

**The CAR Framework:
Capability, Accountability, Responsiveness.
What Do These Terms Mean, Individually and Collectively?
A Discussion Note for DFID Governance and Conflict Advisers
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1. What is the White Paper trying to do in using the CAR framework? Two main things:

- To give DFID staff and the people with whom they work a *common language* to use in working on governance. Don't underestimate the value of a common language. Economists have one. Accountants have one. Medics have one. Political scientists don't, and that can be a source of frustration and confusion for people like Governance Advisers who are trying to influence political issues and actions. Provided that it is appropriate, a common language should be empowering. It should make it easier for Governance Advisers and the people with whom they relate to communicate their work to one another, to understand the grounds on which they might legitimately disagree, etc.
- To provide to the outside world, notably to Parliament, the electorate and other government agencies, a simple and comprehensible summary message about what 'governance' actually means in DFID practice. ("What are you folks actually trying to do?" "We are trying to make governments more capable, accountable and responsive.")

2. Let us look at the definitions of the three terms, beginning with the one that requires the fewest words:

Responsiveness. This refers to a kind of *behaviour*. Mary is responsive to Jane if Mary makes some effort to do something to meet Jane's needs or wants. In the sense in which the term is used in the White Paper, a government or some other public authority is responsive if it makes some effort to identify and then meet the needs or

wants of the people who will benefit from pro-poor growth. Like accountability and capability, responsiveness is not a magic bullet: it does not tell us exactly what Governance Advisers should be aiming for in any context. It is more like a helpful harpoon: it is a way of enabling you to get closer and grapple more easily with the target. And that is about as good as it gets in concept-land. The following are among the questions we will want to ask in any specific context:

- What makes the government of Uzmalia (un)responsive to poverty/growth? The answers could be very variable. Accountability – especially democratic electoral accountability (see below) – can be a very powerful source of responsiveness: governments might pay attention to economic growth and the poor because they want to win re-election. But there can be many other sources of responsiveness, including (a) war or confrontation with radical internal oppositions (the need to keep people loyal and supportive), (b) a strong sense of nationalism, including pride that one's people are doing well compared to others (c) fear that, if the masses are not educated or healthy, the whole nation, including the elite, might suffer, and (d) the desire to help taxpayers prosper so that the government might get its revenue easily. To say that a government is responsive implies nothing about why that is the case. Generally speaking, the governments of the Confucian world (Taiwan, Japan, Korea, China, Singapore) have in recent decades often been responsive to mass welfare despite the absence of strong accountability mechanisms. That is one reason why we should distinguish responsiveness (a type of behaviour) from accountability (a set of institutionalised relationships that might help bring about responsiveness: see below): in practice, we sometimes find high levels of one and low levels of the other, and vice versa.
- How do we recognise responsiveness in practice? There is no general answer to that except 'intelligent judgement'. But one can find strong clues in things like actual budget behaviour. How much of actual – rather than planned – public spending goes on things likely to benefit poor people? What is the trend? Is much expenditure off-budget? If so, it is likely that there is something to hide.

Can one have too much responsiveness? Yes. Governments that are so responsive to the expressed wants of their populations that they spend all their budgets subsidising

fuel, electricity and basic foodstuffs, leaving little for education or health service, would rarely be doing good. Neither would governments that are very responsive to political patrons in a highly clientelistic political system. Again, ‘intelligent judgement’. No single governance value should be maximised (see below). The term responsiveness is prominent in the White Paper because the problem in many countries in which DFID works is unresponsiveness.

Accountability. This a bit more complex than responsiveness. Accountability is an *institutionalised* (i.e. regular, established, accepted) *relationship* between different actors. One set of people/organisations are held to account (‘accountees’), and another set do the holding (‘accounters’). There are many ways in which people/organisations might be held to account. It is useful to think of an accountability relationship as having up to four sequential stages:

- *Standard-setting*: setting out the behaviour expected of the ‘accountee’, and thus the criteria by which they might validly be judged.
- *Investigation*: exploring whether or not accountees have met the standards expected of them.
- *Answerability*: a process in which accountees are required to defend their actions, face sceptical questions, and generally explain themselves.
- *Sanction*: a process in which accountees are in some way punished for falling below the standards expected of them (or perhaps rewarded for achieving or exceeding them).

Expressed in that form, the accountability process sounds very formal, and very much like a legal trial. In some cases it is: for example, the actions of an Auditor-General’s office in investigating the uses of public money by government agencies. But most accountability sequences are not as formal, and/or do not include all these sequences. For example, elections are a very important accountability process, but the only fully-formal part of the sequence that is controlled by an independent authority is the actual polling, i.e. sanctioning process, that determines who will get elected. The other parts of the election process are organised in a decentralised way, and subject to much contestation. No one decrees the standards by which the incumbent government shall be judged. Contestation about those standards is part of the election/accountability process. For an accountability process to be very

powerful, the key parts of the sequence should be outside the control of the accountee: someone else, or an impersonal rule, should determine what the standards are, when and where the accountee will be answerable, and what the sanctions are. The more that accountees themselves control the process – as, for example, when a dictator decides to make a speech giving an account of her actions to ‘the people’ – the less ‘bite’ there is in the process. The two most important sets of accountability sequences for most polities most of the time are (a) elections and (b) the financial accountability of government to the elected legislature. Some would also argue the importance of the accountability of the leaderships of political parties to their members. It is in these areas that DFID and other aid agencies tend to concentrate in governance programmes. Accountability in these areas probably tends to generate accountability more broadly in other relationships within government and between government and the public. A great deal of the accountability that is important to good government is found in bits and pieces that individually may appear partial and insignificant.

Can one have too much accountability? Yes – but mainly in the form of excessive concern with *process* – with how accountees achieve goals. Provided they do not violate the letter or spirit of the law, we would normally not want to hamper the Highways Ministry by requiring them to explain in detail how they are re-organising their Construction Division while in the midst of the reorganisation. We do however want them to be fully accountable for the end product.

What is the connection with *transparency*? It is close. Just as accountability is an important source of responsiveness, so transparency is an important source of accountability. It is central to two of the idealised stages of accountability set out above: *investigation* and *answerability*. But transparency alone does not guarantee the exercise of *sanction*. There are plenty of political leaders in the world whose misdeeds are widely known but unpunished. Think, for example, of a recent Italian case.

Capability. This refers to *organisational attributes*: to the ability to get things done. What things? In the long term, the final objective ('outcome' in logframe language) is pro-poor economic growth. But, as we all know, there is more than one route

toward pro-poor growth, and considerable professional disagreement about how governments might promote that objective. The White Paper and the CAR framework do not directly help us resolve this old, probably irresolvable, conflict. It is not very useful to think of capability in terms of the particular policies that governments might pursue. But we can usefully think about capability in terms of the kinds of generic things that governments need to do to pursue any policies effectively. A capable government has a relatively high ability to do two kinds of things in particular:

- To *formulate policies effectively* in both political and technical terms, i.e. to find out what important stakeholders want; to broker political compromises between different interests so that there is wide commitment to the paths chosen; to explore the costs and benefits of different options from a technical perspective etc; to work out whether objectives are best achieved by a direct, overt programme or by more subtle, incremental 'encouragement' and coordination of a range of governmental and/or non-governmental (commercial or third sector); and generally to come up with policies that are sensible and likely to 'stick'.
- To *implement policies effectively*, i.e. to find the right agencies to work with and through (governmental, non-governmental, third sector); to coordinate different actors and forces; to organise some kind of feedback on programme effectiveness etc.

While DFID is of course interested in the specific policies that governments pursue, the term *capability* mainly signals a concern with this bundle of generic abilities to *formulate and implement policies that are sensible from political, organisational and technical perspectives*, and are therefore likely to 'stick'. But note that the means used to both formulate and implement policies might vary widely. We can usefully think of state capacity as being ranged on a continuum. We present the two poles of that continuum in the table, under the labels of the *command-hierarchy* and the *influence-network* approaches. The table largely speaks for itself and illustrates that there might be big variations between the two. Let us give a hypothetical example of the difference between them in relation to a typical policy problem, i.e. that large numbers of children are turning up for school in the morning to register their

presence, and then disappearing to work illegally in small scale manufacturing. In the *command-hierarchy* mode, typical responses would be to require teachers to do a second registration later in the day, and instruct the police to watch out for 'truants'. In the *influence-network* mode, responses might include, for example, asking trade associations to discuss this issue with their members and offer solutions. Solutions might include seats on school boards - and therefore more direct influence over public education - for associations that were visibly cooperating in discouraging the use of child labour.

Two Approaches to State Capacity*		
	The <i>command-hierarchy</i> approach	The <i>influence-network</i> approach
Underlying descriptive-cum-normative image of how the actors within different state organisations and within society do or should relate to one another:	Emphasis on hierarchical relations and on clear boundaries between different formal organisations. State does/should stand 'above' and 'outside' society.	Emphasis on the value of dense, possibly egalitarian networks of relations that cross organisational boundaries. State and societal actors are interdependent.
Typical ideal modes of state/public action:	Framing and implementing (clear) policy, in a coherent and unified way.	Using influence and contacts to determine what is politically possible, to coordinate different actors within the state apparatus, within society, and across the 'state-society boundary', maximising 'synergy'. (Public action may appear 'fragmented'.)
Important resources required by the state:	Money and the capacity to manage effectively (state) organisations	Linkages and trust with other actors, including 'centrality' to important networks; 'convening capacity'; political skills
Implicit approach to 'accountability':	Formal, transparent accountability, based on clear roles and responsibilities; often process-oriented	Less formal, and more political and outcome-oriented.
Academic disciplines implicitly most relevant for analytical purposes:	Public administration, management	Organisational analysis, political science
* - Arguably, there is a third, 'market' approach.		

There is currently a big debate about these ideas in political science. It is increasingly widely argued that, in the 'advanced industrial economies' at least, patterns of governance are shifting toward the *influence-network* model.¹ There is also a debate

¹ This approach is given a range of other names, above the *regulatory state*. This can be a little confusing, as the term 'regulatory state' is used to signal something about

about what might be causing such a shift, with globalisation, variously interpreted, as one of the main candidates. Most aid agencies define the 'state capacity' problem largely or solely in terms of the *command-hierarchy* model. That is consistent with an emphasis on improving the competences (quality of human resources, equipment, training, managerial capacity etc) of government organisations. And external agencies may have little choice but to focus most of their specific interventions in this way. What really matters for DFID purposes is that both approaches capture very important dimensions of the reality of governance in any context.

A final comment. Is there some problem in the fact that the CAR framework is a mixture of three different kinds of things: a type of behaviour (*responsiveness*); a set of institutionalised relationships between different actors (*accountability*); and a (variable) bundle of organisational attributes (*capability*)? No. It is a strength. Think of them as types of cooking ingredients. You will get a much better meal using one cooking medium (oil), one seasoning (mustard seed) and one basic foodstuff (sprouted mung beans) than if you had, e.g. only three seasonings or three cooking mediums. The synergies between capability, accountability and responsiveness are at least as interesting as those between oil, mustard seed and bean sprouts.

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both (a) the mode of governance, i.e. the ways in which government agencies relate to one another and to non-state actors (i.e. influence rather than command); and (b) the focus of public action, i.e. on regulating non-state actors, rather than on direct service provision.