



Implementing Decentralisation

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GPG's Guide to Decentralisation series explores the practicalities of designing, implementing and managing the process of decentralisation. The Guides explore key areas affecting the planning and delivery of an effective decentralised system, drawing on international experience and best practice.

This Guide aims to assist those tasked with implementing decentralisation in newly devolved bodies. We explore practical approaches to the implementation of decentralisation, covering the following areas:

- Informing employees and keeping them motivated
- Setting priorities and effective planning for the transition to decentralised government
- Joint working between agencies working in the decentralised region
- Getting the best results from available resources
- Supporting elected representatives in the early days of decentralisation

Setting out the vision and resolving uncertainty

In any change process, those who are likely to be affected will be uncertain, unsettled and unsure of the impact the change will have on their lives. These will include those who rely upon the services to be delivered by newly decentralised bodies, the employees who are responsible for delivery and the leaders and decision-makers who will be accountable for the success or failure of the changes.

This paper will place emphasis on involving people who are responsible for delivery of change, another paper in this series sets

out

the experience of decentralisation in the UK suggests that to secure success, an organisation's leaders must be clear about the reasons behind decentralisation and able to explain its benefits. Those who are responsible for delivering the changes need to understand why they are happening and how they could improve democratic engagement and service delivery. As a starting point, the intentions of decision-makers and legislators should be referenced.

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In Jordan, His Majesty King Abdullah II made clear his ambitions for the benefits decentralisation should deliver.²

HM King Abdullah II's ambition for decentralisation in Jordan

"We consider both the municipalities and decentralisation laws as a cornerstone for broadening the role and responsibilities of local administrations in our governorates. These laws are also crucial for deepening citizens' participation and empowering them to contribute towards identifying their priorities, in addition to formulating a future vision for their areas' development plans and distributing developmental gains more equally and effectively."

Our first paper³ in this series on the [transition](#), describes a broad range of advantages for decentralisation from examples in Europe, South America and the Middle East, which can be considered and referenced in explaining the purpose behind decentralisation.

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Organisational leaders are responsible for ensuring that employees and other delivery agencies understand the changes. They will need to be clear about the way decentralisation is planned to operate and to be honest about the impact this will have on working arrangements. Where it is possible to reassure, this should be given clearly and in a way that can be readily understood. From experience, the questions which are likely to be of most immediate interest to employees include:

- Will I lose my job?
- Who will be my employer?
- Will my conditions of employment change?
- Where will I work?
- What will my job be?
- Will I have the same manager and team?
- What opportunities will there be for me?

Planning for Welsh devolution

In the UK, during the process of planning for further devolution of powers to the National Assembly for Wales and resulting structural change, consistent information about the changes was given to employees in open staff forums, addressed by leaders from the organisation as well as others who had experienced similar changes in other parts of the UK and Ireland. There were also opportunities for staff to talk individually to managers about their concerns and to have their questions answered. This helped to build trust, enthusiasm for the changes and motivation to deliver them. Employees were then involved in planning for change through project teams and given ownership of plans for areas in which they worked. This built expertise and helped staff to gain detailed knowledge in specialist areas.

Every opportunity should be taken to build the confidence and commitment of those employees who will be responsible for implementing change, as they will be a crucial resource.

Inclusive planning

Decentralisation involves the introduction of new participants into the normal planning process. In particular, decentralisation aiming to enhance local democratic engagement will almost certainly involve elected representatives in planning and decision-making, tasks previously carried out exclusively by appointed officials and employees. There are likely to be new

duties to work in cooperation with central and local government. This will increase the complexity of planning, but if done well it will also improve its quality and help to achieve the benefits anticipated by policy-makers.

Many of those reading this paper will have experience of planning for the delivery of services. Planning for structural changes resulting from decentralisation requires different thinking, and this paper will explain some of the tools and techniques which have worked well in similar situations elsewhere.

We suggest that the following should be the first areas to be considered in pre-planning for decentralisation and the **early priorities of a decentralised body**:

- **Transition planning** – dealing with the change from one type of organisation to another, defining responsibilities and establishing a change project.
- **Development of staff** – ensuring that employees have the right skills and personal qualities to work effectively in the new structure.
- **Securing and allocating resources** – this is covered in more detail later.
- **Preparing for elected representatives** – this will involve cultural change, new facilities, information gathering and presentation and the preparation of options for decision.

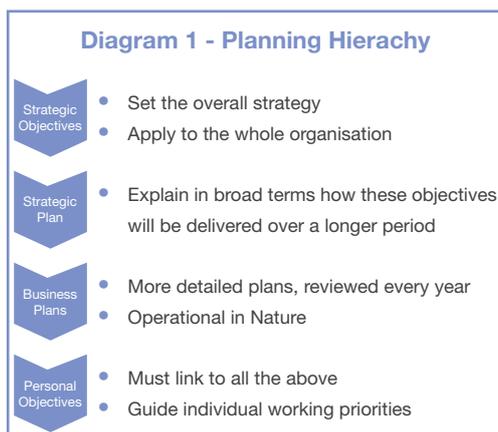
Whatever priorities are selected for planning decentralisation, it will be necessary to identify a starting point and a destination. Where is the organisation now? What does it need to achieve? How can it move from where it is now to where it needs to be?

So, as in any planning process, there will need to be a series of **objectives**, supported by the resources and leadership needed to deliver them. Objectives should not consist of how much resource will be used, but state the outcome intended to be achieved. For example, it is not enough to say how many teachers will be employed or that a number of new schools will be built. The starting point should be the level of educational attainment expected. Then it will be possible to work out the steps along the way to achieve this – including the allocation of resources like teachers and schools, the way performance is monitored and how investment will achieve the desired outcome.

Above all, individuals will need to be **clear about their responsibilities and be accountable** for them. In these circumstances, an effective delivery tool is

likely to be a series of task-focussed projects, reporting to an overall programme board, led by those with the authority to take decisions, deliver resources and monitor performance.

As with all planning processes, delivery is dependent upon all parts of the organisation, from Governor to security officer on the front door. They all need to understand their part in the plan. A simple **planning hierarchy** shows how this can be achieved, but to be successful, it will require good communication and opportunities for involvement at all levels.



In most decentralisation processes, it will be necessary to **work closely with other bodies**. These could include central government departments, municipalities and other councils in the region, contractors responsible for the delivery of key services, civil society organisations and (where they exist) organisations, political or otherwise, supporting candidates for elected office.

Planning groups and projects should take account of working arrangements with all these bodies, offering arrangements for joint working where possible and appropriate. The sort of uncertainties described above in relation to employees may exist in all these other bodies, and similarly open and honest lines of communication must be established. It may not be appropriate to involve all external bodies in formal decision-making, but information sharing and consultation will be likely in any robust planning process.

Engagement with the people served by the decentralised body will inform planning for its operations, and should be a priority. Some of this engagement will be carried out through and alongside newly elected representatives (see later in this paper) and some will be done directly by using existing links, district offices and employees. Our paper in this series on public engagement explores this area in more detail.⁴

Risks and how to handle them

In preparing to implement decentralisation, it will be necessary to identify those things which might go wrong and to establish strategies for reducing risk. Shared thinking on risks both within the organisation and with partners is the best approach to ensuring that implementation is not wrong-footed by unexpected problems.

There are tools which can help with identifying risks and opportunities, but in the case of significant democratic change, it can help to use the PEST framework, particularly for **high level, strategic risks**. This involves considering the issues which might have an impact upon the implementation of decentralisation from the following aspects:

- **Political** – legislation, policy, pressure groups, conflicts
- **Economic** – market factors, exchange rates, funding
- **Social** – ethnic, religious, cultural, wealth and poverty, education
- **Technological** – innovation, information

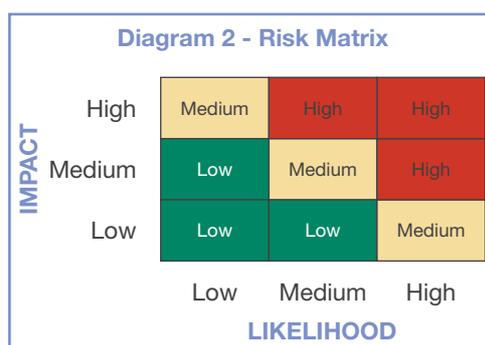
Applying this tool will readily identify areas of risk present in many decentralisation exercises.

In Jordan, for example, applying the model to the current process of decentralising authority to the Governorates is likely to identify the following main strategic risks:

- **Political** – elected representatives may not have the skills needed to carry out their roles. Staff may not be sufficiently attuned to working in a political environment to support elected members. Conflicts both within and outside the region could cause serious disruption in the implementation process. Overseas aid may reduce because of a change in political views in the funding country.
- **Economic** – sufficient budgets may not be available to provide the services the region needs. Expectations about economic development might not be fulfilled because of investment failures.
- **Social** – in allocating resources, insufficient regard could be given to social deprivation in the regions, leading to legitimate local expectations not being fulfilled. The new organisations may lack balance in terms of gender, race and religion and so might not represent the electorate.
- **Technological** – the information technology infrastructure for the new bodies could be insufficient, resulting in poor information sharing. Elected representatives and staff

may not have the information they need to take robust decisions. With limited time and resources, the new bodies may be reluctant to innovate and could fail to find more efficient ways of delivering services.

It will be important to identify risks, but also to maintain confidence by dealing with them realistically. It will not be possible to reduce or remove every risk, but the allocation of scarce resources can be prioritised with reference to their impact on organisation's main objectives. The use of a simple risk matrix will help to emphasise those risks which do not need to take time or resources, and those which will need serious attention.



Those risks having a high impact on the organisation's most important objectives and are more likely to happen will get the most serious attention (red). Risks not having a significant effect and which are relatively unlikely (green) can be acknowledged, but may not need action. It will be important to look at this objectively and to assess risk collectively to get the best results.

Making the most of resources

It is certain that there will be insufficient resources for the new organisations to deliver everything that they would aspire to provide for their areas. In planning for the deployment of resources, we would normally consider the following main areas:

- Budgets
- Buildings and equipment
- People
- Information and communication technology

Because the resources available are unlikely to meet all needs in the area, it will be necessary to **plan for scarcity and to use them to greatest effect**. Senior officials will be accustomed to managing their resources, but decentralisation **applies an extra layer of oversight in the form of elected representatives**. If this democratic oversight works as it should, it will mean

that enhanced scrutiny improves resource allocation by making it more accountable to local people, through their representatives. In the early days, this may be difficult to achieve, because there could be a lack of skill and experience in the organisation. It will therefore be necessary for officials to think in different ways to make best use of resources, and to accommodate additional demands.

In the short term, the most important consideration for the new bodies is likely to be the **level of budget allocated and how best to deploy it**. In building a new budget, there are some radical methods available. These methods might not work well where there is relatively low-key decentralisation. Zero-based budgeting, for example, where no regard is paid to existing structures in building a new budget based on need, is likely to cause fear and demotivation amongst employees. A "status quo" budget is likely to be more attractive at least in the early stages, with previous allocations used as a base, adding in new responsibilities and minus those that have ended. However, the use of more innovative tools should not be discounted for new elements of responsibility and distinct projects.

There are some **issues inherent in allocating resources** where a new layer of democratic oversight is installed. Powerful interest groups can dominate the agenda and local representatives will understandably want to get more for those they represent. Officials will have their own preferences for resource allocation and these may be different to the priorities of elected representatives.

To secure a level of objectivity, it is helpful to ask a series of questions when considering how best to frame options for resource allocation. Here are some areas to explore⁵:

- What are our objectives and how will this allocation help us to deliver them?
- Will this allocation help us meet our legal duties?
- Is this proposal value for money? Can we deliver it in a more efficient way?
- What is the opportunity cost of using resources this way rather than another?
- What impact will this have on local businesses, civil society organisations and other parts of the public sector? How can we engage them to help us deliver?
- What are the social, economic and environmental costs and benefits of the different allocations?

Enabling elected members

There are special considerations in working with **newly elected representatives**. These individuals are not necessarily selected for their technical expertise and will come with their own set of priorities, which will generally accord with the needs and wants of the people who elected them. These priorities will not always match those already established in the organisation to be decentralised, particularly where there have been limited relationships with elected representatives in the past. Officials will need to understand that it is not usually productive to override the ambitions of elected representatives by relying upon purely technical considerations. Different skills are needed.

Experience has shown us that **work done in the early days of a decentralised body to support elected representatives** can prove to be invaluable. This should be a strong focus of pre-election planning. Preparation should go beyond the provision of a meeting room and minimal secretariat support to organise and record meetings. To establish the most productive working relationships with elected representatives, the following approaches have worked well in other decentralised bodies:

- In advance, prepare concise, practical information about the organisation and its services which will be given to new members upon election.
- Identify a team of staff (perhaps one from each main service) with good people skills to welcome and work with members from their election. The demands on this team are likely to be great at first then reduce, but they can be useful points of reference for elected representatives in the future.
- Plan suitable information technology and access to other key equipment for elected representatives who wish to use it.
- Arrange flexible development training designed to familiarise elected representatives with their responsibilities, the legal framework, ethical standards, resources, current plans and who to approach for more help.

One of the early tasks of elected representatives will be to **approve the direction and planning of future services** and it will be for the official machinery to advise on the options. Decentralisation legislation should set out the respective powers of the various parties, but experience has shown

that it will damage relationships and trust to attempt to regulate these relationships by using the law on a day to day basis. A more helpful approach with elected representatives is to take time to understand those factors which will influence them, provide them with accurate, clear and concise information and attempt to find common ground.

Elected representatives will be an invaluable source of trusted engagement with electors and their success in this role is a key purpose of any decentralisation programme. Every attempt should be made to establish sound working relationships from the start.

Conclusion

The impact of institutional change arising from decentralisation of power should not be underestimated. Whatever the legislation and framework adopted, there will be a need to sustain the motivation of employees, plan properly for the deployment of scarce resources and work effectively with democratically elected representatives. It will be for the leaders in the organisation, at every level, to make sure that the ambitions of decentralisation are realised.

About the author



Dianne Bevan worked in The UK public sector for 30 years, firstly in local government as a public lawyer and manager, where she became a Director General at a large municipality and its most senior legal adviser. She then joined the National Assembly for Wales, working in a variety of leadership roles, with responsibility for a wide range of services, including finance, human resources, information technology, communications, building management and support for Members. She has led significant change projects arising from local government reorganisation in Wales, devolution and the resulting institutional transformation.

Acknowledgements

This paper contains my own thoughts and views, but in writing it I have relied upon material jointly prepared for other purposes by myself and fellow GPG Associates Stella Manzie and Joyce Redfearn.

Endnotes

- ¹ Global Partners Governance, Jacqui Smith, July 2017, Rt. Hon.
- ² The Jordan Times, , November 2015 [accessed 15 June 2017]
- ³ Global Partners Governance, Silk, July 2017, Sir Paul
- ⁴ Global Partners Governance, Jacqui Smith, July 2017, Rt. Hon.
- ⁵ I have drawn upon an article by fellow GPG Associate, John Tizard, “*Effective local public budget management is key to local well-being*” in writing this section. The article was published in Al-Ahram’s *Parliamentary Affairs* periodical, November 2016.

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