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Influence Alpha: Shaping Apex Decision-Making In Government

Professor Alexander Evans OBE, Programme Director, London School of Economics

Thursday, 7 September 2023



A Word From Today's Chairman

Charlotte Dawber-Ashley
FS Club Manager
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Today's Agenda



- 15:00 – 15:05 Chairman's Introduction
- 15:05 – 15:25 Keynote Presentation – Professor Alexander Evans
- 15:25 – 15:45 Question & Answer



Today's Speaker



Professor Alexander Evans OBE,
Programme Director, MPA in Data Science
and Public Policy,
School of Public Policy, London School of
Economics



THE LONDON SCHOOL
OF ECONOMICS AND
POLITICAL SCIENCE ■

Influence Alpha: Shaping Strategic Decision-Making in Government

Professor Alexander Evans (a.i.evans@lse.ac.uk)



School of Public Policy ■

How does strategic decision-making work in government – and how can it be shaped?

This talk suggests it is about people (but not very many), ideas, influence (not the same as access) and timing

It recognises that apex decision-making (the small in-group that shape major government decisions) is more ‘Court than Cabinet’, even if norms and cultures of decision-making may vary by principals and group dynamics

Biography matters, including age

One study suggests that older leaders in 'personalist' regimes are more likely to initiate and escalate militarized disputes.



Horowitz, Michael, et al. "Leader Age, Regime Type, and Violent International Relations." *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 49, no. 5, 2005, pp. 661–85. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30045148>.

Leader Age, Regime Type, and Violent International Relations

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University of California, Santa Barbara*

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In this article, the authors investigate the relationship between states' political leaders' ages, their regime type, and the likelihood of militarized dispute initiation and escalation. They examine more than 100,000 interstate dyads between 1875 and 2002 to systematically test the relationship between leader age and militarized disputes. The results show that, in general, as the age of leaders increases, they become more likely to both initiate and escalate militarized disputes. In addition, the interaction of age and regime type is significant. In personalist regimes, the general effect reverses; as age increases, the relative risk of conflict declines in comparison to other types of regimes. Increasing leader age in democracies increases the relative risk propensity for conflict initiation at a higher level than for personalist regimes, while the impact of increasing leader age is most substantial in intermediate regimes.

Keywords: *leaders; age; war; psychology; quantitative*

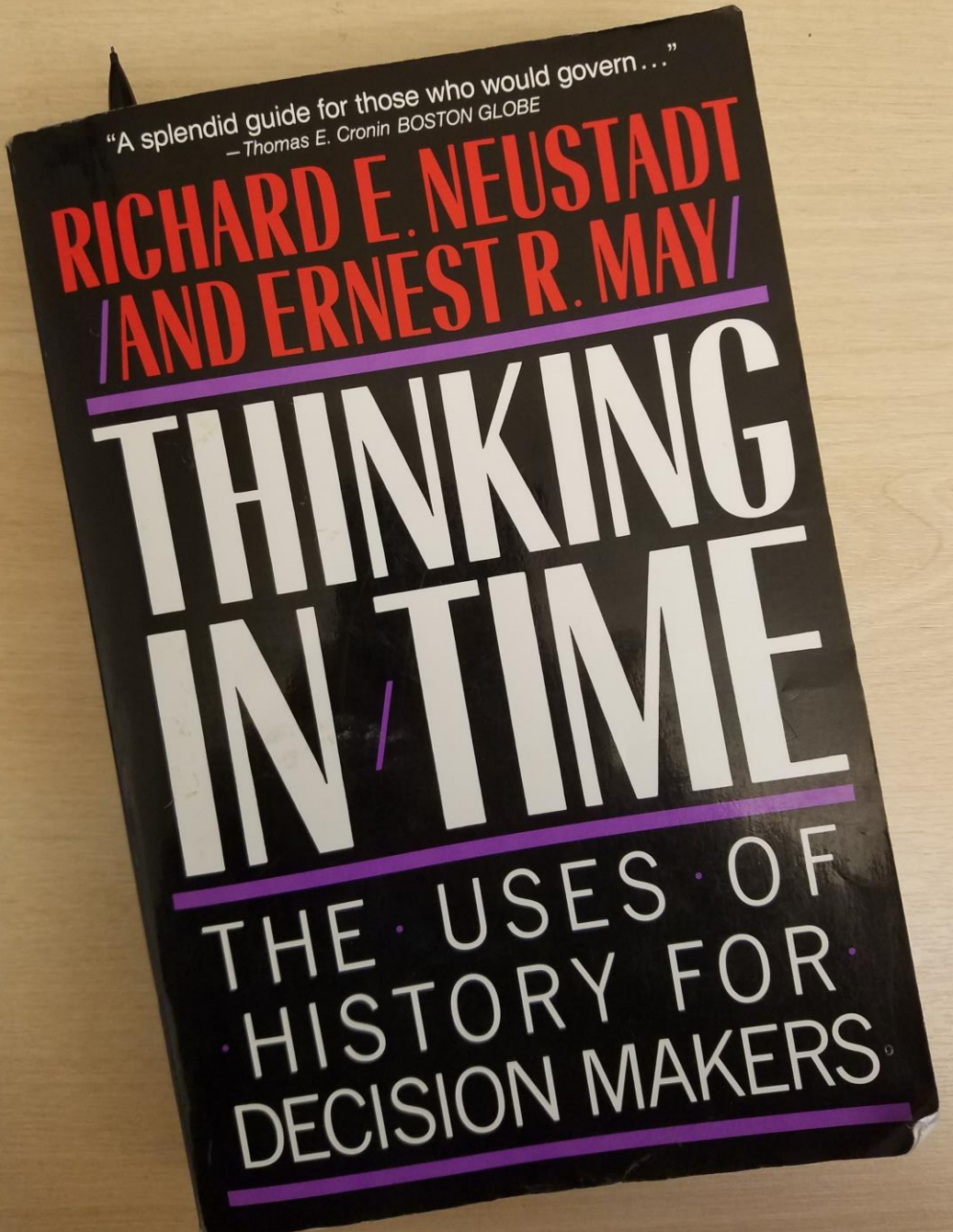


How systems (actually) work

Government planning and strategy, whether made in opposition or in office, rarely shapes all decisions made

Crises shape decision-making

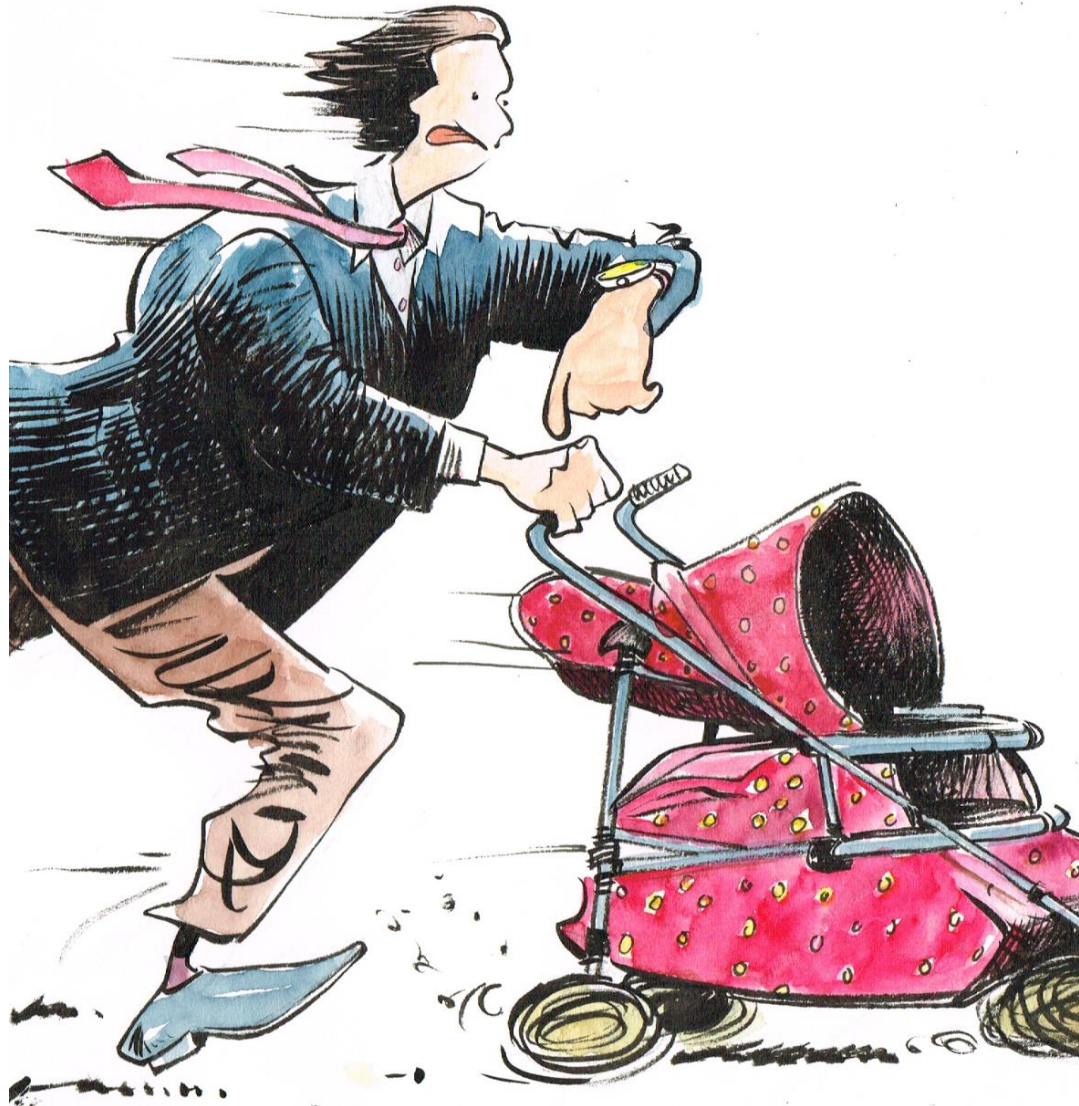
As do informal networks of decision-making



Time – and ‘thinking in time’ - matters

Governments aren't good enough at 'thinking long', drawing on history, expertise or ensuring we're not always in the mode of 'fighting the last war'

Apex decision-makers lack time for reflection



OLE JOHNNY HANSEN 2015

Tidsklemma

- Norwegian word for parents of under 5 year olds
- Literally means 'time-squeeze'
- Used to explain why individuals are stressed, miss things, and feel like they have no time

- Public policy is also about *Tidsklemma* – but it comes with greater consequences



CABINET OFFICE

MY DUTIES IN THIS PERIOD ENFORCED A STRANGE rhythm of life upon me, for I was forced to exist like some nocturnal creature, which hunts while others sleep, and rests from its labors while most of creation is active. When all people of rank left London for their estates, or to follow the court from one place of idle amusement to the other, so I left the country to take up residence in London. When the court returned to Westminster, I removed myself back to Oxford.

I did not find this displeasing. The obligations of the courtier are time-consuming and largely fruitless unless you are chasing the prizes of fame and position. If you are merely concerned with the safety of the kingdom, and the smooth running of the government, then maintaining a presence there is pointless. In the entire country, fewer than half a dozen people have true power. The rest are governed, in one way or another, and I had more than sufficient contact with those who were truly of significance.

Among these, I found few natural allies and many who, either deliberately or because of the limits of their comprehension, worked against the interests of their own country. Such a state, I may say, was to be found everywhere in those days, even amongst the philosophers who thought they were merely teasing out the secrets of nature. Having no care for thought, they did not consider what they did, and allowed

The Court: Power

- Who matters in government and organisations? Is it 4-5 people?
- Whose advice is actually listened to?
- The role of gate-keepers
- Mapping power



Is strategic influence possible?

Direct

- Lobbying (but risk that inputs end up digested at mid-level)
- Access to the core decision-makers (usually the PM, Secretaries of State, some Spads, some officials)
- Shaping Principals before they reach high-office

Indirect

- Highbrow and mass media
- Think-tanks/commentariat

A relentless focus on execution

- Overcoming the West Wing / East Wing dynamic in government
- Ensuring technical and policy inputs go in at mid-level
- Shaping for Parliamentary time
- Engaging with contrary opinions and perspectives

Patience and persistence

- Challenging if you're pursuing short-term goals around tax, regulatory or investment policy
- Requires applied focus on longer-term issues (often harder to land because political and bureaucratic dynamics limit long-termism)
- Sustained (and non-transactional) relationships over time help
- As does good branding – what's the gripping title or story around any proposed new policy?
- And finally, take advantage of **“initiativitis”**.



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Comments, Questions & Answers



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- Mon, 11 September (12:00-13:00) Sustainable Finance: Moving The Finance Industry From Promises To Action
- Wed, 13 September (16:00-17:00) Managing Critical Events
- Mon, 18 September (16:00-16:45) Re-Engineering And Future-Proofing: The Issuance Origination And Admission Process

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