

Brexit - the Change Programme

Setting aside the political mantra and people's views about the rights and wrongs of quitting the EU, I have always been struck by the extremity of the challenge from a programme manager's point of view. Maybe I am overly pessimistic, or maybe I'm not. From my experiences managing Government change programmes, Brexit has always struck me as impossibly complex, unaffordable and likely to take longer than my remaining lifespan.



I've meant to write about this since the second referendum in 2016. (Oh yes, I voted in the first one in 1975 as well.) The learning material for a programme management case study is extraordinary - clarity of vision, unambiguous sponsorship, managing stakeholders, resistance to change, coherence of blueprints, understanding of dependencies, strength of business case, planning, resource and time estimates, resourcing, procurement, change management, contract management etc. Maybe sometime when I have a few days to spare I will write that commentary - but not now.

I was struck, however, that one of my themes was also picked up on the Peston programme (ITV, 23rd January 2019, series 5 episode 3). In a brief informational slot by Anushka Asthana (at 20:30 if you want to find it on ITVplayer), we saw how the planned Brexit transitional period of 21 months sizes up against a number of other lesser Government Change Programmes, ranging from Digital Tax, Customs Declarations and Digital Borders, all at around 5 years, to Universal Credit and Auto Enrolment, both over 10 years.



You can see the original Institute For Government chart here:

https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/MAJ02%20-%20Brexit%20implementation%20period%20-%20v1_0.png

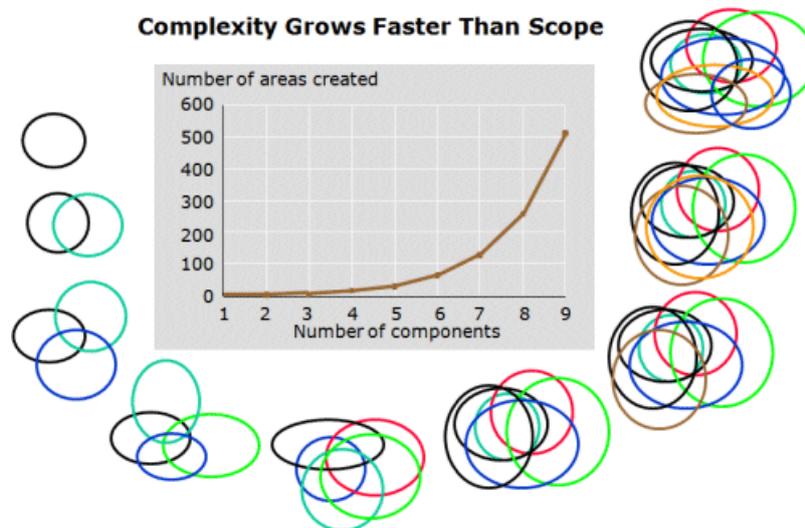
The source for the data was the Institute For Government's Whitehall Monitor 2019, which proved to be a fascinating source of information about programme performance. Over 300 Brexit workstreams are ranked by Government department, with the highest impact being felt by BEIS, DEFRA and DHSC. See

<https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/MAJ01%20-%20Brexit%20workstreams%20NAO%20-%20v1.png>

In another telling chart, we see that trust in politicians has lingered around 19% whereas trust in civil servants has grown steadily to 62%, see

<https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/PER04%20-%20Trust%20in%20professions%20-%20v2.png>

Some of you may previously have seen my theory that complexity grows exponentially at the rate of $2^n - 1$ where n is the number of interrelated things you are dealing with. So, if we apply that to the hundreds of change programmes, thousands of participants and millions of stakeholders - we get a complexity pretty close to infinity. This is why I don't expect to live long enough to see the completion of the Brexit change portfolio.



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