

Appendix 1 – Methodology

In all social science research, a rigorous research design is crucial to ensure the validity and reliability of research findings and outcomes. At the broadest level, a distinction is often made between qualitative and quantitative approaches to research. A quantitative methodology is associated with observing broad phenomena; a concern for quantity wherein the research goal is to estimate average effects. In comparison to the ‘soft’ tools of qualitative research, the reliance upon ‘harder’, more scientific research tools, such as statistical analysis and computer simulations, are perceived as minimising the ‘biases that affect subjective opinion’ (Spector, 1981, p. 7; see also Miller, 1995; Mahoney and Goertz, 2006, pp. 229-31). On the other hand, a qualitative methodology is associated with a certain epistemological perspective, wherein the aim is not to predict, but to offer causal explanations about the world, which involves describing both observable and unobservable phenomena together. Such explanations are based upon an understanding of people as conscious, social beings whose experiences, motives and subjective interpretations are an important part of the causal process (Bulmer, 1984, p. 211; Marsh, 1984, p. 88). Thus, qualitative methodologists ‘do not look for the net effect of a cause over a large number of cases but rather for how causes interact in the context of a particular case or a few cases to produce an outcome (Bennett and Elman, 2006, pp. 261-2). In many respects, the divide between these two research traditions is a crude dichotomy, as there will be an inevitable degree of overlap between the two approaches, and some academics have argued for their drawing together to improve the overall robustness of research design (see, for example, Mahoney and Goertz, 2006). Nonetheless, the choice of methodological approach is dependent on the underpinning aims of the research and the outcomes sought (Brymann, 1988, pp. 108-9). In the context of this thesis, which seeks to explain the emergence of governance theory through an examination of the UK government’s response to emergent challenges, a qualitative approach has been adopted, in order to capture meaning, process and context (Brymann, 1988; Rose, 1982).

Within this, the choice of the research strategy is determined by three main factors: whether the focus is upon contemporary or historical events; the extent of the researcher's control over events; and the nature of the research questions posed. Amongst these three factors, the latter is the most salient in determining the strategy adopted. Descriptive 'what' questions, for example, may be about determining prevalence, which renders the use of surveys and data analysis pertinent, or about conducting an exploratory overview, which renders any technique suitable. Questions which focus upon 'how' and 'why', however, are more likely to favour the use of case studies, experiments and histories (Flinders, 2001, p. 375; Yin, 2003, p. 4). Focusing upon the aims and objectives of this thesis, the emphasis is largely upon contemporary events, with a limited analysis of the history of machinery of government changes to provide a contextual backdrop to the main analysis, and in both instances the researcher has had no control over any events, a significant degree of distance existing at all times. The central question of the research seeks to explain *why* the theory of governance has come to the fore, and the associated challenges posed to the state; and *how* the government has sought to reassert its capacity, and whether measures introduced, such as the PSA framework, have been successful. Taken together, these pertaining characteristics of the research therefore render the case study an appropriate methodological tool, which Yin suggests is the optimum research strategy when 'a *how* or *why* question is being asked about a contemporary set of events, over which the investigator has little or no control' (Yin, 2003, p. 9, emphasis in original).

Accounting for the three variables outlined above, the case study as a research strategy offers several distinct benefits in relation to the aims and objectives of the research. The great advantage of the case study approach is way in which it can establish and account for the unique historical context which has led to the apparent reduction of state capacity, which thus frames and informs the response of government and societal actors (Yin, 2003, p. 13). Case studies utilise a full variety of evidence such as documents, interviews and observations to establish the historical context surrounding events and to provide a thorough explanation of causal relations too complex for quantitative or comparative methods (Yin, 2003, p. 13). Thus, adopting a case study approach to the research allows the

incorporation of such contextual factors, whilst ensuring that the research is well managed and is both internally and externally valid. Unlike broad survey and comparative approaches, the case study allows for

detailed and holistic analysis of sequences in historical cases, they are suited to the study of rare events, they can facilitate the search for omitted variables that might lie behind contingent events, and they allow for the study of interaction effects within one or a few cases (Bennett and Elman, 2006a, p. 259).

Indeed, case studies can

utilise within-case analysis and/or cross-case comparison of the detailed sequential events within one or a few cases to provide inferential leverage on complex causation even when only a few relevant cases are available for analysis (Bennett and Elman, 2006a, p. 259).

In relation to this research, wherein the core focus on the PSA framework is specific to the UK's political and institutional context, the case study is highly suited to analysing its success of the PSA framework tool of central capacity, particularly as its relatively short time in existence precludes extensive longitudinal analysis.

The case study approach also overcomes some of the weaknesses associated with comparative studies, as the ability to account for contextual conditions 'temper broader comparative theories which tend to become obvious and overkill rather quickly' (Apter, 1998, p. 392; see also Yin, 2003, p. 2). In this respect, a small-n sample of case studies is therefore able to minimise the risk of conceptual 'stretching', identified by Sartori, wherein a concept progresses too far along the 'ladder of abstraction', 'diminishing its attributes or properties' to the extent it that becomes too broad to provide analytical utility (Sartori, 1970, p. 1041; see also Lijphart, 1975, pp. 171-2; Lieberman, 1991, p. 309). As Chapter 2 demonstrated, whilst the concept of governance has general applicability, its actual form taken and the response of the government to the emergent challenges is very much dependent upon the institutional forms and historic context of the British state, factors which would not be fully accounted for under a large-n comparative study. Finally, the case study offers a practical solution to dilemmas commonly faced by academic

researchers, as by focusing on a single or small-n sample of cases, 'that case can be intensively examined even when the research resources at the investigator's disposal are relatively limited' (Lijphart, 1971, p. 691). Within the confines of doctoral level political research, the importance of such practical considerations cannot be overstated.

Nonetheless, the case study approach has attracted several criticisms. Lijphart described case studies as 'intensive but uncontrolled examinations', which 'cannot directly result in empirical generalisations' and 'cannot even be used to test hypotheses' beyond the focus of the research (Lijphart, 1975, pp. 158-60). This highlights the two main lines along which case studies are criticised: that their design entails a degree of researcher bias; and that they provide a limited or insufficient basis for generalisation. Whereas quantitative research designs are portrayed as representative and reliable, case studies are perceived as being atypical, piecemeal and unrepresentative (Devine, 1995, p. 141). Indeed, it has been suggested that case studies may simply lead to 'logical conclusions from preordained assumptions', wherein cases are selected according to the predetermined conclusions that underpin the research objectives (Clark, Tracey and Lawton Smith, 2002, p. 268). Inferences drawn from case studies have been perceived as being at best tentative (Rose, 1982, p. 38), as they remain unsuited to yielding conclusions of great certainty as a 'small number of cases is an inadequate basis for generalising about the process under study' (Lieberson, 1991, p. 311). Indeed, such criticisms have been levelled against qualitative research designs in general, being perceived as unreliable, too interpretive, difficult to evaluate and not easily generalisable (Brymann, 1988, p. 84-5). It must be noted, however, that all methodological choices involve trade-offs among criteria that are individually desirable but that often conflict with one another (Gerring, 2001; Bennett and Elman, 2006b, p. 472). Furthermore, the above criticisms can be applied to all research methods, both qualitative and quantitative, which highlights the importance of an effective and coherent methodological framework to ensure the validity and reliability of the research findings.

In any research, the underpinning methodological framework is a ‘logic that links the data to be collected (and the conclusions to be drawn) to the initial questions of a study’, enabling inferences to be drawn concerning causal relations, and defining the domain of generalisability (Flinders, 2001, p. 377). In accordance with Yin’s four-fold design test (2003), the methodological framework of this research has therefore sought to ensure the construct validity, internal validity, external validity and reliability of the research (table A.1).

Table A.1 – Incorporating Yin’s Design Tests into the Case Study Approach

Test	Possible case study tactics	Phase of research in which tactic occurs
Construct Validity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Use multiple sources of evidence ● Establish chain of evidence ● Have key informants draft case study reports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Data collection ● Data collection ● Composition
Internal Validity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Do pattern matching ● Do explanation building ● Do time series analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Data analysis ● Data analysis ● Data analysis
External validity Reliability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Use replication logic in multiple case studies ● Use case study protocol ● Develop case study database 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Research design ● Data collection ● Data collection

Source: Yin, 2003, p. 33.

Construct validity is a concern for ensuring that inferences can legitimately be made from the focus of the case study to the theoretical constructs against which the case study seeks to analyse, a key factor being the development of a robust, operational set of measures. Ensuring construct validity can be challenging, as the risks of subjectivity and pre-determination in case study selection outlined above suggests. Nonetheless, this research sought to employ a clear methodological framework throughout, to minimise the risk of bias and distortion. Chapter 1 introduces the scope, aims and background of the research, defining the research questions that inform the subsequent thesis. The review of the academic literature in Chapter 2 provides a theoretical background, demonstrating the emergence of an academic lacuna, which the thesis seeks to address. Chapter 3 delineates

the machinery of government changes instigated by the Labour government as part of its reform agenda, which was an explicit response to the challenges to the state identified in Chapter 2. Chapter 4 outlines the underlying principles of the PSA regime as part of the reform agenda detailed in Chapter 3. Together, these chapters provide a solid theoretical and empirical foundation for the case study analysis that proceeded in Chapter 5 and 6, teasing out and building upon the various aspects of the research questions identified on the outset. Finally, Chapters 7 and 8 detail the research findings, seeking to relate them back to the central questions identified in Chapter 1, in order to re-examine the pertinent themes within the academic literature. Furthermore, Chapter 8 drew attention to several emerging research agendas that could have an important impact upon this field of research, which represented an overt acknowledgement of the limitations of a singular piece of research. Throughout the thesis, pre-ordained assumptions were avoided, reinforced by the utilisation of a wide range of source types, including interviews, official government papers, think tank reports and Select Committee investigations. Indeed, a maximal approach to sources was adopted, with around 600 documents being incorporated throughout the course of the thesis (see Bibliography), enabling the extensive triangulation of evidence and ideas at all junctures.

The concern for internal validity focuses on ensuring that the all causal relationships are considered (and any non-causal influences specifically rejected) to ensure the completeness of research findings, and to avoid neglecting any undetected salient influences. However, ensuring the internal validity of the research presents a series of challenges

Often in studies... there are variables related to variables of interest which distort or confound the results... In such cases one does not know which of the two was responsible for the observed levels of the dependent variable... [Indeed] there are events that may affect subjects in addition to the independent variables or conditions of interest (Spector, 1981, pp. 17, 24).

Indeed, whilst correlations may 'be established quite easily... their causal nature [can] remain in doubt' (Miller, 1995, p. 168). Thus, an effective methodological framework can ensure the internal validity of the research, by incorporating some of the data analysis

techniques detailed in table A.1, and by offering a challenge function through asking questions such as ‘is the evidence convergent’, or ‘have all competing possibilities been considered’ (Flinders, 2001, p. 277). Within this thesis, the internal validity of the research has been ensured in a number of ways. As far as practicable (see below for issues surrounding access to interviewees), a wide range of interviewees were met, comprising officials and politicians, both past and present, from a range of institutional settings to ensure that a range of viewpoints informed the research findings. Similarly, the use of a wide range of sources and source types has also ensured the triangulation of the research findings, the extensive catalogue consulted in this research minimising the risk of a key causal influence being overlooked or marginalised. In all instances, ensuring effective triangulation of data gathered will ensure the internal robustness of the conclusions eventually arrived at (Neuman, 2000, p. 125).

Within the two case study chapters, a common analytical framework was deployed, as detailed at the end of Chapter 4, to ensure consistency and that the same broad range of contingent factors were considered in both instances (Yin and Heald, 1976, p. 373). Finally, realistic parameters for the scope of the research were established and adhered to. Whilst the PSA framework comprises the core case study of the thesis, its extensive reach over areas of government activity would render meaningful, coherent and effective analysis near-impossible within the confines of doctoral research. Thus, two key PSA targets were selected to enable a within-case comparative analysis to be undertaken, which enhanced triangulation and provided an opportunity to determine the contingent variables through comparison, wherein the ‘likelihood of leaving out a relevant variable may be somewhat lower... as this approach involves studying a few cases in detail’ (Bennett and Elman, 2006b, p. 471; see also Yin, 2003, p. 46). Indeed, the internal validity of the within-case analysis is further enhanced by the selection of a suitable start and end point of analysis; the creation of each PSA target focused upon, with emphasis upon the recently ended 2005-8 monitoring period, as an account that ‘runs from a suitably chosen beginning to the end of the story’ will have greater internal validity than one that ‘starts or ends at an odd or unconvincing moment’ (Bennett and Elman, 2006b, p. 459).

The external validity of the research has also been considered, to ensure that the research findings are generalisable beyond the immediate focus of the case study. The narrow focus of many case studies has been criticised for failing to generate conclusions generalisable beyond the focus of the research (Lijphart, 1975, p. 158). They have been perceived as providing a ‘a useful but limited and potentially fallible mode of inference’, which should be complemented by more wide ranging statistical techniques in order to improve external validity (Bennett and Elman, 2006b, pp. 473-4). In particular, the utilisation on a single case study has been criticised

The scientific status of the case study method is somewhat ambiguous, however, because science is a generalising activity. A single case can constitute neither the basis for a valid generalisation nor the ground for disproving an established generalisation’ (Lijphart, 1971, p. 691).

Similarly, it has been suggested that the adoption of a multiple case study, as opposed to a single case study, improves the generalisability, as ‘the evidence from multiple cases is often considered more compelling, and the overall study is therefore regarded as being more robust’ (Yin, 2003, p. 46). Thus, a distinction is often made between single and multiple case studies; and within the multiple case study approach, the comparative case study has developed as a distinct methodological tool, perceived as further enhancing the external validity of such research

Just as the analytical power of the comparative method increases the closer it approximates the statistical and experimental methods, so the analytical power of the case study method increases the more it approximates the comparative method (Lijphart, 1971, p. 693).

Nonetheless, all methodological choices involve trade-offs (Gerring, 2001; Bennett and Elman, 2006b, p. 472), and if rigorously implemented, in particular ensuring that the internal validity of the research approach is sound, a single case study approach can be externally valid. Indeed, a distinction must be made between generalising theories rather than findings (Flinders, 2001, p. 379); whilst the research findings may not be generalisable beyond the scope of the case study, this does not suggest that they are invalid. Thus, as

Rhodes suggested, a single case study does provide a sufficient basis for generalisation 'if the case study sets out to test a theoretical proposition' (Rhodes, 1994, pp. 165-7). In the context of this thesis, the utilisation of a single case study approach (containing within-case analysis) is appropriate as within the British political system, the PSA framework is unparalleled in terms of scope and function. Whilst the research findings may or may not be generalisable to other institutional innovations or geo-political contexts, their external validity is ensured as the case study has been conducted to test the applicability of governance theory, complementing the body of literature already in existence.

Whilst the PSA framework is the main case study of the thesis, the within-case analysis of the recycling and climate change PSA targets has introduced a comparable perspective. This has further reinforced the external validity of the research. The two cases were carefully chosen to enable the various aspects of the PSA framework to be explored in full, as within the PSA framework a broad distinction between shared/joint and departmental targets has been embedded. This framework accords with the distinction made by Mackie and Marsh

Individual case studies are comparative if they use and assess the utility of concepts developed elsewhere; ...test some general theory or hypothesis; or generating concepts to be used elsewhere or hypotheses to be used elsewhere (Mackie and Marsh, 1995, p. 177).

The within-case analysis of this research fulfils all three criteria, assessing the utility of numerous concepts such as 'hollowing-out' and 'fragmentation' which emerged prior to the introduction of the PSA regime; testing the applicability of governance theory vis-à-vis the PSA framework; and refining the theory of governance by adding impetus to the notion of meta-governance, which can be used within other jurisdictions of the British state or across other countries. Focusing on one aspect in isolation would preclude meaningful analysis of its impact as a tool of state capacity, and would undermine both the internal and external validity of the research conducted. Conducting a within-case analysis of the recycling and climate change PSA targets therefore enables this core distinction to be explored in full. Furthermore, the involvement in Defra in both PSA targets (as the sole owner of the

recycling target and the lead department of climate change) means that the impact of the entire PSA framework across a single department can be analysed. This is important as a comparison of joint and standalone targets across two separate departments would not control for the variable of 'department'; the introduction of an additional dependent variable rendering it impossible to tell whether any similarities or differences were because of the department or target type. The research design that underpins the within-case analysis has therefore also enhanced the internal validity of the research findings.

Whilst the PSA framework represents a unique case, dependent upon the historical and institutional context of the UK and the agency of the Labour government, the research findings have far-reaching applicability, and will be of interest to academics and practitioners operating within a range of national contexts. It is widely recognised that the challenges to strategic steering capacity of core executives are faced by all advanced liberal democracies as evidenced, for example, by the work of Wright and Hayward (2000) which considered the response of several of western core executives in the context of increased institutional fragmentation. Similarly, the far-reaching wave of NPM administrative reforms in the 1980s and 1990s and the resultant unintended consequences associated, such as the rapid unbundling and disaggregation of the state, have posed similar dilemmas concerning the role and capacity of the central government within numerous European and Westminster-style democracies. In this respect, the strategies adopted by the British Labour government to fill-in and restore the strategic capacity of the centre represents one response to a commonly experienced dilemma. Therefore, the empirical observations and detailed analysis of this research will be of interest to academics and practitioners operating in other national contexts wherein similar dilemmas are posed. This further reinforces the external validity of the research findings, as whilst they may or may not be replicable, the lessons learnt are generalisable to a theoretical level. Thus, in terms of transferability, the broader lessons drawn from these empirical observations have resonance beyond the immediate scope of PSA framework, or indeed, the UK.

Yin's final research test concerns reliability, which seeks to ensure the stability and consistency of the study over time, through the creation and maintenance of a case study database, and the development of a clear case study protocol (Yin, 2004, p. 24). As shown already, efforts to ensure consistency, for example in employing a common framework for the within-case analysis, have been key to ensuring the internal validity of the research, whilst contributing directly to the overall reliability of the research. Reliability also entails a series of more practical, organisational considerations to ensure the transparency and archival integrity of the data collected. For each within-case study, several key databases were established and updated at regular intervals to ensure over time consistency. Firstly, a record of all government outputs was created, which in particular catalogued evidence from Annual Reports and Autumn Performance Reports for each department responsible for the targets. This enabled changes over time to be tracked and patterns established, whilst providing a full bibliographic resource of performance information. A similar literature database was established for other primary sources, with sub-sections including Parliamentary Select Committee outputs, European Commission outputs and think tank outputs. Both databases were updated at regular intervals to ensure consistency and to avoid any important information 'slipping through the net.' A comprehensive database of the semi-structured elite interviews conducted throughout this interview was also established, which detailed each respondent's role, organisation, the date of interview and the location of interview. All correspondence with participants has been retained, and all interviews have been transcribed in full. Reliability was further ensured by the use of direct quotations, rather than paraphrase, wherever possible in the thesis, anonymity being ensured as requested.

In the context of elite interviews, 'reliability' has assumed an alternative meaning, wherein there is a concern to ensure that interview responses are as reliable as possible, with the risk of distortion (on both the part of the interviewee and interviewer) being minimised (Davies, 2001, p. 79; Lilleker, 2003, p. 218; Dorussen et al, 2005, p. 318). The use of elite interviews also has implications for the internal reliability of the research, as a range of personal and political motives may lead to respondents downplaying or exaggerating their

role in policy-making and implementation, or in providing partial answers (Lilleker, 2003, p. 208). It has been suggested that a larger sample size would minimise such risks, enabling a broad triangulation of responses. However, whilst it makes 'intuitive sense to use agreement among experts as an indication of the quality of the information they provided', it is essential to ensure that all viewpoints, conflicting or otherwise, are given equal credence as 'there is always a possibility that one expert is "right" and all others are simply "wrong"' (Dorussen et al, 2005, p. 334). Whilst such risks cannot be fully controlled for, an effective interview strategy should minimise them as far as possible. In the instance of this research, interviews were conducted with a range of senior officials and politicians within a range of political arenas and, in the instance of the climate change case target, across all relevant policy areas and departments. Overall, a total of 24 interviews were conducted, and when analysing the interviews, direct quotations were used whenever possible to avoid any distortion or bias. Certainly, there are constraints when employing elite interviewing as a major research tool, in particular there is an issue regarding problems of access which can lead to unrepresentative sampling (Richards, 1996, pp. 200-1). This difficulty was experienced during this research, in particular when seeking to secure the co-operation of top-level political elites such as government ministers past and present. However, an extensive list of potential alternative interviewees meant that sampling could be conducted on a relatively representative basis. Indeed, elite interviews are an attractive research tool as they can provide 'provide insights into events about which we know little: the activities that take place out of the public or media gaze, behind closed doors' (Lilleker, 2003, p. 208). In the British context, this is even more pertinent as

government secrecy is a major problem for anyone doing any branch of political studies in the United Kingdom, while intrinsic difficulties with other sources, such as self-serving biases in published sources and unavoidable incompleteness in documentary archives (Davies, 2001, p. 79).

The elite interview, effectively carried out, can therefore provide an important source of triangulation, which again enhances the internal validity of the research.

Finally, an important consideration for all social science research, regardless of the methodological framework employed, is ensuring that the research is conducted, analysed and reported in an ethically sound manner. In the context of this research, the most important ethical issue relates to the use of expert interviewees as an important source of data. When negotiating access with participants, informed consent was obtained at the outset. All potential participants were fully informed of the purpose of the research (including the underlying research questions) and were told that their responses may appear in a PhD thesis. Many participants, especially senior civil servants, were keen to ensure their anonymity, therefore interviews were recorded in a way which prevented the participant being traced by removing any all personal details and any notable identifiers. Respecting the interviewee's right to anonymity was a delicate balancing act, and it was essential that the results of the anonymised data were still plausible and without significant distortion, which would render the results incongruent to the topic of research (Kane, 1985, p. 212; Rees, 1991, p. 148). Altering the occupation of the civil servant would have been detrimental, as their professional position was the reason the interview was sought, whereas removing name, gender, age and location (in relation to LA officials) identifiers did not undermine the results, as these were not central to the research aims. The ethical usage of documentation was considered. It has been asserted that 'literature searching and content analysis are merely forms of covert non-participation strategy distinguished from observation and interviewing only by the format of the observed data' (Homan and Bulmer, 1982, p. 110; see also Rees, 1991, p. 142). Accordingly, care was taken to ensure that the content of sources used was not taken out of context or distorted, utilising direct quotations whenever possible, with full bibliographic references provided throughout (Rees, 1991, p. 150). Furthermore, it was crucial to uphold the Copyright, Design and Patents Act 1988, and the conventions of intellectual property rights, to ensure that the work of others was not inappropriately encroached upon, and to demonstrate the originality of the research undertaken. Again, careful bibliographic referencing was key, with the use of direct quotations whenever possible, to demonstrate provenance and to enable cross-referencing between the sources consulted and research conducted.

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