

'No room for gifted amateurs': Why effective future policy-making needs integrated learning and cross-agency expertise.

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No longer should we take people with no experience of an area or job and throw them in at the deep end because they have a gap in their experience. Gone are the days of the gifted amateur. Today's world is too complex and demands are too high.

The Honourable Matt Hancock MP, Minister for the Cabinet Office, United Kingdom.¹

My sense is that the future of work is to be organised more around teams, where authority does not so much come from supervisory authority but more from being a team whose members and leaders have different skills.

John Lloyd, Australian Public Service Commissioner.²

Abstract

We live in an increasingly specialised and information rich world, so it is unreasonable to expect any individual public servant to possess all the expertise required to work across all aspects of complex policy issues. Yet government departments are still largely organised along narrow functional and hierarchical lines. To address this conundrum, the Australian Public Service must organise itself as an adaptable learning organisation flexible enough to reconfigure to meet changing circumstances, with less reliance on hierarchy. Interagency task forces must become the norm when developing policy initiatives. Perhaps most challenging, greater cognitive diversity requires the abandonment of the generalist model of recruitment and advancement. Future public sector leaders need both broad environmental knowledge and deep subject matter expertise, but the possession of professional qualifications relevant to their employment will be essential.

Complexity and Digital Age policy: What has changed?

If government in the digitally enabled Information Age is to be effective, let alone efficient, then public sector employees need to adopt an entirely new approach to policy coordination. This category includes civilian, police and military personnel. Governments everywhere are grappling with the major cultural adjustments required to make this objective a reality. The Australian Public Service has always stood comparison with international counterparts in

Disclaimer: The views expressed are the author's and do not represent any official position. The Commonwealth of Australia is not liable for any statement made in this paper.

¹ The Right Hon. Matt Hancock, *Speech at the Launch of the Civil Service Workforce Plan 2016-2020*, UK Cabinet Office, 12 July 2016. <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/workforce-future-plan-matt-hancock-speech> accessed 26 April 2017.

² Verona Burgess, 'No more hiding in the hierarchy: APS commissioner on the limits of layers', *The Mandarin*, 17 January 2017, <https://www.themandarin.com.au/87570-no-more-hiding-in-the-hierarchy-aps-commissioner-on-the-limits-of-layers/> accessed 17 January 2017.

government effectiveness.³ This standing cannot be taken for granted as new technology, changing demography and evolving expectations of the public sector impact on the way that government agencies organise themselves. Those countries that take advantage of the benefits of an adaptive, integrated public sector workforce will be better able to handle the shock of the new than those that do not.

Government departments and agencies are more connected in making and implementing policy than they have ever been. It is commonplace for one agency to have the recognised policy lead while dozens of other organisations are involved in program delivery, or share specific policy responsibilities. Public/private sector partnerships are increasingly the norm. Accordingly, no single individual, or organisation, can possibly possess all the knowledge required to provide the Executive Government with fully integrated and thoroughly considered policy advice. Good policy is developed by teams of experts who have considered all the angles. As the former Head of Australia's Public Service, Professor Peter Shergold wrote, reflecting on the policy shortfalls of the Australian Home Insulation Program and the National Broadband Network:

Mistakes can be costly, and not just because taxpayers' funds may be wasted, misapplied or used profligately. Poor administration can, on occasion, deprive citizens wrongly of their liberties, constrain the application of their rights, fail to inform them of their responsibilities or even, tragically, cost them their lives. Public servants need to answer for their actions.⁴

We are witnessing the beginnings of a shift from a traditional centralised, rules-based public service culture to a more normative, principles and behaviours-oriented culture. Initially, this will be more of a change of emphasis, but generational change will cause the culture to evolve faster than institutions are likely to. This way of doing things will free up ministerial executive offices and departmental senior executive teams to make strategic determinations rather than remaining bogged down in minutia. Not surprisingly, this poses a threat to those who perceive power to be a function of seniority rather than a resource shared by those who possess the requisite expertise and positional responsibility. It is, however, a better way of utilising the professional resource that is the Australian Public Service (APS).

At the same time the centralized approach to managing interdepartmental liaison and coordination by committee provides something of a comfort zone. It means that it is difficult to ascribe accountability for policy to any particular area or person. This comfort zone may have worked once, but as Shergold shows poor policy can have disastrous results. Working through traditional committee processes does not reflect the actual pace of information exchange, nor the requirement for instant and persistent coordination. Again, a professional model for the APS will ensure that it is more responsive and that the Service's human capital is fully realised.

³ *World Bank Governance Effectiveness* (2016 figures place Australia in the 92nd percentile)
<http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/index.aspx#reports>

⁴ Peter Shergold, *Learning from Failure: Why large government policy initiatives have gone so badly wrong in the past and how the chances of success in the future can be improved*, Commonwealth of Australia, 2015, 3.

The good news is that recent years have seen substantial progress in achieving a more whole-of-government approach to policy development. Australian government departments and agencies are more willing to accept common principles that define their relationships.⁵

Consultation between policy areas is substantially better than it was a decade ago. Improved coordination measures, such as interagency task forces, embedded liaison personnel, multiagency education and training and joint exercises are leading to a system of government that is more 'joined-up' than ever before. But as one departmental secretary recently observed: '*whole-of-government* merely means that we are all in the room together, *integrated* suggests that we are working together'. The next step in the professional development of the Australian public service is to start breaking down the stove-pipes that define the legacy public sector workplace and maximise our access to the human capital of the emerging workforce.

Form must follow function in the Information Age workforce

Perhaps the single characteristic that distinguishes the Information Age, digitally enabled, workforce from our Industrial Age forebears is that we now simultaneously enjoy dramatically enhanced access to information and experience chronic data overload. The work of government, always complicated, is becoming more complex at an exponential rate – driven by the seemingly unlimited supply of information at our disposal. Our structures and systems are struggling to adapt. The traditional portfolio approach to government administration is founded on the expectation that policy formulation can be assigned to specific departments and agencies. Yet policy issues in a globalised world are increasingly characterised by interdependencies.

Discrete portfolios will still continue to be relevant in the simpler aspects of service delivery provision by government. But policy-making and coordinated government operations require different approaches to those that have sufficed in the past.

Where once the model of 'generalist' recruitment dominated, there has been a shift to require more highly educated and experienced experts. The debate about 'hedgehogs' and 'foxes' is an old one – dating back to the Greek poet Archilochus – but it is not an either/or proposition.⁶ The public service can be characterised as being divided between the hedgehogs who have prospered through operating the system and the foxes who challenge the very presumptions that the system is founded upon. More progressive workforce planning accepts that innovation is unlikely in a traditional human resources framework. The UK Civil Service

⁵ See for example: *Australian Government Guiding Principles for Civil-Military-Police Interaction in International Disaster and Conflict Management*, Australian Civil-Military Centre, 2015, https://www.academia.edu/26795957/Australian_Government_Guiding_Principles_for_Civil-Military-Police_Interaction_in_International_Disaster_and_Conflict_Management, accessed 17 January 2018.

⁶ Isaiah Berlin, *The Hedgehog and the Fox: An Essay on Tolstoy's View of History*, (1953) 1986, Simon & Schuster, with an introduction by Michael Walzer.; Philip Tetlock, *Why Foxes Are Better Forecasters Than Hedgehogs*, The Long Now Foundation, lecture 26 Jan 2007, <http://longnow.org/seminars/02007/jan/26/why-foxes-are-better-forecasters-than-hedgehogs/> accessed 25 January 2018.

Workforce plan, for example, suggests that it is undesirable for public servants to spend their entire career within the bureaucracy, much less within a single department.⁷

To be effective members of interagency teams policy-makers need deep subject matter knowledge in the tasks they are responsible for. They must also have a broad professional understanding of the capabilities that their colleagues bring to common tasks. Perhaps most importantly, they need the ability to work effectively in teams assembled at short notice to undertake specific policy projects. Two out of three proficiencies will not suffice. To respond to the greater demands of a more complex era we must shift our notion of eligibility for a public service career from a generalist to a professional model.

In his darkly humorous and informative work *No Minister*, former senior public servant and Ministerial Chief-of-Staff Allan Behm wrote that: 'If a professional is one who provides a bespoke solution to a singular problem, then the public service is most definitely a profession'.⁸ At the same time Behm argued that the public service is experiencing a crisis of confidence and that few public servants even saw themselves as members of a profession. To borrow the rather sharp observation of the Honourable Matt Hancock MP, Minister for the Cabinet Office in his speech releasing the UK Civil Service Workforce Plan we need a professional Service, not a gaggle of 'gifted amateurs'. This paper demonstrates why a public service founded on requiring more relevant qualifications and relevant demonstrated proficiencies is necessary to risk manage future shocks. A modern public service should not be an exclusive guild as some traditional professions have fashioned themselves. It should have all the characteristics of a true profession, what Samuel Huntington defined as the possession of a specific body of expertise, the exercise of responsibility and a corporate identity.⁹

Without this corporate identity the APS will continue to struggle to provide the level of advice that Executive Government requires to deliver strong and workable policies. In part, he ascribed this to the media targeting the public service. He also blamed the negative comments of many politicians and 'the fact that the public service is the whipping boy of choice for governments'. He concluded that 'it is little wonder that the public service is insecure, defensive, apologetic and, very often, cowed'. Perhaps most sadly, he argued that:

The problem is more likely to result from the deadening effect of hierarchy and the absence of psychic rewards that good mentoring and professional direction create. As my good friend and former departmental secretary Paul Barratt once observed . . . 'What institution, year on year, can recruit the very best graduates from Australia's universities and, within a decade, render them totally unemployable?'

⁷ UK Civil Service, *Civil Service Workforce Plan 2016-2020*, Cabinet Office UK, 2016, 2, 8-9.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/536961/civil_service_workforce_strategy_final.pdf accessed 2 March 2017.

⁸ Allan Behm, *No Minister: So you want to be a Chief of Staff?* Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 2015 (e-book) Chapter 8.

⁹ S. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations*. New York, 1981, Belknap Press, 8-10.

Professions are characterised by being self-regulating; by establishing and enforcing standards of behaviour; performance and ethics and by exercising control over the workplace application of an identifiable body of knowledge. The old public sector workforce was certainly bound together by the APS code of conduct and relevant legislation, but in all other regards departments and agencies tended to operate as independent city-states. People joined a department, not a service and movement across agencies, much less to the private or not-for-profit sectors was seen as a distraction to a career. In fact career(ist)s generally benefited from being seen as effective advocates for single-service priorities rather than national objectives. By contrast, the October 2009 discussion paper of the *Advisory Group on Reform of Australian Government Administration* identified the attributes of a professional public service as being:

- **mobility**—ensuring that people can readily move into and across the APS to help build a richer base of skills, ideas and experiences at all levels, as well as enabling resources to be easily redeployed to high priority areas
- **continuous improvement**—striving for continuous improvement in all areas of public administration, including business systems, agency management and culture
- **one-APS culture**—fostering a better environment for cross-organisational collaboration, including between regulatory, service delivery and policy development agencies.¹⁰

This objective is never going to be achieved in a siloed, Industrial Age workforce. It requires personnel who understand how to operate within a national public sector profession.

Competing demands for Public Service Capability

The *Advisory Group on Reform of Australian Government Administration* suggested that ‘there is a concern that the policy capability of the APS requires strengthening, especially in terms of its ability to provide innovative and creative advice at a strategic level’.¹¹ It suggested that there was a dichotomy between the work of routine service delivery by government, such as the provision of welfare payments, school curriculums and court systems and the need to provide long-term and critical strategic policy advice. That work requires strong institutions, clear and transparent processes and clear lines of accountability.

The work of making and implementing high-level strategic policy is very different from service delivery to citizens, institutional human resource management or facilities management. These functions are essential to government, but are essentially transactional functions. Policy, particularly strategic policy, cannot be constrained by arbitrary departmental boundaries. It requires collaboration, greater acceptance and tolerance of risk, longer-term focus and a highly skilled and experienced workforce.¹²

¹⁰ Advisory Group on Reform of Australian Government Administration, *Reform of Australian Government Administration: Building the world’s best public service*, Commonwealth of Australia, October 2009, (the Moran Review) 36, <http://www.markdiamond.com.au/download/reform-of-australian-government-administration.pdf> accessed 19 January 2018.

¹¹ *Reform of Australian Government Administration*: vi.

¹² *Reform of Australian Government Administration*, 23-4.

Making coherent policy that is integrated with all aspects of the national project is hard. It is becoming harder as the pace of technological and economic change continues to accelerate exponentially, without adequate institutional and behavioural adjustments. To take advantage of the opportunities that digitisation presents, change agents must implement structural and behavioural adjustments to the APS. The APS needs to move from being an Industrial Age transaction-driven organisation to one that is increasingly responsible for coordinating and implementing Information Age policies, public programs and strategies incorporating civil society and private sector actors.

In his incisive report *Learning from Failure*, Peter Shergold, reflecting on a career that culminated as Australia's senior public servant, observed that

The APS . . . is a brilliant creation, delivering a huge number of transactions every day in an efficient and ethical manner. Yet it remains shaped by its origins as an Industrial scale, command-and-control organisation. A century ago it mostly delivered letters: today, mostly welfare payments. Officialdom still weighs heavily on it. Bureaucratic processes, just as much as drawn-out political negotiation, can slow the way in which things are done. Innovation can be stymied.¹³

The *Advisory Group on Reform of Australian Government Administration* emphasised two criteria that were required if government was going to adapt to the complex demands of a Digital Age environment:

policy integration – connected and integrated policy processes that can draw together all relevant areas of government, particularly service delivery agencies.

human capital – highly capable, skilled and professional policy officers, with the right balance of specialists and generalists, who can exercise sound judgement in the face of ambiguity and uncertainty.¹⁴

Effective cultural change still requires that we continually reassess what human resources we can afford and the manner in which we can best employ them.

The changing face of the Public Service's Human Capital

The APS reflects the society from which it is drawn. From Federation to well after the Second World War, it was rare to find university-trained professionals within its ranks. Unlike the UK Civil Service, which traditionally had drawn on the universities for talent, Australia did not possess a large pool of university graduates. Initially, Australian universities mainly focused on providing graduates for the traditional professions and did not emphasise a broad, liberal

¹³ Shergold, *Learning from Failure*, 2.

¹⁴ Moran et al, *Reform of Australian Government Administration*, 20. Unfortunately, the Advisory Group's proposals for public sector reform and professionalisation had their funding withdrawn in the transition from the first Rudd Government to the Gillard administration. As is too often the case in public life, a great deal of very good policy analysis and advice quietly came to nothing. Dr Nicholas Horne, 'Australian Public Service reform', Commonwealth Parliamentary Library, 12 October 2010, https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/BriefingBook43p/apsreform

education. Admittance to the early public service was by highly competitive examination. The state and Federal public services tended to attract the bright and upwardly mobile, whose families could not afford a university education. It was a time when without additional means or scholarships, the great majority of children left school at 14. As an austere model founded on hierarchy and gradual merit-based promotion it worked quite well, particularly as many public servants supplemented their early education with university night classes and other vocational qualifications. Like other career models of the time, it was founded on the reality of a long practical apprenticeship. Its strengths was the considerable subject matter expertise that public servants acquired over time, through conditions of relative (if grinding) career stability.

It was not a model that encouraged innovation as the Coombs Royal Commission on Australian Government Administration found in its 1976 report. From the 1960s the APS shifted to a generalist model of recruitment. By this time the recruitment culture had changed as the much-expanded university system was graduating large numbers of graduates – many with non-professional generalist science, commerce and arts degrees. The APS sopped them up as it had never before had access to such a large cadre of educated staff. Over the next 40 years, considered a golden age by many long-term public servants, staff rotated through jobs, generally within the same department at an ever more rapid rate.

Career progression was aided by broad, but shallow managerial experience and fewer public servants could truly assert any deep subject-matter knowledge on matters for which they had policy responsibility. There are still strong elements of this generalist cohort throughout the public service. While they may not meet Huntington's definition of a professional service, this group are entirely capable of managing the service delivery and transactional elements of public sector business. They are poorly suited to the business of complex policy development. In today's APS the negative impact of this lack of expertise is exacerbated by rapid staff churn and loss of institutional memory. As Verona Burgess recently recorded:

The median length of service of 'ongoing' APS staff is now 10 years. Of 137,848 'ongoing' staff, 47% have served for fewer than 10 years.¹⁵

The balance of professional expertise within the public service is changing again. In policy areas it is notable how much better qualified junior and mid-level graduates are than their seniors. Postgraduate qualifications have replaced undergraduate degrees as the base standard. In 2018 the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) had the highest percentage of postgraduate qualified entrants at 42 per cent. It would be unusual for any of the other successful new-starters for this notoriously rigorous Department not to have a good honours degree as a minimum qualification. What is interesting is that DFAT is no longer unusual, 40 per cent of Department of Industry and Science and 35 per cent of Defence Department entrants had postgraduate qualifications. Across the public service 26 percent of

¹⁵ Verona Burgess, 'APS leadership churn is looking like carelessness', *The Mandarin*, 23 August 2017, <https://www.themandarin.com.au/82728-verona-burgess-aps-leadership-churn-looks-like-carelessness/> accessed 25 January 2017.

new starters had two or more degrees.¹⁶ The number of entrants with honours degrees and in which disciplines is not known.

Many graduate-entry recruits have undertaken research within the fields they wish to enter and many have prior work experience in the private or non-government sectors, often overseas. In many policy areas, graduates who have arrived straight from university without industry or operational experience are considered non-competitive with their more experienced peers. Washington and other modern public services reflect this trend as legal professionals and postgraduates with degrees relevant to the more complex work of government are attracted to public service work as an employer of choice.

Competition for the more professionally attractive policy positions within government means that it is a buyer's market for selection panels. At the same time many public service leaders are concerned that the best potential Gen Y and Millennial public servants will not settle down to a career in agencies that equate seniority to hierarchical span of control, rather than ability to innovate conceptual and exert influence across boundaries. Having experienced a period of growth in the first decade of the century recent recruitment freezes and the stalling of enterprise-level salary negotiations combined to make the public service marginally less attractive than it was a decade ago. It is one thing to attract the very best, it is quite another to retain them, engage their interest and give them the experiences that will ensure that they remain innovators and not join the Borg collective.¹⁷

In truth we need staff who are both generalists, but who also possess deep and relevant professional expertise in some aspect of their work. The imperative to be able to work in horizontally constructed teams comprised of experts from outside traditional directorate, branch and divisional structure mean that these teams-of-teams need to start their work with a degree of credibility founded on the fact that most if not all of the necessary skill sets and expertise can be assembled to mount a policy task. The United Kingdom's *Civil Service Workforce Plan 2016-2020* provides some indication of the adjustments that we need to make to our sense of what a public servant is. It is worth citing this in full:

To ensure that our people have the right skills to deliver our national priorities we need to create more opportunities for movement. This will allow civil servants to gain a more diverse and broad range of experiences from working across a number of different departments, agencies and in the wider public and private sector. It will also ensure we are able to respond to emerging priorities and can swiftly move people into, and across, the Civil Service to deliver key priorities.

¹⁶ Sally White, Graduate numbers up for Home Affairs, Defence, *The Canberra Times*, 2 February 2018, <http://www.canberratimes.com.au/national/public-service/graduate-numbers-up-for-home-affairs-and-defence-down-or-steady-elsewhere-20180201-h0rwr1.html> accessed 2 February 2018 and personal correspondence with Ms White.

¹⁷ It was brought to my attention by a bright and much younger member of the APS that she had no idea of the meaning of the allusion to the Borg collective. The Borg are a collection of drones constituting a hive mind appearing throughout the *Star Trek* franchise. They strive for assimilation, their motto is 'Resistance is useless'.

Our people must also be able to work confidently with other sectors, and international organisations, as we share delivery of outcomes with external partners. Developing partnerships with other sectors will help develop these skills, and also increase secondment opportunities in and out the Civil Service, creating more opportunities for civil servants to spend part of their career in the private and other sectors.¹⁸

Even today, people joining the public service are finding that they are being streamed, often against their will, into limiting career stovepipes where career progression is as much dependent on meeting common public service selection criteria rather than demonstrated capacity for innovation. While many would deny it, and it is certainly not the intent, the reality of much public sector job selection and promotion is a system of implicit patronage. To rectify this departments have offered training in dealing with implicit bias. However, without embracing the more inclusive model that the UK Civil Service advocates, we are unlikely to retain access to the widest possible pool of professional expertise.

At the same time, focussing on attracting deeper subject-matter expertise has to be a priority. It is still considered a badge of honour by some senior public servants to admit to having no professional qualifications or specific policy expertise in the policy area one is employed in. In my own area of Defence policy, this has led to some extreme examples of group-think where an assertive policy maker can set a policy direction that is slavishly mimicked by non-specialist staff for decades – simply because that was the prevailing orthodoxy.

The current model of civilian graduate recruitment is not consistent across portfolios. Defence, a policy rich environment, identifies twelve career ‘streams’ – one of which is ‘generalist’. However, the Department’s website indicates that generalists may find themselves working in areas that include:

- Strategic management in Navy, Army or Air Force
- Tender and contract negotiations
- Capability analysis
- Strategic policy
- Environmental issues
- Corporate governance
- Public affairs and media liaison
- Project management
- Contracting, program and project administration
- International engagement policy
- Long-term planning on future force structure and capability¹⁹

In any other walk of life, notably the private sector, it would be expected that staff would have significant qualifications and generally, broad industry experience for employment in each or any of these areas. Where once familiarity with processes would have sufficed, the

¹⁸ UK Civil Service, *Civil Service Workforce Plan*, 8.

¹⁹ Defence Graduate Opportunities, Department of Defence website, <http://www.defence.gov.au/graduates/pathway-generalist.asp> accessed 31 January 2017.

constantly changing work environment negates the advantage of time-in-service . As the Defence *First Principles Review* found in 2015:

‘Defence does not have a strategic workforce plan for its enabling workforce. Without it, Defence struggles to identify skills gaps across the agency and place the right people with the right skills in the right roles at the right time’.²⁰

Unfortunately in an environment characterised by complexity and rapid, often unpredictable, change any single agency workforce plan will struggle to stay relevant with the requirement to form constantly changing teams. We no longer require a semi-skilled labour force, we require holistic concepts of a workforce that embraces the mobilisation of teams of expert policy professionals.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade adopts a different approach. It identifies two employment categories — ‘generalist’ and ‘specialist’. There are clearly different streams within the Department, which do not appear on the website, but careers do seem to settle into diplomatic, trade, consular, aid and development professional streams. Even then, the generalist category seems to involve a bet each way as specific, identifiably ‘professional’ qualifications are accounted an advantage. The Department’s website reads:

At the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), the majority of our people are ‘generalists’. Generalists do not require specific qualifications or professional expertise to do their job, but use skills and experience gained through study, training and other roles within the department and elsewhere.

While no specific qualifications are required for generalist roles, we strongly encourage economists and legal practitioners to apply, as there are numerous roles across the DFAT that require economic analysis and legal experience.²¹

We have come some way from DFAT’s recruitment materials of the 1990s which proudly asserted that the quality of the individual, rather than any explicit knowledge was what mattered. DFAT now emphasises the requirement for professional knowledge and expertise and has established:

a Diplomatic Academy to strengthen the professional skills, functional capability and knowledge of all our staff and launched the Workforce Planning Framework to further professionalise and streamline our management of human resources.²²

²⁰ Department of Defence, *First Principles Review: Creating One Defence*, 1 April 2015, 56, <http://www.defence.gov.au/Publications/Reviews/Firstprinciples/> accessed 31 January 2018.

²¹ DFAT Careers, General Recruitment, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, <http://dfat.gov.au/careers/general-recruitment/Pages/general-recruitment.aspx> accessed 31 January 2017.

²² Secretary’s Review, *Annual Report 2015-16*, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, <http://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/corporate/annual-reports/annual-report-2015-2016/home/section-1/secretarys-review/index.html> accessed 31 January 2017.

Without the professional intellectual tools to develop new policy, innovation is impossible. We need to focus on lifting the professional expertise of staff and broaden their allegiance from their own department or agency to a more mature sense of working in an integrated national enterprise.

This point was reinforced by Peter Shergold in his assessment of why so many high-profile policy initiatives had gone so badly wrong in recent years:

The importance of formal qualifications should not be underestimated. One of the best levers to mitigate risks associated with program delivery is to have properly trained and certified practitioners. It seems inconceivable that an agency would put an 'unqualified' manager (someone lacking accredited proficiency) in charge of a multi-million dollar program, but in fact this occurs regularly. Formal qualifications and demonstrated proficiency are a prerequisite for many professions that are given authority for financial and administrative risks inside and outside of the APS: consider, for example, lawyers, engineers, veterinarians, accountants and auditors. These professions have long-standing educational requirements which provide a degree of assurance to employers of the competency of the practitioner. The more senior the practitioner, the higher the level of qualification that is expected.²³

Making adaptation work: The Integrated Approach to policy-making

Closely associated with the issue of maximising access to the best human capital is the need to make the most of it in making policy. Adopting a style of government that combines horizontal connectivity, cooperative behaviours, deep professional expertise and experimentation is known as the 'Integrated Approach'.

The reality of the contemporary public service is that few public sector staff working in the policy domain will be working on only one issue. Most executive level staff will be playing different roles in multiple concurrent policy tasks. Senior executive staff will be involved in literally dozens of policy processes, most of which range across a large number of departments, agencies, private and not-for-profit service providers. There is a very great risk, often recognised, that no individual will possess the 'band-width' to juggle all of those policy responsibilities. It is foolish, and dangerous, to pretend that anyone can.

Accordingly, as Harvard Business School's Henry Mintzberg has long argued, it is naive to advocate any single model for government policy-making. Government, he states 'is an enormously eclectic system, as varied as life itself (because it deals with almost every conceivable fact of life'.²⁴ But Mintzberg recognised that the 'complex, unpredictable activities of today's governments' require greater appreciation of the need for cross-institutional networking. He famously advocated the need for government to shift its

²³ Shergold, *Learning from Failure*, 48.

²⁴ Henry Mintzberg, 'Managing Government, Governing Management', *Harvard Business Review*, May-June 1996, <https://hbr.org/1996/05/managing-government-governing-management> accessed 19 January 2018.

emphasis from traditional departmental organisations to a national normative model. Writing in 1996, he concluded that:

agencies can still be isolated horizontally, but vertical control by the superstructure is normative rather than technocratic. The model allows for radically different microstructures: more missionary, egalitarian, and energized; less machinelike and less hierarchical.

Two decades on the social and technological imperatives for radical devolution and delegation have proceeded apace.

Once again, change is occurring, or at least the recognition that change must occur. Senior leadership programs conducted by the Australian Public Service Commission promote the 'Adaptive approach' in government. Starting in the late 1980s scholars based at the Harvard Business and Kennedy Schools identified the fact that the combination of digital age technology and a more professional workforce was going to result in work being done very differently in Information-based organisations. Peter Drucker wrote that:

Traditional departments will serve as guardians of standards, as centers for training and the assignment of specialists; they won't be where the work gets done. That will happen in task-focused teams.²⁵

We learn, perhaps painfully, from error. The UK Government's 2016 Iraq Inquiry (the Chilcot Report) found that Iraq had been a significant policy failure for the British Government. In broad terms, the report found that Government:

Had a propensity for '**group-think**' – when a group of people conform in their thinking to the extent that their decision making has an irrational or dysfunctional outcome – reflecting insufficient challenge and a lack of thought.

Suffered from multiple impediments to effective **decision-making**: structures and processes impeded the flow of information and evidence; strategy-making was weak and inflexible; and insufficient attention was paid to the capability required for the operation and to determining the resources required to ensure success.²⁶

Unfortunately, these findings weren't news. In response to the strategic morass the UK had found itself in Basra, the Stabilisation Unit (a joint Foreign and Commonwealth Office,

²⁵ Peter Drucker, The Coming of the New Organization, *Harvard Business Review*, January 1988, <https://hbr.org/1988/01/the-coming-of-the-new-organization> accessed 24 November 2015.

²⁶ Ministry of Defence, *The Good Operation: A handbook for those involved in operational policy and its implementation*, January 2018, 7, https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/674545/TheGoodOperation_WEB.PDF accessed 31 January 2018.; *The Report of the Iraq Inquiry*, Report of a Committee of Privy Councillors, (UK) July 2016, <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20171123122743/http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/the-report/> accessed 31 January 2018.

Ministry of Defence and Department for International Development agency) had already developed the *Integrated Approach*. It summarised it as follows:

Integration is forming a single multi-disciplinary and multi-departmental team to take on a task. The task may be planning, it may be designing a programme or it may be delivering a project. When asked to work together government departments generally look to liaise or coordinate, to retain their own teams whilst negotiating with other departments. Experience . . . has shown . . . this does not work. The transactional costs are too high.

Integration is primarily driven by the process of people from different institutions and different disciplines working side by side at several levels to ensure that their perspectives and activities reinforce each other. Integration requires low-level cooperation and mid-level coordination, supplemented by high-level alignment of overall strategic objectives. Integration should improve the flow of information, contribute to a shared understanding of stabilisation challenges and responses, reduce policy and delivery ‘silos’, and ensure greater effect on the ground.²⁷

This approach should find acceptance in Australia. In fact, it is identical to the Shergold Review findings on the failure of Australian domestic policy programs. Professor Shergold summarised the options between continuing as we always have and adopting a new policy culture in a striking table. It succeeds where pages of advocacy might fail.

BE AGILE: LEARN AS YOU GO	
Traditional government	Adaptive government
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retain information • Dismiss opportunities to learn from the experience of others • Leave evaluation of ‘what works’ until the end • Work within the silos of bureaucratic demarcation • Base program design on what has been done in the past 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Share information about good practice—and lessons learnt ✓ Create stages/gates to allow programs to be modified on the basis of ongoing monitoring and evaluation ✓ Learn continuously from doing ✓ Encourage people to share mistakes and ‘near misses’ that can inform program design ✓ Fully embrace whole-of-government cooperation ✓ Imagine new ways of doing things

Peter Shergold, *Learning From Failure*, August 2015.²⁸

Recommendations

²⁷ Stabilisation Unit, *The Integrated Approach is essential*, <http://www.sclr.stabilisationunit.gov.uk/top-ten-reads/comprehensive-integrated-approach/36-the-integrated-approach-is-essential> accessed 31 January 2018.

²⁸ Shergold, *Learning From Failure*, 72.

In an earlier paper, I argued that if the APS is to adapt to the challenges of 21st Century policy-making it needs to adopt the 'Integrated Approach' to joined-up government.²⁹ This paper goes further and discusses the structural, organisational and cultural conditions that need to be met for this to succeed. Again, the good news is that many serving and former senior leaders of the APS are advocating change.

The first requirement is for a fundamental reassessment of the role and functions that the APS will play in the Twenty-First Century. In July 2017 former Defence Secretary Dennis Richardson called for a new 'Coombs Royal Commission' to consider what sort of public service is required for the next 30 years. The former Secretaries of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Terry Moran and Ian Watt supported him in his call for 'a wide-ranging, serious, independent' inquiry, though Ian Watt felt that a full Royal Commission might not be required.³⁰ All of them recognised the fundamental changes that had occurred during their careers and their comments suggested that effective change needs an evidence base, a political champion and to be made Government policy. Whether a full Royal Commission is required for this is open to debate, but the current Secretary of Prime Minister of Cabinet Martin Parkinson subsequently suggested that a regular, non-political, citizens' survey would help the APS to 'frame policy better and alert us to where programs and other interventions are failing'.³¹ There is a strong sense that the APS needs to prick the Canberra bubble and ensure that its contributions to government policy (and service delivery) are more transparent.

The second condition needs to be the adoption of a whole-of-service workforce plan that reflects the principles-based professional approach adopted by the *UK Civil Service Workforce Plan*. Over time, the APS has fragmented, militating against the sense of a national professional public service. Workplace cultures, conditions of service, remuneration and career expectations vary widely. This approach has prevented movement into, across and out of the APS. It has institutionalised departmental silos. It reinforces implicit bias in recruitment and promotion practices. All of these issues produce group-think in policy making and stifle innovation.

Third, the APS has to commit to professionalisation. Once the production of policy was considered the preserve of the C-Suite (the suite of chief executive offices). The joke in Defence was that for major policy documents the relevant Deputy Secretary would withdraw into a locked office and be fed pizza under the door. None of the policy documents produced by solitary executive inspiration survived the test of time. Now senior executives are reliant on their professional staff, often at junior level, to drive policy innovation. In January 2018, the Australian Public Service Commissioner, John Lloyd, stated that in future, management hierarchies would become less and less relevant and that 'authority does not so much come

²⁹ A. Ryan, *Delivering 'joined-up' government: Achieving the integrated Approach to offshore crisis management*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, Strategic Insights paper 111, November 2016, https://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/ad-aspi/2017-07/SI111_joined-up-government.pdf?Wdel_b.AEEMR6v62yKz.RctWKL6SRS.4

³⁰ Verona Burgess, 'Mandarins say it's time for a new royal commission to rethink future and role of the federal public sector', *The Mandarin*, 26 July 2017, <https://www.themandarin.com.au/81812-verona-burgess-dennis-richardson-royal-commission-job-of-the-australian-public-service/> accessed 31 January 2018.

³¹ Verona Burgess, Are public servants so terrified of putting their heads above the parapet? *The Mandarin*, 13 December 2017, <https://www.themandarin.com.au/87208-verona-burgess-public-servants-terrified-putting-heads-parapet/> accessed 13 December 2017.

from supervisory authority but more from being a team whose members and leaders have different skills'.³²

Fourth, the APS needs to invest in a skills and knowledge register. There is no current system to effectively and efficiently access the human capital already resident in the APS. Special purpose interagency task forces are becoming more common and generally do attract many of the best and brightest. But their establishment is generally accidental and subject to the willingness of supervisors to detach some of their best staff to task forces for which they will receive no credit. At the same time the losing agency usually has to cover the absence because the culture still favours hierarchical, permanent establishments. If adaptive government is to become a reality and the Integrated Approach realised, then Departments will initially need to be compelled to cooperate on national policy priority projects.

Fifth, to be characterised as a professional public service, there needs to be greater opportunities for movement. This will entail breaking the monopoly on human resource management currently held within departments. While departments and agencies make their own rules and establish their own mini-professions, there can never be a strong public service professional culture. The Australian Public Service Commission, or some organisation exercising its functions needs to be a stronger repository of standards, behaviours and service wide conditions of employment.

Sixth, the APS needs to invest in those agencies whose business it is to enable integration. Organisations such as the Australian Civil-Military Centre and the UK Stabilisation Unit that have the mandate of Cabinet to build interagency coordination are essential. They do this by developing preparedness through education, training, research and multiagency exercises; identifying whole-of-government best-practices; promoting tight lessons-learned loops to inform policy and providing the integrated institutional memory across departmental boundaries. These agencies provide the cement that holds portfolio government together and can provide the home for interagency task forces working on policy issues that belong to a variety of departments and agencies.

Finally, the sensitive issue of Ministerial/APS relationships needs to be reassessed. This should definitely be a key term of reference for any inquiry into the future of the APS. Ministerial workloads and the complexity of their portfolios continue to increase. Yet the flow of work to Ministers uses systems that are obsolete and which mean that consideration of many policy issues receives inadequate attention or is delegated to an (often junior) adviser. In reality, full and frank advice often translates to a statement that 'what the Minister (or the Minister's office) wants, the Minister gets'. Ministers rarely have deep policy expertise or the resources to develop evidence-based policy.³³ Quite rightly, they are dependent on their relationships with their departments and the broader APS for robust and critical policy support. The APS has to hold up its side of the bargain. As Shergold concluded:

³² Burgess, 'No more hiding in the hierarchy: APS commissioner on the limits of layers', *The Mandarin*, 17 January 2018, <https://www.themandarin.com.au/87570-no-more-hiding-in-the-hierarchy-aps-commissioner-on-the-limits-of-layers/> accessed 17 January 2018.

³³ Behm, *No Minister*, Chap 8.

If adaptation and agility are to become widespread practice, the roles of the public servant and the minister will need to change. Instead of controlling the whole process of implementation, they will act as stewards, shepherding the limited resources of government towards a successful result. Humility will be needed to accept that the shape of policy, or at least the way it is implemented, may evolve in unexpected ways in response to evidence and experimentation. This will be a challenging shift for those who feel more comfortable with a command-and-control style of leadership. The public servant of the future will be the facilitator of innovation.³⁴

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³⁴ Shergold, *Learning From Failure*, 80.