experience. The argument suggests that the remedy is to focus and to be flexible. If you cannot do it all at once, you should do it step by step. Based on previous research into long term policy change in Europe, one can distinguish periods in which those governments did indeed focus on one theme and adjusted their policies accordingly. After accomplishing what was intended, some were flexible enough to change the focus on that aspect that was neglected most in the previous period (De Vries, 2000).

Furthermore, it was argued that such one-sided policies give a pragmatic answer to the theoretical problem raised by classic scholars in political science and public administration, namely that many demands placed on the policy making process pose dilemmas. Maximising one, may go at the expense of maximising another equally important feature of public policies. We distinguished four such conflicting demands, namely short-term goal achievement, long term effectiveness, democratic processes and efficiency, based on two dimensions, namely demands from the administration and from politics, and demands related to results of policies and to the policy process.

In theory, public policies should find a balance between these demands. However, this analysis suggest that it might not be so awkward to try to balance them sequentially instead of simultaneously. Incorporating the time dimension, makes it possible to develop policies that through time are able to conform to each of the demands, although every period is characterised by the protracted neglect of at least one of the demands.

Furthermore, this paper argued that there are several forces motivating governments to focus and to be flexible. Forces at the macro, meso and micro level. Nevertheless, there are also forces that induce governments to fail in this respect and induce them to

do everything simultaneously or that make them rigid instead of flexible. According to this analysis the probability of success for these governments is much smaller than for those governments that do focus and are flexible.

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