
# Europeanisation as 'Projection': Understanding the Changing Face of EU Policy Making within the Core Executive

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*This paper aims to contribute towards both the theoretical and empirical application of Europeanisation to change within national core executives. It is critical of conventional attempts to employ the 'goodness of fit' model in order to explain institutional change, suggesting that it is best suited to an analysis of the reception of structures, policies and/or norms from Brussels rather than change aimed at enhancing the co-ordination and projection of national EU policy. The paper proposes that Europeanisation as projection operates through four distinctive modes – goodness of fit, competitive uploading, institutional fusion, and discursive strategy – which exert countervailing centripetal and centrifugal pressures for convergence on national core executives, triggering the development of divergent national strategies in order to manage them. It then seeks to move beyond traditional institutionalist accounts by developing a strategic-relational network framework which can be employed to map the changing face of EU policy co-ordination within national core executives and to explain how the structure of national EU 'networks' conditions the nature of policy.*

## Introduction

There can be little question that Europeanisation has now established itself firmly within the academic lexicon as a valuable yet highly contested concept. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the deficiencies of existing accounts of Europeanisation with respect to institutional change and to offer a suggestion as to the direction of future empirical research in this area. It aims to contribute both towards its conceptual refinement and the development of a detailed analytical framework for studying the nature of change within national core executives in response to EU membership. The choice of subject matter is quite deliberate. There is a tendency for Europeanisation studies to focus on policy rather than institutional change, in part because the latter is far more incremental in nature, and because there has been a failure to assimilate conventional theories of institutional change (primarily 'new' institutionalism) with the concept of Europeanisation. It is hoped that this paper will go some way towards closing this gap by demonstrating how these conceptual and analytical toolboxes may be better integrated.

By focusing on the nature of the core executive, the study aims to explore the nature of Europeanisation within "those organisations and structures which coordinate central government, and act as the final arbiters of conflict between different parts of the government machine" (Rhodes 1995: 12). It is suggested here that the core executive approach is fundamental for understanding the nature, extent and significance of the impact of Europeanisation on central government. By conceptualising central government as a segmented rather than unitary entity, the approach enables us to examine the differential nature of Europeanisation not only *within* key institutions and/or policy sectors, but also *between* those institutions. Furthermore, the approach permits us to study the asymmetrical impact on key actors and the resources they hold: this provides for a micro as well as meso-level analysis. The core executive approach therefore analyses the impact across all relevant actors by default rather than assuming that some matter more than others; while providing 'sensitivity' to the analysis of the impact of Europeanisation (Bache and Marshall 2004: 6). It can only do this by conceptualising the EU as a political and administrative opportunity structure that gives rise to differential and

asymmetrical empowerment within national core executives. From this we can investigate the process of adaptation that core executive actors may instigate in order to redress the balance by attempting to further redistribute resources, either within the executive as a whole or internally (i.e. within departments). The approach also allows us to transcend traditional institutionalist accounts which say little or nothing explicitly about the location of power within central government. The nature of power is instead implied and remains firmly rooted in the Westminster model: power is therefore viewed as relatively static with the focus placed upon those specific institutions and vertical channels of decision-making within which power is assumed to be constitutionally embedded (Smith 1999). By locating power in such a way, these accounts downplay the extent of change by stressing continuity and minimal adaptation. Yet this ignores the web of horizontal interconnecting and interdependent networks of which the core executive is composed that cut across these hierarchical relationships, while downplaying the importance of informal processes in mediating the impact of EU membership.

The paper is divided into two halves. The first casts a critical eye over much of the existing literature regarding Europeanisation, arguing that the prevailing 'goodness of fit' model is fundamentally ill-suited to conceptualising or analysing change within the core executive. It suggests instead that Europeanisation as projection – understood as those mechanisms that exist within core executives for uploading national preferences into the EU policy process – is best conceptualised as operating through four distinctive modes. The second part of the paper is devoted to outlining an analytical framework capable of capturing the impact of these four modes at the domestic level. It does so comparing and explaining both the nature of core executive adaptation *and* its impacts on policy outcomes. Using strategic-relational network analysis, the framework puts forward a model of network development in response to shifting domestic and EU opportunity structures, which can be used to map the nature and extent of change over time according to four defining network characteristics. It also suggests that in order to evaluate the effectiveness of network adaptation, and thus begin to explain its implications for network outcomes, we consider six endogenous

intervening variables that condition the nature of network change. The paper concludes by briefly assessing the value of the framework for empirical analysis in relation to adaptation within the UK core executive since accession.

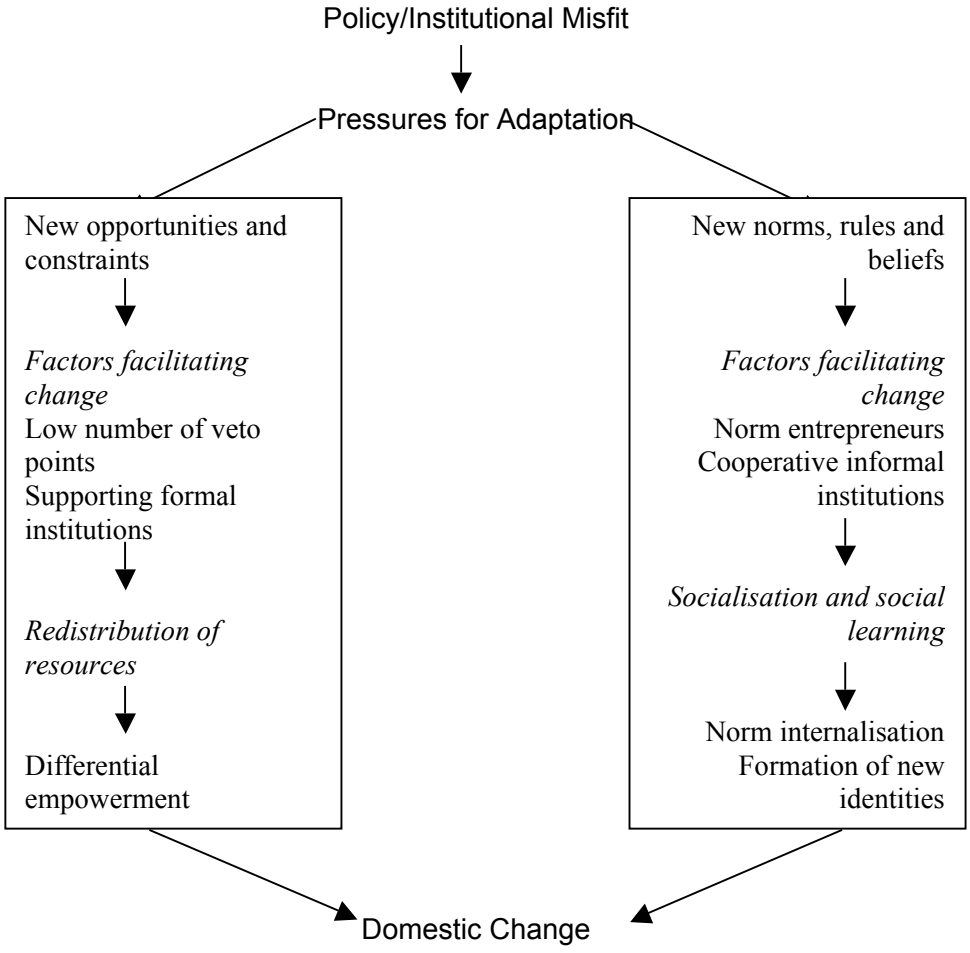
**The Goodness of Fit Model**

The earliest attempt to develop a coherent institutionalist account of Europeanisation is today commonly referred to as the 'goodness of fit' model. Knill and Lenschow (1998) and Knill (2001) were amongst the first to posit that domestic change is determined by the level of compatibility or goodness of fit between Europeanisation processes – understood as norms, rules, regulations, institutions, and procedures – and their domestic equivalents. The degree of 'fit' or 'misfit' between the two generates adaptational pressures for domestic change: the better the fit, the less change will occur. The model suggests that in cases of high adaptational pressure, successful change is unlikely to occur as it challenges core administrative traditions. Conversely, in cases of low adaptational pressure, little adaptation will be necessary. Only where adaptational pressure is moderate, thereby requiring adaptation within the constraints of core traditions, is successful adaptation likely to be found.

Risse *et al* (2001) elaborate on this with their own 'three-step' model of Europeanisation. The model recognised that misfit and adaptational pressure constitute a necessary but insufficient condition for change and that the nature and likelihood of domestic change can only be explained through five domestic mediating factors. Borzel and Risse (2003) clarify this by identifying two alternative mechanisms or paths of domestic change that correspond to two institutional logics (see figure 1). The logic of *consequentialism* posits that EU policy and institutional prerequisites may strengthen or weaken domestic actors by providing resources such as expertise, political legitimacy, or the insemination of solutions to policy problems. According to this rational choice account the likelihood and nature of change will be determined by the differential empowerment of actors and conditioned by two structural mediating factors: the existence of 'veto points' within the political system which may inhibit the ability to reach agreement on the need for domestic

adaptation; while 'supportive institutions' can facilitate change by empowering agents with material and ideational resources with which to exploit EU level opportunities for change (Borzel and Risse 2003: 65). Alternatively, domestic change may occur as a consequence of the changing norms, values and preferences of actors arising from greater interaction and processes of socialisation and learning that EU membership triggers. This logic of *appropriateness* is underpinned by a sociological institutionalist perspective, the nature of which will be affected by the influence of 'change agents' or 'norm entrepreneurs' (Ibid: 67), such as advocacy coalitions or epistemic communities, that mobilise in order to persuade and facilitate the redefinition of interests and identities by domestic policy makers. In addition 'cooperative informal institutions', or rather the norms, values and standard operating procedures of which they are constituted, will shape adaptation depending on whether they are compatible with those prevailing within the EU (Ibid: 68).

**Figure 1. Two Logics of Domestic Change** (Borzel and Risse 2003: 69)



Problematically for this model, a number of studies have begun to question the central assumption that misfit constitutes a necessary condition for change. Heritier and Knill (2001: 288) concluded for example that change may occur as a consequence of endogenous domestic policy dynamics regardless of the level of policy incongruence. Haverland (2000, 2003) similarly demonstrated that variations in domestic institutional opportunity structures shape the pace and quality of adaptation regardless of fit (2000: 85). More recently Thatcher (2004) has suggested that even where EU requirements are entirely congruent with domestic preferences, Europeanisation may facilitate pre-existing domestic strategies for reform through exploitation as a source of justification and legitimation for domestic change by supportive domestic interests. In this instance it is the perception or narrative of misfit that underpins change, not genuine incongruence *per se*. Similarly misfit cannot account for situations in which two different arrangements may be entirely compatible yet domestic adaptation may occur simply because one model is perceived to be preferable to the other. In such a scenario change derives not from incompatibility but simply because of the strategic advantages that may accrue from adaptation.

For the goodness of fit model to incorporate softer mechanisms of change, such as the open method of coordination and learning, it is necessary to broaden the definition of misfit. Hence Borzel (2005: 50) has more recently equated misfit with the way in which domestic policies, rules, procedures or collective understandings may be 'challenged' by the EU. In doing so however the analytical utility of misfit has been compromised as it has become largely analogous to the less meaningful notion of 'difference'. Jacquot and Woll (2003) argue that by concentrating on the institutional dynamics of change, the goodness of fit model underestimates the discretion and role of political actors in shaping and directing the process of adaptation. Although the model acknowledges that adaptational pressure can only produce domestic change if agents react to them (Risse *et al* 2001: 3), it cannot account for why agents would initiate domestic change in the absence of adaptational pressure. As a result of an intrinsic structural determinism the model fails to account for the way in which actors can choose and learn outside of institutional pressures.

Their critique highlights a fundamental flaw at the heart of the goodness of fit model: misfit and adaptational pressure are discursive constructions because what does and does not constitute them is highly subjective, and open to interpretation and contestation. Neither concept is fixed but instead relies on the competing perceptions and actions of domestic policy actors who may have a strategic interest in fostering the perception of misfit in order to justify change.

Finally there are also a number of problems related to the particular mediating factors or intervening variables outlined by the goodness of fit model which help to explain the nature of domestic change. The model not only fails to clarify the nature of the relationship between structure and agency, it offers no suggestion as to which of the two paths, and corresponding institutional toolboxes to which they relate, one should utilise when analysing a particular case study. Furthermore, they appear to conflate subject and process. For example although Risse *et al* (2001) identify differential empowerment and learning as separate mediating factors, Borzel and Risse (2003) by contrast appear to suggest that they are processes by which Europeanisation occurs. Finally and perhaps most problematically, the goodness of fit model is reliant on macro or structural features of the state as explanatory variables. Thus the dependent variable in this case – the nature and direction of domestic change – is explained by a single or related group of intervening variables which are entirely derivative and characteristic of the state. As a consequence it commits an explanatory tautology, suggesting that divergent patterns of Europeanisation are dependent on state form when the only variable studied is the state form (for a variation of this argument see Adshead 2002: 27-8). Consequently the model is dependent on idiosyncratic descriptions of country-specific institutions and agents which prevents meaningful comparative analysis of different case studies (Adshead 2003: 108).

**Europeanisation as 'Projection'**

The relevance of misfit is further complicated by the widening gulf between those who conceptualise Europeanisation as a unidirectional (Radaelli 2003) or 'top-down' (Risse *et al* 2001) model from the EU to the member states, and

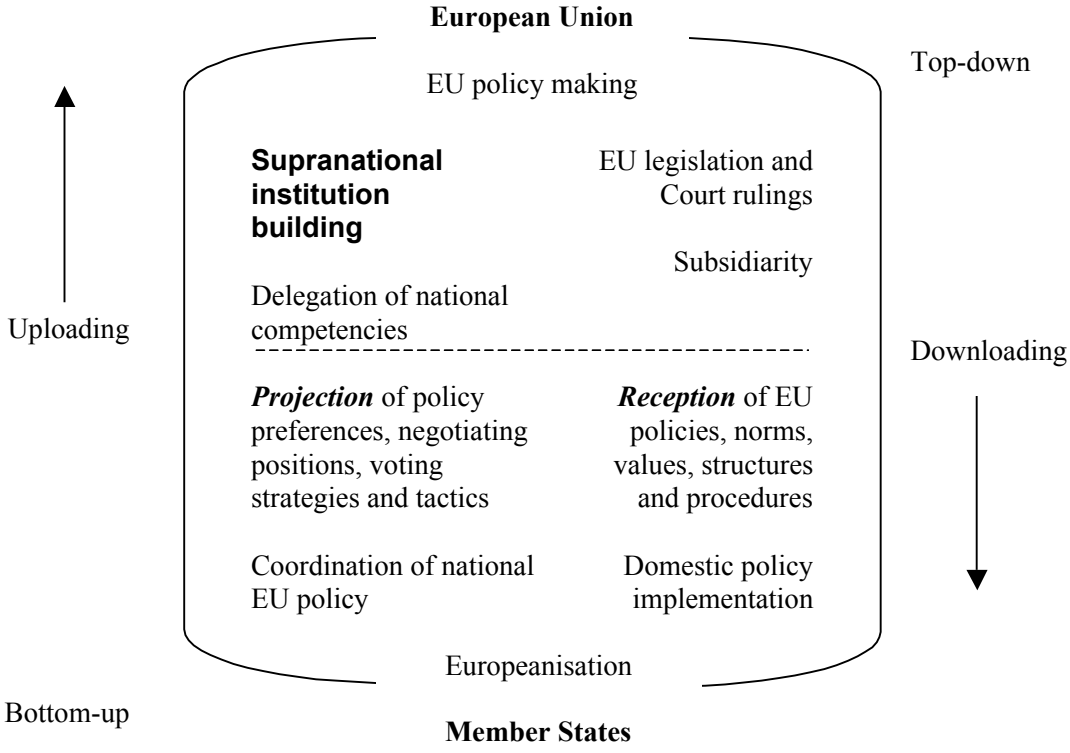
those who suggest that we also incorporate the 'return loop' or 'bottom up' dimension that operates from the member states to the EU (Borzel 2002; Bulmer and Burch 2000). Radaelli (2003: 34) for example argues that in order to differentiate between European integration and Europeanisation, it is necessary to distinguish analytically "between the process leading to the formation of a certain policy, and the reverberation of that policy in national arenas". Yet this top down perspective views the member state as the passive recipient of policies, structures, procedures and norms from a proactive EU to which they must adapt. Borzel instead asks us to consider the reciprocal nature of the relationship, conceptualising it as a two-level game at the national and supranational levels. Accordingly she conceptualises the vertical characteristics of this game as constituting 'ascending' (decision-making) and 'descending' (implementation) stages in the European policy process (Borzel 2002: 195). Traditional accounts of Europeanisation focus primarily on the latter stage of this iterative process, ignoring the extent to which national executives play a key role in both decision making and implementation of EU policy, and thus shape the way in which member states themselves must adapt to it. In this way, Europeanisation at the domestic level is accompanied by a parallel process of 'domestication' of EU institutions, rules and behavioural settings: these 'push' and 'pull' factors constitute an 'adaptational loop' (Wessels *et al* 2003: 7). Even the absence of domestic adaptation may not necessarily be taken as evidence that Europeanisation has not occurred, as member states may have successfully transferred their preferences to the EU level and thus shaped EU policy in order to suit them (Howell 2002). In positing a bi-directional or circular model of Europeanisation, Borzel helps us to differentiate between these two processes by distinguishing between 'uploading' and 'downloading': uploading simply refers to the process by which member states will attempt to transfer their domestic preferences into the EU policy-making arena in order reduce the adaptational cost of receiving and adjusting to final policy outcomes (downloading). Nevertheless, although this successfully clarifies the *conceptual* distinction between the two parallel and complementary processes and hence avoids the dangers of conceptual overstretch, there remains a lack of clarity regarding the *analytical* distinction between the two. In essence we are left with a level of analysis problem:

where does legitimate analysis of 'uploading' as Europeanisation end and 'uploading' as EU policy-making begin?

In order to overcome this we can utilise the simple but effective distinction that Bulmer and Burch (2000) draw between the two-stage response that Europeanisation triggers within member states: *reception* and *projection*. Reception refers to a process by which EU political and economic dynamics are incorporated or 'downloaded' into the organizational logic of national politics and policy-making, and therefore corresponds closely with the traditional goodness of fit model. Yet Bulmer and Burch (2000: 3) argue that Europeanisation also requires the "ability to participate in integration so as to best be able to 'project' a national government's concerns into the EU decision making process". Projection can therefore be understood as a process of domestic adjustment through which the successful 'uploading' of governmental preferences may be secured. The subject of adjustment in this case will relate to vertical (state-to-EU or 'bottom-up') and horizontal (inter- or intra-state) mechanisms of coordination, communication and networking that exist within and between national core executives for the purpose of enhancing a member state's strategic capacity to shape the EU policy process.

Figure 2 below clarifies the nature of the relationship between the two processes. In making this conceptual distinction, we are better placed to draw an analytical line between Europeanisation and European integration. Reception and projection constitute a legitimate focus of analysis for Europeanisation as they relate to processes of change at the domestic level instigated or necessitated by the demands of effective uploading/downloading for which EU membership serves as a necessary condition for change.

**Figure 2. Europeanisation as Reception and Projection** (Adapted from Borzel 2005)




Europeanisation as projection requires us to acknowledge that misfit and adaptational pressure cannot constitute a necessary condition for domestic adaptation. It is self-evident that the EU has no claims to competence in this area nor any ambition to have one – the member states are therefore under no obligation or pressure to adapt and no informal arena to facilitate comparison, best practice or learning between core executives (such as the open method of coordination) exists. Moreover in the case of reception, supranational institutions serve as the 'agents' of misfit – through Court infringement proceedings and Commission reports on the open method it is the EU itself that largely defines the extent of misfit at the domestic level. By contrast, for projection the absence of such instruments at a supranational level means that domestic policy makers are primarily responsible for perceiving and interpreting incongruence between domestic coordination arrangements and the EU policy process. Yet this leaves it open to far wider interpretation. We therefore cannot make a claim regarding the existence of misfit without making normative judgements as to what constitutes effective projection. To simply suggest that incongruence between the two generates

adaptational pressure is to assume that effective projection necessitates convergence. In other words, for a member state to engage in successful uploading it must be 'more like' the EU in its structural, procedural and normative make-up. Yet such a claim can only derive from empirical determination, not theoretical assertion. Different member states may have very different definitions of what constitutes effective projection depending on the nature of their policy aims and preferences. Consequently projection, in addition to misfit, is in part a discursive construction.

How then can we begin to explain domestic adaptation for the purposes of uploading national policy preferences? It is clear from our critique of the goodness of fit model that any analysis must, like later accounts of reception, embrace rather than ignore the complexity of outcomes. This involves transcending narrow conceptions of projection as the vertical or intergovernmental transmission of national preferences. Instead it must account for horizontal or transgovernmental processes of interaction through which national executives interpenetrate one another (Rosamond and Wincott 2006: 9). This leads us to reject Borzel's (2002) two-level game metaphor and instead draw inspiration from Radaelli's distinctive model of multiple vertical and horizontal mechanisms of domestic change (see Radaelli 2003). Figure 3 below outlines a model of Europeanisation containing four distinctive 'modes' through which domestic change within the core executive for the purposes of projection may occur. Each mode corresponds to a necessary condition and will give rise to divergent effects. Moreover, none of the four modes should be viewed as mutually exclusive – they may operate simultaneously and in complementary or opposing directions.

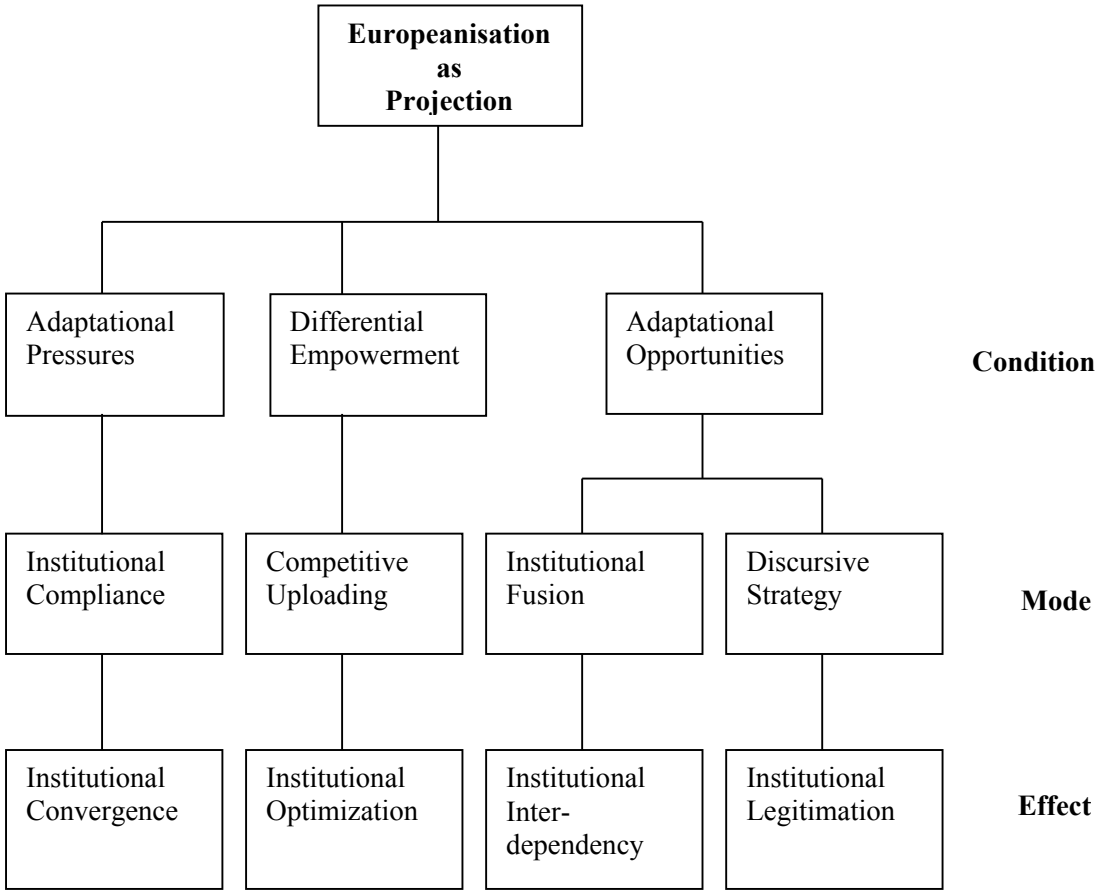
The first mode, *institutional compliance*, relates to a form of domestic change driven by direct adaptational pressures necessitated by specific EU obligations, and which therefore gives rise to institutional convergence between member states. This might include the administrative requirements outlined by the Copenhagen criteria for the Central and East European states. But it will also include examples of domestic adaptation within existing states, triggered by the extension of EU competence, that necessitates the

incorporation of new domestic policy makers into new Council and working group formations. Although sanctions for non-compliance may not exist, non-participation in the EU's formal decision making structures would be widely perceived as a rejection of the obligations of membership.

By contrast *competitive uploading* relies on pressures for change stemming not from compliance but from comparison. Domestic policy makers in this case desire to enhance the uploading of domestic policy preferences through more effective mechanisms of projection in order to reduce the future adaptational cost of downloading other member state policy preferences. This mode assumes that member states are effectively in competition to upload their preferences and will consequently compare their perceived performance against one another. The necessary condition here is best understood as the differential empowerment of national core executives by the EU which may occur at both the inter- and intra-state levels. At the inter-state level the demands of EU policy making will benefit or 'empower' some member states with effective mechanisms of projection over others, as reflected in their perceived success at uploading. Logically those perceived as less successful or 'disempowered' may choose to reform in order to improve their performance. In this way domestic change occurs through a form of transnational 'administrative transfer' as governments adapt their own arrangements so as to keep pace with developments in other member states to avoid relative disempowerment in the EU policy process. At the intra-state level differential empowerment will also occur between departments within the core executive as each have their own arrangements for projecting preferences into the national coordination process. Again competition and perceptions of differential empowerment between departments in their capacity to influence national EU policy may drive internal reform. In doing so member states/departments set in train a 'spillover' dynamic in which reform by one effectively forces others to follow suit so as not to risk being relatively disempowered. The effect of competitive uploading should be optimization rather than convergence, whereby each member state and/or department strives to optimize their capacity to project. Continued divergence can be expected for two reasons: first, the distinctive structural and cultural

characteristics of national core executives/departments will determine what is or is not the 'optimal' arrangement for projection; and second, perceptions of what is or is not 'optimal' will be conditioned by the nature of policy preferences and perceptions of what constitutes successful uploading.

**Figure 3. Europeanisation as Projection**




For the final two modes it is suggested that the desire of domestic policy makers to initiate change in an attempt to exploit the political or administrative opportunity structures afforded by EU membership serves as the necessary condition. The model therefore refers to adaptational opportunities rather than adaptational pressures or differential empowerment. *Institutional fusion* relates to processes of interaction, networking and socialisation between domestic policy makers and their counterparts in other member states and the EU institutions through which policy-making responsibilities are increasingly 'shared' and which may give rise to shifting policy preferences, values, norms and identities (see Rometsch and Wessels 1996). Interaction in this case may

be instigated by policy-makers in order to engage in external learning, to share ideas about best practice, or to facilitate the transfer or emulation of administrative arrangements. The outcome is a growing web of interconnections and networks between national policy-makers which underpins the increasing interdependency of national core executives. The mode can be distinguished from both the goodness of fit and competitive uploading because neither formal compliance nor perceptions of differential empowerment need serve as necessary conditions for change. On the contrary, through this mode national policy makers may share ideas and cooperate to find mutually beneficial forms of adaptation for the wider good of European integration. Here norms of trust, reciprocity and the desire to be a *communautaire* member state may underpin change rather than conditions of compliance or calculations of strategic advantage.

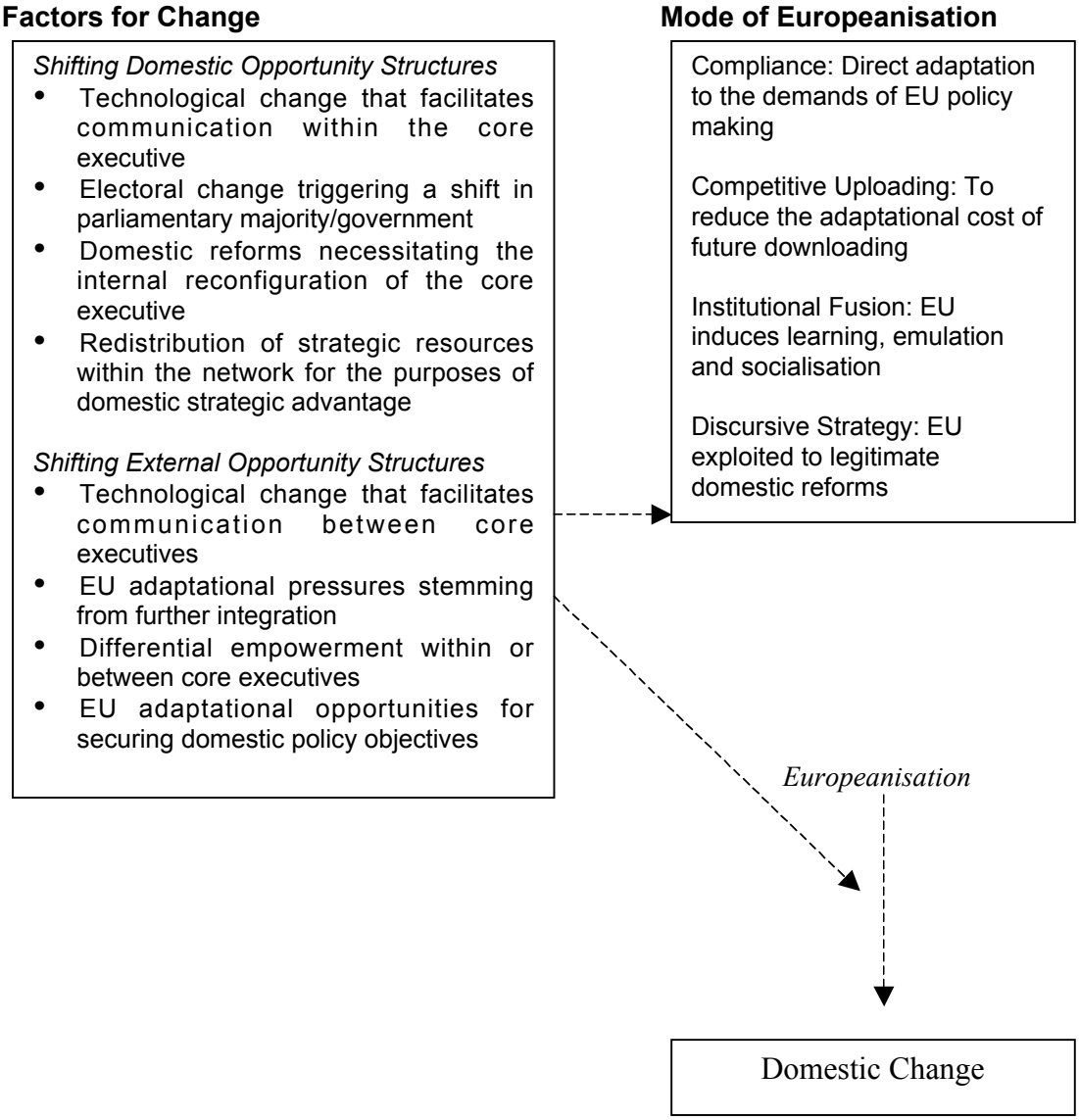
Finally, Europeanisation through *discursive strategy* refers to processes of domestic change that do not derive from the impact of European integration at all – rather, domestic actors may seek to exploit the perceived 'need for adaptation' (Kallestrup 2002). The EU is exploited as an instrument or source of legitimation in order to justify, frame, facilitate or constrain otherwise unrelated domestic reforms. For example change may be instigated in order to manipulate domestic political interests and to reconfigure power resources for strategic advantage (Jacquot and Woll 2003). Here the perceived demands of EU policy making may provide the perfect 'cover' so as to ensure the true motivation remains concealed. Alternatively ministers may exploit the EU as a location to display their statesmanlike qualities while officials may use the demands of membership to enhance their autonomy or press for greater resources at home. Although in this case Europeanisation may be an entirely artificial construct, EU membership still serves as a necessary condition for domestic change and should therefore be included.

**Defining the Independent Variables**

Having provided a firm conceptual basis for studying Europeanisation as projection, it is now necessary to set out in some detail a coherent analytical framework that can be used to elucidate and explain the nature of domestic

change, and its impact of domestic policy outcomes, within national core executives. Before doing so the paper seeks first to elaborate on the nature of the independent variables which may trigger or induce change at the domestic level. Figure 4 below outlines eight testable propositions which stem from either shifting domestic or external opportunity structures, any of which may conceivably explain domestic adaptation within the core executive. These factors are located alongside the four modes of Europeanisation through which the EU may (or may not) directly or indirectly contribute towards domestic change, as indicated by the arrows:

**Figure 4.**



Only where a causal factor can be shown empirically to relate to a specific mode of Europeanisation are we justified in attributing any causation to EU membership. Again it should be noted that the modes are not mutually exclusive – a single causal factor may relate to multiple modes. The relationship between shifting external opportunity structures and the modes of Europeanisation should be relatively clear from the previous section. In the case of technological change which facilitates communication and networking between core executives, causation could be attributed to EU membership where it can be demonstrated that the EU has been the instigator of change and/or if it triggers wider processes of institutional fusion – Commission proposals for a secure communication network between heads of government (known as 'PrimeNet') would be a good example. For shifting domestic opportunity structures the relationship would of course be more ambiguous, yet even here Europeanisation may exert an indirect effect. For example, technological change at the domestic level (such as the use of electronic communication) may be consciously exploited by domestic policy makers in order to enhance their capacity for coordination and projection according to the logic of competitive uploading. More significantly, a change of government and/or parliamentary majority (for an existing government) may lead to domestic change through all four modes of Europeanisation where the new government's policy preferences and strategic interests with respect to Europe diverge radically from its predecessor. Even domestic reform within the core executive (such as wider civil service reform, departmental reconfiguration, or constitutional change) may in turn necessitate further change aimed specifically at sustaining or enhancing a government's capacity to project which may have been unintentionally weakened as a result. Finally, as we suggested earlier, Europeanisation may also be exploited simply as a source of *ex ante* or *ex post* legitimation for internal reforms driven entirely by calculation of strategic advantage, such as intra-party political rivalry. As these propositions demonstrate, any attempt to explain domestic change within the core executive by drawing a simple demarcation between domestic and EU-level causal factors would be artificial and misleading – causation is recognised here as complex and inextricably entwined.

## A Framework for Analysis

Conventional attempts to formulate an analytical framework for Europeanisation borrow extensively from the historical institutionalist toolbox. In doing so however many accounts try to explain the divergent effects of EU membership in different member states on the basis of the macro-level structural characteristics of the state: primarily institutional and procedural arrangements, and organisational or administrative cultures. Subsequent attempts to develop analytical frameworks for a comparative study of Europeanisation – through a consideration of veto points or the impact on domestic opportunity structures – has gone some way to address this fundamental weakness with respect to policy change but there has been little or no attempt to do the same for institutional change. This paper seeks to address the imbalance by employing policy network analysis as an organising concept to facilitate objective comparative analysis of core executive change. The framework adds value to existing accounts of Europeanisation by providing a more comprehensive and detailed analysis of domestic adaptation and facilitates explanation of divergent national patterns of adaptation. By focusing on the changing nature of network – rather than institutional – characteristics the framework breaks the link between Europeanisation 'effect' and state form as 'causal' variable. It does so by extending the focus of institutional analysis from the conventional objects of Europeanisation – structures and procedures – towards a consideration of the relationships that connect them. By conceptualising these relationships as patterns of resource dependency and strategic networking, the framework is able to map the boundaries of the policy area more systematically, offers a more dynamic picture of institutional change, and provides potential explanatory variables for changes in policy outcomes (Gains 2004: 562). In this way the emphasis on networks and networking enables the framework to capture the relational – rather than simply structural or cultural – nature of adaptation within the core executive over time.

The distinctive network framework outlined in this study aims to develop and adapt the strategic-relational network framework put forward by Hay (1998) and Hay and Richards (2000). The framework does not offer a theory of

networks *per se*, but rather to apply a theory of collective strategic action to the social practice of networking. Networks are thus defined as:

> "*Modes of coordination of collective action characterised and constituted through the mutual recognition of common or complementary strategic agendas.* Networks, within such an account, are *strategic alliances forged around a common strategic agenda* (however contested, however dynamic) *of mutual advantage through collective action"* (Hay 1998: 38 [original italics]).

Networks are viewed here as highly flexible, volatile, adaptive, and strategically innovative; while networking is understood as intentional political action by individual or composite actors or players in the pursuit of strategic objectives (Hay and Richards 2000: 2). It locates network players, or rather the *strategic action* of networking in which they engage, within a broader *strategically-selective context* that favours certain strategies over others as a means to realise strategic intentions. Rather than viewing players as passive agents constrained by structures, the framework recognises that strategic action produces direct effects upon the structured context within which it takes place by facilitating strategic learning on the part of players and enhancing their awareness of the constraints and opportunities afforded by the wider context (Hay 1998: 43). Players will utilise this knowledge in an attempt to reshape and reconfigure the network within which they operate in order to realise their strategic interests and policy preferences.

Figure 5 below summarises the process of network development. Once a network is constituted through the recruitment of strategic players, it can be defined and mapped according to its vertical and horizontal characteristics. Utilised as dependent variables, these four characteristics provide an objective toolkit by which to systematically identify, measure and compare the nature of network adaptation over time (figure 6).

**Figure 5. A Model of Network Development**

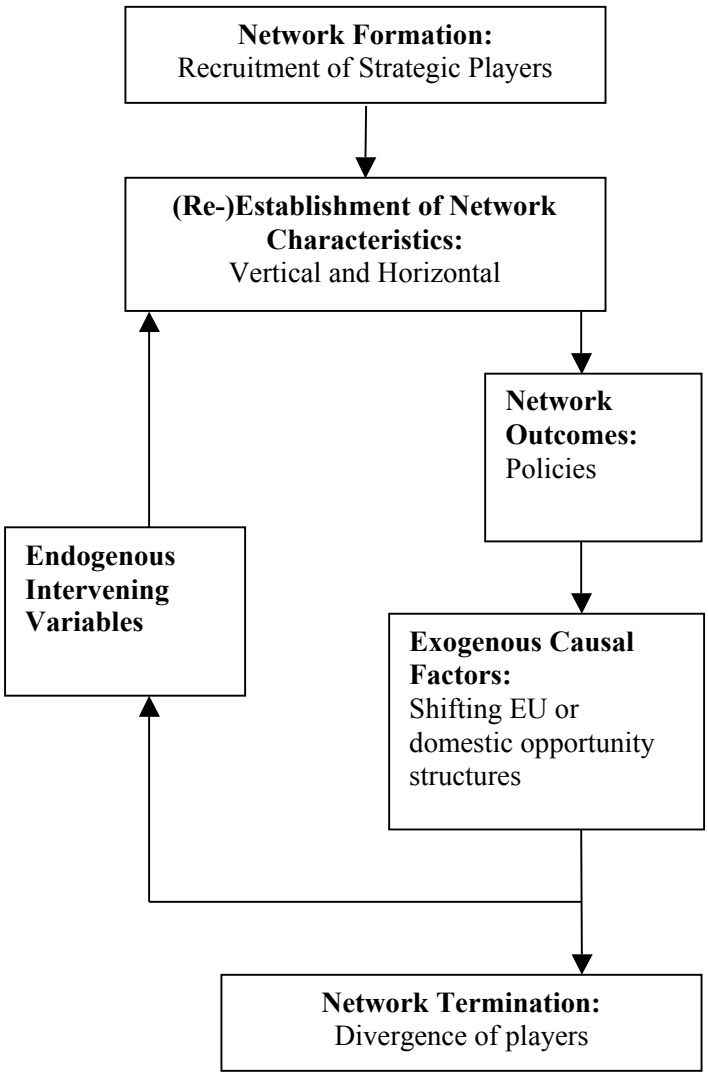


**Figure 6. Network Characteristics (Dependent Variables)**

**Vertical Characteristics**

*Roles* represent the formally defined function and location of key players within the network as set out in statute (Knoke 1990). We would expect to find that formal roles remain relatively stable and path dependent, evolving only incrementally and underpinning the continuity of policy. Six key roles may be distinguished in this respect: ensuring that policy remains coherent and consistent (coordination); effective third-party arbitration and mediation during disputes (brokerage); the development of longer-term objectives and direction (strategic); the management of interaction with external players (interface); and formal responsibility for policy to parliament (accountability).

*Resources* held by players shape the dynamic nature of relationships and internal hierarchies within the network. In doing so the concept recognises that the exchange of valuable strategic resources translates into structured patterns of power dependency (see Marsh and Rhodes 1992). Typically players are recruited into a network on the basis of the strategic resources that they can bring to the table. With respect to EU policy, we would expect to find that EU policy-making provides network players with a variety of different strategic resources (such as autonomy or sources of funding) that can be exploited within the domestic arena for strategic advantage. Attention to these resources, how they vary over time, and their manifestation through the day-to-day interaction of players therefore offers a far more dynamic picture of adaptation than formally defined roles.

**Horizontal Characteristics**

*Structures* refer to those features that configure the pattern of network behaviour, provide stable forums for decision making, coordination, and consultation; embed strategic interaction between players in regularised practices and procedures; and 'lock' players into ordered relationships of mutual interdependency. They will include formal and informal decision making forums at both ministerial and official-level. As key nodal points, with formal decision making powers located at the crossroads of information flows, structures bestow status and authority onto those players that are recruited to them.

*Networking* relates to the frequency and quality of strategic interaction between network players and the number, density and the intensity of connections between them. Strategic interaction will therefore refer to formal and informal forms of networking, established channels of communication and information distribution, as well as internal mechanisms and programmes designed to facilitate strategic learning (such as training and awareness raising). It is concerned with the nature of both internal and external networking: that is between policy makers within the same core executive, but also with those located within other policy making arenas – in the case of EU policy this would include Brussels-based national representatives, officials within the EU institutions, and counterparts in other member states.

Exogenous causal factors relate to changes in domestic or EU-level opportunity structures which provide domestic network players with new or altered opportunities or constraints for strategic action (see figure 7). As such they may trigger network adaptation in order to exploit or minimise the effect of these new opportunity structures, so as to maintain or enhance the

network's capacity to secure their collective strategic interests. Crucially, the nature of network adaptation, and thus future network outcomes, is conditioned by a number of key intervening variables. Alternatively network failure or project completion may result in network termination.

**Figure 7. Endogenous Intervening Variables**

*Informal veto points* refer to those players or structural positions at which network change can be effectively delayed, amended, or vetoed. The framework does not explicitly refer simply to veto points: the concept of a formal veto is inappropriate for analysis of decision-making within the core executive for the explicit or tacit agreement of every network player is not formally required for network change to be undertaken.

*Centralisation* within a network reflects the strategic balance of power between network players, shaping the extent of agreement necessary for adaptation to occur and determining which key players are responsible for network reconfiguration. Hence where power is distributed asymmetrically and responsibility for reform is centralised within a single network player, it may be possible to instigate adaptation with little explicit agreement. Conversely where power and responsibility is more evenly divided, a degree of consensus may be required. The level of centralisation will also condition the capacity of the centre to provide both political leadership and strategic direction for EU policy which rely on centrally located players with the resources and willingness to perform these defining roles.

*Institutionalisation* here relates to the extent to which decision making and coordination are characterised by a high degree of 'formalisation' (characterised by extensive committee structures, regular meetings, strong bureaucratic procedures, and clear policy guidelines) or 'informalisation' (in which ad hoc meetings or interpersonal correspondence predominate, procedures are weak, and formal guidelines non-existent). This variable will have critical implications for the effectiveness and efficiency with which decisions can be made, the precision and clarity of negotiating positions, and the fluidity and adaptability of the network to shifting EU-level opportunity structures.

Mechanisms of *financing* refer to the level of financial resources dedicated to EU-related activity within the core executive and the particular methods and formulae through which it is distributed between network players. This variable reflects the fact that the allocation of finance may be manipulated in the pursuit of strategic interests and therefore constitutes a powerful tool of coherence, provides a cyclical opportunity to set political and strategic priorities (Humphreys 1997: 23), conditions which activities and functions network players can engage in, and shapes their behaviour towards external players.

*Network closedness* relates to the degree to which players are effectively excluded from participating in the network through high barriers to entry or exit, and/or the blocking of new ideas, values, or policy preferences from outside (see Kickert *et al* 1997: 54-5). Closedness therefore conditions the adaptability of the network to changing external opportunity structures and its receptivity to sudden policy shifts. It also determines the level of player autonomy – the extent to which players are insulated from external pressures and are free to collectively pursue their strategic interests.

*Institutional memory* can be defined as the body of knowledge, from formal data and information through to informal skills and experiences, which is essential to the continued and effective achievement of strategic objectives. It includes all those mechanisms and procedures that exist for identifying, accumulating, and sustaining knowledge. Institutional memory therefore conditions the capacity of network players to engage in strategic learning – from the past, from each other, and from external players and events.

The systematic application of these variables to any case study of core executive change helps us to begin to explain distinctive patterns of adaptation and their implications for network outcomes. It is suggested here that these intervening variables are endogenous to all core executive networks. As such they enable us to move beyond traditional institutionalist accounts, which tend to focus on the macro structural features of the state in order to explain domestic change, by considering instead the way in which these static features are themselves reflected in the shifting characteristics of the 'EU' network within national core executives. In other words, they account for the distinctive features of the state without being dependent upon them to explain the timing and nature of domestic change. Consequently these variables provide an objective and rigorous framework through which to engage in a comparative analysis of core executive adaptation in different member states.

**Explaining Core Executive Adaptation in the UK**

The critique offered by this paper of existing accounts of domestic change suggests that historical institutionalism as an analytical framework for the study of Europeanisation as projection can only ever offer a partial picture of adaptation. In focusing on the stability of pre-existing administrative arrangements, traditional institutionalist accounts tend to stress the incremental and path dependent nature of adaptation. A number of studies which have explored the nature of adaptation within UK central government confirm this. Supporting Olsen's assertion that national administrative diversity co-exists with ever closer European integration (1995: 25), Bulmer and Burch (1998: 606) conclude that a pervasive Europeanisation of British central government has remained entirely consistent with the logic or developmental trajectory of the Whitehall machinery. They suggest this is because adaptation has been "less one of institutional constraints blocking adaptation to the EU but of small adjustments, designed to 'translate' EU needs into compatibility with the existing traditions of central government" (Bulmer and Burch 2005: 11). It is assumed that adaptation has been relatively successful because it has 'fitted' well with long-held traditions such as political neutrality, extensive

horizontal consultation, and the primacy of a departmental lead on substantive policy (Wallace 1996). Europeanisation in this sense can be seen to have reinforced rather than challenged many of the traditional features of the domestic machinery – a culture of reciprocity and trust, decision making at the lowest possible level, and the practice of sharing information (Ibid). While many of these conclusions are quite correct, it is argued here that the particular choice of analytical 'lens' that these studies utilise prevents them from resolving the central paradox of UK adaptation (Menon and Wright 1999): if misfit has been so low and adaptation to EU membership efficient and effective, why have successive UK governments been so comparatively poor at uploading? Moreover, is it possible to avoid simply attributing this paradox to the wider domestic party-political context by understanding how this context is itself reflected in the structure of the network that is designed to project EU policy?

The strategic-relational framework outlined in this paper has the advantage of being able to capture the fluid and flexible nature of adaptation by focusing on the system of complex and evolving relationships within. It would suggest that the characteristically path dependent nature of adaptation in the UK simply reflects the relative stability of prevailing roles and structures since accession which have constricted the availability of alternative evolutionary trajectories. Hence existing studies emphasise the pivotal role played by the Cabinet Office since accession in facilitating the coordination of national EU policy, as underpinned by the gradual institutionalisation of the weekly Friday meeting between the head of the European Secretariat and the UK Permanent Representative (Bulmer and Burch 1998). They also highlight the remarkable durability of the traditional three-tier committee structure for coordinating EU policy (cabinet sub-committee and two standing official committees), explaining these features as a reflection of the contested nature of integration within the UK polity. Yet this institutional focus downplays the extent and variability of network adjustment necessitated by EU membership. The paper suggests instead that EU membership has in fact unleashed, triggered or contributed towards a transformation of the way policy is formulated within the core executive. Far from being uniform and unidirectional, a focus on network

adaptation would reveal a process that has often been intermittent and uneven, characterised by periods of indifference, unwillingness or an inability to adjust to integration, punctuated by periods of rapid change in response to the increasing pressures, opportunities and differential empowerment of supranational policy making.

By way of illustrating the added value of the network framework, consider the impact of European integration on two network characteristics: networking and resources. With respect to the first, the framework would reveal the transformation of the UK core executive over the past twenty-five years as EU membership has both necessitated and encouraged the fusion of policy makers from different member states. Here we can differentiate between the adaptational pressure of formal participation in vertical decision making structures (the European Council, COREPER, and working groups) as obligated by membership and which has changed little since accession; and the informal, horizontal day-to-day contacts that exist between opposite numbers which has grown rapidly since the revival of the integration process in the mid-1980s. This expansion of direct strategic networking is further reflected in the fact that departmental officials make greater use of UK attaches in overseas embassies to shape negotiating strategies and for projecting departmental preferences than any other member state. As such attaches are no longer the passive recipients of departmental instructions but strategic players with valuable resources that increasingly shape the nature of projection strategies.

The profound shift represents a clear example of Europeanisation through both competitive uploading and institutional fusion. On the one hand, as the centre of gravity of EU bargaining has shifted away from Brussels and towards member state capitals as a consequence of the increasing importance of informal pre-Council discussions (see Tallberg 2007), so UK policy makers have responded by engaging more proactively in strategic networking at an earlier stage in the policy process, and by delegating greater responsibility and autonomy for tactical decisions to attaches across Europe, so as to sustain their capacity to influence the EU agenda. On the other, this

has in turn opened up new channels of institutional learning and administrative transfer as intelligence can and is being used by departments not only to reconfigure negotiating positions, but also as a source of new ideas and best practice about how to structure departments internally. The additional interaction and fusion of national administrations that this promotes contributes further towards the interdependency of national core executives across the EU.

Yet the pattern of strategic networking across different departments remains highly differential, and one that longevity of participation in EU policy making cannot plausibly account for. The positive record of some departments owes less to direct adaptational pressure derived from years of participation in the formal EU decision making arena, and more to the effect of intra-state differential empowerment and the nature of adaptational opportunities that strategic networking affords. Hence those departments that traditionally lack influence within the Whitehall hierarchy (such as those responsible for agriculture, environment, trade and industry) sought to enhance their power and autonomy within Whitehall by strengthening their capacity for projection in Brussels so as to exploit the sources of funding, policy ideas and expertise, and legitimacy that derives from being an active player in Europe. By contrast, historically powerful departments (such as the Treasury and Home Office) have been slower to engage counterparts because they perceive Europe to be a threat to domestic policy making autonomy and a rival source of expertise and authority.

With respect to resources, EU membership has profoundly reshaped patterns of power dependency within national core executives. Since the establishment of the European Council in 1975, direct adaptational pressure from Brussels has strengthened the influence of No.10 and the Cabinet Office by providing valuable strategic resources. These include access to and the ability to lead summit discussions; the authority to launch policy initiatives; the autonomy to negotiate at a supranational level; the ability to network with, learn from, and construct strategic alliances with other heads of government and their offices;

and the legitimacy to intervene in all aspects of domestic policy with an EU dimension.

Since then, the demands of competitive uploading have exerted further pressure for enhancing the power of the centre, driven by the real or potential risk of the relative disempowerment of those core executives that are ineffective at projecting policy preferences through prime ministerial articulation. In particular, by placing a greater premium on effective coordination so as to anticipate issue linkages and to synchronise negotiating tactics which only players located at the centre can realistically provide, the extension of qualified majority voting since the Single European Act has generated powerful pressures for centralisation. More recently, successive enlargements and the absence of effective decision-making reform in the Council mean that issues are increasingly debated in informal pre-Council discussions between heads of government/state (Tallberg 2007). This imposes a greater burden on the Cabinet Office European Secretariat which plays a critical role in supporting the Prime Minister in pre-Council negotiations. The spillover effect of these transnational dynamics ensures that once a critical mass of governments respond by centralising power, so other member states are effectively forced to emulate them.

The other side of the coin is that structural change in the form of the usurpation of the General Affairs Council by the European Council, the emergence of powerful sectoral councils, and the growing importance of informal pre-Council discussions serve as a source of waning influence for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). The increasingly fragmented and highly technical nature of EU policy has also challenged the traditional geographical-based internal structure of the department, forcing it to centralise and rationalise its European business. In addition, institutional fusion stemming from the growth of departmental strategic networking has also had the perverse effect of undermining the dependency of policy leads on FCO desk officers in London as gatekeepers to Brussels (who traditionally send instructions to attaches via the telegram system) and as a source of EU expertise (which is increasingly ‘mainstreamed’ across government). By

contrast the resource base of the UK permanent representation has expanded rapidly since 1973, not only to reflect the shift in government policy and to keep pace with the extension of EU competence, but also in response to the demands of competitive uploading so as to maintain its capacity to network with an enlarging union of member states. Not only this, the increasingly technical nature of EU dossiers, coupled with greater demands for flexibility during negotiations, has encouraged policy leads to delegate tactical decision making and grant further negotiating autonomy to Brussels-based attaches.

**Conclusion**

This brief overview of two dimensions of network adaptation is not intended to provide a detailed application of the network framework, but rather to offer a glimpse as to the potential value that it can add to existing accounts of core executive change. Furthermore, by dismissing misfit and conceptualising the way in which Europeanisation may induce change through different modes, we begin to form a clearer picture of how EU membership can exert largely hidden, but pervasive and potentially transformative, pressures for change upon national core executives. What it reveals are two countervailing pressures for change: those driving greater centralisation around No.10 and the Cabinet Office (centripetal); and those contributing to greater delegation and autonomy for departments (centrifugal). Understanding how governments respond to these contradictory pressures, and thus account for the nature of network outcomes, requires us to analyse how network adaptation is conditioned and mediated by key intervening variables. By way of pre-empting research in this field, the paper utilises the six variables suggested here in order to pose a series of questions to guide future analysis.

- How do informal veto points within the UK core executive hinder necessary adaptation and/or effective projection?
- In what way does the centralisation of coordination and strategic direction within the UK network facilitate effective uploading?
- To what extent has routine coordination and tactical decision making through formal standing committees become ill-suited to the nature of the EU policy process?

- How does the distribution and allocation of central funds for EU-related activity affect the nature of policy outcomes?

- To what extent does network closedness help to separate or dislocate administrative adaptation within Whitehall from the highly politicised and frequently contested European debate within Westminster?

- How effective is the UK network as accumulating and mainstreaming EU expertise and knowledge?

Utilised as a heuristic device in this way, the framework presented in this paper should contribute greatly to explaining the inconsistent and irregular pattern of uploading that has characterised successive UK governments.

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