

Some comments prompted by  
John Seddon's book  
**“Systems Thinking in the Public Sector:  
the failure of the reform regime – and a manifesto for a better way”**  
... based on some comments initially prepared for a seminar among those promoting  
*The Learning Society (Scotland)*  
(www.learningsociety.org.uk)

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### **Introductory Comments**

John Seddon's book *Systems Thinking in the Public Sector: the failure of the reform regime... and a manifesto for a better way* provides an extraordinarily well documented critique of command and control management and especially of attempts to manage via “Targets”.

The book was/is of particular interest to members of *The Learning Society (Scotland)* because it engages with a number of issues close to the heart of that organisation.

In essence, the members of *The Learning Society (Scotland)* set out to create a pervasive climate of experimentation and learning that would enable Scotland to get greater control over its destiny – but without pre-determining what that destiny would be.

One of the features that characterised its membership as a whole was the observation of the stifling of innovation – and conspicuous nonsense and waste – engendered by centralised “command and control” management in both the public and private services.

In seeking a way forward, its members aimed, in particular, to build on the work of people like Deming<sup>1</sup>, and Johnson and Broms<sup>2</sup>. They now saw Seddon as a powerful ally in their quest.

However, although Seddon's book engaged with a series of issues close to their hearts, it also seemed to raise a number of questions requiring further consideration.

These include:

- (i) The nature of the wider public management system – including its information-collecting components – and participative democracy which would be required to provide for the collection and empowerment of the information needed to (as Seddon put it) move the “design” of public service delivery arrangements from “opinion based” to “knowledge based”;

- (ii) The use of the term “systems thinking” .... which Seddon seemed to use to refer to the design of delivery systems and identification of their specific failures and successes rather than to the study of the socio-cybernetic processes which regularly undermine well-intentioned public action and which point to the need for information-based systems-oriented ways of intervening in them. Such interventions are to be sharply contrasted with the predilection for opinionated system-wide intervention derived from, or at least legitimated via, ideology.
- (iii) The components of a “Learning Society” that are required to provoke pervasive systems-oriented experimentation, learning, application, and evolution toward a society offering sustainable high quality of life for all, looking beyond the effectiveness of the management of specific systems to the inter-relationship between systems.
- (iv) The need to develop an understanding of the socio-cybernetic processes which lead to the continuous reproduction and extension of hierarchy, command and control, subjugation through the invention of ever more ingenious justifications for ever-increasing amounts of useless work, the reproduction of social division based on the continuous invention of symbols of status (leisure on the one hand and benefits queues and cards on the other), and means of compelling people to engage in dehumanising unnecessary work to obtain the former and evade the latter.

### **Alternative Public Management Arrangements.**

Briefly, and perhaps misleadingly stated, Seddon’s recommendations re alternative public management arrangements seem to amount to a suggestion that we should simply abolish targets and leave something new to arise from the ashes.

This made me profoundly uncomfortable.

I well remember what happened in schools when large numbers of secondary school pupils and teachers worked without standards or targets ... and, in particular, when the school leaving age was raised by government decree.

One got almost a bell curve of levels of innovation and quality (if assessed across benefits to *all* pupils and not just norm-referenced benefits to the elites) displayed by schools. Some were extremely innovative in devising developmental experiences for the “new” pupils ... viz those who did not fit into a “grammar school” framework ... who had shown up in schools over the previous 20 years and whose numbers were now to be swollen by executive fiat. At the other extreme were some absolutely appalling dumps.

There were a number of possible explanations of the variance between schools, but one was left in no doubt about the importance of management when head teachers moved from one school to another only to be followed by dramatic changes in schools’ “performance” – both upward and downward.

But attending to the systems issues revealed by these observations was not seen as the way forward.

Instead, the Government sought to address the problem by introducing a common system of examinations based on the old grammar school framework.

These targets certainly motivated a number of the laggards (admittedly to do what Seddon calls “the wrong thing”) ... but, as one hears continuously even today, even allowing for the (sociologically extremely important) norm-referenced nature of the target, there remained considerable numbers of “failing” schools.

But, from the point of view of moving toward a Learning Society, much more important was the destruction of the innovators who were really trying to find ways of meeting the needs of the thousands of “new” pupils now incarcerated in these prisons called schools.

(Of course, it can well be argued that the basic problem lay in that ultimate expression of “command and control” ... the centralised command and compulsion that young people were to be incarcerated for even longer in these environments. Note, further, that the very activities that dominated these institutions could be understood as a crucial part of the process of separating the “intellectual” privileged elite from the hewers of wood and drawers of water ... or, worse, the trash who were to be made to grovel for charity from the rich man’s table and who, as Mrs Thatcher proclaimed, “had to learn their place”... and labelling them accordingly.)

But that is an aside. The issue we are dealing with here is targets.

And, with Seddon, we can, from this example, see quite clearly that targets undermine what “obviously” needs to be done.

But what is it about targets that creates the problem? And what is the alternative?

I am not sure that Seddon is entirely clear about what’s wrong with targets: He simply offers endless, acutely disturbing, examples of the absurd things that happen.

*What is wrong with Targets is that they focus employee’s attention on the commands of the authorities above them rather than on the needs of their customers or clients – and especially the complexity and diversity of those customers’ or clients’ needs.*

There are a lot of things to be noted about this.

One is that, contrary to what is commonly asserted (by *Learning Society* members among others), the managers and employees whose behaviours are (collectively) so abhorrent *are* incredibly inventive. They do not lack talent. They pay attention. Very many of them study the operation of the system insofar as it impinges on them, and they get together with others to manipulate the system. They experiment on the basis of their theories and test and adjust their understandings<sup>2b</sup>.

But what is the alternative?

To come back to schools (and to evade the question of what schools are all about ... their sociological functions ... and to continue for the time being to accept, as Seddon does, that their manifest function *is* their function).

What is preventing them recognising and catering for diversity?

Well, for a start, there is a fundamental problem with the whole idea of catering for diversity in the public sector. It is as if it were generally believed that is more or less OK to cater for diversity in the private (“market”) sector, but taboo in the public sector - where everyone should be treated “equally”. (But even in “the market” the dead hand of pious bureaucratic regulation of everything from tomatoes through film content and news media to sexual orientation, childrearing, and euthanasia concerns many thoughtful people, including many of those involved in *The Learning Society*.)

In reality, this horror of catering for diversity – and especially initiating experiments to devise ways of catering for as yet uncrystallised forms of variety – in the public sector is a fundamental threat not only to *The Learning Society*’s objective of creating a ferment of experimentation and comprehensive evaluation but, since this is crucial to evolution itself, the very survival of our species.

Seddon touches ... more than touches ... on this issue so we will return to it below. Here let us pursue the issue in connection with education.

Having overcome the very notion of catering for diversity (rather than cementing an engineered single-factor form of “diversity” that buttresses the concept of [social] hierarchy), one comes upon the fact that there is no formal understanding of how to think about (conceptualise) high level talents like initiative, problem solving ability, and the ability to work with others, still less how to nurture them. For these reasons alone it is a Herculean job for teachers to nurture the wide variety of talents their pupils possess.

One would imagine that these constraints alone would be sufficient to explain schools’ failure to achieve their purposes... even without other constraints stemming from such things as a day divided into 40 minute chunks and the constraints of traditional examinations (which lack construct or predictive validity.).

But, over and beyond these things, there no formal understanding of how to release diversity – how to nurture distinctively different talents in different pupils.

Nor is there any understanding of how to give those pupils credit for these idiosyncratic high-level talents or their teachers credit for having nurtured them.

Worst of all, these barriers form an interlocked *system* such that attempts to change any one part without changing the whole are negated by the reactions of the rest of the system. One cannot change the educational process very much without changing the nature of the assessments that are made in the certification and placement process at the interface between schools and society. But one cannot reasonably or theoretically introduce more meaningful assessment systems unless one changes both the curriculum processes used in schools and the criteria employers use to select employees. And so on. (See Raven (1994)<sup>3</sup> for a discussion of the barriers or

[http://www.eyeesociety.co.uk/resources/Figure%201%20\(formerly%2023.1\)%20rev.pdf](http://www.eyeesociety.co.uk/resources/Figure%201%20(formerly%2023.1)%20rev.pdf) for a brief but very important sketch map of the socio-cybernetic forces at work.)

So, to do their jobs effectively, teachers would need to be able to get together with others to press for, and be closely involved in, action research programmes designed to release and recognise diversity.

I want to spell out what this means although the statement may seem unduly harsh.

It means that, to be considered competent, teachers must somehow be involved in identifying the systems constraints which undermine their attempts to behave competently and get together with other teachers to get something done about them. Unless they do these things they *cannot* do in their classrooms the very things they most need to do. They *cannot* behave competently *as teachers*.

But, if they are to do these things, time and resources must be set aside for doing them .. and the teachers concerned need to be able to get recognition for the divergent and idiosyncratic contributions they will then make to systems change.

They and their managers need to be held accountable, as Seddon says, not for the specific outcomes of this process ... for who is to know what these will be ... it depends on the diverse contributions of so many people ... but for such things as seeking out, and initiating the collection of, theoretically-based information relating to the educational process itself, the assessment of its outcomes, and the public management system, sifting it for good ideas, and acting on those ideas in an innovative way in the long term public interest.

Note that “acting on it in an innovative way” involves experimentation ...ie adventuring into the unknown and changing one’s behaviour in a systematic way on the basis of the feedback obtained.

But how are we to find out if teachers have done these things?

And how is the information to be given teeth? To whom is it to be fed so that appropriate action will be taken ... One comes across so staff appraisal systems which consume endless time every year but which result only in more data being accumulated in filing cabinets.

Feeding information from even better designed staff and organisational appraisal systems upward in bureaucratic hierarchies to multi-purpose assemblies that are collectively responsible for monitoring the spending of some 75% of GNP<sup>3b</sup> is unlikely to be very effective!

Where does Seddon discuss the links to be established between teachers and a research network designed to develop new theories and tools? Where does he even discuss how the information that is to be generated can be given the teeth needed to shift decision-taking (as he so often recommends) from opinion to information?

How is all this action research to be monitored and advanced?

The researchers required to advance the necessary understandings must be people who are capable of adventuring into the unknown – people who are capable of identifying previously unrecognised problems and finding ways of tackling them – not researchers who have been selected and promoted because they accept that their research topics should mainly be derived from the literature or government “calls for proposals” and that it is appropriate for their work to be evaluated against the standards and targets set up by government agencies and unquestioningly accepted in peer review exercises.

Unfortunately, this is not the end of the matter. For most of the things I have said have been noted repeatedly over the last century.

So, what if the basic problem is the one I hinted at earlier: The possibility that schools *exist* to create useless work, to occupy endless people, to *create* norm-referenced division, to *legitimise* hierarchy and the right of the elite to usurp managerial responsibility - and to do so in such a way that the others appear to be conspicuously idiotic and incompetent ... and thus in *need* of being directed and managed?

Only a systems analysis at another level would enable us to begin to understand and intervene in a system whose “purpose” was in fact quite other than what it is taken to be – or, to use what is now considered to be outmoded terminology, a system whose latent function is quite different from its manifest function.

The current knee-jerk reaction to the word “targets” that has been amplified by Seddon would help us hardly at all.

### **Diversity and Regulation.**

I have touched on some of the issues which surface in connection with catering for diversity.

But it is worth returning to what Seddon has to say.

One of the things he says is that, if one follows a customer demand (presumably after he has helped the client to clarify what it is that he or she wants) through the system one discovers numerous systems barriers that prevent individual demands/needs being recognised and attended to. (Presumably, his own implicit theory is that these barriers can then be attended to and ameliorated. However, we ourselves would point out that there are usually many systems barriers which would, in reality, undermine most efforts to translate such information into effect.)

In this context he advocates study of the variety of consumer demands. This could, presumably, lead to the development of a “supermarket” system for catering for the diversity of needs. But, even then, a concern with profitability ... efficiency ... tends to lead only to “better” provision to meet the most common “demands”... not provision of the unusual and idiosyncratic. (Never mind the constraints imposed by self-appointed guardians of the public morals who as we have mentioned constrain, and seek to regulate, everything from recreational drugs and smoking through entertainment, sex provision [eg the provision of Geisha-girl and Geisha-guy places] and dying with dignity.)

But Seddon’s discussion scratches only the tip of the iceberg. More fundamental questions have to do with the *invention* and *corruption* of “needs”.

On the one hand, one has the creation and invention of endless conspicuous consumption “needs” which both enable the powerful and prestigious to differentiate themselves from others and generate the endless demeaning work required to consign serfs to serfdom.

On the other, one has the distortion of genuine needs – such as for life and livelihood – into demeaning activities like dragging around blocks of stone to build pyramids or filling up and chasing up (‘failure demand’) “benefits” forms ... and forms applying for jobs which either

do not exist at all or offer such degrading work that no one in their right mind would apply for them.

Although Adam Smith's market mechanism was not primarily intended to provide choice in this sense – but instead to offer an answer (which unfortunately does not work) to *The Learning Society's* basic question of how to create a society which innovates and learns without central direction – it has been widely seen as being concerned with offering choice (which has, in turn, become equated with freedom) as an objective in its own right. Yet in fact choice – in the sense used above and in Seddon's versions of it – offers little real choice: One has, for example, no effective choice of a lifestyle offering high quality of life with little consumption of resources. Choice of such an option would require communal change ... which in turn depends on understanding of the socio-cybernetic processes which prevent it and, among other things, the creation of a new roles for public servants.

It is as one stands back from the issues on which Seddon has chosen to focus ... such as endless form filling by benefits claimants and targets which lead providers to keep sending people back to the back of the queue ... that the real issues emerge.

*Why* this benefits system? Instead of occupying their lives form filling and pretending to apply for jobs that would, if they got them, destroy their lives and undermine any effective child care they might wish to offer their children ... long hours working in, and travelling to, far away places with travel costs to themselves and the community not seen relevant by target setting regulatory agencies ... and the creation of all these jobs for benefits claimants' assistants, checkers, job seekers' agencies and so on and so on ... could those concerned not have an entitlement to a decent lifestyle? Why this insistence on work as the only entitlement to access to any other than utterly demeaning lifestyle? Why, when we need to dramatically reduce human demands on the earth's resources, this insistence on "economically productive" [which means destructive] work? What are the systems constraints that result in all of this? How could they be ameliorated? What are the socio cybernetic forces driving it? How could how could one intervene in them?

And even deeper and darker questions.

*Why* the terrifying human proclivity to seek to impose one's own beliefs and lifestyles on others: religion (burning people at stake), beliefs in notions of public management (Fascism, "Democracy"), sexual orientation, "sobriety"? *Why* the equally terrifying proclivity to invent better ways of doing what some "leader" has said should be done despite the fact that there are no personal financial benefits to be derived from so doing ... to invent ever more demeaning benefits claims systems, to humiliate the unemployed, to exterminate Jews, to "privatise" the railways or health services (which, as Seddon notes, exacerbates, rather than reduces, waste through the time spent generating specifications, progress chasing, and cost escalation), to impose received child rearing practices on others (social workers), to impose "national curricula" on all for ever longer periods ... and so on?

On page 73 – 74 Seddon lists a series of managerial beliefs – conventional wisdoms – that would be seriously questioned by any kind of serious observer. Examples include the belief that employees (teachers, housing needs workers) cannot be trusted to study customer's or client's needs and find out how to meet them and its corollary that the design and specification of a system for catering for diversity must be the job of managers and inspectors

while the role of the “coal face” workers (teachers) must be “dumbed down” to mechanical delivery and keeping records of targets met.

So we are faced with the question: If all these conventional beliefs – myths – are so conspicuously incorrect, how did they get there? How and why were they invented? How and why have they become accepted – even codified – as “best practice”? What is the network of social forces leading to this network of interlocking and mutually supportive beliefs and practices?

## **Systems Thinking**

Frankly, I have a lot of difficulty with this term and feel that it would behove the members of *The Learning Society* to think much more carefully about what they mean when they use it - especially if, as it seems, they are going to use it as a cornerstone on which to build their platform.

In fact, Seddon gradually inducts the reader into the use of the term without defining it.

Nothing wrong with that.

Nevertheless, his very first mention of the term – on page 28 – upset me.

“The first question a systems thinker asks is: ‘What is the purpose of this service from the customer’s point of view?’”

That is certainly not the first question I would ask.

I might be much more inclined to ask “What is the purpose of this activity the point of view of the elite, or from the point of view of propagating a divided society, or, still more basically, from the point of view of contributing to an autopoietic process which maintains and extends itself?”

And if I did ask Seddon’s question, I might be much more interested than he seems to be in answers like “To enable me to escape from this degrading and dehumanising system” or “To enable me to develop and get recognition for my talents”.

But, actually, I would not really be likely to ask any of these questions.

I am much more inclined to ask “What leads this sector of society to function as it does?” ... “Can we make some kind of map of this ecological niche and its interacting feedback loops?” “How does it reproduce and extend itself?” This is equivalent to asking “What is the cybernetic system maintaining temperature in this animal?” or “How is this cancer reproducing and promoting itself?”

Still more poignantly: “Is it part of an autopoietic process which grows and extends itself without human direction?”

It would only be *after* one had mapped the functioning of the system that one could entertain the question of what its *purposes* might be ... and, even then, the word purposes would orient one toward an anthropomorphic explanation. One might substitute “sociological function”.



But even that does not really capture the question of “What is its role in some wider autopoietic process?”

As one might ask of an ecological niche: How did it grow? How did it become like that? How does it perpetuate itself? And, if one wanted to change its direction of development: “Where are the key points ... or nodes ... at which I could most usefully intervene in it ... and how best to do this?”

But, to move on.

On page 32 we learn that “If they (managers) have been studying their own work as a system ... (they find) that much of what they thought was good management was not very good at all”.

Well now. What does that mean? Did they really think that what they were doing was “good management”... that the words they were using to present themselves to their superiors actually described a genuine and good *management* process? More likely it means that they have been unthinkingly following (or even just presenting themselves as following) prescriptions they have been given. (No surprise there ... that’s how they got themselves promoted.) Most likely they have not been thinking about *management* at all ... but rather about how to score brownie points ... about the *promotion* system ... not about how best to manage their subordinates in order to meet the organisation’s manifest goals.

But in the next paragraph we learn that managerial behaviour is a product of the system within which they work.

Well. OK. So far, so good. But it does sound like a kind of comfortable blame-avoidance statement. I’ve been hearing this kind of statement for at least 40 years. When used by individuals it comes across as “It’s not my fault: it’s the system”. The reason it sounds so hollow is that it is not accompanied by any discussion of what the key features of the system might be or how to influence them. (Although there are many statements to the effect that that everything is determined by what leads to economic reward.)

But then we suddenly read that “the (dire) performance (of the system) is entirely within their (ie the managers’) control” ... ho hum.

“The task of the systems thinker is to understand what is happening in the system .. how the system is performing in terms of its purpose.”

Back to “purpose”. No mention of *purposes*. No mention of latent purposes themselves to be revealed through study of the specific system under investigation and the wider system of which it forms a part.

But the writing around page 70 led me to feel that Seddon might actually hold a rather wider view than had so far emerged.

There I read that the task of a manager (and to my mind everyone else in the system, but he doesn’t say that) is to think about how the system is working, what is it doing, what are the constraints on it, how to improve it ... and to involve everyone else in the process .. the task is to manage the system.

I have no problem with that ... except that, at least on the surface, he is still talking about *manifest* goals - publicly endorsed goals or purposes ... although the phrase “thinking about what the system is doing” does seem to open the door to other things.

He contrasts this with what he says is a traditional manager’s focus: managing *people*.

Unfortunately, that does not tally with our own experience – for what we ourselves have found is that very few managers think about managing subordinates for the future development of the organisation or their clients; they think about managing the system – their subordinates and superiors – in such a way as to promote their own advancement. So, again, are we talking about the manifest ... publicly espoused ... role of management or the latent, personal, role?

However, let’s go with the flow.

Seddon then argues that the key activity required is to provoke continuous learning about, and improvement of, the system through pervasive theoretically-based experimental action.

This is diametrically opposed to the objective of controlling people.

If one doesn’t think too much about that it sounds good. There appear to be no boundaries here. “The task of the manager is to think about aspects of the system that are beyond the control of the workers”.

But then the word “workers” began to trouble me ... workers? ... workers? ... to what end?

(Actually, according to me, it is also part of the job of the “workers” – eg teachers – to think about the wider constraints on their job and how to influence them ... so a process of continuous interaction between “workers” and their managers (= “non workers?”) is required. [Rosabeth Kanter advances a position that represents an engaging compromise between an “organic” and a hierarchical structure.] But lets skip over that for the time being.)

Well now, does that mean that the task of Head Teachers is to think about those aspects of the wider social system that prevent teachers attending to individual pupils’ needs?

If it *does* mean this, they clearly have to go beyond their current job descriptions and work outside the system.

And what about the administrators above head teachers – ie their managers .. Directors of Education, Advisors, Inspectors, Whitehall?

Does the statement mean that, collectively, they have to think about, for example, the hidden socio-cybernetic processes which, over millennia, have driven us as a species in the direction of centralisation and control, of the progressive usurpation of managerial responsibility by an “elite”, of the creation and progressive demarcation of layer upon layer of “intellectual” managerial work?

At this point, I would like to shift to the use of the term *socio-cybernetic* because it points us in the direction of *studying* the diffuse, interacting, mutually supportive, cybernetic,

governance, processes that control the operation of the system *and the design of better ones*.

Actually, what Seddon has written by page 71 is open to such open-ended interpretation ... and I have been told that he has in fact developed his thinking along these lines. Unfortunately, if so, it does not emerge in the present book.

As I see it, the design of a more appropriate public management system needs to make formal provision to engage – create a niche for - people like Seddon and Deming ... people who can see the system in ecological or socio-cybernetic terms, who can see the needs being created by the operation of the wider system in which a particular system, such as the benefits system, is located. Having two or three people – champions – loose cannon – floating around and bullying their way into organisations in order to fire broadsides and suggest the re-framing of issues and better ways of doing things is no way to run our vitally important public management system. What *arrangements* are needed to create niches for people to collect information about, and promote discussion of, issues that people had not previously even thought of ... never mind seen as being relevant? Such people are crucial to moving societal management ... whether as a whole or in a sub-system – from being opinion-based to knowledge-based.

### **Moving forward is going to be very difficult.**

As I see it, it is going to be very difficult to make the necessary changes.

I say this not just because, as we have seen, any systems analysis of presenting, manifest, problems reveals that their causes are non-obvious, multiple, and far removed from the symptoms. Pervasive, theoretically based, systems oriented intervention targeted at “nodes” in the system would be required. The design of each of the interventions themselves often demands considerable theoretically-based research and development activity. No “common sense” intervention will suffice.

I say it also because my current assessment of the “purpose” of the autopoietic system in which we are living is that it exists in part to generate endless useless work and thus to create and legitimise a divided society in which the differentials in quality of life between the “haves” and “have-nots” compel everyone to participate in a system they know to be fraudulent.

I would like to rephrase what Deming, John Seddon, and *The Learning Society* are trying to do in terms derived from Bookchin<sup>4</sup> ... but which, as it happens, are also used by Johnson and Broms.

What Bookchin noted is that “primitive” societies might be characterised as “organic”.

That is to say, each of the individuals functioned within them as a cell does in an organism.

In an organism, each cell has multiple functions and potentialities.

Yet the cells also have differentiated functions.

They are linked to each other and coordinated, not via a hierarchical command-and-control system, but via an organic network of linkages, sensitivities, and feedback loops.

This is also true of at least some “primitive”, “organic”, societies.

Yet this organic arrangement has been progressively replaced by a hierarchical system which continuously invents work and other processes to maintain itself.

What Deming, Seddon, Johnson & Broms and others are trying to do is to re-establish organic cultures within enterprises: To create settings in which everyone contributes in multiple yet differentiated ways.

They are trying to replace hierarchical control by network arrangements based on multiple feedback loops.

Yet this is precisely what human society has continuously moved away from over many thousands of years.

As Bookchin notes, the absurdity of what has been happening has been noted by hundreds of philosophers and other thoughtful people over at least the past three thousands of years.

Although it has been possible to make changes in lacunae temporarily isolated from the rest of the system (including, according to Bookchin, some whole Greek states), the writings of such authors have had no effect on the general drift of history.

It follows that it will not be possible for us to change things very much unless we understand, map, and find ways of intervening in the systemic – socio-cybernetic – forces that have the evolution of homo sapiens in their grip.

### **In conclusion ...**

... welcome though Seddon’s book is, and more-than-useful though its discussions of “targets”, the associated concept of “failure demand”, and systems thinking are, it is not, in itself, the book we need to move us forward. If Seddon has indeed reflected upon some of the issues discussed above it would be more than useful if he would publish them.

### **Notes**

1 eg Deming, W. E. (1993). *The New Economics for Industry, Government, and Education*. Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

2 Johnson, H.T. and Broms, A. (2000) *Profit Beyond Measure*. New York, NY. Free Press.

2b It is important to note that an entirely different “explanation”, albeit at a very different “level” – but one which is much closer to the theme of this article – can be offered. This is that the systems devised to decrease workload, evade personal responsibility, or increase income were not “deliberately” invented at all. Rather, they grew of their own accord in response to pressures from the system. Thus, in the recent case in which an abused baby died despite the visits of some 60 professionals, all the workers did their jobs according to a well-intentioned set of job specifications. All visited the family concerned, reported that there was a problem, and indicated that dealing with it required areas of competence beyond their own, and suggested that someone else should call. Thus each visit was, from a logical and logistic point of view in reality effective in terms of the very wider goals the system was designed to achieve ... and was recorded as such. The system was not

- deliberately crafted to minimise work load, evade responsibility (CYA), or to chalk up brownie points ... although, in the end, it can be described as having been somehow “designed” to do precisely these things. It was correctly designed to indicate a need to flag up a problem which required the intervention of someone with more appropriate skills. Thus it can be argued that devious ways of meeting the targets were *not* “invented” by smart managers or subordinates. They “just grew” as a result of pressures arising from a wider and unobserved socio-cybernetic system.
- 3 Raven, J. (1994). *Managing Education for Effective Schooling: The Most Important Problem Is to Come to Terms with Values*. Unionville, New York: Trillium Press. [www.rfwp.com](http://www.rfwp.com) (also available from The Competency Motivation Project at 30, Great King Street, Edinburgh EH3 6QH.), or go to <http://www.eyeesociety.co.uk/resources/CILSChap23.pdf>.
- 3b. See Raven, J. (1995). *The New Wealth of Nations: A New Enquiry into the Nature and Origins of the Wealth of Nations and the Societal Learning Arrangements Needed for a Sustainable Society*. Unionville, New York: Royal Fireworks Press [www.rfwp.com](http://www.rfwp.com); Sudbury, Suffolk: Bloomfield Books for the evidence supporting our claim that governments are collectively responsible for the expenditure of 75% of GDP in most Western societies.
- 4 Bookchin, M. (2005 [1971; 1991]). *The Ecology of Freedom: The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy*. Oakland, CA: AK Press. See also <http://www.eyeesociety.co.uk/resources/Bookchin.pdf> for my summary and commentary.