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ABSTRACT

Commission scholars have been skeptical about the reasons governments give for their appointment but have generally accepted that their relationship with government is kept arms-length during their inquiry. An analytical framework is developed on the assumption that backdoor feedback and influence occurs up to the fateful day of endorsement. Commissioners choose to behave acquiescently or autonomously on this day by comparing the regret they could imagine experiencing in retirement as they reflect on this choice. The entrepreneurial hope which underlies the autonomous path may be strengthened to the degree that the inquiry generates hopeful discourse. The autonomous formulation and advocacy of a place-shaping vision for local government by Sir Michael Lyons is explained by his affirmative framing of his inquiry that fatefully propelled it through the '4-D' cycle of appreciative inquiry and laid the foundation for an advocacy coalition that could take up the baton of advocating this vision.

INTRODUCTION

Commissions of inquiry remain a subject of some academic curiosity within the field of public policy studies. The rate of appointment of 'royal commissions' appears to be at a historical ebb in the United Kingdom and New Zealand (Gilligan 2002; Rowe and MacAllister 2006) although they continue to be a prominent feature of the policy landscape in Australia and Canada (D'Ombrain 1997; Prasser 1994). However, scholars continue to be interested not just in the findings and recommendations of these bodies but also in those of various commissions, committees and working groups that have lesser status but broadly similar characteristics (Dollery, Grant and O'Keefe 2008; Resodihardjo 2006; Roberts 1977; Robshaw 1961; Rowe and McAllister 2006). These are:

- Compared to standing commissions, they are *ad hoc in* nature. They have a discrete task, the scope of which is defined in advance, and a limited time to complete it, usually through the submission of a report with factual analysis and recommendations;

- They are all, to some degree, *official*. Their appointment, terms of reference and resources are made at the discretion of one or more branches of the government. Moreover, even if they do not have statutory powers to compel individuals to give evidence or make submissions there is a presumption that, as good citizens they would have a civic duty to do so;

- Their membership is typically drawn from *outside* government circles and they are typically expected to operate in a public arena, at the boundary between State and Society. As Ashforth (1990) has observed: 'Public inquiries mediate between

State and Society. They listen to Society and speak to the State. They interrogate Society on behalf of the State' (p.9);

- They normally have no role in implementing policy. Once they have conducted their inquiry and made their recommendations in their report, their job is done.

Literature Review

A literature has developed that goes beyond the policy impact of particular commissions that exhibit these characteristics to exploring, in more general, the role such instruments play in the policy process (Ashworth 1990; Chapman 1973; Clokie and Robinson 1937; D'Ombrain 1997; Prasser 1985; Rowe and McAllister 2006; Sheriff 1983; Weller 1994; Zegart 2004). The central research question seems to be 'Why do governments appoint commissions?' bearing in mind that, as Weller (1994, p. 259) has pointed out, 'they are created to undertake tasks that governments are either unwilling or unable to do'.   Lists of reasons are typically suggested. Table one compares lists provided by scholars in various English-speaking countries.

[INSERT TABLE ONE HERE]

Not only are these lists broadly similar in content, they also indicate that a vein of skepticism runs through scholarly responses to the official reasons governments give for forming these bodies as well as an appreciation of the difficulties involved in evaluating their 'success'.

Stone (1994) has gone further than most in trying to formulate an analytical framework to comprehend these complexities. He delineates three analytical perspectives on commissions, 'each associated with a distinctive criterion of success' and 'a distinctive understanding of the role of a public inquiry' (p.245).

'The public inquiry as impartial adviser': Its purpose from this perspective, would be to produce a useful report and 'success', would be evaluated according to the degree to its findings and recommendations are endorsed and subsequently implemented by the government. They can accordingly be viewed as a (usually unacknowledged) *response to government failure.* Their formation is driven by an implicit lack of trust in the Public Service to generate new ideas or think outside the frame of prevailing policy paradigms or the narrow set of feasible options that are achievable through mutual adjustment within insider policy networks. Alternatively they may reflect a failure to resolve policy disagreements and conflicting interests behind closed doors such that certain sections within the bureaucracy may 'positively encourage an inquiry being established so that their point of view may be taken to a wider audience for resolution' (Prasser 1985, p.5).

'The public inquiry as political instrument': From this perspective public inquiries function both as a form of political theatre designed to generate the illusion of action, concern or consultation and agenda manipulation through 'symbolism', 'tokenism', 'postponement' and 'redefinition of issues'. Their success will be related to the extent to which they create an impression of objectivity and freedom from politics while, at the same time, being amenable to manipulation in pursuit of political objectives (Stone 1994, p.247). In this regard they are a source of government failure, assisting politicians who seek to delay or obfuscate decision-making but generating little in the way of publicly valuable new information after taking into account their time and cost and the availability of alternative deliberative mechanisms within the normal policy process.

'The public inquiry as interpretive authority': This perspective is reflected, for example, in the work of Burton and Carlen (1979), Sheriff (1983) and Ashworth (1990). They typically

draw from discourse analysis to elaborate the role of public inquiries in the social construction

and perpetuation of two inter-related policy myths (see Yanow 1992). The first is the myth that

the State can function as a neutral and instrumental domain separate from Civil Society and yet

dedicated to the advancement of the common good. The second is the myth that the common

good is advanced by framing the subjects of inquiry as a series of problems amenable to rational

solution. As Prasser (1985, p.3) has put it: 'An inquiry with its expert members, public hearings

technique and ability to prepare a report with definite recommendations parallels our conception

of rational sequential decision-making where a problem is defined, analysis is made and

proposals are suggested'. This suggests that to use Grint's (2005) distinction between 'tame' and

'wicked' problems, public inquiries can satisfy the demand for governments to give the

impression of control by reconstituting wicked problems in a tame form, amenable to unilinear

solution. Stone (1994, p.249) has suggested that the primary criterion for a commission's

success would be where its 'ideas and arguments persist as significant reference points for

judgment and action'.

Motivation for Study

Stone's analytical framework goes some way toward addressing the under-theorization of

commission studies. I would suggest, though, that it needs to be developed in a number of

directions. First, its predominantly demand-side perspective that relates the demand for

commissions to both the public goods they generate (in the form of new ideas, an enhanced

information base or improved deliberation) and the private political benefits they are expected to

create for governments at the time of their formation needs to also incorporate a supply-side

perspective that takes into account the leadership choices facing commission chairs as they seek

to bring the inquiry to a close and formulate a concrete set of findings and proposals in its final report.

Second the vein of skepticism that surrounds the official reasons given for forming commissions needs to be extended to query the myth that is typically perpetuated by governments and commission members that, over the course of the inquiry, their relationship is strictly arms-length. This is another example of a 'useful policy myth' (Goldfinch and Wallis 2010) since it both vindicates and legitimates the independent nature of the commission and its process of inquiry.

It is hard though to believe that in every case neither government nor commission have any interest in seeking to find out what the other is thinking as the inquiry takes its course. Governments, for example, will be interested in obtaining advance knowledge of the commission's findings and proposals as they develop so that they can plan their response to them. If they fail to endorse them or endorse them only in part, they could potentially be embarrassed by Opposition and media claims that commission inquiry was a charade, a waste of time and taxpayer money, that served only to advance the government's own narrow political purposes. On the other hand these findings could be themselves be politically embarrassing or they could shift the policy agenda in a way that their full endorsement would not only expose the government to the political and administrative costs of implementing them but also the risk of being blamed for any subsequent 'implementation gaps' (Marsh and Rhodes, 1992). This could, in turn, open up an opportunity for a future government to claim credit for more effective implementation.

Commission chairs also have an interest in finding out what the government is thinking. Are their proposals likely to be endorsed or not and, if it seems likely they are not going to be

endorsed, how will they respond to this information? Will they simply accept the government

response and return quietly back into private life or will they retain the hope that, even if the

current government does not endorse the proposals, a future government will do so? Will they

choose behave like a Kingdonian 'policy entrepreneur' (Kingdon 1995), continuing to advocate

for their 'pet proposals' and build up advocacy coalition support (see Sabatier 1988) until the

policy community has ripened to a greater state of receptivity to them?

The Curious Case of Sir Michael Lyons

This paper will seek to make a contribution to the commission literature by developing an

analytical framework to address these issues. It will make specific reference to 'the curious case

of Sir Michael Lyons'. The luminary status of Sir Michael in the UK local government

community is reflected in his knighthood for services to this community in January 2000. No

questions were raised about his capacity to lead, as one person, a major inquiry in the Local

Government in England in 2004. Some eyebrows were, however, raised about his purportedly

close connections with the incumbent Labour Government. The media saw him as a 'political

friend' and something of a 'fix-it man' for the then UK Prime Minister, Gordon Brown (Youngs

2007). Sir Michael was at pains, though, to insist to whatever extent such connections had been

formed they did not in any way affect the independent nature of his inquiry (Rowe and

McAllister 2006).

It would be hard, though, not to surmise that Sir Michael had sufficiently significant

'back-door' access to Brown and his intermediaries to be able to gauge whether or not his

developing proposals would 'fly'. They certainly underwent a relatively long period of gestation

from 2004 to 2007 during which he found himself 'pushing against an open door' when it came

to requesting adjustments to his terms of reference to allow his inquiry to shift from its initial focus on local government finance options toward elaborating a far-reaching 'vision' of a 'place-shaping' role for local government (Dollery, Grant and O'Keefe 2008). This seems to have crystallized during the course of his prolonged public inquiry and was elaborated with increasing enthusiasm and conviction by him in three successive reports (Lyons 2005, 2006, 2007). It is hard to believe then that he had no inkling that the Brown government would decide not to endorse most of the more concrete proposals that addressed his original brief although his place-shaping vision remains a source of interest, acclaim and, for some, inspiration, not just in the local government policy community in the UK, but also overseas.

The question of the leadership options facing Sir Michael thus makes a particularly interesting case study since it is clear he must have faced the leadership options posited by the theory developed in this paper in a way that was uncluttered by the need to form a consensus position with other committee members since he was the sole commissioner of a one-person inquiry. What actually unfolded in the course of Sir Michael's interaction with the Brown government is of course a matter of pure speculation since to whatever extent it occurred, it would have been exclusively behind closed doors, with major players being committed to maintain the veil of confidentiality.

Plan of Paper

The remainder of the paper is structured into three further sections. The next section integrates Hope Theory (SDT), Self Determination Theory (SDT) and Mini-Max Regret Theory (MRT) to analyze the logic of existential choice a commissioner such as Sir Michael would face in deciding whether to behave as an acquiescent or an autonomous commissioner. The following

section then augments this analysis by considering the role the nature of the inquiry can play in developing support for the commission's proposals outside the Cabinet or other executive body that has to decide how far it will endorse them. The paper concludes with a recapitulation of its main findings and some suggestions for future research.

THE LOGIC OF EXISTENTIAL CHOICE FACING A COMMISSIONER

For a commissioner such as Sir Michael the 'fateful day' of existential choice can be imagined to be on the day when the incumbent government makes public the degree to which it is prepared to endorse his policy proposals. The proposals will then assume a place on the policy agenda and the government will be held accountable for the extent and effectiveness of their implementation. On that day, the commissioner will have to 'come out of the closet' and 'reveal his or her true colors' as either an *acquiescent* or an *autonomous* commissioner. Prior to that day, the commissioner can use whatever behind-close-doors influence he has to enhance the receptivity of the government to his proposals.

A number of economic revisionists (Hirschman 1982; Sen 1977) have advanced broadly similar arguments that such a choice cannot be modeled accorded to the principles of constrained utility maximization since *homo economicus* is a 'rational fool', without the reflective capacity to form a 'second order' evaluation or 'metapreference' about what she wants her preferences to reveal or, as Taylor (1989) put it, the type of behavior that fits the kind of life they 'believe it is worthwhile to live'.

I would go one step further. Following Shackle (1973), I would propose that to make such choices, actors will require the imaginative capacity to subjectively project themselves to a

future time when they reflectively evaluate them with the benefit of hindsight and are therefore able to imagine themselves experiencing regret.

A relatively modest measure of such an imaginative capacity is exhibited by the 'existentially rationally' voters in Ferejohn and Fiorina's (1974) solution to the Downsian 'paradox of voting'. This paradox arises from that the prediction that if voters apply the expected utility maximization model then, even if they care a great deal about the outcome of an election and the costs of voting are minimal, they will still abstain from voting if the probability that their own vote will influence the outcome of the election tends toward zero.

. Ferejohn and Fiorina use a mini-max regret model to resolve this paradox. They argue that even if it is remotely possible that a vote could influence the outcome of an election, a voter would assign this prospect equal weight with the highly probable prospect that it will not make a difference. Such voters would then compare the regret (a) they would imagine themselves experiencing if they woke up on the day after the election and found to their unpleasant surprise that their decision not to vote may have actually made a difference in a close election (an emotion it is not hard to imagine some Florida Democrats experiencing after the 2000 Presidential election) with the regret (b) they would experience if they voted in the remote hope that it would make a difference and realized, the day after, that this was an exercise in futility - a waste of time, effort and emotional energy (Collins 1993). If (b) was anticipated to be less than (a), MRT would predict that the individual would vote.

In the case of commission chairs, such *ex post* reflection could be imagined to be, not on the day after the election, but during retirement when they could imagine themselves looking back on 'a lifetime of achievement – challenges met, rivals bested, obstacles overcome' (Coen and Coen, 1998). Among the few regrets they might imagine themselves to experience –

perhaps too few to mention – would be those associated with their chosen behavior in the light of how they chose to respond to the government's endorsement decision with respect to their recommendations.

How this imaginative assessment of future regret will influence their choice about the type of commissioner they want to reveal themselves to be is depicted in Figure One.

[INSERT FIGURE ONE]

If commissioners choose to behave acquiescently, they will pay close attention to whatever backdoor feedback the government gives them over the course of their inquiries. This feedback may be transmitted informally through whatever friends they may have in Cabinet or indirectly through various intermediaries. These can include other members of the commission, particularly those trusted to give a government perspective on the political feasibility of proposals, or through senior public servants who have been asked to make themselves available as a source of advice to the commission. All such advice will be cloaked in confidentiality since it is in both the government and commissioner's interest to sustain the impression of independence over the course of the inquiry.

Through such feedback the commissioner will get an indication of whether the government values proposed agenda adjustments more than they do. Figure One shows that the government evaluation of the net benefits of agenda adjustment will take the shape shown by the curve denoted 'acquiescent'. This is based on the following assumptions:

- Even if there is no agenda adjustment, governments derive some political benefits from appointing commissions. As the literature review in the previous section

indicated, many commission scholars view commissions as useful political instruments even if governments have resolved in advance to largely ignore their recommendations. The 'acquiescent curve' is thus shown as having a positive intercept on the vertical net benefits axis.

- For the government, there may be, up to some limit, increasing net benefits to be derived from endorsing some agenda adjustment after the commission report comes out. This provides some vindication of the decision to appoint it in the first place in the face of Opposition claims that it was 'simply a waste of time and taxpayer money'. The government may also be given some credit for thereby signaling its willingness to learn from a body charged with establishing how the public interest may be enhanced in a particular area of concern. However, there will be a limit to the extent to which the government derives increasing net benefits from endorsing changes in the policy agenda recommended by the commission. Through such endorsement the government is effectively making itself accountable for their implementation and thereby assuming not only the attendant political and administrative costs but also the risk of being blamed for any subsequent 'implementation gaps' (Marsh and Rhodes, 1992) in a way that could open up an opportunity for a future government to claim credit for more effective implementation. The 'acquiescent curve' is thus shown as rising to a maximum at AG and falling thereafter. This represents the maximum agenda adjustment the government is willing to endorse.

The following proposition can thus made:

Proposition 1: The government will endorse that level of agenda adjustment that maximizes its own political net benefits.

It is important to note though that the government may be open to invisible influence by the commissioner right up to the 'fateful day'. The acquiescent curve may thus shift up to the day at which its shape and position determines the 'take it or leave it' decision the government makes about agenda adjustment.

I would propose that the commissioner's capacity to influence this decision will cease on this day. Not only will the commission be wound up but the commissioner will, to some degree, have to keep publicly silent about his or her misgivings and disappointments about the government decision for fear of damaging their prospect of future public service appointment. Sir Michael Lyon's response to the Brown government's rejection in 2007 of his more concrete recommendations about local government finance is instructive. Despite a prolonged and expensive inquiry he showed admirable restraint in refraining from publicly criticizing his 'friends' in the Labor government for what could uncharitably be interpreted by its opponents as a proverbial 'kick' of the 'wicked problem' (see Grint 2005) of local government reform into the 'long grass' from which it is unlikely to be retrieved any time soon (See Rowe and McAllister 2006). There is no way of knowing whether this restraint was 'bought' by the Brown's subsequent decision to appoint him to chair the BBC (a prestigious position he held for three years before stepping down in 2010- perhaps as a final act in his glittering career of public service) or with whether, given the fact that he emerged from the 2004-7 inquiry, aged only 60, with his 'head held high' and with his ears ringing with accolades for the acuity and inspirational quality of its report, Sir Michael anticipated that such an offer would be forthcoming without him seeking or being explicitly offered it and was thus motivated to behave with some degree of

acquiescence. It is clear though that this level of acquiescence did not completely close off an autonomous path for Sir Michael. By choosing to formulate and continuing to advocate a far-reaching vision of a 'place shaping' role for local government that presages an aspirational level of agenda adjustment that could come to be embraced at central, as it increasingly is at local government level, for some time into the future, he also chose, in part, to behave according to the ideal type of what we will call an *autonomous commission chair*.

Such a commissioner's autonomous evaluation of the net benefits of agenda adjustment is indicated by the curve denoted 'autonomous' in Figure One. A useful concept of autonomy has been formulated within 'Self Determination Theory' (SDT). Central to SDT is the distinction between autonomous and controlled motivation. According to Gagne and Deci (2005), autonomous motivation involves 'acting with a sense of volition and having the experience of choice' while being controlled involves 'acting with a sense of pressure, a sense of having to engage in the actions' (p.336). This corresponds with Dworkin's (1988) concept of autonomy as 'an inner endorsement of one's actions'. There is a continuum along which autonomy is expressed such that the 'more autonomous the behavior, the more it is endorsed by the whole self and is experienced as action for which one is responsible' (Di Virgilio and Ludema, 2009, p.78).

This concept can be applied to understand the role hope plays in shaping a distinct path that can be existentially chosen by a commissioner such as Sir Michael. Wallis and his collaborators (Wallis and Dollery 1999; Wallis, Dollery and Crase; Wallis, Dollery and Mcloughlin 2007) have drawn from developments in positive psychology (Seligman 1998; Snyder et.al 2000) as well as the dissonance-based theory of emotions advanced by Elster (1998), to argue that the type of policy entrepreneur described by Kingdon (1995) is essentially

motivated by hope. Kingdon characterizes policy entrepreneurs as policy actors with a personal

identification and emotional investment in 'pet' problems or proposals. They are prepared to 'lie

in wait' for the policy climate to be ripened to greater receptivity to them so that they can take

advantage of windows of opportunity to push them to prominence on the policy agenda. This

would seem to be consistent with the following conception of hope articulated by Erich Fromm

(1968):

> Hope is paradoxical. It is neither passive waiting nor is it unrealistic forcing of circumstances that cannot occur. It is like the crouched tiger, which will jump only when the moment for jumping has come. Neither tired reformism nor pseudo-radical adventurism is an expression of hope. To hope means to be ready at every moment for that which is yet to be born, and yet not to become desperate if there is no birth in our lifetime. There is no sense in hoping for that which already exists or for that which cannot be. Those whose hope is weak settle down for comfort or for violence; those whose hope is strong see and cherish all signs of new life and are ready at every moment to help the birth of that which is ready to be born.

Wallis *et.al.* (2007) argue that this reflects what Elster would characterize as an 'action

tendency' produced by a particular emotion – in this case hope. Now entrepreneurial hope

would be based on autonomously formed convictions about the worth and possibility of varying

degrees of agenda adjustment.

The 'autonomous' curve shown in Figure One is thus based on the following

assumptions:

- There will be an upper limit to entrepreneurial hope. This is indicated in the

  diagram by the level of agenda adjustment, AC. This reflects that level of agenda

  adjustment both by the current and future governments that the commission

  autonomously believes to be both worthwhile and possible. Net benefits for an

  autonomous commissioner would be maximized at this point but fall to zero for

  greater levels of agenda adjustment since these would be deemed politically

  impossible for any government.

- Net benefits for decreases in agenda adjustment below AC would fall continuously reflecting the disappointment an autonomous commissioner would experience at rising levels of political resistance to his or her proposals. The 'autonomous curve' is thus shown as being positively sloped.

- Net benefits would still be positive for zero agenda adjustment, since it is supposed that the chair is likely to derive some reputational utility from being appointed to this role even if the report has no impact, simply 'gathering dust' in the public archives. Moreover, provided the chair does not publicly protest this non-endorsement, his or her reputational capital may be sufficiently enhanced for this person to expect the current government to consider him or her for subsequent public service opportunities during its term in office. The 'autonomous curve' is thus shown as intersecting the vertical axis at a positive value.

The second proposition follows.

Proposition 2: The net benefits associated with an autonomous path can be assessed with reference to an autonomously determined entrepreneurial hope that reflects the level of agenda adjustment the commissioner believes to be both worthwhile and possible.

How then does the commissioner choose between an acquiescent and an autonomous choice path? I would suggest that if they are able to imaginatively project themselves to a time of retirement from public life, they will compare the regret they can imagine themselves experiencing from the two paths.

- The regret from choosing an autonomous path that, when viewed in hindsight, is eventually seen as a futile waste of time and emotional energy will be determined

by (a) the vertical distance between the autonomous curve and the horizontal axis at AG. In other words there are no zero benefits from holding on to the entrepreneurial hope associated with this path and the commissioner will regret not simply acquiescing to the government endorsed agenda adjustment, AG.

- The regret from choosing an acquiescent path will be associated with a failure to hold on to entrepreneurial hope. It is measured by (b) the difference between commissioner net benefits, as indicated on the autonomous curve, at points AC and AG respectively. It is the regret a commissioner could imagine him or herself experiencing as they reflected on their failure to publicly identify themselves as advocates for agenda adjustments that eventually came to be endorsed by a future government. It is the regret from perceiving oneself to have 'sold out' on one's convictions.

The mini-max regret criterion can thus be applied to make the following proposition:

Proposition 3: Commissioners will choose an autonomous path if the regret imagined from perceiving themselves to have 'sold out' on their entrepreneurial hopes is greater than the regret imagined from realizing these hopes are futile.

In the case of Sir Michael, this logic would explain the different paths he seems have chosen with respect to different aspects of his final report's proposals. He largely acquiesced to the government's non-endorsement of his more concrete proposals but continues to follow an autonomous path that expresses the entrepreneurial hope he has in his place-shaping vision. This is made easier by the support for both this path and vision he was able to develop from a emerging 'advocacy coalition' (See Sabatier 1988) over the course of his inquiry. The way the

'boundary' role of a commission and the nature of inquiry it undertakes can affect this support will be considered in the next section.

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF HOPE

There is a developing literature within the field of public administration on the catalytic role boundary-spanning actors operating from boundary organizations can play in the generation of new ways of knowing in the policy process (Carlile 2002; Guston 2001; Miller 2001; Feldman et.al. 2006; Schneider 2009). This has been applied in studies of integrative public leadership and collaborative governance (Bryson et.al 2006; Morse 2010; Ospina and Foldy 2010; Page 2010). This application brings together structural and agentic perspectives on how public actors can create and leverage deliberative opportunities to generate public judgments about how to advance the public good or create public value in particular contexts (Denhardt and Denhardt 2000; Elster et.al. 1998; Feldman and Kahmanian 2005; Heifetz 1994; Moore 1995).

Although these ideas have not, to my knowledge, been applied in commission studies, this would seem to be a promising path of theoretical development since commissions and their chairs exhibit, to a marked degree, the salient characteristics and institutional functions that according to Cash et.al. (2006) 'enable boundary work'. These include:

- accountability to both sides of the boundary (i.e. Society and the State);

- the use of 'boundary objects' (See Bryson et.al 2006) in the form of reports that are 'co-produced' by actors on different sides of the boundary; and

- the practice of boundary-spanning activities such as 'convening', 'translation', 'coordination and complementary expertise' and 'mediation'.

By being appointed to chair or lead an inquiry, commissioners such as Sir Michael would have the opportunity to exercise the 'integrative public leadership practices' of 'framing the agenda', convening stakeholders' and 'structuring deliberation' so as to generate 'political will' and civic capacity' in pursuit of a shared public purpose that emerges in the course of the inquiry (See Page 2010, pp. 248-251).

The burgeoning field of 'appreciative inquiry' (AI) (Cooperrider and Srivastva 1987; Srivastva and Cooperrider, 1990; Whitney and Trosten-Bloom, 2003) provides practitioner-based and theoretical insight into how the fateful choice about the mode of inquiry may shape the subsequent social construction of hopeful discourse and a generative social capacity (Bushe 2007) to advance an emerging common purpose. From this perspective the 'fateful choice' is whether to interpret the subject of inquiry diagnostically or affirmatively.

According to AI afficionadoes, a diagnostic interpretation tends to produce what they call 'deficit-based discourse' that, at its best, achieves a clear identification and diagnosis of problems, and selection and implementation of solutions but has difficulty in sustaining energy for change by fragmenting possible sources of co-production and limiting implementation to elites who cannot see beyond their own technocratic constructions of the problems and solutions (See Grint 2005; Stewart 2003). This is probably inevitable for most 'investigative commissions' that seek to get to the root of problems or incidences of maladministration that are typically well-defined in their terms of reference. These can be compared with 'policy commissions' (D'Ombrain 1997) that do not necessarily have to have this diagnostic bias.

Thus, for example, while Sir Michael acknowledges no methodological debt to AI, his fateful decision to frame the subject of his inquiry affirmatively does seem to have led him through what Cooperrider has called the '4D cycle' comprising sequential 'discover', 'dream',

'design', and 'destiny' phases. He thus sought to go beyond his initial terms of reference to frame the purpose of his inquiry as being to find ways of 'strengthening leadership and expanding the opportunities for local people to influence local decision making' (Lyons, 2007, p. 2). That the Brown government did not resist this decision may have been interpreted as a signal that it was looking to Sir Michael to counter the 'top-down', 'control freak' style of Tony Blair's nevertheless strong engagement with local government reform by formulating a bottom-up (Sabatier 1986) but nonetheless recognizably 'Third Way' adjustment to the local government reform agenda (Martin 2010).

The affirmative topic selection then led the Lyons Inquiry through a 'discover' phase in which it was able to identify what Sternin and Choo (2000) call 'positive deviations' - exceptional examples of effective 'place-shaping' that 'involve little, if any, institutional reform (and leave 'bottom-line' financial accountability well alone)' (Dollery et.al. 2008, p.485) by advancing local development through engaging the local community and identifying and negotiating funding sources from business enterprises. Areas where Lyons interpreted such place-shaping occurring included:

- Gateshead, where the 'council led the regeneration of the area through arts, culture and leisure';
- Southampton that 'repositioned' itself as the heart of culture, leisure and a hub for knowledge-based industries on the South Coast;
- Nottingham that developed a £13 million Centre for Contemporary Arts in cooperation with the city's two universities, and

- The 'Black Country' where citizens developed a deep sense of belonging to a region representing 'Britain's Venice', based on the canal system (Lyons 2007, 175).

By exploring what made these and other examples exceptional, Sir Michael was able to move into the 'dream' phase of AI - crystallizing a system-wide vision of place-shaping as 'the creative use of powers and influence to promote the general well-being of a community and its citizens' (Lyons 2007, 51).   Dollery et.al. (2008) interpret this as

> The touchstone of a prescriptive vision for British local government, characterised by devolution from higher tiers of government, incorporating strong elements of local leadership and local stakeholder representation, the strategic identification and capture of funding opportunities (both statutory and entrepreneurial) and, above all, a requirement that citizens be aware of these processes and share in a consensual vision for the future of their 'place' (p.486).

This naturally led to what AI theorists call the 'design phase' in which 'provocative propositions' that challenge a target audience to realize aspects of the vision that are already grounded in actual positive deviations. Such propositions must not be so prescriptive as to discourage creativity and undermine confidence. In elaborating the 'meaning of place-shaping' Sir Michael was at pains to point out:

> The term place-shaping covers a wide range of activity – indeed anything which affects the well-being of the local community. It will mean different things in different places and at different levels of local government, informed by local character and history, community needs and demands, and local politics and leadership. The powers and freedoms which local government can exercise are an important part of enabling councils to play this role. However, I am clear that effective place-shaping is as much about the confidence and behaviours of local government as it is about statutory powers or responsibilities' (Lyons, 2007: 174).

Place-shaping did, however, need to de sufficiently differentiated from other local government leadership practices to allow 'place-shapers' to identify themselves through adherence to its core principles. Eight such principles were formulated as such 'provocative design principles' by Sir Michael:

- Building and shaping local identity;

- representing the community, including in discussions and debates with organizations and parts of government at local, regional and national level;

- regulating harmful and disruptive behaviours;

- maintaining the cohesiveness of the community and supporting debate within it, ensuring smaller voices are heard;

- helping to resolve disagreements, such as over how to prioritize resources between services and areas, or where new housing and development should be located;

- working to make the local economy more successful, to support the creation of new businesses and jobs in the area, including through making the area attractive to new investment and skilled workers, and helping to manage economic change;

- understanding local needs and preferences and making sure that the right services are provided to local people through a variety of arrangements including collective purchasing, commissioning from suppliers in the public, private and voluntary sectors, contracts or partnerships and direct delivery; and

- working with other bodies to respond to complex challenges such as natural disasters and other emergencies (Lyons 2005, p.31)'.

Such a framework can provide the positive core and generative basis for what Cooperrider somewhat dramatically calls the 'destiny' phase of appreciative inquiry. In this phase whoever leads the process of inquiry will come to see themselves as no more than a catalyst for whatever spontaneous, voluntary initiatives and social movement activity it generates. In the case of a commissioner such as Sir Michael, the destiny of the entrepreneurial hope expressed in his place-shaping vision would be the formation of an 'advocacy coalition' of

state and societal actors who would share a hope in the worth and possibility of practices that reflect its core design principles. Cognition of this destiny would strengthen his own hope so as to commit him more strongly to an autonomous path by making the possibility of agenda adjustment contingent on the sustaining and development of hopeful discourse within the emerging advocacy coalition.

How this process can occur has been insightfully elaborated by Ludema and his collaborators. They propose that any inquiry is generative of *hope* when it generates a vocabulary 'that serves as a potent "life-giving" force for transforming social and organizational relationships' by allowing 'people to live beyond current circumstances, transcend the status quo, and transform present reality into one of greater aliveness by placing it in the context of broader and deeper possibilities (Ludema *et.al.* 1997, p.1021)'. Barge (2001) endorses this 'reconceptualization' of hope as a 'discursive practice' and distinguishes it from the traditional view of hope 'as a psychological concept that emphasizes positive expectations for goal attainment' (p.64). I would argue that the two concepts of hope are inter-related since hopeful discourse generates a stream of stories about hopeful actions and a positive emotional energy that is stimulated through interaction (Collins 1993; De Virgiliio and Ludema 2009) that could also raise these expectations among the members of a network such as the type of advocacy coalition that could coalesce around Sir Michael's vision of place-shaping.

The analytical framework developed in this paper can thus be completed with the following proposition:

Proposition 4: The affirmative interpretation of the subject of inquiry is fateful since it generates the social construction of hope through appreciative inquiry and the potential

formation of a hope-based advocacy coalition in a way that can bias the commissioner toward the selection of an autonomous path.

The theoretical contribution of this framework to commission studies and its application to future research in this and other fields must be considered by way of conclusion to this paper.

CONCLUSSION

This paper extends the skepticism much of the commission literature expresses toward the official reasons governments give for forming commissions to the official version of their relationship with commissioners being strictly arms-length over the course of their inquiries. Based on the assumption that commissioners receive backdoor feedback about the political feasibility of their proposals, it brings economic revisionist and social constructionist concepts together in analytical framework that elaborates the logic of two fateful choices facing these actors. The first concerns the autonomy with respect to which they hold fast to their own convictions in the face of clear feedback that the government is going to some degree ignore their recommendations. The second concerns whether or not they are going to frame the subject of inquiry appreciatively so as to facilitate the social construction of the type of hopeful discourse that can be sustained within an emerging advocacy coalition that can take the case up after the commission has wound down.

While this logic was applied to the 'curious case' of Sir Michael Lyons, it identified factors that could explain the leadership choices revealed by other commissioners. Thus while one would expect the repeated public appointments and close government connections of Sir Michael to induce him to behave in an acquiescent manner, he actually displayed considerable autonomy in terms of formulating and advocating his vision of place-shaping. This could be

explained in terms of the prolonged nature and appreciative mode of his inquiry that allowed a long-term vision to crystallize and a supporting structure in terms of an emerging place-shaping advocacy coalition to develop that could provide a focus for the entrepreneurial hope that predisposed him to behave in an autonomous way.

Other cases may be susceptible to a more clear-cut explanation in terms of this logic. Probably the vast major are acquiescent since the inquiry is too short and its mode too diagnostic to give rise to autonomous hope. There are, however, exceptions where commissioners behave more like autonomous actors, stimulating hopeful discourse and reframing the policy agenda in such a compelling way that they can be attributed a leading role in effecting significant policy adjustment (see Resodihardjo 2006).

The logic elaborated in this paper could thus invigorate commission studies and shift its focus from a concern with whether or not commissions are successful since, by following this logic, both governments and commissioners can be seen as equally 'successful'. It would also seem to have applications to other forms of public involvement particularly where they take the intermittent, 'shifting', character described by Hirschman (1982). The fateful choices facing the actors concerned can then be evaluated according to regret imagined at some future time when they have finally withdrawn into private life and so would be subject to what could be called an existential rather than economically rationalist logic.

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Table One: Lists of Reasons for Appointing Inquiries

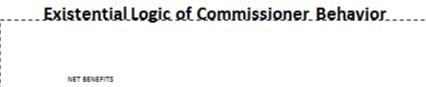| Study	Country	Reasons for Appointing Inquiries
Clokie and Robinson (1937)	United Kingdom	To prepare the way for predetermined policy; To provide expert advice in areas where governments have no policy; To passing the buck for solving a problem; To forestalling criticism by presenting the appearance of action; To kick the topic into the long grass.
Prasser (1994)	Australia	To provide a perceived independent response to a crisis situation; To investigate allegations of impropriety; To obtain information; To define policy problems; To provide Government with policy options; To review policies, programs or organizations; To resolve public controversy; To help governments manage policy agendas; To justify government decisions; To help governments determine what to do about previous promises.
D'Ombrain (1997)	Canada	To prepare for fundamental changes in the direction of the country To introduce new ways of dealing with important sectors of national life; To provide fresh insights into well-known problems; To balance unpopular decisions; To buy time dealing with controversial policy sectors.
Miller and McKinney (1993)	United States	To garner public support for a policy to which the president is already committed; To show symbolic concern over a situation at the highest level of government; To establish a fact base for others to use; To respond to crises, deflect political heat from the president and allow passions to cool when issues become explosive; To overcome the 'stovepipes' and parochial thinking of the permanent bureaucracy; To gather more information about a problem and its policy alternatives;\ To forge consensus among the interests represented on the commission itself.
Easton (1994)	New Zealand	To investigate an incident where criminal procedures are not appropriate; To distance the government from a decision where it may have an interest; To consider policy issues that are intractable to parliament or on which the government has an open mind.

FIGURE 1:
Existential Logic of Commissioner Behavior