

in-touch

Newsletter



Greetings from PAI

Dear friends and colleagues

We at PAI want to send you our very best wishes during this global pandemic and we sincerely hope that you and your families, friends and colleagues are staying safe and well. These are difficult and uncertain times and our thoughts are with you all as you cope with changes to your daily lives at work and at home. We would also like to say a big thank you to our amazing staff, who have remained dedicated and good-humoured throughout these difficult months.

For many of us, being in “lockdown” has given us time to reflect and we have been encouraging our consultants and Workshop Directors to share their thoughts and observations with us. Our colleague, Philip Champness, has written a very enlightening article on leadership during this unprecedented time and you can read this on the next two pages. Philip’s article is also available on our website (www.public-admin.co.uk) and you will also find topical pieces from some of our other colleagues on the News and Views page of the website.

Fortunately, most of our consultancy work continues, with consultants working remotely on our civil service reform project in Albania, public sector reform project in the British Virgin Islands, strengthening capacity in policy development and coordination in Kosovo, job evaluation, pay and grading reform for the civil service in The Gambia, gender equality in Palestine, strengthening capacity in monitoring and evaluation for government institutions in Turkey, etc.

We are continuing to respond to requests for proposals for new projects and programmes. In particular, the European Commission funded framework contract on Structural Reform Support Services, focussed on EU Member States, has been very active and we are currently working with our lead partner, KPMG, on two interesting projects – improving the core information system for the Croatia Tax Administration and supporting the Insolvency Service in Cyprus.

We are also very pleased to be a partner with Tetra Tech for a new contract for the Good Governance Fund financed by the UK Department for International Development (DFID). Together with our consortium



Drawing by Maria and Sofia Gromlyuk

partners, we will be delivering technical assistance and capacity building for Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Serbia in support of their domestic reform agendas.

Though it has obviously not been possible for us to run our usual range of professional development workshops since March, we are currently developing some interesting ideas for future workshops, planning our 2021 schedule and are also busy putting in place measures to protect our staff and everyone who visits our offices in the future.

We have been hosting free webinars and have been very pleased and encouraged by the number of people who have joined us, and the wide range of countries represented. Our first webinar, presented by communications expert, Bob Wade, was on Coronavirus Communications and the second was on Re-building Judicial Systems Post-Coronavirus. Neil McCallum, our Workshop Director for our programmes on Judicial Administration and on Transforming Criminal Justice, led this webinar. It was a real pleasure to be interacting with colleagues across the world and to have such lively question and answer sessions and exchanges. We’ll keep you up to date with news of forthcoming webinars. Do join us!

We have had many requests for our coaching services whilst people around the world have been working in difficult conditions. Our coaches have been using Skype and

Zoom to engage with leaders on the new challenges at work created by the coronavirus crisis. The coaching sessions stimulate learning and insights into personal motivation, skills and wellbeing. The sessions can be for individuals or small groups. If you would like more information, please do contact us at pai@public-admin.co.uk.

Of course, we miss working with people face-to-face (though not too close!) and we very much look forward to welcoming you back to London or to seeing you in your country as soon as we are able. In the meantime, please keep in touch with us by email or phone (contact details are on the back page). To end our greetings on

a positive note, we thought we would share with you the lovely drawing on the front page by Maria and Sofia Gromlyuk, twin daughters of our colleague, co-Director Slava Gromlyuk. Many households in the UK have been displaying similar rainbow images in the windows of their homes as a tribute to all the key workers from health, social care and many other essential services who have worked tirelessly and courageously during the pandemic. We would love to hear whether you have similar tributes in your countries, so please let us know.

With very best wishes to you all and we hope to see you again soon.

Leadership in the time of coronavirus

Philip Champness, PAI Associate Consultant

In January Chinese scientists reported a deadly new virus – coronavirus or COVID-19 - that spread rapidly from person to person and caused an acute respiratory disease. There was neither a vaccine nor a cure. Since then the virus has crossed international borders to trigger a global pandemic.

Pandemics are not new. We know from earlier pandemics (such as influenza, Sars and Ebola) that governments can slow their spread by reducing or eliminating contact between people. They enforce social distancing, close businesses and schools, ban large gatherings and make people who can work from home do so. They may also test people frequently, quarantining those who have the virus and tracing and testing all their contacts. These interventions put a brake on economic activity and many people may lose their livelihoods. The pandemic requires leaders who can tackle the health crisis, mitigate economic depression, relieve social hardship and deliver services.

How do we find solutions to a pandemic? We begin by recognising the kind of problem we are dealing with.

A complex problem – Complex problems have interwoven causes and effects. They cannot be solved by linear thinking, or mathematical modelling alone. There is no single right answer to Covid-19. Action in one area may have unintended consequences elsewhere. Answers emerge using the advice and insights of a wide range of experts, specialists and advisers. Covid-19 needs leaders who can host large group conversations, who listen, evaluate and synthesise advice from many sources.

An urgent problem – The virus moves quickly and delays in imposing social distancing can increase the number of infections. As Lenin observed “There are decades where



nothing happens and there are weeks where decades happen”. Urgency demands responsive action and timely decisions. Dangers arise when leaders assume that any quick decision is better than none and that urgency justifies autocracy and centrally directed command and control.

An uncertain problem – We cannot accurately predict the outcomes from our interventions, nor when a vaccine may be available. Leaders need to be open to new knowledge and willing to adapt their actions in the light of it.

A volatile problem – The situation is volatile because people are afraid and decision makers are under great pressure. There is fierce media scrutiny. Government messages need to be clear, empathetic and reassuring. When people fear that they may be infected by others it becomes easy to blame outsiders and minority groups. Leaders need to ensure that their messages do not blame or vilify vulnerable groups.

What qualities would we observe in effective leaders?

The ability to learn from experience – Leaders must learn from their own and other people’s experience. Humility means learning from unexpected sources and from people who are not afraid to speak the truth, challenge conventional wisdom and offer alternative points of view. In February scientists were predicting huge loss of life if no action was taken to prevent the spread of the virus. They failed to make their case strongly enough and leaders were reluctant to accept their dire warnings. Valuable time was lost before action was taken.

Having self-knowledge – Effective leaders know their blind spots and the stereotypes that predispose them to look for ideas from ‘people like us’. They are aware that when faced with a novel problem they may need new ideas. The early imposition of social distancing in the UK was opposed by advisers who thought that keeping people at home would be resisted in a democracy. That assumption (that cognitive bias) proved to be wrong.

Admitting when things go wrong and being agile in putting it right – We need leaders who are practical, transparent and able to generate trust. They need to

acknowledge failure and respond positively to new information. The UK’s Chancellor of the Exchequer has submitted at least four budgets, each one adding to a raft of support for businesses, employees, self-employed people and charities. Far from undermining his authority, his agile responses have been warmly welcomed.

Recognising the importance of ethics in decision making – Technical solutions to complex problems have severe limitations. Effective leaders recognise multiple constituencies and acknowledge that decisions may have different consequences for different groups. Ethical decisions are based on empathy, emotional intelligence, care and respect. An ethical approach means collecting data to understand the causes of disparities in different communities and taking action to promote fairness. There is a debate between proponents of isolation who want to minimise deaths from the virus and those who want to put the economy first by allowing normal life to function. That debate can only be effective if value judgements about the society we want are made explicit.

In a time of fear and loss we need leaders who generate hope that one day things will be better. One day Covid-19 will lose its power and we will review and reflect on our experience. It will become clear which leaders fostered creativity, demonstrated empathy and acted fairly and effectively in exceptionally challenging circumstances.

Cubans visit PAI

Following our previous successful collaboration with the University of Havana, Ministry of Higher Education in Cuba, we hosted experts from the University’s Centre for the Study of Public Administration at a special study visit to London and Cardiff in January. The programme was funded by the British Embassy in Havana and focussed on Local and Regional Government and Devolution: Policies and good practice for local autonomy, economic development and sound financial management.

As well as having briefings at PAI in London, we arranged visits to the Welsh Assembly, the Welsh Government and the Wales Governance Centre, University of Cardiff, all of which were highly rated by the Cuban participants. They really appreciated the warm welcome they were given and the chance to discuss areas of common interest and, of course, compare different constitutional and government practices in Cuba, England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Despite a very packed schedule, the group even managed to fit in a little sightseeing before returning to Havana.



Our group with Professor Richard Wyn Jones (back row centre), Director of the Wales Governance Centre

Working with frontline Government organisations in Kosovo

Steen Bruun-Nielsen, Associate Consultant and Project Team Leader

Just before most parts of the world locked down a few months ago, PAI completed a project in Kosovo to reform three government bodies, namely the Kosovo Competition Authority (KCA), the State Aid Department (SAD) and the Public Procurement Review Body (PRB). KCA and SAD are key players in monitoring markets to promote competitiveness and the PRB provides a valuable forum for dealing with complaints concerning public procurement tenders, a very important market segment.

Each of these organisations is in the front line for safeguarding market fairness and transparency. The project started in autumn 2018 and our team of four advisors and a project assistant have been focusing on building capacity and improving working procedures.



PRB colleagues together with our very efficient project assistant Valbona Hajredinaj (on the left), at an “ad hoc” meeting

Competition, state aid and public procurement are key EU policy areas and alignment of Kosovo legislation with the relevant EU rules is a continuous process. We organised regular workshops for staff from the KCA, SAD and PRB to update their knowledge on EU rules, policies and principles. Wherever possible, the workshops were tailored to relate to ongoing cases specific to each of the organisations, so as to maximise the practical relevance of the training.

A closely related activity was the introduction of standard procedures concerning, for example, market investigations and the process of examining public procurement complaints and drafting decision concerning such complaints. Important tools for these activities were templates/checklists and guidance notes tailored in co-operation with the staff so that the tools could be used in day-to-day work. For the SAD, we helped to develop an inventory of existing state-aid schemes in Kosovo; the first of its kind and indispensable for monitoring purposes. As regards the PRB, we supported organisational reform and advised on how best to amend internal working procedure regulations, not least to incorporate the new procedural tools. It is an indicator to the success of the project that, throughout the project, we were continuously involved in discussing the most effective ways of handling actual cases.

We enjoyed very good working relations with everyone in the KCA, SAD and PRB and are optimistic that the positive results achieved during the project will be sustainable in the longer term.