THE PIA REVIEW

Part 1: Enabling better public sectors

by Pia Andrews

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THEMANDARIN

Introduction

Part 1: Enabling better public sectors

On the cusp of a new decade, I had something of an epiphany. I realised three interrelated things:

- I had accrued almost 20 years of working at the intersection of technology, government and society, with a range of roles in private, public and political jobs but always focused on creating great public outcomes from technology the best I could.

- We are 20% into the 21st century, and yet fundamental paradigm shifts, modern methods or multi-discplinary collaborative approaches are still not being integrated into policy, program or project planning across our public sectors.

- That I seem to keep having the same discussions with people, I keep seeing the same patterns repeating, and I keep seeing people called "thought leaders" for pointing out the bleeding obvious :) What is driving these patterns has become something of a professional passion.

So, I decided I wanted to do something about it. I contacted the Mandarin and asked if they'd be interested in some articles on public sector reform through the lens of a digital practitioner. They were more than supportive, although probably got a little more than they bargained for :) My deepest thanks to Harley Dennett in particular for all his encouragement, deep discussions and sub-editing for what became the "Public Sector Pia Review", a cute play on words that was both memorable, and reflective of my passion for collaborative approaches. Indeed, all articles were peer reviewed by a range of experts, collaborators and thought leaders for which I am very thankful (they are all named in the relevant articles, thank you all!).

I committed to write 20 articles, in 20 days, about 20 years experience in preparation for 2020! I managed to write 18 in 18 days, but the final two articles were deep, reflective and needed serious consideration and peer review (they were on how to maintain an apolitical public service in practice, and the unintended consequences of New Public Management with practical mitigations). These are published in two parts, with all essays not trying to assume all answers, but simply reflecting my lived experiences and what has worked for me:

1. **Doing public sector better, today** - essays written to provide practical tips, methods, tricks and ideas to help public servants to their best possible work today for the best possible public outcomes; and

2. **Reimagining government** - essays about possible futures, the big existential, systemic or structural challenges and opportunities as I've experienced them, paradigm shifts and the urgent need for everyone to reimagine how they best serve the government, the parliament and the people, today and into the future.
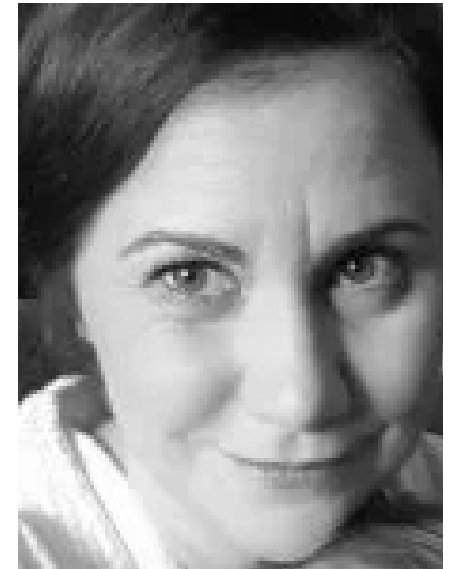
PIA ANDREWS

A RENOWNED DATA AND DIGITAL GOVERNMENT SPECIALIST, PIA ANDREWS MOST RECENTLY WORKED AN EXECUTIVE IN THE NSW GOVERNMENT. PIA HAS ALSO WORKED FOR THE AUSTRALIAN AND NEW ZEALAND GOVERNMENTS AND ALSO BEEN AN ORGANISER WITH GOVHACK.

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I hope this collection of essays can provide some practical ideas, strategies, lessons and discussion starters for public servants across Australia and the world, and I look forward to continuing to learn, contribute to and support the public sector reforms and evolutions that are so urgently needed to support the communities we all serve.

I encourage you all to be frank and fearless, but also kind, compassionate, inclusive and future focused in everything that you do, so that we can help build and contribute to better, more optimistic futures for everyone. You don't have to feel powerless in the face of a huge problem. Just do your part - whatever you can do today, tomorrow and every day - and together we will create truly better public sectors for better public good.

It apparently only takes 3% of any population to create a change, so simply be and expect the change you want to see. The behaviours, practices and assumptions you walk past, are the ones that will persist.

Finally, an enormous thank you to my supportive, insightful, brilliant and constructively challenging husband, Thomas. You help me keep it real and you make all things possible, thank you.

Cheers,

Pia

Publisher's note

Pia Andrews is not like most contributors writing about today's public sectors and their challenges. Few contributors would contemplate writing a 20-essay series, let alone inside a month. Few contributors could pull in such a wide range of leaders in their respective fields to critique and collaborate. When Pia approached me to write about better public sectors from the perspective of a digital innovator I did not quite imagine just how large that scope would be, or how rewarding it would be to see the results enjoyed by so many readers from around the world. This was what *The Mandarin* was created for, and I'm proud to say the 'Public Sector Pia Review' is the finest collection of essays I've had the privilege to publish since the website launched. Thank you Pia and all the people who reviewed the essays.

HARLEY DENNETT

Editor, *The Mandarin*

THE MANDARIN

Enabling innovation and collaboration across the public sector

One of the main pressures on public sectors is around budget and resource constraints. Everyone increasingly has less to do more. In some cases, some of those pressures are conflated by fatigued systems and staff that haven't had investment for decades, with a mountain of technical and cultural debt that grows every day. Collaboration can help ensure better outcomes through working together, cross-sector, cross-jurisdiction, with communities and with strategic partners around common goals. When we talk to and work with others doing similar work, we can all build upon the efforts of each for better outcomes.

Arguably, it's not the job of a citizen to understand the complexities of government, but rather the job of government is to do the hard work to abstract the complexities of governance for better engagement and services for citizens. That's our job, which means if you're not collaborating and working across governments in whatever you are doing, then you're not likely getting the best possible outcomes for citizens in the most efficient way.

But there are many challenges to collaboration. One of the biggest challenges is the isolating nature of operational silos created by vertical accountabilities and competition for budget. This creates territorial, adversarial protectionist behaviours, like unwillingness to share even the most basic artefacts, content or tools. Many people, particularly managers, feel pressure to delivery to the specific goals of their chain of command within a tightly constrained budget which makes it much harder to take the risk of co-investment or co-resourcing an outcome. Many believe they can't justify engaging or operational collaboration with others, because success and risk are largely measured in project delivery terms rather than impact or outcomes.

Some strategies to consider when trying to improve collaboration in the public sector including team culture development, tapping into natural motivation, using or developing horizontal work programs (like life journey mapping), and reframing how we see leadership.

Establishing an empowered and safe team culture

It feels impossible and risky to collaborate or work openly when you are under enormous pressure, and unfortunately, a lot of public servants live this reality every day. If you want to improve collaboration to yield the many benefits, it is critical to establish a strong team culture that supports and recognises experimentation, collaboration and openness. Collaboratively developing a culture statement with your team, branch, division or even department draws out the behaviours people want to see in their work environment, and creates a foundation for mutual respect, trust and engagement across your team and with your colleagues. You should be able to establish a mutually agreed team culture within 3 months or so which then starts to yield immediate benefits for the teams and work program. By about 6-9 months you should see

behaviours changing and individuals starting to naturally collaborate, share and reach out more. If your culture explicitly supports experimentation with permission to try (and fail), then people can try things before major commitment, which also enables greater collaboration around small test cases for mutual benefit.

It is also critical to ensure a carefully balanced program of work that gives the team some breathing space, which also means protecting your teams from unnecessary busywork. The amount of "urgent" requests in any department is sometimes breathtaking, and people often drown in the barrage of email and work longer and longer hours, becoming less and less productive. It is important for individuals, and particularly senior executives, to constantly ensure they are doing their part to protect their teams so that the majority of time is being spent on doing the actual job, and not getting entirely sucked into busywork that doesn't further the agenda. This means trying to streamline, automate and sometimes deprioritising busy work to protect important work. It also means senior management needs to delegate more decision making to empower teams to get better outcomes, not just delegate effort, and certainly not to delegate busy work.

Once you have a team that feels empowered, supported and less pressured, magic can start to happen!

One of the things about being a child of the internet (albeit in the very early days), is that I consider my workspace not limited to the desk that I have. I don't start any new project with "what tools do I have, who's in my immediate team, who's in my area/department, how does my budget limit me"? I tend to start with what's happening in the world, not just to integrate good practice into what we do, but to see the whole world as my workspace, my playground, my community of practice. In this way, you can

both leverage what and who is already out there rather than starting from scratch each time, and you also automatically get into a collaborative mindset. When you value what is already out there, you tend to want to reach out.

Another cultural way to support collaboration is to openly share. When you share what you are doing, you naturally attract potential allies who share your goals, and with whom you can forge a strategic and mutually beneficial partnership, where all parties are naturally motivated to collaborate.

Tapping into natural motivation

The concept of finding the 'natural motivation' of players involved is a key component for any type of systemic change to be successful. This isn't a particularly unique or new idea, but I am constantly surprised by how rarely I see it adopted in practice, and how often things fail by not taking it into consideration. It is critical if you want to take a new idea from the domain of evangelists and into 'business as usual' because if you can't embed something into the normal way people act and think, then whatever you are trying to do will be done reluctantly and at best, tacked on to normal processes as an afterthought.

In recent years I've been doing a lot of work to try to change systems, thinking and culture around open government, technology in government and open data, with some sustained success. This is in part because I purposefully take an approach that tries to identify and tap into the natural motivation of all players involved. This means understanding how what I'm trying to do could benefit the very people who need to change, and helping them want to do something new of their own volition. Why does this matter? If I asked you to spend an extra couple of hours a week at work, for no extra pay, doing something you don't understand that seems completely unrelated to your job or life, you'd tell me to sod off. And understandably so! And

yet we expect people and behaviours to simply comply if we change the rules. If I talked to you about how a new way of doing something would save you time, get a better outcome, save money or made life better in any way, you would be more interested. Then it simply becomes a matter of whether the effort is worth the benefit.

Some folk argue that you can drive change by simply punishing non-compliance or creating incentives, but I would argue that though you can force certain behaviour changes through punishment or reward, if people aren't naturally motivated to make the behaviour change themselves then the change will be both unsustainable and minimally implemented.

When I took over data.gov.au, there was a reasonable number of datasets published but they weren't being updated and nothing new was being added. It was a good first attempt, but open data had not really been normalised in agencies, so data publishing was sporadic. We quickly realised if open data was just seen as a policy and compliance issue, then this would never really change and we would hit a scaling issue of how much we could do ourselves. Through research, experimenting and experience, we found that open data could provide actual business benefits to agencies which became a natural motivation for some agencies to establish their own open data programs. We would start an agency on the open data journey by helping identify datasets that save them time and money, looking at resource-intensive requests for data they regularly get and how to automate the publishing of that data, or where they needed data APIs for service delivery. This then frees up resources of which a proportion could often be justified to start a small open data team. We also helped agencies get value from public reuse of data (GovHack was particularly helpful for this). Once an agency team saw genuine benefits, they would want to resource and overcome barriers for themselves. In 2 years we went from zero to 20 agencies engaged in open data publishing.

Motivation doesn't need to always come from within the individual person or organisation. Sometimes motivation comes from a little healthy competition! I have had people in agencies utterly uninterested in open data who become interested when they saw other agencies getting benefits and success stories. Don't underestimate the power of public successes! Be as loud as you can about successes you find or have as this builds demand and helps bring more people on your journey.

If you want to make real change, I encourage you to take an empathetic approach, think about all the players in the system, and how to ensure they are naturally motivated to change. If the path of "good" is also the path of least resistance, then people will naturally walk it and collaboration will be naturally enabled.

Life journey programs

Life journey mapping is a novel but powerful way to create naturally motivated collaboration across departments. New Zealand has led the way with life journey based service integration, and it is distinct from "customer journey mapping" in that it intentionally maps the full experience of people through a significant life journey, looking at all the user needs and services across all sectors. Often people start with family and friends when having to go through a significant life event, such as end of life, becoming an adult or starting a family. Life journey programs provide opportunities for reducing (through integration) the steps of major life journeys, improve outcomes and dignity for citizens, and to create greater integration and improvements for agencies and society as a whole.

How does it enable collaboration? By providing one of the very few horizontal levers in government that can help overcome the vertically aligned portfolio siloes. Usually, a service delivery team would do the customer journey mapping of their particular transaction, or perhaps the user experience of their department, but even if they want to improve the whole user experience they have low support to go outside the portfolio mandate to improve the experience with other departments or jurisdictions. And yet, for major life journeys, it is inevitable that citizens have to deal with multiple departments and jurisdictions. When you establish a life journey program, agencies can participate in the process of understanding the holistic journey of people, and can see ways to improve the journey up or down stream from their part of the journey. Life journey programs naturally motivate agencies to collaborate sideways as everyone benefits from improving the entire user experience rather than just tweaking individual steps along the way. Many citizens rate their government experience only as good as their last or worst exchange, so raising the quality of the entire experience is critical. Often the integration or service reform opportunities can also create some business benefits for agencies themselves, which then creates further natural motivation to collaborate on life journeys.

I have seen this working well in New Zealand, and when I started in the NSW Government I established a life journey program from scratch and was amazed at how quickly it brought agencies to work together, though this does require senior buy-in and putting key life journey agencies in the driving seat of the agenda so they bring their gravitas and networks to the table. It's also important to note that if you don't ensure rapid delivery and value realisation, then enthusiasm and investment from agencies quickly wanes.

Designing horizontal programs and pressures that cross-portfolio lines is an important and helpful counterbalance to the vertical pressures of our Westminster system to enable collaboration.

Leadership

Leadership programs in public sectors often teach top-down leadership methods and models to senior executives. This reinforces the flawed notion that seniority correlates somehow to superiority, which in turn drives senior executive behaviours that disempower and dismiss the experience, expertise and value of people the further down the hierarchy they are. The alternative is to consider "servant leadership" as the new norm in the public sector. Servant leadership is about serving, protecting and supporting the people who work for you to bring their best and whole selves to work. It is about acknowledging that excellence comes from everyone, not just from the top. Servant leadership brings everyone on the journey, and turns change into something that can be collaborative and opportunistic, rather than dreaded. Change is certainly the new normal, so building resilience in our people and teams is critical to maintaining momentum.

Finally, I often hear people say, "Oh, we can't possibly do that. We need good leadership first". Allow me to turn this around. We are all leaders in this sector. We are the future of the public service and nothing will change by waiting for someone else to change it. We need people leadership, technical leadership, policy leadership, subject matter leadership, vision, kindness, collaboration. There's leadership needed in every discipline at every level and identifying what you can do better in your job today is more important than waiting for someone else to lead you. I urge all public servants to lead through doing and be the change you want to see. Actively collaborate with your peers and partnerships across the sector, the community and the world, and you will see far greater impact and outcomes from your work and efforts.

How to scale impact through innovation and transformation

Over the past decade, I have been involved in several efforts trying to make public sectors better. I've observed a lot of effort is put into tweaking traditional models of working which usually creates the same old results. If we want to change outcomes, we need to consider new ways of working, not just what needs to be done. Public sectors will continue to operate under increasing budgetary and resource constraints whilst the needs of the communities we serve continues to grow, creating an exponentially growing needs gap. The only way to meet this gap is to learn how to scale impact, and innovation and transformation can help do just that.

Unfortunately, innovation and transformation have become buzzwords without meaning for many people, but if we can genuinely differentiate them, they are powerful enablers.

Innovation is how you work, particularly in embedding a culture of empowered experimentation and creativity as part of your business as usual workload. The more you support innovation in your teams, the better the productivity and impact of those teams, the more they can self-direct ways

to improve things, and the better the impact. So those who say they can't afford to innovate are missing the opportunity to get the benefits of innovation within existing budgets.

Transformation is systemic change or evolution towards a fundamentally different pattern, outcome or operating model, rather than just iterating away from the most highly prioritised pain points. Public sector transformation could be about reimagining the public sector to be fit for purpose in the 21st century. Many of our structures, processes, and operations are rooted in decades or centuries old assumptions and practices, and change efforts to date have largely been about better, faster, cheaper. But there are significant systemic barriers to our ability to evolve and rapidly respond to change which makes it very hard to stay ahead of rapidly changing community and economy needs. I believe we need to transform our public sectors to be resilient and responsive to change in real time, including greater engagement and partnership with communities, but that article another day.

With life getting faster and exponentially more complicated, we need to take a whole of system view if we are to improve 'the system' for people. People sometimes balk when I say this, thinking it too hard, too big or too embedded. But we made this, we can remake it, and if it isn't working for us all, then we need to adapt, like we always have.

So, changing **how we do things** (innovation) becomes the **capability and capacity** needed to scale impact through daily efforts such as more agile, experimental, evidence based, creative and collaborative approach to the design, delivery and continuous improvement of stuff, be it policy, legislation or services.

And **changing the system around us** (transformation) becomes the **focus and vision** for scaling impact through creating the right policy levers, futures & program planning and

systemic structural change to drive better and naturally motivated societal outcomes. Innovation and transformation are both complementary and mutually dependent.

How to scale innovation and transformation

I'll focus the rest of this article on the question of scaling. I wrote this in the context of scaling innovation and transformation in government, but it applies to any large system and it is worth noting that **empowering your people** is the greatest way to scale anything.

I'll firstly say that **openness** is key to scaling anything. It is how we can influence the system and inspire and enable people to individually engage with and take responsibility for better outcomes and innovate at a grassroots level. It is how we ensure our work is evidence based, better informed and better tested, through public peer review. Being open not only influences the entire public service, but the rest of the economy and society. It is how we build trust, improve collaboration, send indicators to vendors and engage with research and academia. Working openly, including opening our research and code, being public about projects that would benefit from collaboration, and sharing most of what we do (because most of the work of the public service is not secretive by any stretch). Working openly is one of the greatest tools to scale the impact of our work. Openness is also the best way to ensure both a better supply of as well as a better demand for what is demonstrably 'good'.

A quick side note to those who argue that transparency isn't an answer because all people don't have to tools to understand data/information/etc to hold others accountable: it doesn't mean you don't do transparency at all. There will always be groups or people naturally motivated to hold you to account, whether it is your competitors, clients, the media, citizens or even your own staff. Transparency is partly about accountability and partly about reinforcing a natural motivation to do the right thing.

Scaling innovation — some ideas

- **Create some play time** — I often hear quite senior public servants bemoan the lack of new funding to innovate. Everyone in government feels under pressure to use 100% of their resources all the time. But the backlog of work is exponentially growing, and whether you use 100% or 90%, your impact is still continually dropping proportionate to the problem space you are trying to address. I have always taken the apparently novel approach of trying to balance fast delivery with long term delivery, creating some time and support for staff to explore what is possible. This is critical if you want a hope of addressing your growing problem space, as it is impossible with a 100% workload. You can get your whole team innovating by ensuring at least a little time is protected to innovate, by instilling a team culture that supports and recognises innovation, and by creating a carefully balanced program of work that protects the team from unnecessary busy work. I am always delighted and impressed by the ideas and constructive creativity of highly empowered teams, but it takes support and effort by senior leadership for any team to become and sustain such a culture.

- The necessity of neutral, safe, well resourced and collaborative **sandpits** is critical for agencies to quickly test and experiment outside the limitations of their agencies (technical, structural, political, functional and procurement). Such places should be engaged with the sectors around them and work openly to rapidly share insights and toolkits. Neutral spaces that take a systems view also start to **normalise a systems view** across agencies in their other work, which has huge ramifications for transformation as well as innovation.

- **Seeking and sharing** — sharing knowledge, reusable systems/code, research, infrastructure and basically making it easier for people to build on the shoulders of each other rather than every single team starting from scratch every single time. We already have some communities of practice but we need to prioritise sharing things people can actually use and apply in their work. We also need to extend this approach across sectors to raise all boats. Imagine if there was a broad commons across all society to share and benefit from each others efforts. We've seen the success and benefits of Open Source Software, of Wikipedia, and yet we keep building sector or organisational silos for things that could be public assets for public good.

- **Require user research in budget bids** — this would require agencies to do user research before bidding for money, which would create an incentive to build things people actually need which would drive both a user centred approach to programs and would also drive innovation as necessary to shift from current practices Treasury would require user research experts and a user research hub to contrast and compare over time.

- **Staff mobility** — people should be supported to move around departments and business units to get different experiences and to share and learn. Not everyone will want to, but when people stay in the same job for 20 years, it can be harder to engage in new thinking. Exchange programs are good but again, if the outcomes and lessons are not broadly shared, then they are linear in impact (individuals) rather than scalable (beyond the individuals).

- **Support operational leadership** — not everyone wants to be a leader, disruptor, maker, innovator or intrapreneur. We need to have a program to support such people in the context of operational leadership that isn't reliant upon their managers putting them forward or approving. Even just recognising leadership as something that doesn't happen exclusively in senior management would

be a huge cultural shift. Many managers will naturally want to keep great people to themselves which can become stifling and eventually we lose them. When people can work on meaningful great stuff, they stay in the public service. When public servants can share their expertise publicly it also scales impact by growing public trust and collaboration..

- A **public 'Innovation Hub'** — if there was a simple public platform for people to register projects that they want to collaborate on, from any sector, we could stimulate and support innovation across the public sector (things for which collaboration could help would be surfaced, publicly visible, and inviting of others to engage in) so it would support and encourage innovation across government, but also provides a good pipeline for investment as well as a way to stimulate and support real collaboration across sectors, which is substantially lacking at the moment.

- **Emerging tech and big vision guidance** — we need a team, I suggest cross agency and cross sector, of operational people who keep their fingers on the pulse of technology to create ongoing guidance for Australia on emerging technologies, trends and ideas that anyone can draw from. For government, this would help agencies engage constructively with new opportunities rather than no one ever having time or motivation until emerging technologies come crashing down as urgent change programs. This could be captured on a constantly updating toolkit with distributed authorship to keep it real.

Scaling transformation — some ideas

- **Exploring futures** — what sort of society, or quality of life do we want? If we don't explore this, then how do we know what we need to change towards? Too often we are reacting to changes that have already happened, but the best way to predict the future is to create it (paraphrased with apologies to Alan Kay). Exploring what "good" could look like, indeed what "bad" could look like gives us some future states to work towards and mitigate against. It is the unique and special role of public sectors to understand and respond to the changing needs of the people we serve, so why not explore and co-design better futures?

- **Shared vision** — right now in many countries every organisation and to a lesser degree, many sectors, are diverging on their purpose and efforts because there is no shared vision to converge on. We have myriad strategies, papers, guidance, but no overarching vision. If there were an overarching vision for Australia that was co-developed with all sectors and the community, one that looks at what sort of society we want into the future and what role different entities have in achieving that ends, then we would have the possibility o*f natural convergence on effort and strategy.* Obviously when you have a cohesive vision, then you can align all your organisational and other strategies to that vision, so our (government) guidance and practices would need to align over time.

- **Human measures of success** — If we changed how we measured success to be not just economic but aligned to human outcomes (like quality of life) we would see a natural but significant transformation in culture, prioritisation, behaviours, incentives and approaches across government, which would dramatically scale the positive impact of public programs and policy for people.

- **Funding "Digital Public Infrastructure"** — technology is currently funded as projects with start and end dates, and almost all tech projects across government are bespoke to particular agency requirements or motivations, so we build loads of tech but very little

infrastructure that others can rely upon. If we took all the models we have for funding other forms of public infrastructure (roads, health, education) and saw some types of digital infrastructure as public infrastructure (like digital legislation, service registers, high integrity identity), perhaps they could be built and funded in ways that are more beneficial to the entire economy and society.

- **Agile budgeting** — we need to fund small experiments that inform business cases, rather than starting with big business cases. Ideally we need to not have multi 100 million dollar projects at all because technology projects simply don't cost that anymore, and anyone saying otherwise is trying to sell you something If we collectively took an agile budgeting process, it would create a systemic impact on motivations, on design and development, or implementation, on procurement, on myriad things. It would also put more responsibility on agencies for the outcomes of their work in short, sharp cycles, and would create the possibility of pivoting early to avoid throwing bad money after good (as it were). This is key, as no transformative project truly survives the current budgeting model.

- **Gov as a platform/API/enabler** (closely related to DPI above) — obviously making all government data, content, business rules (inc but not just legislation) and transactional systems available as APIs for building upon across the economy is key. This is how we scale transformation across the public sector because agencies are naturally motivated to deliver what they need to cheaper, faster and better, so when there are genuinely useful reusable components, agencies will reuse them. Agencies are now more naturally motivated to take an API driven modular architecture which creates the bedrock for government as an API. Digital legislation

(which is necessary for service delivery to be integrated across agency boundaries) would also create huge transformation in regulatory and compliance transformation, as well as for government automation and AI.

- **Exchange programs across sectors** — to share knowledge but all done openly so as to not create perverse incentives or commercial capture. We need to also consider the fact that large companies can often afford to jump through hoops and provide spare capacity, but small to medium sized companies or non-profits cannot, so we'd need a pool for funding exchange programs with experts in the large proportion of industry.

- **All of system service delivery evidence base** — what you measure drives how you behave. Agencies are motivated to do only what they need to within their mandates and have very few all of system motivations. If we have an all of government anonymised evidence base of user research, service analytics and other service delivery indicators, it would create an accountability to all of system which would drive all of system behaviours. In New Zealand we already have the IDI (an awesome statistical evidence base) but what other evidence do we need? Shared user research, deidentified service analytics, reporting from major projects, etc. And how do we make that evidence more publicly transparent (where possible) and available beyond the walls of government to be used by other sectors? More broadly, having an all of government evidence base beyond services would help ensure a greater evidence based approach to investment, strategic planning and behaviours.

So there are some ideas to consider, and I hope you have found this useful. I encourage all public servants to consider how they innovate and transform every day.

We created the system, and therefore we can reinvent the system: the urgency behind public sector reform

I am driven by a sense of urgency, both to improve our public sectors and to reimagine the world as we know it. I've shared below the four 21st century paradoxes that most drive me, for discussion and interest. I believe they put us at a fork in the road where we can either choose to reinforce legacy outdated paradigms with shiny new things, or choose to forge better paths. To do the latter, we need to critically assess the systems and structures we built and actively choose what we want to keep, what we should discard, what sort of society we want in the future and what we need to get there.

I think it is too easily forgotten that we invented all this and can therefore reinvent it — if we choose to. To not make a choice is to choose the status quo.

This is not to say I think everything needs to change. Nothing is so simplistic or misleading as a zero sum argument :) Rather, the intent of this article is to challenge you to think critically about the systems you work within, whether

they enable or disable the things you think are important, and most importantly, to challenge you to imagine what sort of world you want to see. Not just for you, but for your family, community and the broader society.

The four paradoxes are as follows:

- **Paradox 1:** Although power is more distributed than ever, most people are still struggling to survive.

- **Paradox 2:** Government is an important part of a stable society and yet is being increasingly undermined, both intentionally and unintentionally.

- **Paradox 3:** Substantial paradigm shifts have already happened, but are not being integrated into people's thinking and processes, let alone public policies or vision.

- **Paradox 4:** We are surrounded by new things every day and yet there is a serious lack of vision for the future.

Paradox 1

Though power is more distributed than ever, most people are still struggling to survive.

The Internet has become both an extension and enabler of equality and power by massively distributing both to ordinary people around the world. How has power and equality been distributed? When you consider what constitutes power, five elements come to mind: publishing, communications, monitoring, enforcement, and of course, property. It's important to note I'm not suggestion these things are net positive or negative, but rather simply our new reality and worth considering.

Publishing — in times gone past, the ideas that spread beyond a small geographical area either traveled word of mouth via trade routes or made it into a book. Only the wealthy could afford to print and distribute the written word, so publishing and dissemination of information was

a power limited to a small number of people. Today, the spreading of ideas is extremely easy, cheap, and can be done anonymously. Anyone can start a blog or use social media, and the proliferation of information creation and dissemination is unprecedented.

How does this change society? Firstly, there is an assumption that an individual can tell their story to a global audience, which means an official story is easily challenged not only by the intended audience but also by the people about whom the story is written. Individuals online expect both to have their say and to determine for themselves what is most credible. This presents significant challenges to traditional powers such as governments and public sectors in establishing an authoritative voice unless they can establish and maintain trust with the citizens they serve.

Communications — individuals have always had some method to communicate with individuals in other communities and countries, but up until recent decades, these methods have been quite expensive, slow, and controlled. This has meant that historically, people have tended to form social and professional relationships with those close by, largely out of convenience. The Internet has made it easy to communicate, collaborate with, and coordinate with individuals and groups all around the world, in real time. This has made massive and global civil responses and movements possible, which has challenged traditional and geographically defined powers substantially. It has also presented a significant challenge for governments to predict and control information flow and relationships within the society. It also created a challenge for how to support the best interests of citizens, given the tension between what is good for a geographically defined nation state doesn't always align with what is good for an online and trans-nationally focused citizen.

Monitoring — traditional power structures have always had ways to monitor the masses. Monitoring helps maintain rule of law through assisting in the enforcement of laws, and is often upheld through self-reporting because those affected by broken laws will report issues to hold detractors to account. In just the past 50 years, modern technologies like CCTV have made monitoring of the people a trivial task, where video cameras can record what is happening 24 hours a day. Foucault spoke of the panopticon gaol design as a metaphor for a modern surveillance state, where everyone is constantly watched on camera. The panopticon was a gaol design wherein detainees could not tell if they were being observed by gaolers or not, enabling in principle, less gaolers to control a large number of prisoners who would theoretically behave better under observation. Foucault was concerned that omnipresent surveillance would lead to all individuals being more conservative and limited in themselves if they knew they could be watched at any time. The Internet has turned this model on its head. Although governments can more easily monitor citizens than ever before, individuals can also monitor each other and indeed, monitor organisations and even governments for misbehaviour. This has led to individuals, governments, companies and other entities all being held to account publicly, sometimes violently or unfairly so.

Enforcement — enforcement of laws is a key role of a power structure, to ensure the rules of a society are maintained for the benefit of stability and prosperity. Enforcement can take many forms, including physical (gaol, punishment) or psychological (pressure, public humiliation). Power structures have many ways of enforcing the rules of a society on individuals, but the Internet gives individuals substantial enforcement tools of their own. Power used to be who had the biggest sword, or gun, or police force. Now that major powers and indeed, economies, rely so heavily upon the Internet, there is a power in the ability to disrupt communications. In taking down a government or corporate website or online service, an individual or small group of individuals can have an impact far greater than in the past on power structures in their society, and can do so anonymously. This becomes quite profound when citizen groups emerge with their own philosophical premise and the tools to monitor and enforce their perspective.

Property — property has always been a strong basis of law and order and still plays an important part in democracy, although perspectives towards property are arguably starting to shift. Copyright was invented to protect the "intellectual property" of a person against copying at a time when copying was quite a physical business, and when the mode of distributing information was very expensive. Now, digital information is so easy to copy that it has created a change in expectations and a struggle for traditional models of intellectual property. New models of copyright have emerged that explicitly support copying (copyleft) and some have been successful, such as with the Open Source software industry or with remix music culture. 3D printing will change the game again, as we will see in the near future the massive distribution of the ability to copy exact or superior physical goods, not just virtual ones. This is already creating havoc with those who seek to protect traditional approaches to property but it also presents an extraordinary opportunity for humankind to have greater distribution of physical needs and wealth, not just virtual. Particularly if you consider the current use of 3D printing to create transplant organs, building materials, or the potential of 3D printing combined with some form of nano technology to reassemble molecular materials into food or other essential living items. That is starting to step into science fiction, but we should consider the broader potential of these new technologies before we decide to arbitrarily limit them based on traditional views of copyright, as we are already starting to see.

By massively distributing publishing, communications, monitoring, and enforcement, and with the coming potential massive distribution of property, technology, the Internet has created an ad hoc, self-determined, and grassroots power base that challenges traditional power structures and governments.

But there are also systemic (and artificial) limitations on the distribution of power, most notably limited capacity, but also rising inequity. Increased busyness and living costs means most people have increasingly scarce time and resources and simply cannot participate fully in their own lives let alone in contributing substantially to the community and world around them. If we consider the impact of business and organisational models built on scarcity, centricity, and secrecy, we quickly see that normal people are locked out of a variety of resources, tools and knowledge with which they could better their lives. The cost and complexity of living is dramatically increasing and the quality of life is decreasing. We take publicly funded education, research, and information and lock them behind paywalls and then blame people for not having the skills, knowledge, or facts at their disposal. If a substantial challenge of the 21st century is having enough time and cognitive load to spare, why don't we have strategies to free up more time for more people? What do we need to do systemically to empower more people to move beyond survival and into being able to thrive?

Paradox 2

Government is an important part of a stable society and yet is being increasingly undermined, both intentionally and unintentionally

The realisation here has been in first realising how important our public sectors (and democracy) are in providing a safe, stable, accountable, predictable, and prosperous society while simultaneously observing first hand the undermining and degradation of the

role of government both intentionally and unintentionally, from the outside and inside. I have chosen to work in the private sector, non-profit community sector, political sector, and now public sector, specifically because I wanted to understand the "system" in which I live and how it all fits together. I believe that "government" — both the political and public sectors — has a critical part to play in designing, leading, and implementing a better future. The reason I believe this is because government is one of the few mechanisms that is accountable to the people — in democratic countries, at any rate. Perhaps not as much as we like, and it has been slow to adapt to modern practices, tools, and expectations, but governments are one of the most powerful and influential tools at our disposal, and we can better use them as such.

However, I posit that an internal, largely unintentional and ongoing degradation of the public sectors is underway in Australia, New Zealand, the UK and other "western democracies", spurred initially by an ideological shift from 'serving the public good' to acting more like a business in the "New Public Management" policy shift of the 1980s. This was useful double speak for replacing public service values with business values and practices, which ignores the fact that governments often do what is not naturally delivered by the marketplace and should not be only doing what is profitable. The political appointment of heads of departments has also resulted over time in replacing frank, fearless, and evidence-based leadership with politically palatable compromises throughout the senior executive layer of the public sector, which also drives necessarily secretive behaviour, else the contradictions be apparent to the ordinary person.

I have seen the results of these internal forms of degradations. From workshops where people under budget constraints seriously consider outsourcing all government services to the private sector, to long-suffering experts in the

public sector unable to sway leadership with facts until expensive consultants are brought in to ask their opinion and sell the insights back to the department where it is finally taken seriously (because "industry" said it), through to serious issues where significant failures happen with blame outsourced along with the risk, design and implementation, with the details hidden behind "commercial in confidence" arrangements.

The impact on the effectiveness of the public sector is obvious, but the human cost is also substantial, with public servants directly undermined, intimidated, ignored, and have a growing sense of hopelessness and disillusionment. There is also an intentional degradation of democracy by external (but occasionally internal) agents who benefit from the weakening and limiting of government. This is more overt in some countries than others. A tension between the regulator and those regulated is a perfectly natural thing; however, as the public sector grows weaker, the balance between sectors is lost and public good becomes harder to maintain. I have seen many people in government take a vendor or lobbyist word as gold without critical analysis of the motivations or implications, largely again due to the word of a public servant being inherently assumed to be less valid than from the private sector. This imbalance needs to be addressed if the public sector is to play an effective role. Greater accountability and transparency can help, but currently, there is a lack of common agreement on the broader role of government in society, both the political and public sectors. So the entire institution and the stability it can provide is under threat of death by a billion papercuts. Efforts to evolve government and democracy have largely been limited to iterations on the status quo: better consultation, better voting, better access to information, better services. But a rethink is required and the internal existential crisis and systemic degradations need to be addressed.

Paradox 3

Substantial paradigm shifts have already happened but are not being integrated into people's thinking and processes, let alone public policies or vision

The realisation here is that even if people are motivated to understand something fundamentally new to their worldview, it doesn't necessarily translate into how they behave. It is easier to improve something than change it. Easier to provide symptomatic relief than to cure the disease. People often confuse iteration for transformation, or symptomatic relief with addressing causal factors, so perhaps there is also a need for critical and systems thinking as part of the general curriculum. This is important because symptomatic relief, whilst sometimes necessary to alleviate suffering, is an effort in chasing one's tail and often perpetuates the problem.

One of the other problems we face, particularly in government, is that the systems involved are largely products of centuries-old thinking. If we consider some of the paradigm shifts of our times, we have moved from **scarcity to surplus**, **centralised to distributed**, from **closed to open**, **analog to digital** and **normative to formative**. And yet, people still assume old paradigms in creating new policies, programs, and business models. For example, how many times have you heard someone talk about innovative public engagement (tapping into a distributed network of expertise) by consulting through a website (maintaining central decision-making control using a centrally controlled tool)? Or "innovation" being measured (and rewarded) through patents or copyright, both scarcity based constructs developed centuries ago? "Open government" is often developed by small, insular teams through habitually closed processes without any self awareness of the irony of the approach. And new policy and legislation is developed in analog formats without any substantial input from those

affected or those tasked with implementation, or consideration with how best to consume the operating rules of government in the systems of society. Consider also the number of times we see existing systems assumed to be correct by merit of existing. For instance, a compliance model that has no measurable impact. At what point and by what mechanisms can we weigh up the merits of the old and the new when we are continually building upon a precedent-based system of decision-making? If 3D printing helped provide a surplus economy by which we could help solve hunger and poverty, why wouldn't that be weighed up against the benefits of traditional scarcity-based business models?

Paradox 4

**We are surrounded by new things every day and yet there is a serious lack of vision for the future**

One of the first things I try to do in any organisation is understand the vision, the strategy, and what success should look like. In this way, I can either figure out how to best contribute meaningfully to the overarching goal, and in some cases help grow or develop the vision and strategy to be a little more ambitious. I like to measure progress and understand the baseline from which I'm trying to improve but I also like to know what I'm aiming for.

So, what could an optimistic future look like for society? For us? For you? How do you want to use the new means at our disposal to make life better for your community? Do we dare imagine a future where everyone has what they need to thrive, where we could unlock the creative and intellectual potential of our entire society, a 21st century Renaissance, rather than the vast proportion of our collective cognitive capacity

going into just getting food on the table and the kids to school. Once you can imagine where you want to be, only then can we have a constructive discussion where we want to be collectively, and only then can we talk constructively the systems and structures we need to support such futures. Until then, we are all just tweaking the settings of a machine built by our ancestors.

I have been surprised to find, in government, a lot of strategies without vision, a lot of KPIs without measures of success, a gap between policy and implementation, and in many cases a disconnect between what a person is doing and the vision or goals of the organisation or program they are in. We talk "innovation" a lot, but often in the back of people's minds they are often imagining a better website or app, which isn't much of a transformation. We are surrounded by dystopian visions of the distant future, and yet most government vision statements only go so far as articulating something "better" than what we have now, with "strategies" often focused on shopping lists of simple tactics 3-5 years into the future. The New Zealand Department of Conservation provides an inspiring contrast, with a 50-year vision it works toward, from which it develops its shorter-term stretch goals and strategies on a rolling basis and has an ongoing measurable approach.

Hopefully these paradoxes provide some food for thought, and encourage greater collective urgency for reforming the public sector to reflect the changing world and what sort of future we need and want as a society. Let's all build the holistic, responsive, kind and values-driven public sector we need to thrive both individually and collectively, and not be content to create beautiful cogs in a broken machine.
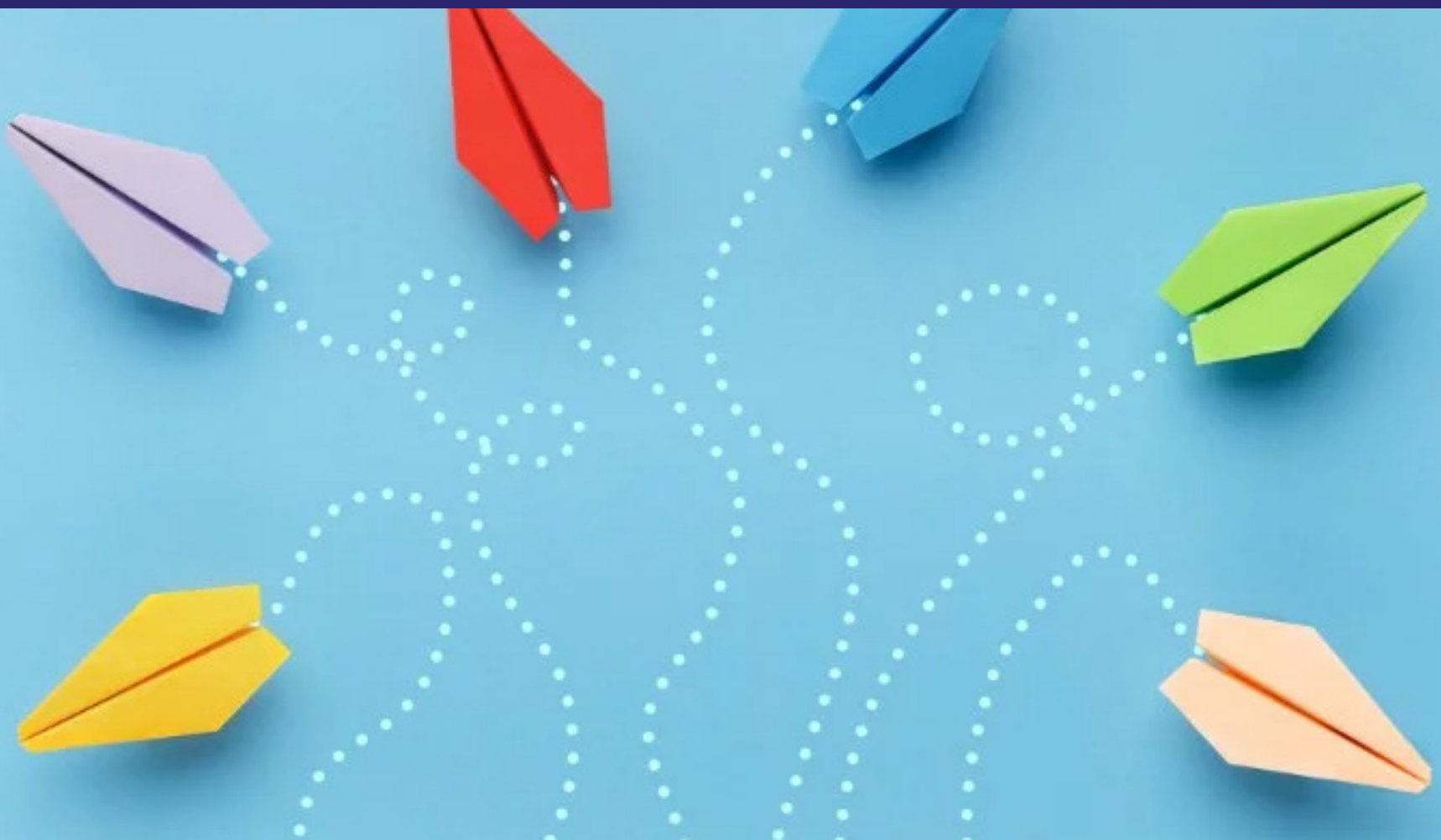
How to avoid change for change's sake

Change: the very word inspires quite different responses in different people, from excitement to dread. I see change as twofold: a **tool for getting us somewhere ne**w, and a changing **force we must respond to**. Change for change's sake is both a waste of time and a distraction from real problems and opportunities.

A pattern of behaviour I repeatedly see in private and public sectors is reactive change programs that try to prioritise and fix individual problems (a deficit view) rather than recognise and fix the causal factors that created the problems in the first place. Such a pattern of change creates a lot of set-and-forget programs of reactive symptomatic relief and iterative improvements without direction.

So, how can we design proactive, effective and adaptive change efforts that both respond to what is happening around us and that take us where we need to go? I believe useful change efforts require two things: direction and responsiveness.

Direction

If you don't know where you are going, how will you know when you've got there? To take the saying a little further: if you don't know where you are going, how will you ensure every action and decision you make is contributing to getting there?

I see a common pattern of change without direction, which usually creates a systemic divergence and duplication of efforts that sees teams and individuals all just trying to achieve their own goals independently of each other. If you have a clear purpose, direction and vision for any collection of people, then the individuals therein tend to naturally align their efforts accordingly, which creates convergence and effectiveness of effort. If a person can't trace what they are doing for the overall goal, then there is a problem.

As an aside, of course there is some necessary busy work in running any organisation; but, it should be a matter of proportionality. Ideally, all people and teams should be spending 80-90% of their effort on activities that contribute to the direction and organisational goals. When you see people spending less than 50% of their time or less on the actual work that needs to be done or on symptomatic relief, then there is a problem. I tend to automate, streamline or simply stop any busy work that I can and encourage my teams to do the same, but of course not all people feel empowered or supported to do this, especially if the busy work comes from up the hierarchy. But I encourage everyone to at least be proactive and cognisant in trying to ensure a reasonable proportion of your day-to-day effort is making your intended impact.

So how do you determine direction? The public sector has some hard-coded purposes embedded in the Constitution and foundational legislation that should provide some consistency and convergence, but the differing responsibilities across different portfolio legislation and the differing top down directions from different ministers makes it harder for the public sector to sustain convergence of efforts around common direction. Some public sectors have strong senior leadership with clear purpose and direction that in turn drives sustained and effective change across organisations. But some are so reactive they are unable to maintain momentum of any change program. Public sectors need to be continually progressing their own evolution while being responsive and supportive of the policy agenda of the government of the day. To do either without the other puts that public sector out of balance.

Successful organisations know how to establish clear direction, but how about successful societies? How would we see natural convergence of efforts across sectors for the benefit of everyone? Personally, I would love to see an overarching and collectively developed vision for Australia around which we could all converge across sectors and across ideological aisles.

In the absence of one, you need to ensure you know or create sufficient direction for all efforts in your team, your organisation and ideally across your sector to cohesively drive toward.

Responsiveness

Ironically, many change programs are also designed at a point of time with ongoing delivery then oblivious to ongoing extrinsic changes happening every day.

In short, there are many change programs that don't change.

If you don't keep an eye out along the way, how do you know if you are even going in the right direction? Every journey needs both a destination and a willingness to respond to what happens along the way, whether it is traffic, a storm or running out of fuel. You wouldn't get in your car, start it up and start driving without a destination or purpose in mind. And you wouldn't set and

forget the journey, as you need to respond to traffic, lights, someone crossing the road, etc. Even smart cars maintain both a direction and responsiveness to changing conditions.

So how do you build responsiveness into a work program? And what inputs do you need to understand and respond to change?

There are many ways to build responsive teams, and I discuss how to establish an empowered and safe team culture in Enabling Collaboration Across the Public Sector. For the purpose of this article, I'll talk more about how to **structure the work itself**. I would also suggest the most powerful inputs at your disposal are continuous **public engagement** and **monitoring of trends**. Below are some practical strategies that may help:

- First, you need to actively **design your work program around continual change.** This means adopting methods that are constantly reviewing, optimising and, where necessary, pivoting to maintain course — the same as you would in your car :) I would suggest adopting agile work methods with regular retrospectives, an agile budgeting approach that doesn't lock the full work program in at a fixed point, and constant engagement with key stakeholders to show delivery and manage expectations.

- I talk about this a lot, but if possible, **work in the open**, both internally and externally, as this will help build trust and confidence in your team. Trust is especially important when you identify something that needs to be responded to, such as a pivot or change in approach. If you don't have trust and delegation of sufficient decision-making, then responsiveness can become limited by top-down controls. The ability of a team to respond requires leadership that supports and encourages them to be responsive.

- Public engagement:

  - If you ensure regular **proactive engagement** with representative user groups of your service, policy, regulation, etc, then you can keep your finger on the pulse of changing needs and trends. This means you need to ensure you seek their thoughts and ideas, not just seek validation of your direction.

  - You could establish an **independent advisory group** of people who are aligned with the purpose, which I find often helps to both inform the work program and help mitigate the dangers of siloed teams or assumptions. If you do this, I do recommend you make it as open as possible so it doesn't become exclusionary. It can also be a great means of support when things need pivoting.

  - You also need to ensure there are effective, accessible and ongoing **public feedback mechanisms** for people to provide their experience to you. If you suddenly see a spike of feedback on a service, negative or positive, there is a reason to investigate and optimise.

- Monitoring of trends:

  - Ensure you know the policy intent(s) you are working within, and design from the start, a way to **measure/monitor relevant trends** so that when you implement any form of change you can see if there is any corresponding impact.

  - When you develop your trend monitoring approach, also design and create **key triggers for notification**, and ensure your team actively monitor for unexpected changes that you need to respond to or notify.

The inevitability of Machinery of Government change

All public servants experience the unique and regular disruption from Machinery of Government (MoG) changes. From a change in portfolios to a change in government, the impact on departments is enormous. For large changes, it can take a year or two to finalise a series of MoG changes, giving perhaps a year of full productivity in the election cycle, only to then start again. Whenever you have major top-down change like a MoG happening, you also have a negative impact on culture, as people feel uncertain, unsafe and disempowered. If we want to see more effective, productive and efficient public sectors, I truly believe this is an area that needs some focused effort and investment. This is hard in an environment that primarily values the immediacy of service-delivery improvements, and yet is critical for maintaining the capacity, culture and productivity needed for great service delivery.

MoGs are not going away, so ideally we would see some investment in modernising the administrative structures of government, like described by Allan Barger in his exceptional Government Digital Twin article, which talks about how much easier it would be to manage MoG changes if our foundations were digital. For instance, if the organisational structure of the public service was a data set that linked to the Administrative Arrangement Orders (AAOs) of the day, then when you changed the AAOs, you could have core digital infrastructure for government administration and service delivery. You could potentially automate many of the painful and manual aspects of a MoG change, including system and personnel access changes, payroll and HR systems, stationery and email signature blocks, legislative line of responsibilities, etc. Basically, if we want to see true digital government, we need to invest in the modernisation of government itself, not just the services provided to the public. This isn't a "nice to have", but rather a critical foundation for evolving to be a 21st century public sector that can respond to the changing needs of a 21st century society and democracy.

Until then, public servants can only do our work the best we can. But I do encourage everyone to try to automate and minimise the negative impacts of MoGs on the day-to day work of the public sector, which means protecting capacity, buffering core service and policy delivery, and ensuring you keep the impact of such change in proportion, as it can otherwise simply swallow up all available time and effort, which in turn undermines the very purpose of having a public sector.

The hidden lesson in 'many hands make light work'

"*Differentiation of labour and interdependence of society is reliant on consistent and predictable authorities to thrive*" — Durkheim

"Many hands make light work" is an old adage both familiar and comforting. One feels that if things get out of hand we can just throw more resources at the problem and it will suffice. However, we have made it harder on ourselves in three distinct ways, all of which are relevant to planning and programs in the public sector:

- by not always recognising the importance of interdependence and the need to ensure the stability and prosperity of our community as a necessary precondition to the success of the individuals therein;

- by increasingly making it harder for people to gain knowledge, skills and adaptability to ensure those "many hands" are able to respond to the work required and not trapped into social servitude; and

- by often failing to recognise whether we need a linear or exponential response in whatever we are doing, feeling secure in the busy-ness of many hands.

Specialisation is when a person goes very deep on a particular topic or skill. Over many millennia we have gotten to the point where we have developed extreme specialisation, supported through interdependence and stability, which gave us the ability to rapidly and increasingly evolve what we do and how we live. This resulted in increasingly complex social systems and structures bringing us to a point today where the pace of change has arguably outpaced our imagination. We see many people clinging to fixed process, inherited traditions, and romanticised notions of the past whilst we hurtle at an accelerating pace into the future. Many hands have certainly made light work, but new challenges have emerged as a result and it is more critical than ever that we reimagine our world and develop our resilience and adaptability to change, because change is the only constant moving forward.

One human can survive on their own for a while. A group can divide up the labour quite effectively and survive over generations, creating time for culture and play. But when we established cities and states around 6000 years ago, we started a level of unprecedented division of labour and specialisation beyond mere survival. When the majority of your time, energy and resources go into simply surviving, you are largely subject to forces outside your control and unable to justify spending time on other things. But when survival is taken care of (broadly speaking) it creates time for specialisation and perfecting your craft, as well as for leisure, sport, art, philosophy and other key areas of development and progress in society.

And yet, for all our progress, most people today have no capacity for anything beyond a modern form of mere survival, with many skating uncomfortably close to poverty on a regular basis. Our vulnerable have the greatest time impost put on them to justify why they should get support from the state, which also means no time to spend on improving one's lot. How did we allow this to happen and how can we fix it?

I want to talk about interdependence. I think many people today have internalised the idea that they each make it on their own if they work hard enough, but it is **only** through the structure of an interdependent society that the opportunities to specialise and "make it" are even possible. This means recognising and having empathy for the fact that many more people are part of and relied upon for any one success than is acknowledged, and indeed sometimes the success of one person relies upon the disadvantage of others. Public servants must be attuned to this reality so that work done in the public sector contributes to a positive outcome for all society, not just for a few, and the net positive outcome is best served by understanding all the moving parts in any policy or program including the interdependence mapped out therein.

Back to interdependence. The era of cities itself was born on the back of an agricultural technology revolution that made food production far more efficient, creating surplus (which drove a need for record-keeping and greater proliferation of written language) and prosperity, with dramatic growth in specialisation of jobs. With greater specialisation came greater interdependence as it becomes in everyone's best interests to play their part predictably. A simple example is a farmer needing her farming equipment to be reliable to make food, and the mechanic needs food production to be reliable for sustenance. Both rely on each other not just as customers, but to be successful and sustainable over time. Greater specialisation led to greater surplus as specialists continued to fine-tune their crafts for ever greater outcomes. Over time, an increasing number of people were not simply living day-to-day, but were able to plan ahead and learn how to deal with major disruptions to their existence. Hunters and gatherers are completely subject to the conditions they live in, with an impact on mortality, leisure activities largely fashioned around survival, small community size and the need to move around. With surplus came spare time and the ability to take greater control over one's existence and build a type of systemic resilience to change.

So interdependence gave us greater stability, as a natural result of enlightened self-interest writ large where one's own success is clearly aligned with the success of the community where one lives. However, although interdependence in smaller communities creates a kind of mutual understanding and appreciation, we have arguably lost this reciprocity and connectedness in larger cities today, ironically where interdependence is strongest. When you can't understand intuitively the role that others play in your wellbeing, then you don't naturally appreciate them, and disconnected self-interest creates a cost to the community. When community cohesion starts to decline, eventually individuals also decline, except the small percentage who can either move communities or who benefit, intentionally or not, on the back of others' misfortune.

When you have no visibility of food production beyond the supermarket, then it becomes easier to just buy the cheapest milk, eggs or bread, even if the cheapest product is unsustainable or undermining more sustainably produced goods. When you have such a specialised job that you can't connect what you do to any greater meaning, purpose or value, then it also becomes hard to feel valuable to society, or valued by others. We see this increasingly in highly specialised organisations like large companies, public sector agencies and cities, where the individual feels the dual pressure of being everything and nothing all at once.

Modern society has made it somewhat less intuitive to value others who contribute to your survival because survival is taken for granted for many, and competing in ones own specialisation has been extended to competing in everything without an appreciation of the necessary interdependence required for one to prosper. Competition is seen to be the opposite of cooperation, whereas a healthy sustainable society is both cooperative and competitive. One can cooperate on common goals and compete on divergent goals, thus making the best use of time and resources where interests

align. Cooperative models seem to continually emerge in spite of economic models that assume simplistic punishment and incentive-based behaviours. We see various forms of "commons" where people pool their resources in anything from community gardens and 'share economies' to software development and science, because cooperation is part of who we are and what makes us such a successful species.

Increasing specialisation also created greater surplus and wealth, generating increasingly divergent and insular social classes with different levels of power and people becoming less connected to each other and with wealth overwhelmingly going to the few. This pressure between the benefits and issues of highly structured societies and which groups benefit has ebbed and flowed throughout our history but, generally speaking, my hypothesis is that when the benefits to the majority outweigh the issues for that majority, then you have stability. With stability, a lot can be overlooked, including at times gross abuses for a minority or the disempowered. However, if the balance tips too far the other way, then you get revolutions, secessions, political movements and myriad counter-movements. Unfortunately, many counter-movements limit themselves to replacing people rather than the structures that created the issues however, several of these counter-movements established some critical ideas that underpin modern society.

It is worth briefly touching upon the fact that specialisation and interdependence, which are critical for modern societies, both rely upon the ability for people to share, to learn, and to ensure that the increasingly diverse skills are able to evolve as the society evolves. Many hands only make light work when they know what they are doing and are heading in the right direction. Historically the leaps in technology, techniques and specialisation have been shared for others to build upon and continue to improve as we see in writings, trade, oral traditions and rituals throughout history. Gatekeepers naturally emerged to control access to or interpretations

of knowledge through priests, academics, the ruling class or business class. Where gatekeepers grew too oppressive, communities would subdivide to rebalance the power differential, such a various Protestant groups, union movements and the more recent Open Source movements. In any case, access wasn't just about the power of gatekeepers. The costs of publishing and distribution grew as societies grew, creating a call from the business class for "intellectual property" controls as financial mechanisms to offset these costs. The argument ran that because of the huge costs of production, business people needed to be incentivised to publish and distribute knowledge, though arguably we have always done so as a matter of survival and growth.

With the Internet suddenly came the possibility for massively distributed and free access to knowledge, where the cost of publishing, distribution and even the capability development required to understand and apply such knowledge was suddenly negligible. We created a universal, free and instant way to share knowledge, creating the opportunity for a compounding effect on our historic capacity for cumulative learning. This is worth taking a moment to consider. The technology simultaneously created an opportunity for compounding our cumulative learning whilst rendered the reasons for IP protections negligible (lowered costs of production and distribution) and yet we have seen a dramatic increase in knowledge protectionism.

Isn't it to our collective benefit to have a well-educated community that can continue our trajectory of diversification and specialisation for the benefit of everyone? I love this recent story of a farmer who built from scratch an energy source for his home and village using books from the library. Open access to knowledge is a powerful tool for self-empowerment. Anyone can get access to myriad forms of consumer entertainment but our most valuable knowledge assets are often fiercely protected against general and free access, dampening our ability

to learn and evolve. Consider publicly funded research and papers being behind education paywalls as a critical case in point, though it is starting to change. The increasing gap between the haves and have nots is surely symptomatic of the broader increasing gap between the empowered and disempowered, the makers and the consumers, those with knowledge and those without. Consumers are shaped by the tools and goods they have access to, and limited by their wealth and status. But makers can create the tools and goods they need, and can redefine wealth and status with a more active and able hand in shaping their own lives.

As a result of our specialisation, our interdependence and our cooperative/competitive systems, we have created greater complexity in society over time, usually accompanied with the ability to respond to greater complexity, complexity that is growing exponentially. The problem is that a lot of our solutions have only been linear responses to this exponential problem space, which is creating an **exponential needs ga**p. The assumption that more hands will continue to make light work often ignores the need for sharing skills and knowledge, and often ignores where a genuinely transformative response is required. A small fire might be managed with buckets, but at some point of growth, adding more buckets becomes insufficient and new methods are required. Necessity breeds innovation and yet when did you last see real innovation in your organisation that didn't boil down to simply more or larger buckets? Iteration is rarely a form of transformation, so it is important to always clearly understand the type of problem you are dealing with and whether the planned response needs to be linear or exponential. If the former, more buckets is probably fine. If the latter, every bucket is just a distraction from developing the necessary response.

So perhaps many hands make light work for a while, but many minds would achieve exponentially more.

Government 2.0 — the substance behind the semantics

Ten years ago, I was part of an optimistic and enthusiastic community that was forming internationally around the possibilities for reimagining government, public sectors, and democracy, by using new opportunities from the Internet and increasingly accessible technologies. It was broadly framed as 'Government 2.0', which was both fun but also sparked a continuous semantic argument amongst many. It was fascinating to see people rail for and against the term, when it was the substance of exploring new possibilities and the grassroots sense of exploring new ground together that was the most interesting, important and (potentially) disruptive.

There was foundational work in 2009 from thought leaders like Tim O'Reilly, who spoke about Government as a Platform (see also his great paper from 2010), which challenged people to think differently about how public sectors could operate if we took the lessons from the Internet, tech sector, and open source. In Australia, the government of the day commissioned an Australian Gov 2.0 Taskforce, which was itself a multi-sector and diverse group led by Dr Nicholas Gruen. The taskforce embarked upon significant public consultation to develop a recommendations paper for the government, which was almost entirely agreed to in the government's response and which led to a lot of activity within a couple of years, including:

- a Declaration of Open Government;

- the establishment of the Gov 2.0 Awards;

- A Gov 2.0 primer (largely tech-focused);

- increased efforts around open data, including the establishment of data.gov.au in 2010 (which was relaunched in 2012) and update to IP guidance, and publishing of Budget data (not just PDFs); and

- online engagement training for public servants and great social media leadership.

But the Gov 2.0 Taskforce was also a **significant catalyst for bringing people togethe**r across different sectors, disciplines, and perspectives around reimagining government. It was a fun and formative time for many people, communities, and organisations, with the ripples still felt.

Personally, I still draw inspiration and practical guidance from a lot of the work done and from many people I remain connected to. But, there are many people entering the public sector now who don't know about or appreciate the importance of that time.

I am particularly concerned to see a repeating pattern of people continually re-discovering ideas that should by now be normalised in our public sectors, like the notion that public participation in public government might have value, or that the public sector can adopt new technologies while also adapting to better and more accountable governance. Or that user-centred and agile methods can improve public outcomes not simply in IT but in anything from service delivery to policy.

Many thanks to Thomas Andrews and Craig Thomler for their peer review of this article, and I do still recommend Craig's great and long-running blog eGovau, which has a plethora of examples and commentary of the evolution of public sectors over the past 15 years.

I recently re-read a Gov 2.0 primer I wrote 10 years ago and thought it might be helpful as part of this *Public Sector Pia Review* to briefly revisit the opportunities and lessons from Government 2.0. I would also suggest that perhaps at a grassroots level we need to either reclaim the term or find something else we can rally around so that, at the very least, we can reconnect as a community for mutual support in the very necessary and urgent reforms required for the public sector to continue to be fit for purpose during the increasing pace of change dominating the 21st century, and to best serve the increasingly complex, interdependent, and changing needs of the communities we serve.

A few of us from back then, including some original members of the Gov 2.0 Taskforce, thought it might be interesting and fun to undertake a 10 year review of our progress against the Gov 2.0 Taskforce Report recommendations, and to consider what has happened in the past 10 years and what we need to do next. Not just what we should recommend, but what we, as individuals across sectors, can do to improve and reform our public sectors for better public outcomes.

If you can, please come along or contribute to our Gov 2.0 Taskforce Ten Years On event on November 16th.

Many thanks to *The Mandarin*, Cordelta, and the Museum for Democracy for their generous support of the event.

Firstly, this is about you

I want to first frame this article as being about you. Not your team, your profession, your organisation, your jurisdiction, or your leadership. It is not about the complex context in which you work (particularly if you work in the public sector), nor about all the reasons why this stuff is hard. This is about you choosing to do your part, in whatever shape that takes, to maximise public good, the best public outcomes, and the best public sectors we can create. It is about not waiting to be asked, or for permission, vision, or leadership, but rather to figure out innovative and effective ways to apply your skills, passion, and values every day in everything you do. It is not about being rewarded or lauded — it is about you choosing to deliberately make our society just a little bit better.

This article is primarily directed to Australian audiences, but if you're in another jurisdiction I hope you'll still find the following ideas and observations useful.

Getting back to basics: what 'Government 2.0' is

When I first heard the term 'Government 2.0' I thought it sounded pretty naff. It was obviously riffing on Web 2.0, and a lot of the successes talked about looked like fairly straightforward uses of the Internet by politicians and government agencies.

A lot of excited people waded into the Government 2.0 debate with talk about access to data and transparent decision-making, or

shiny new apps. My view had been they were getting too specific and missing the broader and important need for evolution and transformation of the processes, practices, and structures that were largely shaped in the 18th century or earlier.

Wikipedia defines Web 2.0 as being second-generation web development and design. I think there are four main identifying features of Web 2.0. I say this not as a Web 2.0 expert, but as a long-time geek observing and participating in this space and continually working with emerging technologies and social trends. Following are foundations for understanding the opportunities of Government 2.0:

- **Online and always connected** — being online at all times. This means people can use services/data/systems at their convenience, that data and systems can be constantly used, collected and aggregated. It moves away from the concept of tightly managed interfaces with society and towards opportunities for continual engagement and participation by very large and diverse communities. This necessitates changes to manual or analog approaches.

- **Massive integration and aggregation** — facilitates data mashups, cross-platform communications, and the ability to publish once and to many places. This creates both great opportunities and great issues for society, as are currently being keenly felt and debated.

- **Broadcasted peer-to-peer conversations** — enables global social networking, online public community development, a shift from one2many (i.e. public statements) to many2many (i.e. online forums and chat), and the range of public and private conversations therein.

- **Beautiful and dynamic user experiences** — the shift to a user-centric, dynamic, interactive, and beautiful user experience is an important factor, especially as there is now far more understanding about how people use the Internet and how it differs from other media.

As mentioned in an earlier article, Tim O'Reilly neatly defined Government 2.0 in the best, most accessible and most persistently meaningful way I have seen. This encourages me to continue to use his definition:

"Government 2.0 is not a new kind of government; it is government stripped down to its core, rediscovered and reimagined as if for the first time. And in that reimagining, this is the idea that becomes clear: government is, at bottom, a mechanism for collective action. We band together, make laws, pay taxes,and build the institutions of government to manage problems that are too large for us individually and whose solution is in our common interest. Government 2.0, then, is the use of technology— especially the collaborative technologies at the heart of Web 2.0—to better solve collective problems at a city, state, national, and international level."
— **TIM O'REILLY**, GOVERNMENT AS A PLATFORM (2010)

The opportunity of Government 2.0, then, is the ability, as Tim puts it, to reimagine government and work towards fundamentally better public outcomes in accordance with the values and culture of the society you serve. This necessarily means we need to shift from a 100% reactive approach to things (megatrends, threats, and even opportunities) and start to ensure at least a reasonable proportion of our efforts, time and resources are committed to proactively designing better futures towards which we can progress.

Craig also raised a critical lens:

"… it is about taking ownership of our governance and future, rather than allowing external factors and interests to drive this future. The essence of risk management calls for risks be identified and pre-emptively avoided/mitigated (ahead of responding to realised risks), the essence of preventative health care is to avoid illness through changing behaviours, environments and proactive steps, ahead of treatment with medicines. Gov 2.0 is about thinking about how we organise ourselves for the future, and design the pathway to the future we want from the many possibilities presented (adapting and evolving our understanding as we progress). It is about Leading us into the future, rather than just Managing events as they occur."
— **CRAIG THOMLER**

Arguably, Government as a Platform is a crucial enabler for Gov 2.0, and indeed for any fundamental transformation of our public sectors to be fit for purpose in the 21st century, as it represents not just a technology or design principle but rather a paradigm shift to governments operating more like a series of high-value nodes in a network that feeds from and into a complex and interdependent global social and economic structure.

Governments have some special and unique responsibilities, but the more we can operate like a foundation upon which others can build value, the more we contribute to greater public outcomes, and the greater impact we can have for less effort than it would take to do it on our own.

Open Government

In Australia, we are very lucky to start with a reasonably Open Government, with transparency to varying degrees enshrined in legislation and practice. Obviously, there is always more to do, but there is already a lot of public engagement, consultation, and information made available, including about the operations of our parliaments.

Online tools and methodologies offer some new ways to improve our system and to help get the average busy Aussie engaged. After 10 years working in the public sector, and 10 years before that working with the public sector (in the tech sector) *I really believe that open that isn't digital doesn't scale, and digital that isn't open doesn't last.*

We see plenty of Open Government initiatives looking at better ways of getting access to documents (FOI requests) which are themselves unreadable PDFs, which creates an issue of scale when people or organisations are trying to retrospectively hold the government of the day to account. On the other hand, plenty of digital initiatives have been attempted that are developed internally and that have resulted in shiny new stovepipe closed systems that only last as long as the company or individual who commissioned them.

With this in mind, I personally think good 'open government' is the natural result when you have both:

- government policy and practice that informs, empowers, involves, and collaborates with citizens, and

- a well-informed and engaged public (which is essential for democracy), and

- an empowered public service that continually improves itself and shares knowledge across silos to maximise learnings and preserve and build on good practice and approaches.

We originally identified three main focus areas for open government:

- **Open, transparent and participatory decision-making** — engaging citizens directly in the processes of decision-making, whether that be political (e.g., policy or legislative development) or bureaucratic (i.e. planning a new piece of public infrastructure). This improves public trust in government as it becomes open for scrutiny and oversight. After all, it is OUR public sector, all of us. With the dramatic increase in the use of machines, automation, and AI in the day-to-day work of public sectors, this means a necessary consideration, planning, and development of 21st century trust infrastructure to ensure decision making in government is accountable, traceable, appealable, auditable, and ultimately, accountable.

- **Citizen-centric services** — government agencies (and services) engaging with citizens based on their individual needs, which can mean leveraging information such as their location, type of help they need, perhaps even personal information. This means citizens are given the right information, from the right person, in a single place.

- **Access to government information** — ensuring all government information that can be made available (excluding data with privacy, security, or commercialisation implications) is available to the general public. This encourages public and private innovation on top of government data, to the benefit of the society and economy.

First steps for Government 2.0

I have tried to put together some practical first steps for government representatives and agencies who are struggling to understand this concept.

The first step is to **connect**. Connect with others in your sector (other teams, other departments, other jurisdictions), connect with your clients/ users and those affected by your work, connect with naturally aligned organisations (with shared goals), and connect with multi-disciplinary groups to help inform your work with a range of perspectives, experience, and expertise in the room. Just by connecting with others you will see what is possible, learn from the past, and hopefully contribute to the efforts, evolution, and momentum of change across the public sector.

Learn from others' successes

"That some achieve great success is proof to all that others can achieve it as well." Abraham Lincoln

Look at existing successes around the world (including non-Western and non-English-speaking countries), and the broader impact of these case studies. This will help you understand some basic strategies that may suit you and some ideas of the impact that may result. Below, I've put four sets of examples I think we can learn a lot from. I've also got another article on participatory governance which has some great case studies (that I won't repeat here). Here I'll focus more on Gov 2.0 examples from the times past.

SUCCESS IN AUSTRALIA

Some amazing people have been pushing this barrow for years — with varying degrees of success — and have created some cutting edge Gov 2.0 initiatives.

At an agency level, there are many successes driven by passionate Web 2.0 and Gov 2.0 individuals which have been extremely beneficial to many projects and citizens. I'll post some of these case studies soon. Unfortunately, often enough, champions of citizen-centric services and online engagement in the public service are unable to talk publicly about their successes, but that is another story. There are useful examples from before 2009 in the Gov 2.0 Taskforce report itself and the Government 2.0 Public Sphere (PDF, sorry) even as well as a variety of public sector innovation awards. I would also strongly refer people to the early and formative Design Gov efforts (from Web Archive of 2013) in Australia that were trying to instil design and service thinking well before it was cool.

SUCCESS IN THE U.K.

A lot of the early work in the U.K. was formative for early Australian efforts, including the Power of Information Taskforce (2008), which was based on a report completed in 2007 by Ed Mayo and Tom Steinberg called the Power of Information review. The core aspects of the taskforce recommendations include: helping people online where they seek help; innovating and co-creating with citizens online; opening up the policy dialogue online; reforming geospatial data; modernising data publishing and reuse; and, a modern capability. This work formed some of the context for the open data work in the U.K. and the establishment of the Government Digital Service (GDS). In the past 10 years there have been many, many great success stories, civil society progress, and transformation of the public sector, but I was particularly excited to see the Civil Society Strategy, released by the UK government, which is a clear acknowledgement of the need to improve participatory governance.

Define your success criteria, and make it outcomes-oriented

It's important to consider early on what Government 2.0 means to you, both strategically and practically. What do you see as success criteria for a successful Gov 2.0 implementation? For me, and for most public servants, it is about public outcomes. So, regardless of the pressures

you are under, keep those public outcomes in mind, because a) it will keep you sane, and b) it will help ensure high integrity outcomes over time.

Beware the hype

'Government 2.0' was a buzzword, and new buzzwords emerge every day. You always need to have a way to differentiate between hype and reality without falling prey to simple optimism or pessimism. This is why both multi-disciplinary AND public participatory approaches to public policy and services are so critical. There is a lot of hype about, and you need to ensure when you are engaging expertly with experts in this space that they really know what they are talking about. You also need to carefully consider new products and services in this space to ensure they meet your strategic needs. Simple and easy solutions, particularly the solutions your users can engage with and aggregate will be more used and more useful.

Cross-reference advice you receive, build relationships with several people/groups/companies in this area, get your people involved in the community, and pool your resources with others in government to help you. And remember, there are no silver bullets, no single-solution or single framework that will solve all your problems.

Engage with the community

There are some passionate individuals and communities in this space, and empowering one or a few internal champions to engage will be enormously beneficial through what is learned and then able to be integrated into your strategy. Below are a few communities I knew of 10 years ago. Where are the equivalents now?

- Twitter — check out the #publicsphere, #gov2au, and #gov20 hashtags (discussions), and connect with people who are participating in the discussion. This will rapidly get you in

touch with many local experts, as well as in tune with what the Twitter community interested in this space are saying.

- Conferences — look for and attend Gov 2.0, Web 2.0, and Open Government events. There are many happening in Australia at the moment, and some significant ones also happening overseas. They used to be announced on some of the Gov 2.0 communities below.

- Gov 2.0 groups/lists — there were several useful ones. A few I joined at the time included the Gov 2.0 Australia mailing list, the GovLoop networking group, the Gov 2.0 Ning group, and of course it is worth subscribing to and participating in the Government 2.0 Taskforce blog.

I'm not sure where a Government 2.0 community can now converge, engage, and connect. There are certainly a lot of 'digital government', 'innovation', or design in government communities which have some crossover, but sometimes they get a little limited to digital transformation and business or service delivery imperatives rather than broader public sector reform.

Find small wins first, but don't stop there

There will always be small wins, and the best thing to do would be to consult with your users on what they want and their prioritisation to help you identify small and quick wins in this space. A few potential examples are below, just to get you thinking about what kind of practical things you might want to do:

- Ensure your news and information is available by RSS or ATOM — both are formats that allow people to subscribe to and even aggregate your updates. News might include local council or agency updates, weather reports, press releases, or speeches. Anything you want to communicate publicly.

- Ensure geospatial data (location) is stored with your data; for instance, infrastructure projects or events have clear location information. Then expose this location data along with the normal information so both you and the general public can create user-centric maps based on your your data.

- Make iterative improvements, and don't look for a single, all-inclusive solutions, because a) great ones don't exist, b) they rarely do any one thing particularly well, and c) they will be out of date within the month and are hard to replace or append to. Look for specific functions you want, and iteratively add them as part of your backend suite, integrating them seamlessly into your front nd. This way you can add and remove functions as you want them. To achieve this, you need all your technology to be standards compliant with web standards, data formats, and protocols. It will give you a lot of flexibility in the long run.

- When considering public consultations, put the consultation online on a blog post for public comment and allow people to respond to each other. Let people know the comments will be included in the public consultation. You could also run a public sphere event for further public consultation.

But if you only focus on small wins, you run the risk of staying peripheral to systemic change, and thus limited to small changes. There is only so much 'low hanging fruit', and I would argue the top of the tree is now where we need to focus.

Constantly re-evaluate

Ensure you plan into your Gov 2.0 strategy regular reassessment (perhaps quarterly or half yearly), as this area will continue to change and shift. You need to be able to adapt and engage. Your participation in the Gov 2.0 community will assist you in assessing your own progress and to help maintain momentum.

Long-term success in the Open Source community

There are many lessons that can be learned from the Open Source community. The strategies of online engagement, public collaboration on projects, encouraging positive and constructive input, consultative decision-making, and open and transparent processes have been very effectively used by the open-source community for over 30 years. Here are a few examples:

- **Encouraging constructive public contributions** — ensure there is a well-communicated tangible project goal to ensure everyone is heading in the right direction. This helps you draw your community back from unconstructive behaviours. You also need to set the tone of the project. Whether it be some instructions on how you'd like them to participate or a code of conduct, setting the tone will help keep the community constructive. Users will often self-regulate if there is clear direction on the goals and tone of the project.

- Ensure people **can easily find and access whatever they need to contribute** — the more barriers to entry (which may be anything from a non-disclosure agreement to buried information), the fewer participants you'll get. You need great documentation for how to participate and to explain the philosophy of the project. Where possible, include people in the planning phases and decision-making of your project so the process benefits from broader community input and also from people wanting to see it succeed due to the sense of personal contribution in the process.

- **Release early, release often** — this idea is based on software code being released early in the development cycle, and as often as possible, as this makes it easier for other software developers to test and contribute to the project. From a Gov 2.0 perspective,

this could be applied to any sort of online engagement from policy development to general communications. People would prefer to have access to the information in a way they can both access and hopefully contribute to than wait for a potentially more perfect but slower response. The perceived perfect is the enemy of the good, particularly when it comes to establishing an open process.

- **Many eyes make all bugs shallow** — basically, the power of 'crowdsourcing' as it is becoming known. Creating a discussion or a thing in the public eye and garnering the wisdom of the crowd by encouraging and empowering many participants.

- **It all comes down to values** — the open-source community is not a single, homogenous culture, but there are some common values held across the spectrum that create a basic foundation for collaboration and coordination that traverses cultural, language, geo-political, and other usual barriers to engagement. If you take a values-based approach to the work, if you engage with, understand and reflect the values of the communities you serve, then your policy, services, regulation, etc will naturally be more aligned to what is needed, and will naturally be more successful, sustainable and self-perpetuating.

Last word

This is (still) a very exciting time for government and citizens. I know a lot of people, particularly public servants and those working with public sectors, who are feeling frustrated, skeptical, under pressure, and even scared to engage in reimagining our public sectors. But if we don't, who will?

We have opportunities to improve our public sectors through the use of online, technical, participatory, open, and distributed approaches, and there are myriad ways to weave these into our daily work. It would be great to see more leadership, more vision, more support, encouragement, etc, but can we afford to wait? Can society afford for you to wait?

If you embrace Government 2.0 and the notion that we need to reimagine our public sectors in partnership with the broader community, we can collectively achieve better and more sustainable outcomes for everyone.

Good luck, have fun and thank you for doing your part to make Australia a better, more inclusive and more equitable place to live for everyone. Stay focused and do what you can.

The useful balance found in equally serving three masters

As a public servant, you sometimes feel like you are being pulled in different directions. On the one hand this is normal, as we serve many purposes and changing leadership over time, but I wanted to encourage you to take heart, to find ways to maintain your balance, and to be confident in your work, because you're doing a really important job.

When you work in the public sector it can be challenging to pursue genuine 'good' in the face of high pressure expediency. I have found the work and teams have benefited by actively trying to be apolitical, values-based and evidence-driven. Evidence-driven approaches — like service/system design, holistic or future policy proposals, science, or data analytics — can be hard in the face of top-down directives, unless there is a clear process, demand, and support for what will actually work (especially if the evidence is in conflict with the direction given). In the case of public sectors, the stakes and pressures are especially high because many people are affected by good or bad work, and high pressure expediency could be from budget cuts, politics, habitual reactivism, or a genuine crisis.

So, how can you maintain enough balance to provide a solid foundation for sustainably achieving 'good' outcomes when undertaking public service? We often hear about the importance of an apolitical public sector, but what does that mean day-to-day — and what do you need for yourself to be comfortable performing that role?

In this article I've drawn on my experience working across, with and in various jurisdictions to share the useful balance I have found in actively trying to equally serve three 'masters': the **government** of the day; the **parliament**; and the **people**.

This article primarily explores the relevant Australian Commonwealth laws and guidelines that apply to Commonwealth public servants; however, the principles are equally applicable to state and territory public servants in Australia, and public servants of like systems in other jurisdictions.

I hope this article encourages some discussion and exploration of the history and basis upon which our public sectors were built and how we get the right sort of practical balance day to day.

A big thank you to all the people who peer reviewed this article, including Thomas Andrews and Nicholas Gruen, as well as several current and previous public servants and political staffers.

Who are these three masters?

The Public Service Act 1999 laid out as its first **main object** *"to establish an apolitical public service that is efficient and effective in serving the **government**, the **parliament** and the **Australian public**"*. I'll come back to the "efficient and effective" part later, but this bold and I think insightful objective provides the basis for a mental model that can help public servants maintain the balance needed to deliver sustained public outcomes and good. It was somewhat softened later in the same document by the words "within the framework of ministerial responsibility", but I think the objective is one we can all apply usefully in our day to day work. It provides a simple but effective mental framework for all public servants to maintain a personal internal balance and sustained focus in the face of high pressure work environments and constant change.

Although the articulation of these three masters became less obvious in subsequent public sector legislation in Australia, it remains front and centre on the APSC Integrity and Code of Conduct information. The concept seems to fade in and out of the public and political narrative, with changing expectations and demands of public servants over time. The concept has even been contested in some court cases. But this approach has certainly been helpful to me, as it makes it possible to always bring the work we do back to a purpose driven approach. One that serves the government of the day (after all, they are our elected representatives), but does not do so blindly or at the cost of oversight or the public good.

If we were to consider these three masters like the legs of a stool, then we are most stable when we have equal pressure and responsiveness to all three. I believe many of the challenges we face in public sectors today trace back to that balance at various times being too skewed towards any one leg at the cost of the other two. To my mind, this challenge presents a real problem to public sector effectiveness, public trust, and public outcomes, so I wanted to share some of the ways in which I try to ensure that the stool is, for me (and in accordance with my own personal beliefs, ethics and standards), always balanced.

How do we best serve all three

How the public service can best serve the government is to provide frank, fearless, and evidence-based advice, including discussion on what is desirable, technically feasible, and economically viable. I often see frustrated public

servants assume or claim that their minister won't listen, but it has been my experience that ministers are certainly interested in the ideas, expertise, and realities faced, particularly when trying to implement their policies. They want to hear about new challenges and opportunities, which are often most obvious at the coalface of service delivery, regulation, or policy development. They want to know the risks and 'bad' news so they have a chance to do something about it. And they certainly want to know about the associated costs.

Elected representatives are responsible and accountable for the policy decisions they take, and the public sector is tasked, among other responsibilities, with the implementation of those decisions. But they are also usually hungry for new ideas and to hear what works, especially when it comes to bleeding edge opportunities like the impact of new technologies on policy or services. This proactiveness is certainly appropriate, given it is also the role of the public sector to provide advice, to look ahead and develop policy options to meet the future challenges and opportunities, and to engage with the public. I think there is an important role for the public service to provide a trusted and apolitical voice in the public domain. There is also a significant amount of public sector work and efforts where the direction is defined by legislation, the constitution, case law, international crises, emergency response efforts or indeed, by the needs and values of the communities we serve. This means even just on any given day, there is an active balancing act required to conduct our work.

While there is great scope for innovation and ground up proposals from the public sector, public servants don't have unfettered rights to divert their effort away from directions that have been reasonably and lawfully given to them. To do so may expose the service, and the individual, to accusations that they are engaging in a 'frolic'. At the same time, the majority of the work of

public sectors is usually not affected by changing government policies, as there is so much established in legislation, the constitution or existing operations, so there is a lot of scope for apply an innovative, evidence based and values driven approach to the work, accountable to but less affected by changing policy landscapes. So public servants should not feel they can't do ANYTHING without the say so of their minister. Indeed, it is in day-to-day implementation and administration of our public sectors that there is great scope for further evidence-driven approaches, apolitical balance, innovation, and participatory approaches.

In public sectors you often hear people talk about the 'front page test' whereby people are encouraged to consider how their actions would look on the front page of the news. I have often seen this applied through purely a political lens rather than a public good lens, as there is sometimes more pressure to not embarrass a minister than there is to genuinely address the challenge. When the heads of departments are perceived as political appointees, this can erode practical and cooperative apolitical engagement with parliamentary processes and with the public.

How the public service can best serve the parliament is at least twofold: provide oversight, and as the 'doing' arm of the legislature. For oversight, public officials need to be able to justify to the parliament (through estimates committees and other oversight mechanisms) how the policy was implemented, what advice was given, the outcomes, and how money was spent. As the legislature, the parliament is responsible for debating, improving, and assuring all new legislation and laws, so the public sector can assist with providing appropriate facts, evidence and modelling to support the best possible legislative outcomes. Of course, sometimes these responsibilities can be subjected to political theatre, but they are important points of intersection between the

public sector and parliament and it is the job of public servants to occupy this space calmly, professionally and from a balanced position of evidence, to always help ensure the best public outcome prevails.

Just to be clear, best public outcomes is not the same as the outcome you personally want. You need to remove all ego and focus on evidence based public outcomes from different policy approaches, including some your department may propose to the minister, and how to best work with your minister (and their delegates) to implement what is agreed.

How the public sector best serves the Australian public is also something important to consider daily. On the one hand, public engagement can greatly assist in developing user-centred or test driven policy options, designing better services, social, or economic interventions, or myriad other opportunities to engage people in developing the services and laws they rely on. On the other hand, being accountable to the Australian people and to ensuring the best possible public good is a helpful lens to apply to all our work. Forget the front page test — how would your mum, dad, or grandma feel about it? How openly can you work, so that you are always inviting peer review, feedback and participation in the process?

Expanding 'us' to all three masters

Another part of this mental model is to actively consider all three 'masters' as necessary and helpful (in different and sometimes challenging ways) to ensuring the best work and outcomes from the public sector. When it is framed, even subtly, as the minister and us versus the world, things can fall out of balance. I would suggest that genuinely seeing the parliament and Australian public as partners in the work of the public sector naturally leads to better outcomes, engagement, openness, peer review, robustness,

and a better balance for maintaining a values-driven and evidence-based approach.

If all public servants were to at least consider the government, the parliament and the Australian public as our three genuine masters that we should try to serve in as balanced a way as possible, it provides three (3) key benefits:

1. a helpful internal balance against becoming either politicised or rebellious, which provides a stronger and more sustainable foundation upon which we can serve all three without being perceived as swinging any way at the cost of the others;

2. a greater perception (from all three masters) of being the trusted, professional, expert, apolitical, evidence-based, and values-driven voice in the room, which grows trust in government services, law, regulation, and legislation; and

3. a naturally more robust basis for engagement with a greater breadth of skills, expertise, and experience to draw into the important work of policy and legislation, regulation, taxation, service delivery, and other critical functions of the public sector.

The phantom master hidden in plain sight

It is also worth noting the old adage that you get what you measure. Our Australian public sectors were, broadly speaking, initially established as simple rules of administration and obedience to direction. Nowhere in these early foundations do you find the 'why' or purpose. Later, in the 1999 Act, we see a full values statement along with two interesting requirements that have dominated public sector culture ever since: **efficiency and effectiveness**.

Having the language of efficiency and effectiveness in the public service is appropriate, but it needs to be balanced with purpose and outcomes. But when you look to the foundational

frameworks of the Australian Public Service, where is the reference to purpose, to outcomes, or to the intended goals for society, the economy or people more broadly? Surely success in public sectors should be predominantly measured in the resulting human outcomes? By embedding efficiency and effectiveness without explicitly embedding the intended impact on humans, I believe we have and have experienced the impact of fourth phantom 'master': the assumed and unrelenting master of **blind financial prudence**, with increasingly diminishing returns, usually at the cost of all other masters.

On the one hand, it seems obvious that if you want to do something, especially with public funds raised from taxpayers, that you should try to be efficient and effective. But on the other hand, efficient and effective as stated goals in isolation from other goals are a little tricky because they beg the question: to what end? Anyone can be 100% efficient in that if you give them nothing, they can do nothing. We always hear "*there isn't budget for that*", but the fact is, there is a substantial amount of money involved in the public sector and it is more a matter of prioritisation than availability.

The policy direction of the government day often is prescriptive around a small number of key priorities, which is their prerogative, but for the rest it is important that public servants always try to ensure an holistic and balanced approach that drives the best policy and public outcomes. The lack of holistic budgeting across the public service and the conflation of often highly competitive approaches to accessing funds has created an uneven distribution that is not always aligned with best outcomes (or efficient or effective programs) and is not balanced by a consistent measure of impact on people. So how do we ensure key functions and services are appropriately funded balanced against policy priorities of the government of the day? How do we invest in the continuous improvement of

the public sector and meaningful cross sector public policy reform that is important but not the political priority of the day? How do we ensure good human outcomes in the face of purely economically measured systems?

Many other public sectors have stated aims, legislation, or even a constitutional mandate to protect and support the rights or dignity of their public, which provides a balance for them to this and all other pressures, and it is perhaps worth consideration here in Australia.

Balance and values

Once you have balance, then you are better able to maintain a values and purpose driven approach to the work of the public sector. Below are some links to the history of how we got to the APS values we have today. It won't be new for all, but might provide some interesting insights for some. I think the values of any public service should also be continually checked, balanced against and continuously improved to be reflective of the changing values of the people and communities we serve. It is only if the public and public sector values are in alignment that we can understand and be appropriately responsive to the changing needs of the communities we serve.

It was interesting to go back through time and consider the foundational values, or lack thereof, of the Australian Public Sector. The Act that established the APS in 1902 was largely administrative and had no detail of values or purpose. Rather, it laid out the rules for regulating the administration such as hiring, promotions, salaries, etc. Some values are implied subtly throughout, but more obviously in the **Offences** section, where anyone found guilty of disobedience, negligence, incompetency, alcoholism and improper conduct would be reprimanded. Though it isn't clear what is meant by improper.

In the Commonwealth Public Service Act (1922) the **Offences** section was extended to include a public official in both their official and unofficial capacities, and to hold them accountable to both this **Act and regulations**, and to the oath (or affirmation) made by all public servants (laid out in the Fourth Schedule) to **bear allegiance to the King and to uphold the Constitution**.

It might amuse some to know these early foundational documents did very clearly mandate that women were only allowed to be hired until marriage, a rule that persisted until 1966 when the another round of changes to the original Act occurred in the Public Service Act (1966). There was a significant review into the APS that recommended a values-based approach be implemented.

Finally, in the Public Service Act (1999), we saw actual values enshrined in legislation, a long list that makes for interesting reading.

1. (a) the APS is apolitical, performing its functions in an impartial and professional manner;

    (b) the APS is a public service in which employment decisions are based on merit;

    (c) the APS provides a workplace that is free from discrimination and recognises and utilises the diversity of the Australian community it serves;

    (d) the APS has the highest ethical standards;

    (e) the APS is openly accountable for its actions, within the framework of ministerial responsibility to the government, the parliament and the Australian public;

    (f) the APS is responsive to the government in providing frank, honest, comprehensive, accurate and timely advice and in implementing the government's policies and programs;

(g) the APS delivers services fairly, effectively, impartially and courteously to the Australian public and is sensitive to the diversity of the Australian public;

(h) the APS has leadership of the highest quality;

(i) the APS establishes workplace relations that value communication, consultation, co-operation and input from employees on matters that affect their workplace;

(j) the APS provides a fair, flexible, safe and rewarding workplace;

(k) the APS focuses on achieving results and managing performance;

(l) the APS promotes equity in employment;

(m) the APS provides a reasonable opportunity to all eligible members of the community to apply for APS employment;

(n) the APS is a career-based service to enhance the effectiveness and cohesion of Australia's democratic system of government;

(o) the APS provides a fair system of review of decisions taken in respect of APS employees.

2. For the purposes of paragraph (1)(b), a decision relating to engagement or promotion is based on merit if:

    (a) an assessment is made of the relative suitability of the candidates for the duties, using a competitive selection process; and

    (b) the assessment is based on the relationship between the candidates' work-related qualities and the work-related qualities genuinely required for the duties; and

    (c) the assessment focuses on the relative capacity of the candidates to achieve outcomes related to the duties; and

    (d) the assessment is the primary consideration in making the decision.

In 2013 there was an overhaul of these values in the Public Service Act (2013) to simplify them down, and to require public servants to demonstrate and promote the APS Values, the APS Employment Principles, and compliance with the Code of Conduct.

- **Impartial:** The APS is apolitical and provides the government with advice that is frank, honest, timely, and based on the best available evidence.

- **Committed to service:** The APS is professional, objective, innovative and efficient, and works collaboratively to achieve the best results for the Australian community and the government.

- **Accountable:** The APS is open and accountable to the Australian community under the law and within the framework of ministerial responsibility.

- **Respectful:** The APS respects all people, including their rights and their heritage.

- Ethical: The APS demonstrates leadership, is trustworthy, and acts with integrity, in all that it does.

After reading through all these values, how does it align with your values? Those of your community or family? How do you apply a values based approach in your day to day work?

In researching for this article, I also found a review done in 2008 that resulted in various areas of implementation, recommendations, and practical guidelines for public servants to consider what it means to be an apolitical service. It was called Reinvigorating the Westminster tradition: Integrity and accountability in relations between the Australian Government and the APS, was launched by the Australian Public Service Commission in 2008, and makes for a fascinating read.

Final word

In conclusion, it is my experience that it in trying to equally serve all three masters we are better able to serve any of them well. It is hard to progress in any direction if you are constantly reacting to the ever changing winds, but I have found this balancing act helps to maintain a sustained equilibrium and stable foundation for effectively progressing evidence-based work that is values- and purpose-driven.

Ultimately, it is the practice that this counts most. It is in what you **choose** to do that you demonstrate your values and the sort of public servant you are. So choose carefully, because your work is important, and if affects everyone.

I hope this has provided some food for thought, and some ideas for how to help maintain greater balance and stability in your work in the public sector, whatever your level or domain of control.

Dissecting recent recommendations for renewing public trust in government

Government: the very word invokes quite different responses for different people. To some, it means the frustrations of politics, regulation or paperwork. For others, it is a roadblock to game. For many, it is simply a necessity for public services, laws or national security. For still more, it is a word that invokes fear: fear of punishment, having children or entitlements take away, or of personal information being misused.

Trust is hard when you are so many things to so many people, especially when you are both the social worker and the cop. So, trust arguably needs to be about ensuring you are seen as trustworthy, fair, accountable and values-driven. Trust is something you need to earn every day, not something you ask for.

In a world where the Internet and technology have dramatically sped up change, complexity and the distribution of power (albeit unevenly), it is fascinating to see yet another round of public discussion on how to renew public trust in government. Sadly, this often results in the same old ideas: good practice, capability improvement, and public participation. All of these assume to improve the supply side of good governance, but not necessarily the demand nor the core reasons for declining trust.

Where is the discussion about the conflation of politics with public sector? Or the need to ensure traceability and explainability of decision-making where automation or Artificial Intelligence is used? How can our public services operate in a citizen-centric, transparent and trustworthy way when they are under constant pressure to simply cut costs or react to whatever the minister of the day wants? How can policy and service designers engage with citizens and communities when anything said publicly is seen as the domain of professional communications teams?

Democracy 2025 worked with senior executive officials from the federal government to create nine recommendations to renew public trust for consideration by the Secretaries Board. On one hand, it is great to see more deliberative processes being explored by senior executives, and kudos to Democracy 2025 in supporting this approach. But the recommendations reached are already widely accepted as being good practice and have been endorsed in different forms several times over the past decade. So what are the barriers to progress here? I would suggest the recommendations wouldn't be sufficient to address declining trust, and don't address the core blockers that continue to make good practice very hard to achieve in public sectors.

The nine recommendations are below, with some of my thoughts on might help to successfully implement them, informed by my experience in multiple public sectors in Australia and overseas. Please note the order is changed from the article linked above for ease of analysis.

The recommendations to support good practice

- *To maintain the central role of the APS in the Westminster advisory system, **capability needs to be enhanced through the adoption of the best innovation and evidence-based practices.***

- *To ensure programs and services are fit for purpose, **citizen-centred design** should be a first principle of policy and service development.*

- *To ensure a sustainable future, **long-term strategic policy systems should be built on key policy issues** (e.g. the economy, climate, ageing, geopolitics, education, health and wellbeing).*

- *To deliver on the APS's role as defined by the 1999 Public Service Act, courageous and authentic leadership is required at the senior executive level. This should be enshrined and **measured through the achievement of the APS vision, putting public service values into practice, meeting accountabilities and delivering positive outcomes for Australian communities**.*

All of these recommendations are pretty obvious, so what are the blockers?

Well, the first issue is demand. You can design the best evidence-based, citizen-centric, long-term policy or service you like, but if the minister or secretary doesn't want it for any reason, then it dies a silent internal death, often to be resuscitated a few months or years later. You can put measures into place but if they don't tell the story that the media team wants, then the story or metrics are changed. Basically, to see sustained improvement of good supply, there needs to be demand for what is good, not just what is expedient.

Realising policy intent is impossible when policy and implementation teams don't work together. You need to have more agile, user-centred but also visionary policy methods that engage users/citizens and implementation folk in the earliest stages of policy development. And

implementation requires policy folk be involved, to ensure success is measured according to the intended policy outcomes and not just the usual project or service measures that are captured at the end of the process.

The measurement recommendation also talks about achieving the APS vision, but this is a difficult thing to articulate when there are now generations of people in the public service who have been taught to believe the vision of the APS is to do whatever the politics of the day dictates. This lack of an agreed foundational vision for our public sector leads to building castles on sand, and loses credibility with the communities we serve. If the public service were perceived by the public as apolitical, values-driven and existing to ensure public good, then, I believe, we would certainly see greater trust and engagement.

So, to achieve these recommendations, I would suggest we need the secretaries to support:

- **Working in the open.** If the public sector simply worked more openly in the design and delivery of policy and services, it would create opportunities for people to participate and greater peer review, it would increase systemic incentives to get the best, evidence-driven outcomes, and it would help improve trust in those same policies and services. In short, working in the open creates both a demand for the good and a means of achieving greater good. It also makes it easier for reuse of the evidence and work by other programs.

- Establishing a **more apolitical public sector**, with merit-based apolitical heads of departments, and a **clear APS vision** that connects with and reflects the values of the communities we serve as well as the foundational core responsibilities of the public sector, independent of the government of the day.

- **Updating the policy toolkit and measures** to ensure agile, user-centred and test-driven methods are part of usual policy development, and form **multi-disciplinary teams around end-to-end policy** programs rather than everyone just handing off to the next area of responsibility.

- To **stop assuming that sharing data will magically improve things,** especially when purely data-driven policies often get normative outcomes. Consider strategies to inform policy and decision-making that protect the dignity and privacy of citizens, and create public governance and security statements to assure citizens that data about them is not inappropriately reused. It is hard to ask for trust while simultaneously trying to share citizen data without any new commitments to controls, accountabilities or transparency.

- An agreed and holistically applied approach to **measuring impact beyond pure economics** is needed to embed genuine citizen-centric practices, prioritisation of funding and outcomes. Adopting something like the Human Service Outcomes Framework from the NSW government, or the Intergenerational Wellness Framework from the NZ government to all federal government policies, services and programs would create a huge shift in incentives, prioritisation, leadership and alignment of everyday public sector efforts with genuine community needs.

The recommendations for participatory governance

- *To ensure that programs and services meet the needs and aspirations of the citizenry, the APS should **embed a culture of authentic, early, regular and open citizen engagement to drive policy development**.*

- *To counteract truth decay and communicate effectively with the citizenry, the APS needs to **engage in public policy debate** to justify actions, explain policy and present evidence in an honest and reliable way.*

- *To improve civic and whole of government understanding of public policy decision making, a **public right-to-know guarantee should be provided through an open government information framework** (subject to normal exemptions).*

While it is great to see the sentiment of participatory governance in these recommendations, these principles have broadly been agreed for decades, so what is holding us back? The APS has very strict rules at the moment that make it both very risky and scary for public servants to engage openly about anything, which has led to a systemic issue of most public sector engagement being funneled through professional media and communications teams. This creates a significant barrier and bottleneck to authentic, early, regular and open citizen engagement. Even just operational blogging can prove too difficult for many public servants, let alone substantial public engagement. Public servants need to be able to engage with people and communities directly. We need to be trusted, as the professionals we are, to engage public participation in policy, service and program design and implementation. We also need to have greater secretary commitment to open government as the default practice of our public sectors — not as a nice-to-have.

Once you get beyond the public sector barriers there is also the biggest challenge for participatory governance: time! Most people are busy all the time. They are at full-time work, full-time at home, and have no capacity to contribute to anything beyond their immediate family and work needs.

So, to achieve these recommendations, I would suggest we need the secretaries to support:

- **Updating the social media policy and APS Code of Conduct** to explicitly support all public servants to engage online and with the public as part of their professional work, with appropriate support, training and guidelines.

- **Differentiate official communications and professional communications**, where the former is the domain of communications/media teams, but the latter does not require approval or oversight from communications teams nor approval from ministerial offices. This would free-up public visibility substantially and improve public trust in the professionalism, expertise and services of our public sector. Frankly, there is a lot of business-as-usual public engagement that should be happening every day, rather than limiting public engagement to large communications campaigns.

- Ensure all public consultations are discoverable in the one place, with people able to subscribe to notifications about consultations. This would make it easier for people to tune in and contribute more easily.

- **Establish equitable participatory programs** that address the issue of citizen capacity. For instance, perhaps new major policy proposals could include a "citizen policy duty", where a demographically representative group could be paid their time — like with jury duty — for a few months to contribute to the policy development? Or a civic gap year, for a number of people each year to enter the public service from all walks of life to contribute to policy areas of interest where they have experience or expertise. If we don't create equitable means of participation, then consultations or collaboration will continue to the domain of those lucky, privileged enough or paid to have time on their hands.

The recommendations for capability development

- *To benefit from the diversity of knowledge and experience in different sectors, APS staff should be **mandated to rotate into other sectors and jurisdictions**.*

- *To build strong and effective working relationships between ministers, political advisers and the APS, **collaborative learning and development opportunities should be developed and senior departmental officers rotated to adviser positions in ministerial offices**.*

These recommendations are fine, but they miss the critical point that public sectors have expertise that would be of value to other sectors. Therefore, I suggest we also need the secretaries to support:

- Rotations into other sectors and jurisdictions should include **reciprocity arrangements** to also bring and share public sector expertise, including with non-profit and community organisations.

- Ministerial staffers being rotated into the public service as **frontline public servants**, to better understand how the system works and where there are genuine challenges.

What's missing?

To my mind, if the focus were on renewing trust, the biggest missing piece in the recommendations would be shifting the narrative from "getting trust" to "being trustworthy". For an article that implies all the benefits of citizen-centric design and public participation in policy, it might have been helpful to involve citizens in developing or at least testing the recommendations. Trust isn't given — it is earned. And it would be very helpful to ask people "what it would take for you to trust government?" I ask people that question all the time, and the answers are often surprising.

So, what do people need to see from the public sector to trust it? What does the "trust infrastructure" for the 21st century look like, especially when you consider the opportunities and threats when using Artificial Intelligence and automation in the delivery of policy, services and regulation? How can we ensure people's rights and dignity are maintained in the day-to-day work of our public sectors rather than being motivated by purely economic drivers?

These are all things to discuss "*authentically, early, regularly and openly with citizen engagement to drive policy developmen*t", to quote the recommendations, and I hope some of these ideas help public servants to consider ways of increasing trust through your actions, openness and engagement.

Participatory public governance: why we need it, what it is, and how to do it (in that order)

For everything we do in public sectors, it is when we collaborate and draw on broader expertise and experiences that we get better outcomes. Indeed, the characteristics that most significantly contributed to the rise and rise of homo sapiens is our capacity for **cumulative learning** and **cooperative competition**. Individuals inherit and engage with **knowledge**, and then build upon that foundation to develop new knowledge, continually exchanging, enhancing and improving.

So, if is it such a biological imperative, why does participatory public governance seem so alien or novel to so many? Some of it is habits from increasingly top-down instruction on day-to-day programs, and some of the barriers are similar to those for broader collaboration, so please also see the article on enabling greater collaboration in public sectors. But in a modern democracy, public participation in governance provides both the key to better policy and services, and also a means to understanding the changing needs and values of those we serve so our public sectors can be continuously responsive, resilient and relevant.

For the purpose of this piece, I will focus on what participatory public governance means to me, why it is so important, and some tips for how to support more public participation in your daily work. I also want to acknowledge the contributions of Amelia Loye, who kindly provided feedback and comments for the first draft of this article.

Why?

I could start with what, but let me first give you some reasons to spend your time reading about participatory public governance.

Firstly, if you involve in the process some people or organisations who will be affected by your policy, legislation or service, you have a **better chance of your work being successful** by bringing in the experience, expertise and natural motivations of the communities you serve. Getting diverse voices in the room means your work will naturally be more inclusively designed and more likely to help more people, noting that 'diverse' necessarily means going outside of your organisation and outside of the your stakeholders. Stakeholders are more likely to think in terms of self-oriented interests (family, property, business needs), whereas diversity is more likely to result in more inclusive design and better public interest or common good. In service delivery, this is often done through user research, but why not in policy or legislation? And why not include users in governance rather than just research? In New Zealand, the SmartStart life journey service (for birth of a child) has a highly effective advisory group that includes the national midwives organisation and a child health organisation (Plunket) to help inform and prioritise the program and service design around real community needs.

Secondly, **participatory public governance provides a means of scaling impac**t, particularly given the constant and unrelenting pressures on resources. There will always be people or organisations who are naturally (systemically) motivated to do things being done by the public sector. Consider also those who are under- or unemployed, 'retired', on parental leave, or just looking for new experiences. Opening up regulatory approaches by deshrouding markets or publishing compliance self-assessments would be picked up by the clients, staff and competitors of companies, to drive institutional nudging towards the regulatory outcome rather than just increasing efforts to prioritise which decreasing percentage of regulated entities we can afford to assess. New Zealand used to have a citizen policy jury, which was a paid demographically balanced group of citizens who contributed to major policy development. "Many eyes make all bugs shallow" is an idiom for the tech community that is relevant here, and participatory governance provides many more eyes.

Thirdly, **participatory public governance helps maintain a more evidence- and outcomes-based focus on the work**. All projects in government are subject to the same intrinsic pressures of any other organisation: politics, competing budgets, restructures, prioritisation, egos, etc. It is sometimes deeply frustrating to see great ideas be de-prioritised, especially when the long-term or public benefits are demonstrably significant. If you build participatory governance into your work and program, you have a powerful mechanism to build genuine evidence and prioritise what is most needed in the community. You can only get so far in tweaking existing systems, and analysis of the data you already have from systems already in place generally only provides a basis for minor tweaks or nudges that may not get the intended policy outcomes. When you develop policy positions through participatory processes, you get more test-driven, evidence-based, values-based and also more highly trusted outcomes.

Finally, public sectors play a special role in many societies, including Australia, to serve the community and promote greater public good. Public good is also a core value or tenet for most public servants. So it is both interesting and important to consider the idea that 'good' may be different for different people. What is 'public good', and how does it change as societal norms evolve over time? If you don't keep your finger on the pulse, how do you know when change occurs? **To deliver 'public good' necessarily requires continual engagement with the public** we serve, in all its diversity, to understand what good means, especially in an increasingly and continually changing national and global context. Taking a values-driven approach to public management isn't about just defining core values, but also understanding and reflecting the values of the people we serve.

Personally, I believe participatory governance is critical for public sectors to be responsive, resilient and effective in serving the community, and in ensuring greater transparency, account-ability and appropriately incentivised work programs.

What?

So, what does participatory public governance look like? There are many, many different ideas on this. Many people seem to assume public participation in governance means voting every three years or requests for information, but to me, I am most interested in how the public sector engages with and includes the public in the processes and decision-making of public sector governance.

I have outlined four broad levels of practical participation in public governance that might be helpful if you are new to this. Hopefully it helps you consider the differing value and options for public participation in your work, and to recognise potential new opportunities. Please leave a comment if I have missed something critical.

Please also note that nothing can be participatory if people can't find it. Public visibility, including to relevant organisations and community groups, enables discovery, and people can only participate in what they know about. In a heavily time-poor society, you also need to create space, opportunity and put serious effort into getting diverse views into the room in a way that is equitable.

Level 0: request for comment. This is where we are at today. Departments release discussion papers for comment or feedback, which usually means there is substantial work done to shape a direction in a paper that is published for feedback, and then people are effectively invited to just tweak what has been created. Engagement varies, with some consultations just publishing online, and some going all out to proactively engage with stakeholders and community groups.

- Pros: easy to do, tends to focus feedback in a pre-defined direction.

- Cons: normative outcomes, tends to focus feedback in a pre-defined direction.

Level 1: user centered practices. Any form of early engagement with 'end users' of a strategy, policy, program, service or piece of regulation is helpful as a form of participatory design, but isn't really participatory governance. I include it here because a) it is still a useful form of getting more participation in public sector processes, but b) many people think it is more than sufficient as a form of public engagement in the work of government. More on that later. When you engage with the end users of your work, be it a service or policy, you have a better chance of meeting their actual needs. If you don't engage with end users, understand them and test different approaches with them, then you are simply imagining or hoping people will use/interact with your work in the way you intend. For service delivery, we have all seen user-centred design (UCD) becoming mainstream in

many public sectors, resulting in better-designed and more intuitive service delivery. Sometimes UCD also includes observing user behaviours (the lawn experiment). The Life Journey approach takes this even further to understand end user journeys across organisations and sectors around complex events. In the policy profession there has been some early adoption of UCD and agile methods for policy (eg, NSW Policy Lab) to develop policy artefacts that are easier for policy consumers to understand and implement. In legislation and regulation design, we've seen bringing end users into the room result in profoundly better rules and outcomes (Better Rules work, NZ).

- **Pros**: work gets shaped around actual user needs and the testing approach assures a better quality output with more predictable implementation. There are well understood methods with many skilled professionals available. Usually participation is equitable because diversity is necessarily sought and compensated for inclusive design.

- **Cons**: even though the work output is better shaped, you still get a somewhat normative outcome because the broad direction is largely set in that you are engaging people only as end users which assumes the product is necessary. There is a subtle power imbalance to be careful of as it can too easily focus feedback in a pre-defined direction, eg., "which design is better" as opposed to "is this the right thing to be doing at all"?

Level 2: participatory drafting. This is where something is still in an early formative phase, and you engage publicly or externally in helping shape it from the start, which is quite different to user centred practices, where you engage with end users primarily to just understand and test their needs. Participatory drafting can draw out some profound ideas, assumptions and experience very early, to help shape something from the start. It requires strong support for

getting the right outcome and an appetite for having flexibility in the direction of the thing. This approach creates a little more work up front, and can lead to quite a different direction than first anticipated, but gets something that is likely faster to implement, with greater public support, and results that are more durable and sustainable. Good examples of participatory drafting include the vTaiwan approach taken to co-draft Uber legislation in Taiwan (2015), the New Zealand Police wiki for participatory legislation (2009), the Australian Public Spheres done by Senator Kate Lundy to co-draft policy recommendations (2008-2009) which included public contributions to the Gov 2.0 Taskforce Report of 2009 and citizen Policy Juries in Canada (2010-13) which were also used in New Zealand for a time. Other examples of participatory drafting could include public proposal systems, which aren't just about feedback, but that enable completely new ideas, like public ideation or participatory budgeting projects. Ideation work and participatory drafting work has been done in Australia for years with local examples including work by engage2, Democracy 2025, Bang the Table and many many more community or company led participatory programs. The question to my mind is why we haven't yet seen this become normal public sector process, something worth unpacking for your organisation. Participatory budgeting examples include Porte Alegre, Brazil since 1989, NSW's My Community Dividend and Iceland's Iceland's Better Reykjavik. Service examples are trickier because even internally, the scope of a service is often defined by policy, legislation or strategy, so it is in these early phases where participatory drafting is most powerful. Although a lot of public servants seek external feedback for their work (policy, legislation, services, etc) through subject matter experts, industry engagement, stakeholder engagement or consultants, the value of public participation in drafting or designing is that you get a perspective from

the people who will be affected by the work, not just those with a subject matter expertise, business or contractual imperative.

- **Pros**: much more formative method for overall direction, gains greater public trust and support through their participation, better quality outcomes informed by public values as well as a broad range of experience and expertise.

- **Cons**: unless the coordinators make an explicit effort to enable equitable and diverse participation, this method can too easily create over representation of privileged groups who have time and skills, and who aren't intimidated by government. Extra effort needs to be made to ensure representative and inclusive participation.

Level 3: system co-design or 'walking together' through to co-delivery. All the methods above involved people at different levels of influence in the work, with increasing levels of flexibility in direction. Genuine co-design is rare as it necessarily involves bringing two or more parties together on an equal footing to determine shared goals, methods and values, and actually design and decide the way forward together. This means being very flexible on all aspects of the work, including perhaps the idea it isn't appropriate at all. It is the most disruptive to a centralised or top down way of working, but does yield the best results, especially for wicked problems. It is also the best at avoiding potential or even accidental exclusive (single purpose or homogenous) design by the people responsive for the policy or services. This approach is rare in the public sector for many reasons, but could be used more to provide better outcomes for systemic challenges or opportunities. A few good examples I've seen include the 'Walk Together' design methodology more information here) which is a culturally responsive design approach, the participatory action research work done for the 'Both Ways' report (2004), and great work done by Old

Ways, New in bringing design, culture and technology together. When initiatives are then co-delivered, you get a profound impact through systemically motivated partners collaboratively delivering around shared or common goals. Amelia mentioned her favourite example of co-design and co-delivery as the work done in South East Queensland during the 2005 floods where government co-designed and co-delivered a work program to respond to the crisis. Indeed, a lot of great co-design and co-delivery seems to happen when there is a crisis, the question is how we can bring it into business as usual.

- **Pros**: is the best path for working through complexity or 'wicked problems' and for getting to design sustainable solutions that don't just include people in the process, but enables them to genuinely shape it in accordance with their values.

- **Cons**: requires the most commitment, flexibility and support. Requires time, skills, relationship building and longer term deadlines to get to a point of genuine consensus through engagement and co-design, noting this isn't a con, but makes it harder unless teams in government are supported to take time to do this kind of work properly.

Level 4: shared oversight or co-governance. All the methods above get you to a point in time, the highest level of participatory public governance is where you have public transparency, oversight and participation in the ongoing governance of your work. Sometimes this is ostensibly achieved through independent advisory or steering groups, but to operate properly these groups should have their minutes and decisions publicly available to avoid creating unaccountable or self-serving governance. To reflect back to SmartStart in NZ, having independent groups on the project governance (in this case, via a steering group) provides a balancing force that tips in the favour of the

citizens needs amidst the ongoing tensions of budget constraints and competitive projects in public sectors. If we had citizens or citizen groups involved in policy governance, I believe we would see greater public outcomes. This is also reflected in the work of Collaboration for Impact. This of course requires ways to support equitable an inclusive representation on such governance groups, which then requires either persistent funded roles or some other funding mechanism. Given so many things in government are funded as projects with start and end dates, it would take some significant work to make this normal in many public sectors, but I suggest it is worth the effort as it sets programs up with oversight and pressures that are well balanced and aligned towards best public outcomes.

How?

So how do we bring about participatory public governance? Here are a few things I think are useful enablers to consider, but I also urge all public servants to look at how you can engage the communities your serve in the work you do, and how you can build trust and persistent relationships along the way.

- **Internal demand:** it needs to be usual practice to engage people and communities, and not just 'stakeholders' in public policy design. This means a top down commitment and genuine valuing of public contributions into the process.

- **Internal capacity/capability:** internal capability is critical to enabling meaningful participatory approaches to the work of our public sectors. It is worth noting that although capability development is critical, if you don't have a genuine demand for public participation, then capability will wither over time. If you have genuine and persistent demand, then capability development will pay dividends in driving better public sectors and better public outcomes. Internal capacity isn't

just the skills required, but also the building of persistent data and evidence bases that can inform work, strategic directions and programs on an ongoing basis, with the benefit of hindsight and institutional memory kept intact.

- **Citizen capacity:** the biggest challenge to participatory public governance, to my mind, is that most people are full time at work then full time at home, dropping kids off early and picking them up late to then be rushing around all hours of the day. We need ways to free up and fund people's time. Again, see the collaboration article for more ideas on this.

- **Systemic motivation for better human outcomes:** in spite of the personal values of many public servants, the core drivers of action in Australian public sectors has become time, budgets or top down directives. Not only does this create a systemic disincentive to engage the public in genuine codesign, but until we have systemic and holistic drivers that value human outcomes, we will continue to see primarily politically and financially incentivised policies, services and general activities of our public sectors. To improve things we could adopt explicitly human outcomes success measures like the Living Standards Framework in NZ, or the NSW Government Human Services Outcomes Framework.

- **Independence:** if public service is only politically directed, then it can't or won't be incentivised to engage the public in policy. When public policy is informed from a genuinely apolitical professional perspective, you get more evidence based policies. So some political independence is crucial to genuine participatory public governance.

I hope this article has provided some food for thought and tips for constructively engaging with the public on your work.

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Government as a Platform: the foundation for Digital Government and Gov 2.0

This article explains the idea of "Government as a Platform", commonly known as GaaP, including the benefits, challenges and how you could apply it in your everyday work, regardless of whether you work in policy, regulation, service delivery, or anything else. In short, GaaP provides a framework and methodology for designing, delivering, and dramatically improving the impact, scale, and effectiveness of public sector efforts and policy outcomes.

The term "Government as a Platform" was originally coined by Tim O'Reilly, influenced by the broader "as a platform" paradigm shift where business models were emerging, influenced by the internet and Web, that shifted towards service-oriented architecture and distributed ecosystems of service providers: 'platforms' upon which anyone could leverage common components and value-add through building apps or tools. Tim proposed that governments should open up the doors so that the private sector could build on the back of government digital infrastructure (like open data) to better serve a rapidly changing market. I take this one step further to propose that "Government as a Platform" is an important principle not just for technical architecture, but for policy and program management, as it implies that no problem can be solved by any one organisation alone, but by collectively making the things we each do discoverable and mashable by many, and by assuming that complex issues require a collective of systemically motivated contributors. In this way, we can create the foundations for a robust, diverse, and resilient ecosystem of services and converging efforts towards increasingly better public outcomes. Government can, and should, reliably provide certain fundamental parts of a "social and economic platform" for society, but exactly the remit of government is subject to different cultural and political norms in different countries. I'll discuss what I think those foundations are in the Australian context further below.

Government as a Platform provides the necessary foundation for four key benefits:

- For government programs and policy to be **responsive, resilient, and relevant** throughout a time of increasing societal and economic change. In splitting the front end from a consumable series of back end services, agencies gain the ability to more rapidly iterate the customer experience of the service, taking into account changing user needs and

new user platforms (mobile is just the start — personal AI helpers, augmented reality and embedded computing are just around the corner). When the back end and front end of a service are part of the one monolithic codebase, it is simply too expensive, time-consuming, and complicated to make any changes to the service, let alone support continuous improvements or respond to changing user needs.

- To **digitally enable everything we do in government** for better service delivery, modern and scalable approaches to regulation and compliance, better risk and security management, more efficient and effective outcomes and the possibilities of bringing persistent policy, evidence, and implementation brought together to ensure we are collectively heading in the right direction.

- To **enable an ecosystem of services, products, and other value-add** on the back of public investment (like data & research), digital public infrastructure (like regulation as code, service catalogues, eligibility engines), and the economies of scale for which governments are uniquely placed to take advantage of (like space infrastructure, national security and spatial tools, census data, etc).

- **Automation and dynamic service delivery** — the final and least shiny benefit, 'though the most interesting from a service-improvement perspective, is automation and integration. If your data, content, transaction systems, and rules are programmatically available, you create the opportunity for holistic service delivery across portfolios and jurisdictional boundaries, such as the different steps of a life event to be integrated or automated where personal consent is granted. The user-consent part is really important, just to be clear! So rather than having 17 beautiful but distinct services that a person has to complete

individually, a user could be asked at any one of those entry points whether they'd like the other 16 steps to be automatically completed on their behalf. Sometimes, the best way government can serve citizens is to get out of the way.

Outsourcing service delivery?

Government as a Platform is certainly not about public sectors just providing APIs and letting the 'free market' solve all problems. That would be a disaster, as it has been everywhere that has attempted to privatise all public infrastructure, but especially so in a country like Australia, where we value public infrastructure and services as a basis of economic and social stability and a foundation upon which people can thrive. It also isn't feasible or sustainable. Public sectors should always provide key public services for which they are uniquely motivated, authorised, or that are in the broader public or economic interest — even when there are private or non-profit sectors providing related or competing services — for four important reasons:

1. The public sector necessarily needs to **provide inclusive services to all citizens**, as opposed to other sectors that are naturally motivated to serve sustainably profitable customer segments.

2. By providing a baseline quality of service to the public, the public sector can create an **upwards pressure on the market to provide a minimum threshold quality** of services to the public, the 'sedan' of service delivery where the Ferraris and unicycles can be provided by the private sector. Public sectors can provide open-source reference implementations and developer kits to help ensure a consistency of quality or experience, as we do with business APIs provided by the ATO.

3. The **public sector is accountable to the public**, parliament, and government of the day, and key public services should have oversight to help ensure they don't create harm, inequity, security risks, or illegal outcomes, especially when you consider key areas of government responsibility like high-integrity identity credentials (birth and marriage credentials, passports, etc), social services, taxation, customs, defence, standards, and many many more.

4. The public sector **is not (or shouldn't be) driven by a profit imperative**, which means there are less pressures to make money from citizens, and more pressures to serve the public good.

This is certainly not to say that government should do everything. We need to be careful to not overplay or underplay the role of public sectors in society, and the general polarised narrative of all or nothing obviously doesn't help navigate this issue effectively. We need to be clearer and confident in what roles the government should clearly play and stop seeing absolutely everything as contestable if we are to ensure that balance is appropriately maintained.

So, what does Government as a Platform look like and what role do public sectors play?

A brief explanation and history of Government as a Platform

As mentioned, the term "Gov as a Platform" was coined by Tim O'Reilly in 2009. He spoke about the potential to transform government into a platform, similar (for those unfamiliar with the "as a platform" idea) to Google Maps, or the Apple/Google app stores. Basically, government could provide the data, content, transaction services, and even business rules (regulation, common patterns such as means

testing, building codes, etc) in a consumable, componentised, and modular fashion to support a diverse ecosystem of service delivery, analysis, and products by myriad agents, including private and public sector, but also citizens themselves.

Seems obvious right? The tech sector has been taking this approach for over a decade.

What I have found is there a lot of interest in 'digital government' where it is usually just digitising an existing process, product, service, or channel. The model of consumable, modular architecture as a strategic approach to achieve greater flexibility and agility within an organisation was, while enabling a broader ecosystem to build on top, simply not well understood by many, though althat is starting to change. Certainly there are pockets that understand this, especially at the practitioner level, but agencies are naturally motivated to simply delivery what they need in isolation from a whole of government view. It was wonderful to see New Zealand picking up a whole of government GaaP approach in 2017 in this vein, but many governments are still focused on simple digitisation rather than system transformation.

Gov as an API

One of the greatest impacts of the DTA and the UK Government Digital Service has been to spur a race to the top around user-centred design and agile across governments. However, these methods, while necessary, are not sufficient for digital transformation, because you too easily see services created that are rapidly developed and better for citizens but still based on bespoke siloed stacks of technology and content that aren't reconsumable, and then aren't extendable or adaptable to ongoing changes in user needs. Why does this matter? Because there are loads of components needed for multiple services, but siloed service technology stacks lead to duplication, a lack of agility in iterating and improving the user experience on an ongoing

basis, a lack of programmatic access to the components that would enable system to system automation, and a complete lack of the consumable and mashable service components, the "platform" or foundation, upon which an ecosystem could be built.

The key to success in implementation is to take a Unix/Linux mindset of having many simple things that do one thing really well and can be integrated, rather than trying to build highly complex functions that try to be everything to everyone (and end up being either so generic or so complex as to be nothing to anyone). It is about making it simple to reuse those things that are worth being reusable so they can serve many purposes. It's also useful to note not all components will be APIs — some might be SQL views, or an events bus, or verifiable claim, so assume gov as an API is shorthand for gov as a series of easy to use programmatic interfaces.

When I was at the interim DTO in 2016, we realised that no single agency would fundamentally ever be naturally motivated, funded, or mandated to deliver services on behalf of someone else. So, rather than assuming a model wherein an agency is expected to operate against their own interests and vertical accountabilities, we started considering new models. New systems wherein agencies could achieve what they needed (and were mandated and funded) to do, but where the broader ecosystem could provide multi-channel services delivery for which where there is no wrong door for citizens to do what they need. One channel might be the magical 'life events' lens, another might be third parties, or state and territory governments, or personal AI helpers, or citizen mashups. There are many agents, organisations, and sectors that have persistent relationships with their customers or clients, allowing them to exponentially spread and maintain user-centred design in ways that individual agencies by themselves can not afford to do, now or into the future.

This vision of Gov as a Platform was just a reflection of the Amazon, Google Maps, the Apple 'apps store, and other platform models so prevalent in the private sector as described above. But many governments have, to date, largely interpreted 'Gov as a Platform' as simply common or shared platforms or shared services. While common or shared platforms can provide savings and efficiencies, it has not enabled the system transformation needed to get true digital transformation across government or third-party value-add on the top of reusable government service components.

So what does this mean practically? There are, certainly, pockets of people doing or experimenting in this space. Here are some of my thoughts to date, based on work I've done in Australia (at the interim DTO), in New Zealand (with the Department of Internal Affairs), and in New South Wales.

Firstly, you can largely identify four categories of things involved in any government service:

- **Content** — obvious, but taking into account the domain-specific content of agencies also as the kind of custodian or contextual content usually managed by points of aggregation or service delivery;

- **Data** — any type of list, source of intelligence or statistics, search queries such as ABN lookups, services catalogue, persistent evidence base, or service analytics'

- **Transaction services** — anything a person or business interacts with, such as registration, payments, claims, reporting, etc. Obviously, they require strict privacy and security frameworks; and

- **Business rules** — the regulation, legislation, code, policy logic, eligibility engines, or reusable patterns or algorithms (such as means-testing) that are usually hard-coded into projects as required. Imagine an authoritative public API with the business logic

of government available for consumption by everyone. For more on this concept, see this [Rules as Code](#) presentation.

These categories of components can all be made programmatically available for the delivery of individual initiatives and for broader reuse either publicly (for data, content, and business rules) or through strict controls (for transaction services). But you also need some core capabilities that are consumable for any form of digital service, below are a few to consider.

- **Identity and authentication**, arguably also taking into account user-consent-based systems that may be provided from outside of government.

- **Service analytics** across digital and non-digital channels to baseline the user experience and journey with government and identify what works through evidence. This could also fuel a basic personalisation service.

- A **consistent government web platform/experience** to manage and draw together relevant government information for service delivery.

- A **services register** in the form of a consumable register of government services (human services) to draw from across the board.

- A public **eligibility and calculation engine**, to make the rules of eligibility and calculation (much of which are in legislation) available as an API for anyone to consume, including government agencies themselves.

- **Legislation/regulation as code**, because if all prescriptive legislation and regulation were machine consumable, it would create enormous efficiencies, improved regulatory and compliance outcomes, improved policy outcomes, and greater explainability and traceability of decision-making while still allowing for appropriate judgements in principles-based legislation.

- **Payment, notification and verification services**, which are common but duplicated across government. The UK has done great work in identifying and building reusable service components/platforms like these in their service toolkit.

- **The structures of government**, because if we had a digital representation of government that reflected the structure, lines of responsibilities and legislative authority, portfolios, departments, programs, and even budgets, we'd have the basis for more automated, efficient, effective, and agile government, especially when you consider the regularity of machinery of government changes. Imagine being able to say "this area of responsibility now reports to this minister and secretary" and all our systems automatically are reflecting the change, rather than the extremely manual and high effort required to do it today. Please see the excellent article by Allan Barger on creating a digital twin of government for more on this concept.

- A series of **verifiable claims for common requests** in service delivery, which would then reduce the need for data-sharing and dramatically reduce the cost, processing, time, and indignity around many services today. For instance, rather than having to take a payslip in to prove your income for a social service or tax credit, imagine if the service delivery agency could say "do you give us permission to verify with the ATO that you meet the means test?" Imagine if we took a conditional approach to matters, where you don't need to provide documentation to prove your age (birth certificate, licence, passport), all of which give too much information, but rather can provide a verifiable claim that "yes, I am over the required age". See the verifiable claims work by W3C for more info on this concept, but it could be a huge transformation for how gov and privacy operates.

Government 2.0

As an aside, Tim also defined Government 2.0 in the best and most prevailing way I have seen, and it encourages me to continue to use the term:

> **"Government 2.0 is not a new kind of government; it is government stripped down to its core, rediscovered and reimagined as if for the first time. And in that reimagining, this is the idea that becomes clear: government is, at bottom, a mechanism for collective action. We band together, make laws, pay taxes, and build the institutions of government to manage problems that are too large for us individually and whose solution is in our common interest. Government 2.0, then, is the use of technology—especially the collaborative technologies at the heart of Web 2.0—to better solve collective problems at a city, state, national, and international level."**

— **TIM O'REILLY**, GOVERNMENT AS A PLATFORM (2010)

The real opportunity of Government as a Platform is the ability, as Tim puts it, to reimagine government and work towards fundamentally better public outcomes in accordance with the values and culture of the society you serve. Government as a Platform is a crucial enabler for Gov 2.0, and indeed for any fundamental transformation of our public sectors to be fit for purpose in the 21st century, as it represents not just a technology or design principle, but rather a paradigm shift to governments operating more like a series of high-value nodes in a network that feeds from and into a complex and interdependent global social and economic structure. Governments have some special and unique responsibilities, but the more we can operate like a foundation upon which others can build value, the more we contribute to greater public outcomes and the greater an impact we can have for less effort than it would take to do it on our own.

If you are interested in public sector reform, I recommend you tune in to or attend the upcoming Gov 2.0 Taskforce: Ten Years On event. It will be a chance to reflect on the progress we have made, new challenges or opportunities that have surfaced over that time, and what we can do about it as optimistic people who care about great public sectors to service great public outcomes.

Final word — Government as a Boat

Although most of what I've covered above is most obviously relevant to service design and delivery, hopefully people in other areas of government will consider the useful implications for policy, programs, regulation, and more. If you see the world as potential collaborators or contributors to what you are trying to achieve, and actively seek our naturally motivated parts of the system you are interacting with, then you start to naturally design and deliver ways of operating that will have greater impact, and that enable and leverage greater resources than you will ever have at your disposal. Taking a modular, agile, and mashable approach to whatever you are doing, and assuming that your role is to be both a doer of great things and an enabler of many others doing great things, is quite a profound change in worldview.

I believe that when operating at their best, public sectors are like a giant ship. There are lots of moving parts, various specialist teams operating in unison to keep all the passengers above water regardless of where they sit. When those specialist teams don't communicate, don't head in the same direction, or try to hand the oars to the passengers, it gets increasingly hard to ensure everyone has what they need and are kept safe on their journey. If you make those teams compete, then you end up with holes emerging and water gushing in. To torture the metaphor, it is particularly unhelpful when people steal the life-rafts and drift alongside yelling that no

one really needs the ship anyway, while still relying on the ship's kitchen, medical supplies, slipstream, and protection against sharks and storms.

Government as a Platform is also like that giant ship: a platform for people to stand upon, to be safe and to thrive. Our job is to make sure the ship doesn't sink, to maintain a steady course, and to maintain the ship as required. Perhaps we need now to upgrade to a hovercraft or spaceship to better serve the changing needs of the communities we serve and reflect the changing times. But we can't change strategy or course if we don't acknowledge that public sectors are and have always been a platform for successful societies, we will always be government as a platform.

Many thanks to the various folk who provided great peer review on this post including Chris Gough and some great public servants who'd prefer to remain unnamed.

Useful references

- Tim O'Reilly's paper on Government as a Platform
- Government as a Platform: a Value Propositions Discussion Paper by Brock Jera and Pia Andrews
- A Government as a Platform guide by Richard Pope which provides great guidance backed by substantial research.
- Government as an API: How to change the system (speech) by Pia Andrews
- Article by Derek Alton from Canada on Gov as a Platform
- Article on why digitally created and consumable rules (like legislation) are required for better government, better services and better compliance, by Tim De Sousa and Pia Andrews
- Allan Barger's article on the need for a digital twin of government to optimise the day to day operations and continual changes happening to our public sectors
- A list of common registers, components and open APIs used by governments around the world

Trust infrastructure for digital governance and the 21st century

Technology is increasingly embedded in the processes and decision-making of government. As this happens, we're discovering a challenging paradox: technology offers great opportunities for better service delivery, better policy, better governance, and more informed decision-making, but brings with it greater risks of reduced accountability and auditability, entrenching biased or inequitable outcomes at scale, and making more difficult the transparency or ability for citizens to appeal decisions.

It is clear a careful rethink is needed — as a part of any digital transformation or digital government strategy we need to consider how we ensure visibility and traceability of technology-enabled decisions and the authority (and legality) behind them. We also need to rethink our approach to security and risk. Otherwise, we risk not only the creation of an unaccountable black-box approach to public governance, but plummeting public trust in our public institutions, with implications for social justice and economic stability.

To renew and maintain public trust, the biggest shift needs to be from 'getting trust' to 'being trustworthy'. Trust isn't given, it's earned. Too many efforts in this space start from the premise of 'once people understand the benefits they'll give us social licence to do whatever is needed'. It would be very helpful to ask people what it would take to trust us. I ask people that question all the time, and the answers are often surprising. These are all things to discuss authentically, early, regularly, and openly with citizen engagement to drive policy development.

Many thanks to Tim De Sousa, Mark Mckenzie, and Alison Kershaw for peer reviewing this post.

Public sectors are increasingly prolific users of big data, AI, and more, but we also need to be especially responsive to customer use of AIs that interact (or will interact) with public sectors as well as hostile uses of technology. While we scramble to keep pace and leverage new opportunities, we must also hold ourselves to the highest possible standard of accountability, integrity, and transparency so that the communities we serve can trust us.

This Mensa Canada article put it most concisely, and is even more true and critical for public sectors than companies:

> **Trust is the currency of business. Companies which provide context, ensure transparency, and maintain auditability for their AI systems and algorithms will prosper. These companies will create intelligible AI, and in turn gain their customers' trust.**

I have found the differing responses from people on this topic to be fascinating, both inside and outside the public sector. Many seem to fall into either the camp of full believers or full skeptics: *"technology is great and if you say otherwise you are a luddite!"*, **or** *"technology is only making things worse and you are removing humanity from human services!"*, both of which start from a position that is hard to engage with constructively. I would like to suggest it is important that we all take a balanced approach so we (and the people we serve) can benefit from the opportunities while we also actively mitigate the very real risks and issues.

Personally, I am both excited and concerned. I'm excited about the new opportunities in government, like test-driven regulation, policy difference engines, AI supported service delivery, genuine consensus driven governance, and many other optimistic possibilities that all leverage technologies and the internet. I'm concerned about the use of big data to automate normative outcomes (which easily entrenches biased assumptions, like issues with AI hiring or Face2Gene), autogenerated content that targets children for profit, proactive delivery of services that people don't want automated, social credit systems, and a variety of other uses of technology that can hurt people without recourse. Public sectors can't stop all the terrible misuses of technology, but we can at least ensure our own systems and applied use of tech is ethical and aligned to the values of the people and communities we serve. I believe it is the responsibility of **every public servant** to do their best to ensure best possible public good outcomes and ensure gaps don't emerge that could create unethical, unaccountable, or inequitable outcomes.

> **"It is the responsibility of every public servant to do their best to ensure best possible public good outcomes and ensure gaps don't emerge that could create unethical, unaccountable, or inequitable outcomes."**

I'm also concerned that so many people designing new programs of service delivery or regulation start with user-centred design that assumes only human users, and miss the need to also design for machine 'end users'. Designing with machines as users in mind would be a handy trick to ensure good human outcomes by enabling positive machine usage (like personal AI helpers) and better mitigate against bad machine

usage (like phoenix AIs). I do recommend people check out the emergent work of the 3A Institute, which has a range of leading researchers and organisations around Australia involved, and is actively exploring this space.

We are in a rapidly changing world, so why wouldn't we actively, holistically, and continuously consider what changes we need to make to operate most effectively and appropriately? The simple answer, usually, is that no one has time to plan outside their immediate day-to-day pressures. So step one in creating fit-for-purpose trust infrastructure (or any other strategic, policy, or technical futures planning) is to free up a little time. See my article on enabling innovative teams in public sectors if this is your first barrier.

This article presents ideas for the sort of 'trust infrastructure' we need to improve and maintain public trust. It talks about explainability, oversight and digital governance, how to enable auditing and appealability, and what you could be considering right now to contribute to public trust infrastructure, even in small ways. This article doesn't talk about behaviours, culture, practices, processes, politics, or the challenges of barriers to oversight and accountability of outsourced systems. If you are interested in any of these and some ideas for how to build trust in government more broadly, please see the Pia Review on Dissecting the Recent Recommendations for Renewing Trust in Government.

Where do you start when trying to design trust infrastructure?

When you start talking about trust infrastructure, if can get complicated quite quickly, as people have varying definitions for accountability, transparency, traceability, etc. But I would suggest a way to focus and shape your efforts might be assisted by three really simple and user-centred questions. These would help you can build your systems to be trustworthy, and therefore capable of being trusted.

1. How would you audit the process and decisions?

2. How would an end user appeal a decision?

3. What does the public need for you to be considered trustworthy?

Almost anything we do in government needs to have a solid, demonstrable answer for **all** of these questions, and these questions take a user-centred view (where auditors and people affected by or consuming the service are the end users). Why don't you actually map the user journey for the first two questions? This would likely reveal the need for realtime and in perpetuity decision capture, traceability of authority (like legislation or policy) in making a decision, and discoverability and communication of decisions to end users. If you understand and design an optimum user experience for auditing and appealing the decisions or outcomes of your work, then you have likely designed something that is quite trustworthy. But on the third question, one that is unique and critical for public sectors to be effective, why not *ask* people what would make you trustworthy, rather than just asking for (or demanding) trust? A little user-centred design for how to be seen as trustworthy by the people and communities that need and rely on us every day, noting that this will likely be different for different agencies and public sector functions.

For people working in AI or data analytics who respond that explainability is all too hard and their work is only a contributing factor to a decision and not the decision itself, and therefore explainability is only the responsibility of the 'business owner', I would like to encourage you to consider explainability also your job. Because if anyone is substantially making a decision based on something you have produced,

then you are responsible, at least in part, for the outcomes of those decisions. If not formally, then at least morally. I'll discuss a little more the challenges around explainability with regards to AI further below, as there are genuine challenges, but it has been interesting to find that agencies with skills in traditional processes around evidence (such as intelligence agencies) tend to naturally use technology in ways that maintains traceability and explainability so that everything stands up in court.

Explainability

Capturing and assuring the explainability of a decision or action taken by the public service is critical for the ability to audit, appeal, and maintain the integrity of our public institutions. It is also critical for ensuring the actions and decisions are lawful, permitted, and correctly executed. As such, it is important to ensure and regularly test the end-to-end explainability and capture of that information for the work we do in the public sector, especially where it relates to anything that directly impacts people — like service delivery, taxation, justice, regulation, or penalties.

In fact, the public sector has ALWAYS been required to provide explainability in administrative decision-making. Administrative law principles require that decision-makers only make decisions that are within their power, only take into account relevant evidence, and provide their decision together with reasons for the decision. The public sector is uniquely experienced and obligated in this respect. So, any and all technology-enabled decision-making system should be compliant with administrative law principles.

It was only in late 2018 that we had a landmark court case in Australia (Joe Pintarich v Deputy Commissioner of Taxation) which ruled that an automated piece of correspondence was not considered a 'decision' because there was no

mental process accompanying it. This creates a huge question and issue for the legitimacy of all machine-generated decisions, as was stated in substantial detail by the dissenting judge, and should be a major driver for agencies to invest in and mandate explainability to be captured in any significant decision-making so that the relevant and traceable authority is captured for the record, and so that those decisions can't be easily overturned by this precedent.

The "rules as code" work that is taking off around the world provides another piece to the puzzle. If the legislative, regulatory, or policy authorities for your service or decision-making were all available as authoritative code from a persistent source (like api.legislation.gov.au), then you could capture the authority for decisions in real time. Imagine simply and immutably capturing 'based on x, y, and z legislation, the policy rules of a, b, and c and this data, this decision was made'. Capturing the legal basis of decisions requires that legal basis to be available to and persistently referenceable by machines.

Explainability also requires visibility and discoverability. Currently, people have very little visibility of the decisions made by government agencies with or about them, and this leads to the onus often being on citizens or businesses to prove why a government department did something. This becomes a burden for people who are already time-poor, and particularly when people are vulnerable and already under significant other burden. Of course, just making decisions publicly available doesn't mean everyone has the skills, digital literacy and capacity to use the information, but it is a good start!

If decisions made about or with citizens regarding service delivery were captured in real time, in a form that citizens could access, then there would be greater transparency and empowerment for citizens receiving services. For instance, 'x received this rebate/service/entitlement on this

date based on this authority/rules'. This citizen's ledger could also ensure greater accountability and auditing of government service delivery.

Storing the outcome of a decision or validation of claim on a persistent ledger for citizens to access details about their interactions with government could improve visibility, trust, auditing, and appealability of decisions. Such a ledger doesn't currently exist anywhere so far as I know, and obviously there are risks in such an approach, but it could also provide extremely beneficial information for finding patterns of unusual use, like a birth certificate being invoked in multiple states on the same day, which would indicate potential identity theft. If such a function were co-designed with citizens, I believe we could ensure the right balance of privacy and accountability.

Do you really need to share that data?

Most governments are trying to create better services and proof of identity through digital initiatives, starting with the assumption that sharing data is necessary for better services. Meanwhile, trust in public institutions is rapidly dropping, as is the social licence for sharing sensitive government data. Perhaps we need to explore innovative ways to create fundamentally better, more secure, and more trustworthy modern services without requiring bulk data sharing — for instance, we could use **verifiable claims** to assure certain conditions of eligibility rather than copying and pasting personal data around the system.

Public institutions are uniquely responsible for a lot of information. This includes information about people, businesses, public services, and the economy, from high-integrity identity attributes like birth or marriage certificates, to eligibility rules and public service registers, to regulatory requirements and macro economics. Government departments also have a significant

amount of administrative data from which information can be derived or inferred. But copying and pasting this data around the sector, even when permitted, creates duplication of effort, increased costs of processing and security, inconsistencies, and additional risk.

A lot of digital initiatives are limited in impact by trying to automate and streamline existing business processes, rather than solving problems in modern and more scalable ways. Modular and federated approaches to digital architecture can enable data to stay at the source and be better leveraged across the system, reducing many of the issues above, while simply verifying a claim where possible ('does the person meet the age/ means test requirement') dramatically reduces the need to share, process, and store sensitive data.

If customers of a government service or non-government services that require validation from a trusted government information source (such as a birth certificate), we could dramatically improve their experience by building verifiable claims for common service delivery needs. Imagine applying for a service and being asked "***do you give us permission to check that you meet the means test and other eligibility criteria for this service***", with the results then visible to you for validation and for your record into the future. No paperwork (paper or digital), no copy and pasting, no processing, and above all, a more dignified experience. If done properly, the service provider doesn't even need the personal information (like the age or address of the person to validate they are over 18 to sell them liquor).

Oversight and accountability

My strongest recommendation for oversight and accountability is **public testability**. You should have your rules, test cases, eligibility engines, algorithms, or programmatic interfaces to AI/ APIs available for people to test the outcomes against expectations and the rules. This helps

people feel a greater confidence in the decisions made on the back of those systems. This was also a big part of our Better Rules (drafting better legislation/regulation) and Rules as Code (human and machine consumable rules) work in New Zealand and New South Wales, where my teams developed prototype 'eligibility engines' that provided both the technical utility of rules for service delivery, and the traceability and visibility or the complex web of legislation, regulation, and policy involved, which could then be publicly tested.

It has been interesting to see some examples of community organisations do the work to make Hansard and other foundations of the Australian democratic system testable. Open Australia are a great contributor in this sense.

What oversight is there around human and automated decisions, and in particular the use of AI and assuring processes align with genuinely permitted rules as laid out in legislation or law?

There are a few ways we could improve the trustworthiness of government systems. There are of course governance mechanisms that would help, like independent oversight through citizen committees and third parties that are not bound to the controls, agenda, or influence of government. But, again, for this article I'll focus on digital governance approaches.

The most interesting government-led works happening in the world, that I know of, are in New Zealand and Canada. In New Zealand, the national statistics agency StatsNZ has created an holistic approach to algorithmic transparency and accountability that includes an **Algorithm Charter** that commits government agencies to improving transparency and accountability in their use of algorithms over the next five years. This is a response to the recommendations from the *Algorithm assessment report* in 2018. When you consider this is the same country that is also creating a Digital Bill of Rights, you can

see a pattern of trying to ensure good human outcomes are prioritised in the work of the public sector.

The Canadian Government created an Algorithmic Impact Assessment tool, which provides a useful framework for categorising and applying proportionate governance, accountabilities, limitations, and oversight on the use of algorithms. The New South Wales and federal governments of Australia are developing ethical AI frameworks, which will be a good start domestically, and I know there is a lot of work and consideration into explainability in public sector usage of AI happening all around the world, but this is a quickly evolving space and I don't know of anyone who has it fully under control yet.

But frameworks alone will not solve this problem. Indeed, sometimes they form part of the problem. When people are focused on compliance with a policy, framework or governance, then they are focused on assuring great inputs to a system, when what really matters most is the output. You need oversight and accountability of both inputs and outputs. It almost doesn't matter your intent or compliance if you create enormous harm. So again, measuring and monitoring impact of policy, services, legislative change, and regulation is critical.

Certainly maintaining a register of medium-to-high-risk algorithms and AI usage across governments might help with oversight and governance, but it might also be useful to build certain minimum standards of explainability, auditing, traceability, and oversight into the various digital design standards around the world.

As a novel idea, if you were to monitor all public sector programs for impact on quality of life, regardless of what tools or machines were used, you'd also have a chance of identifying and

mitigating where programs, systems, AI or anything else was having a negative impact on humans and society, without limiting the scope of intervention to a particular technology, channel or assumed risk.

Security and digital integrity

If you can't secure your systems and data, then you lose trust. We've seen many examples of this in recent years and the overarching lesson is that there is no real excuse for critical national digital infrastructure to be compromised. You can't blame the vendor, or the internet, or current processes or even the people or machines that are cracking into your systems. The security, integrity, and highly proactive monitoring and realtime mitigation of threats to your systems are 100% your responsibility. So, what are some tips for security approaches that support public trust?

Firstly it is useful to expand upon the traditional locked gate philosophy, where end users are categorised and granted access according to levels of trust and held accountable according to the terms of use, and embrace the idea of **real-time pattern recognition and response systems** that continuously monitors for and responds to atypical patterns of usage. I am always surprised by how easily people apply a tick-box mentality to security and are uncomfortable with thinking critically beyond the compliance requirements. I remember a particular case years ago when the department security folk tried to penalise me for not applying a patch to a service my team was running, even through the patch was for the Windows operating system and we were running Linux. It took days to get formally agreed and documented that we weren't non-compliant with security requirements. And yet we made a significant effort to ensure we were monitoring for users, usage, system changes, and data integrity, which wasn't of much interest but we did it because we wanted people to trust our data.

One of the most important enablers of modernising your approach to security is to adopt agile, test-driven, and modular approaches to your security infrastructure, which then allows you to rapidly prototype, properly address genuine risk, and then scale what works. I was very impressed by the internal security compliance work done by the Australian Government Department of Agriculture as presented to a recent international security conference by Mark Mckenzie, so if you want validation that agile methods can drive great security solutions and outcomes, they are a great case study. Mark wrote a great primer about how security through obscurity simply doesn't work (back when we were at the DTA).

Secondly, **regularly war game your security approach**. Actively try to understand your own vulnerabilities and engage with external and genuinely independent experts, researchers, and civic activists who can help you to identify these vulnerabilities for better public outcomes. When you involve a range of internal folk, including senior managers, it doubles as a useful education exercise because it will quickly reveal not just technical issues but also any gaps in process, communications, and areas of responsibility. You should engage external people too, though, or it can miss things. I know some public servants are nervous about engaging with genuinely independent folk (as opposed to just a contractor or vendor), but I've always been impressed by the work of applied researchers like Vanessa Teague, Chris Culnane, and Ben Rubinstein, each of whom I would trust to bring high integrity testing to the table and who would be trusted by others if they were to give something a clean bill of health.

Thirdly, a simple but powerful tool for improving digital security is to **assume machines as 'users' from the start.** If your security framework or digital design standard required policy,

regulators, and service designers to consider machines as 'end users', you would get two areas for security improvement. It would help to:

- Plan effective and proportionate security approaches to enable appropriate machine to machine usage, such as business systems of regulated entities or personal AI helpers.

- Identify and plan for the security approach to also be designed to mitigate likely or potential inappropriate machine to machine usage, like Distributed Denial of Service attacks (which are BAU for most government services), criminal/nefarious usage of the system or data, or software to reverse engineering personal information through brute force attacks.

Basically, if you assume machines will interact with your systems, whether there are APIs or not, you can design appropriate and proportionate security approaches from the start rather than applying a compliance approach at the end.

Finally, **publish your security approach for public access**. Obviously not the level of detail that would create an opportunity for bad actors to compromise your system, but share your broad approach to help citizens, businesses and your clients/users/customers to have confidence in the digital integrity of your systems. If you want a good example, I'm particularly impressed by the security and data integrity approach taken by the NSW Data Analytics Centre, which includes a detailed and public security statement and outline of their data governance.

Ensuring appealability

How could a citizen appeal a machine generated decision let alone a human generated one? Mapping and meeting the citizens needs for this very important "user journey" would likely lead to the foundations for trust infrastructure for citizens. It would necessarily require a way for citizens to access decisions about them, the explanation and authority of those decisions, and a simple and equitable to access appeals process that respects the time and dignity of the citizen.

Interestingly, just the day before publishing this article, a parliamentary Advisory Report into the Identity-matching Services Bill 2019 and the Australian Passports Amendment (Identity-matching Services) Bill 2019 recommended both bills be strengthened to provide protections for Australian citizens. Many thanks to Leanne O'Donnell for highlighting it on Twitter at such a convenient moment. The Report includes **Recommendation 3:**

> **The Committee recommends that the Australian Passports Amendment (Identity-matching Services) Bill 2019 be amended to ensure that automated decision making can only be used for decisions that produce favourable or neutral outcomes for the subject, and that such decisions would not negatively affect a person's legal rights or obligations, and would not generate a reason to seek review."** [emphasis mine]

This recommendation seems to subtly acknowledge that decisions that have a negative impact on people require greater due process than those of a positive or neutral impact, but I would suggest that all decisions that impact a person, whether they are a citizen or not, need to be explainable, immutably recorded, accessible, and appealable, because 'positive' or 'neutral' are somewhat in the eye of the beholder.

I hope this article has provided some food for thought, and I look forward to the discussions moving forward.

The myth of IT procurement reform: how to avoid sprinting off cliffs

This article addresses the persistent assumption that simplifying public sector procurement is the silver bullet required to get better outcomes for both public servants and private sector vendors. I've spoken to so many people who start their project with the premise that something just needs to be bought and that 'procurement' is often only limited to external sourcing. There are often significant barriers or systemic disincentives to internal or cross sector sourcing, which means shared platforms or reusable components are not easy to find or consider. It is not to say that government procurement couldn't or shouldn't be made easier, but I thought it might be helpful to share some insights about how procurement reform in itself can be something of a red herring unless it occurs within a broader program of reform.

A big thank you to Thomas Andrews and others who provided some peer review and spirited discussions on this one.

Below are some ideas that hopefully will help you navigate, balance, or initiate conversations about procurement (or procurement reform) along with other considerations and frameworks to get the best possible public and service outcomes, as well as a stable markets for vendors. There are three overarching messages here:

- Ensure you have **relevant internal technical expertise** to inform decision-making, differentiate what you should buy off the shelf (commodity needs) between what you should potentially build or co-build (domain-specific needs). Don't assume either are inherently better, as they both have pros and cons.

- Do not engage only with vendors, who understandably need to sell their products and services, but also **engage with those who share the same goal** or need as you. That might be people in other governments, but could also be organisations systemically motivated to achieve a similar outcome.

- It is imperative that you **consider the long-term direction** for whatever you buy or build and whether the motivations are aligned with the goals. This means distinguishing what should be national digital infrastructure from what are just IT systems and not accidentally giving away the keys to the kingdom.

If you are procuring anything, there are great guides available in every jurisdiction that document all the mandatory requirements, but here are a few additional things I would suggest you also consider:

- Have you done any service or system design prior to choosing a solution to buy or build? If not, your choice may not be fit for purpose.

Testing is critical before you commit, which is why it is worth spending small on discovery and alpha stages before doing a full business case. See the UK agile digital and IT projects guide.

- Have you engaged with procurement or sourcing experts early to understand all of the options available to you? Not just external, but internal options?

- Do you maintain ownership, access, and visibility to all data in the system? If not, have you considered the impact of the loss of this ownership in a future changed world order?

- How do you maintain visibility of operations for digital design standards assurance, auditing, and accountability purposes?

- What is the exit cost and other exit challenges of the arrangement?

- How much flexibility do you have for changing needs? Both predictable or unexpected ones?

- Is it possible for the solution to be vendor agnostic, as far as practicable?

- How have you maintained a good likelihood of competitive bidding for the work moving forward? Have you mapped out the potential futures for the solution, including negative ones to mitigate against?

A quick note to the private sector

Please don't assume public servants are clueless. The amount of meetings I have had where it is assumed we must know nothing about technology, or implementation, or running systems is both condescending and darkly amusing. I have worked 10 years in the private sector and 10 in the public sector, and although there are pros and cons in both, there is no less a level of expertise and professionalism

required for the public sector as in the private. Indeed, in the public sector, we have to deal with complexity of requirements, systems, programs, constraints, competing interests, and outcomes that are unmatched by most non-government organisations, and yet there is a prevailing attitude held that by merit of being a public servant, we must have no understanding about anything. Consider that we are balancing these multitude of factors when we make procurement decisions, and this can make some big decisions in government inherently slower. So when we get together across sectors, community and organisational boundaries, let's work collaboratively and respectfully on what the best possible public outcome is. After all, having a great society and economy is in everyone's best interests, and functional and effective public sectors are critical for that to happen.

Procurement complexity in government isn't just for the fun of it, or to make life difficult for you

One of the challenges we face is that we do have genuine complexity around procurement. A lot of this is laid out in the Commonwealth Procurement Rules and the complexity it is a result of the co-existence of specific domestic requirements (accountability, auditing, privacy, legislative orders, etc) with a web of intersecting (and sometimes conflicting) rules and requirements set by various free trade agreements and international organisations (some additional context here and here). It isn't reasonable to expect everyone to understand this web of complexity, but it is important to understand that it is indeed complex, and that if there is something weird that your team is struggling with, be it the team seeking a solution, the sourcing team, or a vendor, it might help to go back to why it is a requirement and what was the source of that requirement. There are

certainly some complexity from legacy habits or inherited processes, but understanding what is a genuine mandatory legal and/or policy requirement — and what isn't — might also help to make better judgement calls and a better use of your time, both from a procurement and from a provider perspective.

Commodity versus domain-specific systems

How often do you hear people talk openly about commercial off the shelf (COTS) software as the assumed better solution? Usually, this sentiment is held by people who don't actually implement solutions, because many implementations require significant customisation, configuration, integration, or modifications to actually implement a COTS product into production. The very concept of COTS assumes a binary 'bespoke versus COTS' dichotomy without taking into account the differing needs of different types of systems or problems.

Let's briefly acknowledge there is a difference between commodity and domain-specific functions. In most agencies in the public sector, there will always be work to do for which there are no COTS product ready to go and no generic solution. This is due to some systems in government being inherently niche and specialised. How many clients are there for a national taxation solution? Or a social welfare payments tool? Or for managing and publishing high integrity legislation? Or for recording and preserving high integrity and high trust information like trust births, deaths, and marriages in perpetuity? How many private organisations have to think about **anything** in perpetuity, like our agencies and archives do every day? The public sector has many unique and domain specific functions, which is in itself no different to any other sector. But we also have some quite domain-specific obligations and requirements that are entirely appropriate for

a democratic system that needs to be accountable to the government, the parliament, and the people — our three bosses. Although there are certainly commodity, repeatable, well defined, or componentised needs for which COTS products may make perfect sense, the amount of shoehorning domain-specific requirements into COTS products, often to the point where the COTS product is completely bespoke, means we often get the worst of both worlds. Unfortunately, when people assume COTS, they often can miss relevant and appropriate open source software.

So, my first framework for you is to consider whether what you are doing is commodity or domain-specific and whether it is well defined or relatively ambiguous. Generally speaking, you don't want to jump straight to pure COTS for domain-specific functions or where there is high ambiguity. You also want to consider whether what you are doing should be considered as **digital public infrastructure**, especially where it is relied upon by others (like is the case with roads, hospitals, and other public infrastructure). Digital public infrastructure includes functions for which government are uniquely placed to provide or be authoritative for such as high integrity identity, various government data, legislation and regulation rules (as code), government service registers, spatial data, etc. I believe digital public infrastructure is generally a good candidate to consider having internal expertise to design, run, manage, or at least heavily oversee as distinct from general IT solutions that serve the department to function and have limited reuse value. For the purpose of this article, it is just worth considering but I'll do another article on "Government as a Platform" to explore this concept more fully.

If your particular solution needs to be able to scale with low cost, needs to be flexible to change and extendable over time, then you might also want to explicitly explore open-source options for which there is now

a significant marketplace of commercial support available (like any other software) but it also helps to maintain a greater competitive market by not locking in to any one vendor. I believe there are some domain specific solutions that governments would be best served to build, to open source and to collaborate with a community of government developers across jurisdictions because of the uniqueness of those functions to government. This is already the default approach taken for software developed with public money in several countries, but it is variable in Australia.

Co-creating design and solutions

Where there is another organisation that shares your objective, you may find opportunities to co-design, co-resource, and co-implement or co-run a shared solution or service. My favourite example of this is the Fintel Alliance, an AUSTRAC initiative that brings intelligence, regulators, and financial sector organisations together to collaborate on strengthening the financial system and disrupting financial crime. This is obviously very different from procurement, but is nicely supported through flexible procurement approaches, as each partner organisation might choose to provide their piece of the puzzle through internal or external capabilities. A vendor is generally incentivised to provide you with something you are willing to pay for, which means the possibilities for innovation are completely tethered to the appetite of the procuring officer or agency senior executive. But we share many needs and goals with other organisations, including in the private, public, and non-profit sectors, so identifying natural partners to work through ambiguity, and to co-design, co-resource, and co-implement if there is a genuinely shared interest is a great way of improving the efficiency and effectiveness of programs or solutions. This might be something to do before a significant procurement, or something that complements procurement approaches.

The risk of perverse incentives and false equivalence in whole-of-government procurement arrangements

There are certainly benefits in establishing all of government procurement arrangements for software tools that are commonly needed. These panels provide a great way to save money through leveraging economies of scale rather than each agency or business unit engaging in procuring the tools individually. There are two challenges I have seen that need to be taken into consideration when designing and delivering all of government procurement arrangements to ensure you don't get unintended consequences.

The first is the **success criteria for procurement teams can create inverse incentives**. If your value and success is measured by how many agencies or teams you have using the arrangement, then you run the risk of prioritising panel subscriptions rather than ensuring the right solution for the right need. I have seen small teams in agencies be encouraged to use very complex and expensive software tools where a simple database, cloud-based, or free tool might have sufficed. I have worked with great procurement teams who present a genuinely full range of sourcing options but I have also seen many procurement teams simply interpret needs through the lens of what panels they have in place.

The second challenge is the **lack of subject matter expertise at key decision points** in sourcing. You get IT contracts where the procurement, contract managers and project managers who have little understanding about technology making big decisions about (usually) purchasing a tool, which assumes buying technology is set and forget. You must have actual technologists involved in the process, and the requirements must be informed by great service design and testing, otherwise you are just taking a gamble.

It is critical to ensure anyone looking for solutions go through two useful steps before talking about procurement panels, noting, of course, sometimes services need to be procured to undertake these steps, a difficult catch 22 for some:

1. Some service-design basics to ensure they have a well defined problem space, an understanding of user needs, and some prototyping or testing on different approaches that can confirm what will meet the user needs;

2. Once there is clarity of what is needed, it is important to consider what is available for reuse, be it all-of-government platforms or tools, reusable components, solutions used by other jurisdictions, any relevant open-source or cloud-based options that provide a point of functional and cost comparison, or indeed any agencies that provide a service or tool that meets the need. Of course, this would require a place to search for reusable components, something for which NSW Government has an early example and the UK Government has an excellent repository of reusable gov.uk services/platforms, components and guidance. The UK 'Choosing a Technology' guide is quite helpful.

Only then, armed with a good understanding of the 'what', some points of comparison and options, does it make sense to look through procurement panels. Though I note some of the above is not easily possible at the moment, it would be more useful.

Habits of oversimplified but false equivalence are easy to fall into when you get preferred panels and then have procurement teams under pressure to increase the panel subscription. "That sounds like an HR solution, here's SAP" or "that sounds like a data need, here's Tableau" rather than what would be more useful at times: "What are you trying to achieve and let's see if anything we have is appropriate, but you may be best

served to go outside of the scope of our panels". You get significant inefficiencies and productivity issues when people are led or forced into using tools that aren't fit for purpose.

For anything we do in government, it is useful to use design methods to better define the problem or opportunity, and only then either build, take to market, use a panel or leverage some that is reusable. The pressures of buying now and getting the cheapest immediate option need to be carefully balanced against the longer-term opportunities, risks, value, flexibility, and minimising technical debt.

When to collaborate and when not to

If you are open to collaborating on a solution, then when should or shouldn't you do so? This is far simpler than may seem to be the case. Basically, if the problem you are trying to solve has others who are similarly motivated or invested, then there is a good chance of genuine collaboration. If you don't, then collaboration isn't viable. For instance, legislation as code has a huge group of organisations who would benefit, including regulated entities (and government agencies themselves) who consume rules from legislation every day and so would benefit from having legislation-as-code as digital public infrastructure. But running the email or office suite for your organisation would likely excite no one outside your organisation, so it is likely not a candidate for collaboration, except with those trying to sell you the best possible email/office suite solution. Great vendor relationships are important, but they are very distinct from naturally motivated collaborations around a shared need. Taking the time to determine the best procurement model for these collaborations may be a new practice for your organisation, but the end result will reap dividends (and you'll have a new procurement model to use in the future).

Having the expertise to engage with experts

One complaint you often hear from companies is that the people they deal with in government don't seem to understand what they do. This is partly a result of engagement with vendors being largely managed by procurement and contract managers rather than by people who understand the substance of the engagement or solution. If you don't have domain experts in the room and who are involved in the ongoing vendor relationship, then you run the risk of mutual incomprehension, poor understanding of requirements, and a tick-box approach to assuring a good outcome. One of the challenges here is that the over reliance on outsourcing from some agencies and jurisdictions has hollowed out a lot of technology domain expertise, and where there is expertise, it is often 110% committed to dealing with the IT systems and growing internal technical debt. There is also a dangerous habit of outsourcing the expertise to define and then manage complex contractual arrangements, creating dependencies on contractors for mission-critical implementations. I would suggest that bringing IT and procurement/contract management closer together would get better outcomes, and maintaining an internal workforce of technologists and technical experts, particularly ones that are supported to continually develop their skills and knowledge, is crucial to good procurement outcomes.

Some business and IT teams treat their procurement (and legal) colleagues as peripheral players, but expert procurement advice brought early into the process can save significant time and money for everyone. If you don't have the necessary procurement skills in your team, grow or secure them.

'Set and forget' is not a viable methodology for digital projects, and 'launch' is not the end of a project, but rather than start of continuous

improvement if you are to have systems that respond to changing needs and requirements. If you want digital systems that are sustainable beyond launch, it is helpful to ensure contracts and contractors align to some common digital design standards and agile work methods, which also means a little flexibility in contracts so that every change request doesn't break the bank.

Of course, it is hard to maintain technical expertise if you subscribe to the idea that you should outsource all implementation, because the expertise will often leave. So, I would like to suggest that getting the right and appropriately sustainable outcome for the public sector isn't about outsourcing or insourcing, but rather it is about having a balanced hybrid model of internal and external delivery. My recommendation is that anything genuinely domain-specific or that is a national digital public infrastructure should be run by internal capabilities (with support, but not complete dependence, on vendors) and that it provides a persistence of internal capability for ensuring procurement outcomes are generally better. It goes without saying that no single person in the organisation should be expected to have, or be allowed to build, subject matter expertise to the exclusion of all others, or to be made irreplaceable.

Agency procurement guidelines need to allow their business and technical staff to consult with vendors directly and widely, to both learn what is available on the market and to allow vendors to pitch their products without going through lengthy EOI processes. There are widely divergent interpretations of the Commonwealth Procurement Guidelines on this matter across agencies.

The necessary accountability of public sectors

A lot of work is outsourced by government to third parties. This can be a good way to deliver some things (and there are many arguments as to how much outsourcing is too much); however, there is a serious transparency issue when the information about contracted work is unable to be monitored, generally with the excuse of 'commercial in confidence'. In reality, truly unique solutions to procurement needs are relatively rare. All contracts should have minimum reporting requirements and should make publicly available the details of what exactly is contracted, with the exception of contracts with national security where such disclosure creates a significant risk. This would also help in creating a motivation for contractors to deliver on their contractual obligations. If procurement officers across government had enhanced training to correctly apply the existing confidentiality test from the Commonwealth Procurement Rules, it would be reasonable to expect that there would be less information hidden behind commercial in confidence and more accountability, which would drive better outcomes and would provide greater possibilities for managing and mitigating risks. When things go wrong in the public sector the impacts can be devastating, so accountability, oversight, and effective continuous management is critical.

The barriers of insourcing

Often a business unit in a department will find it hard to find and engage with potentially appropriate internal capabilities. There is rarely an internal service offering that isn't limited to BAU IT functions, and I've seen many IT departments or service-design functions that have to charge for services, which creates a barrier for even the most basic advice or support. Many IT departments are underfunded, and so can be tempted to overcharge for new works in order to subsidise critical but underfunded systems. So if the internal IT expertise is hard and expensive, how would a typical team get the necessary expertise to make a great technology decision let alone have a realistic chance of effective insourcing? The answer

is that business units end up being completely reliant upon either the advice of ad hoc skills in their team or their vendors. More technically-literate functions end up being able to innovate with technology, while many other business units struggle with basic tools and low investment. A real case I saw included an internal IT department give a quote to a low capability business unit to do an 'online survey' for… wait for it… $4 million, for a non-sensitive and small survey of agency needs. On the one hand, I can only imagine IT were either limited to an expensive tool or trying to subsidise their budget, but the business unit accepted the quote without question and ended up doing the survey by emailing documents.

Better technology literacy would help everyone make better choices.

If departments both valued and supported the maintenance of an internal capability (which necessarily means designing and running some things internally, or the expertise erodes over time), and then ensured the expertise was funded to provide some advice, expertise and design/delivery to the rest of the organisation, then you'd have better informed sourcing and procurement decisions being made.

Final word

In conclusion, of course we need procurement practices that are streamlined, effective, easy for vendors to understand and engage with, and as simple as possible. But procurement-reform efforts that simply improve the ease of buying stuff can lead to bigger, faster, and more costly disasters unless there are also improvements in all the areas outlined above.

It is relatively easy to just speed up: from walking, to jogging, to running as fast as you can. But if you are headed in the wrong direction, you might well find yourself just sprinting off cliffs.

What does open government mean for digital transformation?

Openness is a critical tenet for democracy. It enables transparency, which enables accountability, which in turn drives better public outcomes and ideally a useful check and balance on power. But openness is also a critical tenet for modern public sectors if they are to be capable of responsiveness and resilience in the face of dramatic and rapid change, and to best ensure evidence-driven policy, programs, and service delivery. As part of this Public Sector Pia Review, I wanted to talk about open government as it applies to digital transformation of the public sector, beyond the usual (but important!) scope of transparency and freedom of information.

I do recommend you also check out the Open Government Partnership (including Australia's participation and the community around it), the great work of Open Australia over many years, and the Digital 9 (a collection of governments committed to open digital government), all three of which sit in the interesting intersection of open and digital government. I also encourage you to look closely at how Taiwan is dramatically raising the bar for open inclusive government in a digital world. There are also a lot of initiatives around the non-digital specific world of open government, including the Accountability Roundtable, Transparency International Australia, and many more. I also encourage you to read some of the great case studies that explore the intersection of digital and open government in this report on 'Upgrading Democracy' by the Centre for Policy Development from 2009.

This article provides some ideas about how open government can (and arguably should) apply to all digital government and transformation efforts in public sectors. Many thanks to the peer reviewers for this article, including Peter Timmins, an indefatigable force for Open Government in Australia.

Open digital government?

In exploring open and digital government, to me a lot of it comes down to two simple ideas:

1. write once, read many; and
2. many eyes make all bugs shallow.

If you do something, you may as well do it to share. Then you naturally get more reuse, more value realised, more opportunity to improve, more eyes. Don't just run an event, record it to publish. Don't just write a manual, publish it for broader reuse. Don't just develop a fix for something, contribute it back to the codebase. And with more eyes, you can harness more minds, more ideas, more creativity, more testing,

and more hands. The work we do in public sectors affects many people, so there are many people naturally motivated to ensure the work is good.

Below are some practical concepts that build upon this concept specifically for public sectors.

Embrace change as inevitable and an opportunity

Firstly, it is important to understand that transformation of public sectors is both inevitable and necessary to be fit for purpose in the 21st century and beyond. Although many 'digital' efforts in the public sector are limited to just improving service delivery, true digital transformation presents the opportunity to reimage government and implement the digital public infrastructure and modern approaches we collectively need to be effective, responsive to community needs, trends and global context, and truly outcomes focused in a rapidly changing world.

I often hear people say they are suffering from 'change fatigue' in public services, and I encourage all public servants to embrace change as the new normal, and to develop ways to be change optimistic. Of course, this would be greatly enabled by a culture across government that involved and empowered all levels to innovate, but regardless, change is upon us and it presents an opportunity to change for the better how we operate day to day.

Working in the open

Working in the open, when possible, helps build trust, confidence in your team, and collaboration. Building trust and buy-in to your work is especially important when you identify something that needs to be changed, such as a project pivot or change in approach. Openness is also **key to scaling impact**. It is how we can

influence the system and inspire and enable people to individually engage with better outcomes and innovate across organisational and sector boundaries. Openness is also how we can ensure our work is **evidence-based, better-informed and better-tested, through public peer review**, and it is how we get greater coordination and convergence of effort across sectors, as it sends myriad lead indicators to vendors, researchers, and non-profit sectors. When you share what you are doing, you also attract natural allies who share your goals or problem space, and with whom you can **forge strategic and mutually beneficial partnership**s, where all parties are naturally motivated to collaborate.

In short, openness is a great way to ensure both a better supply of as well as a better demand for what is demonstrably 'good'.

Working in the open, to me, means two things:

- **Sharing the journey** — sharing what you are doing as you progress, not just at the end or launch or something, is a great way to build interest, trust, and buy-in for an initiative, but also helps to identify relevant opportunities for projects that would benefit from collaboration. If you make public what you are doing, which should be the default case (as much of what public sectors do is not actually secret), the others who are dealing with the same challenge can find, share, or contribute to what you are doing, even across the same organisation or sector. Sharing the journey would ideally also include sharing progress, like measures of success over time, which also grows trust.

- **Sharing and contributing to artefacts** — reusing and contributing to relevant efforts from others, opening up our research, code, data, reusable web services, lessons, and prototypes (tech and policy). This means we are not reinventing the wheel, and are enabling others to build on the back of our publicly

funded efforts. It also means we can leverage peer review, external contributors, and cross jurisdictional efforts.

Effective, constructive, and collaborative public engagement greatly improves the opportunity to include the knowledge and experience of citizens in policy and projects. Public engagement strategies work best when they are underpinned by strong community development, a clear and collaboratively developed goal, a genuine interest in the inputs of others, and a process that is as low a barrier to entry to engage in as possible.

Basically, we are moving towards an era of participatory and co-designed governance, which is both inevitable and beneficial for better public outcomes. So, exploring ways to share and grow skills and to collaborate broadly is certainly a part of open digital government.

Open infrastructure — Government as a Platform

As we translate existing public sector operations into a digital world, and indeed as we invent new ways of working in a digital context, we have the opportunity to create digital public infrastructure and achieve the notion of government as a social and economic platform. Ideally, digital public infrastructure would enable great services and better administration, but it should also enable better digital access to justice: to the rules and decisions made with and about the people we serve.

If we don't build the foundations of digital government openly, then how can people trust it? If we don't build immutable explainability into the decisions and actions of our public sectors, then how will people audit, appeal, or have appropriate oversight or governance? How can we ensure our services and the decisions made are accountable in how they are managed, monitored and run? Digital government provides new challenges but also new opportunities for

openness, accountability and transparency, but only if we design from the ground up for **open digital government** on the back of trust infrastructure that is trustworthy.

Citizen centric services is about putting the genuine user experience first to create a dignified experience for citizens when they interact with government. Citizen centric services requires good data and metadata, including geospatially enabled information about government services, and the rules of eligibility and calculation relating to those services. Constant feedback loops that engage the input, ideas and experiences of citizens are extremely important to establish effective citizen centric services, and to ensure the iterative improvements over time to keep services relevant and responsive to the changing needs of the population. **Reusable service components** make it more possible to create more personalised and accessible services through myriad and emerging channels, and although this includes many services that are identified, there are also many services that can be provided anonymously. It is important to not force people to have to log in unless they really need to, as it can feel intimidating for people who have negative or scary interactions with the public sector, particularly vulnerable people.

Open rules, open algorithms, and programmatic explainability are needed if you want to ensure traceability, accountability and appealability of decisions. For algorithmic transparency, it means we need to design explainability and decision capture into our systems, machines, and use of AI, otherwise we too easily get black box decision-making that is completely inappropriate for the public sector. Rules of all sorts are always eventually applied in software, which can reduce transparency of their application. Rules as code is the concept that the rules of government (particularly prescriptive ones), in legislation, regulation, operational policy, etc, are made available in an authoritative human and machine consumable form. Today,

these rules are only authoritatively available as human (lawyer) language, and anyone applying the rules, including in departments, is interpreting and translating those rules into myriad software tools that then creates gaps in application and accountability. When drafting new legislation, we can use modern agile and digital methods to develop test driven rules which can result in Better Rules in the first place, that are drafted in human and machine-consumable form from scratch, allowing governments to host a rules API for anyone to use. I believe rules as code is core digital public infrastructure, and it has been shown to provide dramatic benefits for service delivery, compliance, better regulatory outcomes, and reduced cost across the entire economy. Most importantly to this article, this concept then provides greater access to justice and transparency of authority and the rules that define and shape the world in which we live.

Open data is an obvious example for open infrastructure. Open data is about taking the vast majority of government datasets and information that don't have personal information or security issues, and putting them online in the most useful way possible. In a practical sense, for data to be most useful (both to the public but equally important for other parts of governments to be able to leverage the data), it needs to have permissive copyright (such as Creative Commons BY), be machine readable, time stamped, subscribable, available in an openly documented format (open standard), have useful metadata, and wherever possible have good geospatial information available. Ideally, your data needs to meet the needs of developers and machines as well as end users. Starting on an open data journey can be difficult, so below are four useful steps to take, each with its own challenges:

1. **Differentiate between sensitive and non-sensitive data!** Not all data requires an in depth Privacy Impact Statement to just consider publishing. It is useful to have clarity about what is sensitive and what isn't and to

put proportionate governance in place that protects sensitive data whilst not dramatically inhibiting non-sensitive data sharing. For instance, it absolutely makes sense for any data that has personal information to have risks carefully considered with appropriate oversight and vetting. But the location of public parks doesn't have any personal information and is really helpful information for people to have access to.

2. **Just get non-sensitive data online!** This stage is where an organisation just tries to get online whatever they can. It often means the licensing is not entirely clear or permissive, the data format is whatever the organisation uses (which may or may not be useful to others), the data may be slightly out of date and it often isn't clear who the contact for the data set is making follow-up hard. This stage is, however, extremely important to encourage, as it is where every organisation must begin and build upon. It is also important because to achieve quality open data, major changes often need to be made to systems, workflows, technologies, and organisational culture. Access to imperfect data in the short term is far better than waiting for perfection.

3. **High quality data!** This is the stage where issues around quality publishing of data have been teased out, and an organisation can start to publish quality data. It is hopefully the point at which the systems, culture, workflows and technologies used within the organisation all facilitates open data publishing, while also facilitating appropriate settings for secure data (such as sensitive privacy or security information). This stage takes a lot of work to achieve, but also means a far lower cost of publishing data, which helps among other things, keep the cost of FoI compliance down.

4. **Collaborative data!** This final stage of open data is where an organisation can figure out ways to integrate and verify input from

the public to data sets to improve them, to capture historical and cultural context and to keep information up to date. This is also a challenging step but where government departments and agencies can engage the public collaboratively, we will see better data sets and greater innovation.

It is worth also noting that when it comes to sensitive data, you shouldn't share it unless you really need to. This article should help you determine when it might be more appropriate to share an insight, alert or when to simply verify a claim rather than sharing sensitive data for service delivery purposes.

Open Source and Open Government

Open Source has provided a natural fit for a lot of Open Government initiatives for many years, both in public sectors across the world and in myriad civil society initiatives. In public sectors, we get the benefits from widespread use of open standards, the ability to rapidly deploy and iterate, the large developer and support communities around mature Open Source projects (such as Drupal, WordPress, or the statistical tool R), and the competitive and sustainable nature of commercial support around mature Open Source projects. Open Source approaches also let departments extend and enhance functionality around business needs rather than shoehorn business requirements into off-the-shelf products, noting that this requires a mature sourcing approach that doesn't assume everything we do in public sectors can be bought off the shelf (please see the Pia Review on procurement considerations for better outcomes). Most importantly, there is a strong cross over of values and practices between Open Government and Open Source which can really support great and sustainable public benefits and outcomes.

In January 2011, AGIMO released the Australian Government Open Source Software Policy, which had three principles:

1. **Principle 1:** Australian government ICT procurement processes must actively and fairly consider all types of available software.

2. **Principle 2:** Suppliers must consider all types of available software when dealing with Australian government agencies.

3. **Principle 3:** Australian government agencies will actively participate in Open Source software communities and contribute back where appropriate.

The third principle, in particular, represented a fundamental shift in how government could engage with Open Source: by seeing itself as a potential contributor in the community. It was very exciting, but few departments to date in Australia have really realised the value of technical and technology collaboration in Australia, which isn't unique to Open Source but is strongly embedded in most Open Source projects. Open Source has become a foundation for many other jurisdictions to innovate and transform, and is even one of the Digital 9 tenets, which is a group of countries committing to exemplary digital-transformation agendas. There are many Open Source code repositories now from public servants and departments across the world, so there are myriad opportunities to collaborate and stand on the shoulders of giants.

In July 2011, after six months consultation, AGIMO also released the Australian Government Open Source Software Guide V2, which was a useful document for departments and agencies to help them comply to the policy directive where they must consider Open Source in their procurement processes.

Since then, the Digital Transformation Agency has included Open Source as part of the mandatory Digital Service Standard, fashioned after the same requirement in the UK Digital Service Standard.

Just briefly, to return to the cross over of values. Many people in the broader Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) communities share some common cultural values with public servants that would probably surprise both groups. Those values centre around freedom for all, doing 'good' in the world, sharing (for progress and mutual benefit), the importance of doing (not just talking), and trying to solve tricky problems for society. Having walked in both works, I continue to be surprised by how much cultural overlap there is, and yet minimal interaction (beyond technologists) but there is a lot that public sectors can learn from Open Source that can help us achieve better public outcomes.

Final word

Transparency is, of course, critical for open government, and so it is critical that public servants always try to work and design systems with maximum transparency. Especially those of us working in digital government and transformation initiatives. If you end up with less accountability through digital technologies, then not only have you gone backwards from a public good sense, but you have wasted the great opportunities for openness that digital can bring to bear.

Achieving true open government is necessarily a constant and evolving challenge. Day to day you need to ensure it is a foundation for all public sector efforts. Although this is obvious for many, the digital government landscape is changing so fast that is can be easy to just do what needs to be done today. But if we don't ensure every day that we have **open digital government**, then it will be too easy for openness to slide, and democracy to suffer.

Hopefully this article has provided some food for thought, but please consider how you can bring more openness into your work, programs, policies and services, because we shouldn't have to ask for trust, we should operate in the most trustworthy way possible at all times.

New Public Management: the practical challenges, remedies and alternatives

When I started working in the public sector, I found a few strange patterns of operations and behaviour that I struggled to understand. I couldn't understand how we could get such a gap between implementation and the original intent. Why were people choosing to not share or work together? Why were teams just handing off unfinished projects to each other, or choosing short wins that created predictable (and demonstrable) long losses, thereby adding to the technical, administrative and cultural debt of the agency and the government?

I went looking for answers and, after 10 years of testing different hypotheses, I believe that many of the current challenges in public sectors link back to two causal factors:

- The impact of increasing reactivism to politics and 24-hour media scrutiny, in public sectors (which varies across jurisdictions); and

- The unintended consequences of New Public Management and trying to make public sectors act like the private sector.

If you're interested in some ideas for maintaining a balanced public service rather than perpetual political or other reactivism, you might also be interested in the article about serving three masters. But this article is about New Public Management (NPM).

It is worth briefly mentioning that NPM was introduced in the midst of global uncertainty in an effort to make public sectors more efficient, more responsive to elected governments, and more engaged with other sectors. This article is about some of the practical and unintended consequences of the adoption of the principles of New Public Management by public sectors. It explores what we can do about them to ensure that our programs, services, policies and legislation serve the best public good and are delivered in a way that aligns to the purpose and roles of our public sectors.

Political/electoral cycles are short and the incentives on politicians are to focus on what they see as being urgent, whereas the public service has a duty of care over the long term. There's a tension in this model which has tended, I think, over the past 20 years or so, to skew towards the public service delivering on the short-term political agenda at the expense of investing in the foundations for its own longevity.

Why is New Public Management more of a problem now than it has been in the past? I'd argue that it's because we now have several generations of public servants who have come

into the public service without the institutional memory of anything before 'government as a business'.

The dangers of treating public service like a business

Treating the public service like a business has become the norm, with the structures, language, practices and incentives inherited from private sector managerialism. We know that citizens don't expect public sectors to act the same way — which is evident in the feedback, discussions, user research and myriad public engagements — yet when we adopt the mindset of a business we create pressure to act more like a business in everything we do. This isn't entirely terrible — it can encourage efficiency and effectiveness, as well as investment in what will improve the experience of the people that interact with departments and agencies, but it has gone too far in many ways and places. When the functions of government are all referred to as 'business units' there is an implicit expectation to drive savings or cost recovery as an end rather than a means, and an implicit zero-sum game competitiveness between functions that really should be working closely together to get holistic outcomes for the community. The separation of policy from operations, and strategy from implementation and maintenance, has been an important contributor to funding being prioritised around delivery of the political agenda (urgency) rather than longevity. This is particularly the case for small agencies, whose incentives will always cause them to prioritise the delivery of wide

and ambitious policy agendas over investment in sustainable organisational infrastructure that would keep them functioning properly.

When you compound this with a common lack of differentiation between core and non-core functions in a department, you can see funding start to be heavily prioritised around urgency rather than longevity, or the lack of alignment between personal (senior executive) and system and citizen priorities, or top down imperatives rather than investing in the core foundations that **support** the needs of the community, or the purpose of a public institution. This **purpose** is often encoded in the constitutional or legislative basis of the organisation, or sometimes in policy. But if you don't prioritise funding (and structure, and incentives) around purpose, then it becomes necessary for an organisation to find itself running side hustles to supplement critical systems, functions or staff, which is an inherently unsustainable pattern. Innovation is seen as a nice to have, rather than critical for evolving antiquated systems or processes. Enabling innovation is now everyone's job.

Public sectors should simply not be driven by a purely financial or efficiency imperative, because it conflicts very quickly with public good outcomes, and inevitably leads to decisions that prioritise money over people. When everyone is under constant pressure, there is precious little time, permission or support for proactive policy or program exploration. This is dangerous in a world that is constantly changing, and is a relatively new issue. For instance, earlier in my career, policy teams used to have some opportunity for self-directed exploration of policy options for the government of the day and, although some teams still have this role, I have seen increasingly fewer policy professionals and teams have this opportunity. This creates an opportunity cost, as policy professionals are sometimes in a good position to see and explore emerging trends across a system or government as they arise, especially

when policy teams stay connected to several areas of implementation as they pertain to a policy objective. An overwhelming financial imperative, unbalanced by other pressures, makes it hard in public sectors to justify creating space and time for innovating or addressing long term challenges, even though, ironically, many in the private sector manage to fund innovation just fine.

On the other hand, the service delivery imperatives of the private sector have provided some good lessons and practices for public sectors around prioritising a great "customer experience" (CX) and focusing our efforts around continuously addressing "customer needs". Of course, many "customers" of public sectors aren't really customers, in that don't have an option to get the service elsewhere. However, I have seen firsthand the genuine benefit to program and services development when a CX lens is strategically and widely applied. When functions of government that don't consider themselves service providers have to consider a CX lens, you can get some great results: regulators considering the CX of regulated entities, legislators considering the CX of anyone (including service delivery departments) using the legislation, or policy teams considering the CX of people who need to apply new policy positions.

So while there are certainly things that public sectors can learn from the private sector, I think we need to reconnect with the basic premise that public sectors are different and should not blindly copy private sector practices, because the roles, responsibilities, incentives and purpose are fundamentally different.

Functional segmentation

There has always been challenges of siloed behaviour in Westminster-based public sectors. But NPM compounded this issue with **functional segmentation** of specialisations. Indeed, the

mantra at the time was "make the managers manage" (thanks Malcolm). In my experience, policy, drafting, implementation, investigations, litigation, etc are all separate "business units" that compete for funding and attention. Each have different KPIs, which can deviate efforts and process from the overarching purpose, and result in cannibalistic functional competition that detracts greatly from the ability to be outcomes-focused across teams, even within the same department! Teams can come together around priorities or emergencies, but are almost the exceptions that prove the rule. I've heard stories of pre-NPM times when people who actually worked as a social worker were involved in developing the Social Services Act (NZ), because it used to be normal practice to have what we'd now call cross functional experts be part of the policy development process. Now we have policy professionals who have on the one hand brought greater consistency of methods and professionalism to the practice, but on the other hand have become separated from implementation. Bridging the policy/implementation divide is critical to ensuring outcomes-based efforts, prioritisation and resourcing, so perhaps we need to consider organisational structures that have multi-disciplinary teams wrap around outcomes, rather than be separated into functions? Meanwhile, just seeing people across different functions as necessary to the success of an outcome, allies not distractions or blockers, is a good start.

Roles of the public sector

We have a real issue of constant questioning and revisiting the roles and purpose of public sectors, certainly in Australia and New Zealand. Why? In my experience, it is usually because either people are under budget constraints and so start trying to shed more and more cost, to the point where critical public services become threatened. Or because of a philosophical ideology that thinks the free market can solve all problems and that government should just get out of the way (which emerged with NPM over the past 30 years). In the former case, we need holistic and nuanced decision making across the public sector that balances the proposals by highly pressured individual functions against the needs of the entire public sector and the diverse communities we serve. In the latter case, when the lens of "market failure" is simply applied without thought, we are assuming government is only here to do what the private sector won't and that public sectors are the problem rather than a means to a solution.

I've heard many people, inside and outside of government, assume that public servants can only "help" by providing resources or 'getting out of the way', and don't see the public sector either as a platform upon which they can build, nor as a potential partner in solving complex problems.

The biggest unintended and unfortunate consequence of the constant question about whether government should be doing something is the existential crisis I see in many public services. Many feel constantly assumed to be "less than" the private sector: not as innovative, not as effective, not as capable. That assumption then leads to a particularly dangerous assumption that if you want something done right, just get the private sector to do it, and yet some of the most innovative, effective, capable and ultimately driven people I've ever worked with have been public servants.

But surely government exists to provide stability, predictability, key services, and the broadest social and economic outcomes for the community? I would argue it is necessary that public sectors do certain foundational roles, because they can do so at a **scale**, and can deal with a high level of **system complexity**, for **increasingly diverse needs**, can do so **sustainability** and are **motivated by a public good imperative**. Taking a duty of care approach means necessarily taking a systems approach,

and long term in public sector terms means decades or centuries and public sectors can provide a platform upon which the **whole society and economy can thrive**. Of course, when public sectors acted more and more like private sectors, this became difficult to discern.

Of course, the non-profit sector is also an important part of the puzzle that is often overlooked. Many vulnerable people will go to a trusted non-profit well before they choose to deal with government, because we are **both** the social worker and the cop. So it is critical that we engage with, support and proactively enable non-profits to do their very best work for the people who most need it. Our role in government isn't just to do, but to support.

The shift to outcomes-driven public services is a useful step, but if we are to get genuinely better public services and a cohesive culture and approach across the public sector, then we need to explore the genuine roles of government in a digital economy, and build part of our strategy and success measures around that.

In the jurisdictions in which I've worked, the absolute minimum set of public sector roles are found in foundational articles like the Australian Constitution, constitutional conventions and in legislation. Again, to use Australia as an example, the federal government provides national security, communications and transport infrastructure, an in-perpetuity record of the births, deaths and marriages, national standards, immigration and much more. Here is a handy guide about the federal, state and local government roles and responsibilities for Australia, several of which are defined in our Constitution, with thanks to the Parliament of NSW website.

If we want to design the core roles and responsibilities of governments in a digital economy, we need to start with the basics above, and then look carefully at current and emerging ways that people and organisations **want** to engage with public sectors, like we did

in exploring future modes of service delivery in the New Zealand Service Innovation Lab. People want and assume that we are looking at the ramifications of AI and automation for quality of life and the future of work, but are our policy, service delivery, compliance and myriad other teams empowered to explore new horizons?

What does public infrastructure look like as it extends beyond roads and communications infrastructure to a digital economy? We also need to consider what digital transformation means for the very foundations for public sectors to operate at all, like legislation, administrative orders, budget management systems, policy development, accountability, regulation and what a digital twin of government would look like.

The roles and responsibilities of public sectors today should potentially reflect three key things:

- The roles and responsibilities outlined in the foundational documents of the society;

- The needs, values and expectations of the people and communities we serve (again, please see the serving three masters article); and

- An application of the previous two as they extend to digital foundations for a digitally enabled government, society and economy.

On the third point, we must consider the different incentive systems of different sectors, and ensure we do in the public sector the things that align with public sector purpose and incentive systems for the best public good. For instance, legislation provides myriad rules by which society must depend on, and so the provision of legislation is clearly a public sector role. So as we are looking at digitally consumable rules (like legislation and regulation as code), I would argue we should therefore consider the provision of authoritative digital legislation (like api.legislation.gov. xx) a role of the public sector, rather than just setting principles or outsourcing something so foundational.

There is a very mixed public narrative about the roles of public sectors in modern society. It would be beneficial to take this moment in time to engage widely, across sectors and communities, to co-create a clear consensus on the minimum agreed roles and responsibilities of public sectors. This would better allow the ideological arguments to be constrained to the areas of disagreement without the widespread erosion of public sector existential confidence, something that is currently consistently hammered by a widely held assumption that absolutely everything is contestable.

Public sector versus private sectors — a lesson in finding balance
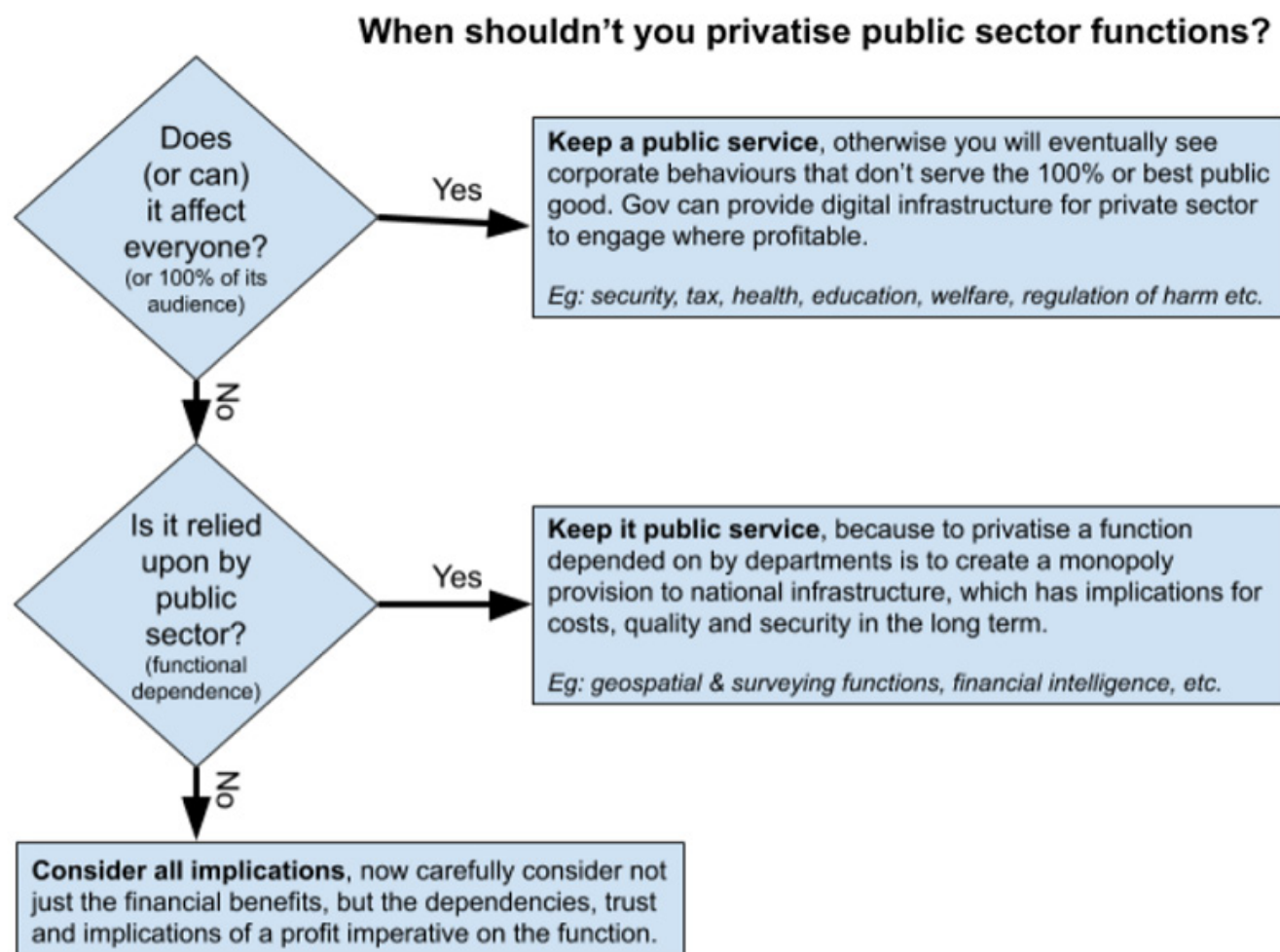
The lack of general consensus on the roles of public sector today creates a variety of survival behaviours that are counterproductive. We need to get back to a broad consensus of a few key ideas:

- That **public sectors are a necessary and positive foundation for society (and democracy).** Many people coming into the public sector seem to start with the notion that the best type of government is small and invisible, which doesn't really align with the diversity of actual functions of our public sectors nor the diversity of needs of the people. Sadly, the same perspective is usually backed with the argument "well that's what I'd want", which is, to my mind, the very worst rationale because it assumes one person's (usually very privileged) experience reflects everyone else's, which is debunked with even the merest of research or service design.

- **There are some things that only the public sector should do**. This shouldn't have to be said, but when everyone is under serious (and somewhat artificial) budgetary and staffing constraints all the time, it can lead to function-based decisions at the cost of the system and community at large. For instance, you can see a branch or team deciding to change, outsource or close something down because they need to reduce immediate costs, with implications for others that rely on that thing. I've seen people suggest outsourcing key functions of government just to meet an efficiency dividend, without consideration of the effect of different incentive systems on that function. So we need to collectively differentiate between:

1. What **only the public sector** should do;
2. What the **public sector should definitely not do**; and
3. Where there is debate and disagreement in between.

Even the staunchest of ideologues would not propose that everything should be done or not done by the public sector, and yet the prevailing cultural assumption in public sectors is that anything is up for discussion, which leaves an existential axe hanging over the public sector at all times.

"*The lesson: trying to turn non-market parts of society into markets, while blithely ignoring all the obvious reason such "markets" would fail, is a fool's errand.*" Ross Gittens, [Confessions of a pet shop galah: a lot of reform backfired](#) (Nov 2019)

Whilst I think the Constitution provides a good starting point for defining what public sectors should be responsible for, it was clearly written well before the digital age and so a rethink is needed. Below is my very simplified thinking on the matter.

When shouldn't you privatise public sector functions?

Does (or can) it affect everyone? (or 100% of its audience)

Yes → **Keep a public service**, otherwise you will eventually see corporate behaviours that don't serve the 100% or best public good. Gov can provide digital infrastructure for private sector to engage where profitable.

Eg: security, tax, health, education, welfare, regulation of harm etc.

No ↓

Is it relied upon by public sector? (functional dependence)

Yes → **Keep it public service**, because to privatise a function depended on by departments is to create a monopoly provision to national infrastructure, which has implications for costs, quality and security in the long term.

Eg: geospatial & surveying functions, financial intelligence, etc.

No ↓

Consider all implications, now carefully consider not just the financial benefits, but the dependencies, trust and implications of a profit imperative on the function.

Whilst the public service needs to also deliver on the policy agenda of the government of the day, the general public and industry also expect that public sectors are keeping an eye on emerging trends and formulating policy positions and proposals to protect and support the wellbeing of the community. Sadly, today, many public servants believe that it isn't their role to (as the public service) to raise new policy ideas, or they don't have capacity outside of day to day operational work, or that they have no permission to pursue proactive policy ideas. Policy teams used to explicitly have time for practice work, but this is not common now and needs to be reprioritised in policy functions.

If this proactive policy futures work is outsourced, or delivered primarily through consultants, then we lose the public sector voice of sustainable public good, and we lose the possibility of ensuring policy positions that are co-developed with citizens. Public sectors must keep a hand on the wheel whilst also seeking knowledge and

expertise from across sectors and communities, and I would suggest the role of being an expert facilitator of creating balanced, evidence-based and public good policy positions is a critical one of modern, effective and values driven public sectors

The impact on regulation

In a business sense, the philosophy underpinning regulatory reform has largely shifted to a principles-based approach as a means of reducing cost and providing flexibility for implementation in businesses. And yet, more interpretation requires more effort and creates less consistency of application, so the cost and complexity are simply shifted from policy teams into the consumers of regulation making it much more costly for the regulated sector, particularly small and medium enterprises. The gap between policy and implementation also can make it much harder to realise the original policy intent. Pressures to reduce costs at a business unit level

can also become an impediment to collaboration across teams in the public sector, and certainly gets in the way of actually solving the problem.

Bringing a business perspective to the table is critical for regulation to work well (see our article on creating better rules and rules as code) but treating the act of regulation itself as a business becomes tricky because there are many imperatives for regulation, not just economic ones. If you measure success in regulation as how many compliance breaches you've identified, you can find the organisation becomes perversely incentivised to not strengthen the systems and reduce non-compliance.

Commsification — the issues around marketspeak

What do you think of when you hear the term 'public sector'? A lot of people don't distinguish between 'government' and 'public sector', and the general public narrative at the moment is one that assumes that private sectors are inherently better than public sectors, and assumes public servants to be barriers: ignorant bureaucrats that couldn't deliver value to save themselves. This whole narrative is both insulting and untrue for the vast majority of public servants I have worked with, but there is generally no contrary view in the public domain.

The voice of the public sector has been stifled, misrepresented and glossed over by deep and broad 'commsification'. Don't get me wrong, great professional communications teams are excellent at shaping a narrative and getting a message out there. But there are three unintended consequences of trying to apply professional comms across the entire public sectors:

- **Marketing doublespeak** has seeped into all forms of communications to the detriment of clear, meaningful language. You could almost pick up the executive summary from any two departments and you'd get the same reference

to 'synergy', 'efficiency', 'streamlining' and a focus on customer experience. This is often not the communications teams pushing the language, but senior executives who want to sound more business-like. This problem is best articulated by the great Don Watson in his book, Death Sentence, which should be mandatory reading for all public servants.

- The **notable absence of facts** in the public sphere. Public sectors have a lot of information, data and facts at our disposal, including high value publicly funded research, and things for which public sectors are uniquely authoritative on (statistics, economy measures, etc). It is critical that the public service publishes facts in a way that isn't about a good news story, or trying to reflect the policy of the government of the day. Of course people will debate about whether all things are facts, but as a basic principle, if public sectors don't publish facts for which we are uniquely responsible, then who will? To not do so doesn't just erode public trust in public institutions, but contributes to many other negative impacts like declining business confidence and international relations. We have all seen facts interpreted as 'bad news', and then dressed up, obfuscated or spun by comms strategies.

- The **silencing of public servant professionals**. Public servants are an extremely diverse group that make up almost 2 million people across federal, state and local jurisdictions. We include designers, technologists, operations, front-line staff, economists, scientists, educators, infrastructure expertise, intelligence specialists, lawyers, regulators, managers and many many more. When public service professionals can participate in the public domain in the context of their professional expertise, it contributes great value to the public sphere, as well as improved trust between those who serve and those who are served. It also creates an opportunity for

greater public participation in policy and design of public programs and peer review from different experts across society. Obviously, this doesn't mean sharing secrets, or classified information, but there is a great scope for professional discussions between public servants and other sectors. Unfortunately, many departments believe anything 'public' should be done through a communications team, which becomes both a bottleneck as well as a shift away from many genuine voices towards a single official corporate voice. Often enough, this official voice then also becomes a voice for the political priorities of the day, which blurs the lines between political and public sector messages.

My recommendations for this are simple:

- Use **clear, meaningful language at all times,** whether in a business case, media release, strategy document or report.

- Be an **authoritative source of facts** for things you are uniquely authoritative on, regardless of the policies of the day.

- Purposefully **recognise and support both the official and unofficial voices** of public sectors. Professional comms teams should certainly be responsible for the official voice of an organisation, but all public servants should be encouraged and supported to engage outside their organisations and online in professional discussions with others, with only the sorts of reasonable limitations that you would expect under any organisation. It certainly does get much trickier with regards to how a public servant should engage in political debate, but for the purpose of this article, I'm specifically talking about encouraging and supporting public servants to engage respectfully in the public sphere as professionals with their own voice, not through the lens of official comms. Blogs, social media, speeches at public events, are all great ways to share, test and improve the work of our public sectors more broadly.

- Finally, **empower your communications teams to do what they do well** without trying to do it all. A lot of policy and program people paint their communications teams as "bottlenecks" but perhaps they are more like a traffic cop, balancing the priorities of stakeholders who were deeply interested in the work of their internal clients (but deemed irrelevant by those clients), as well as the needs of journalists, bloggers, political parties, other program areas and internal-to-government stakeholders. It's also important to distinguish between marketing and strategy. Marketing is about the good news story. Strategy is about making important links and tying a project's messaging to the overall agenda. I think a lot of comms teams are pushed into pure marketing activities when they can be so much more helpful as a highly skilled capability.

Are there alternatives?

The first alternative I want to talk about is Government as a Platform (GaaP), which is often seen as a technical framework, but is an excellent strategic framework. Without going into detail (read the article for that), GaaP provides a way of organising our public sectors so that we can deliver everything we are uniquely responsible for, as well as enable others outside our teams, organisations, jurisdictions and sectors to 'mash up' the data, rules, content and transactions we provide into new value for the community.

A more holistic alternative framework, developed in 1995, is Public Values Management (PVM). When I first heard of this idea it made complete sense, but I've found people have taken it to mean many different things. I believe actively shifting to a PVM approach creates a way for departments and governments to be better public institutions for sustainable and systemically motivated public good. But rather than talking about what it could or should be, I discovered an exceptional application of the

theory in a fascinating, detailed and pragmatic 2017 paper called "Public Value Management Theory" (DOC) by the Chartered Institute of Purchase and Supply. This paper talks about the key elements of PVM as they apply to the public sector (in particular to procurement), and I think these concepts apply across the board:

1. "3 elements of the **Strategic Triangle** are in place. These are: strategic goals and values; the authorising environment (eg gaining legitimacy to undertake specific projects); and operational capability (eg resources and skills etc.)

2. The emphasis on **societal rather than individual needs** with two dimensions of public value being "What do the public most value?" and "What adds value to the public sphere?" (Benington, 2011). This means that public bodies in addition to providing good quality services to individuals, have a duty to provide broader benefits to the local community as a whole, with such benefits being measurable.

3. The **role of public managers** as "explorers" and creators of public value by looking outward, upward, downward and inward, as co-ordinators of the three elements of the strategic triangle and with an emphasis on political management skills.

4. The emphasis on **networked governance** with public bodies working and leading across organisational boundaries including within a "mixed economy" network of public, private and third sector providers.

5. **Co-production** is core to the creation of public value with public organisations and their providers working with the public and clients in both designing and delivering services." — Public Value Management Theory 2017, Alan Turrell (CIPS).

I refer you to this paper as a repeatable blueprint for applying PVM to your area of public service. I was also fascinated to see public values defined in it as economic, social/cultural, political and ecological.

Meanwhile, I have also seen PVM interpreted substantially more narrowly, where 'value' is simply used a euphemism for business benefits, and not reflective either of broader societal value, nor reflective of the values of the people served. This seems like a lost opportunity, as it would simply repeat the challenges of New Public Management with shiny new language. So I encourage you to consider the core difference between NPM and PVM to be shifting to a more holistic and sustainable approach in delivering value for and with society.

I think that whilever we measure success in purely **economic** (efficiencies, savings, economic outcomes, etc) or **delivery** (launched, 'customer' metrics, completion rates, etc) terms, then the incentive systems will continue to be NPM at their heart. Prioritisation of funding will continue to be driven by economic imperatives, and 'value' to the public will be limited to economic or individual benefits at best. But public sectors also need to provide other forms of value. Social cohesion, national security, stability and predictability, standards, a social safety net, etc. When measured purely economically or on delivery measures, we miss the forest (society) for the trees (individuals and budgets).

When he was Privacy Commissioner, Malcolm Crompton delivered a report Light Touch' or 'Soft Touch' — Reflections of a Regulator Implementing a New Privacy Regime" (2003) on his thoughts on possible KPIs for a regulator. He set out these thoughts in three areas: Economic impact; Social outcomes; Public accountability for resources.

So, as well as adopting Public Values Management theory, I think we need to explicitly adopt consistent measurement frameworks across public sectors, from policy through to implementation, that take into account quality of life and other societal measures that reflect the values of the communities we each serve, to ensure our investment and resourcing prioritisation aligns accordingly. The two examples I am most familiar with are the Living Standards Framework in New Zealand, or the NSW government Human Services Outcomes Framework.

Connecting to Country

The final challenge I want to briefly explore, is the institutionalised cultural homogeneity of NPM. I should say this isn't unique to NPM, but whether it is a business imperative, or something else, there are a lot of deeply embedded assumptions and ways of working that are seen as normal in public sectors that have the effect of quelling diversity of practices and culturally diverse knowledge systems. A "business process" is assumed to be valid if it delivers to the business purpose, and there is then pressure to do something as quickly and efficiently as possible. Exploring different methods and knowledge systems is seen as a nice to have, rather than a crucial way of including different ways of working in the process. Designing inclusively is starting to become more understood as having value, but again through the lens of more efficient service delivery to more people, rather than the lens of developing services that are more aligned with the values of the community, and the notion that public sectors should be enablers for human dignity, which includes cultural dignity.

So, as the very last thing I wanted to write about in this series, I wanted to briefly share the most profound but recent part of my journey in better public sectors. When I worked in the New Zealand government, the widespread assumption and practice of engaging with

Māoridom, not just as "clients" of government services, but as a knowledge system that brings new and unique insights to what we are doing, and why. Obviously nowhere is perfect, but it showed me some different and better ways than I'd experienced to date in Australia. So upon returning to Australia, I made it a part of our work program to seek and engage with different knowledge systems, and to learn how we could connect to country in our work in the public sector, and as individuals for a more genuine, respectful and partnership oriented approach to engaging with communities across Australia.

In my own branch, we started looking at how to engage differently. I hired a wonderful lady, Belinda Trikilis, to be our cultural advisor across all our work (digital government, policy, data, innovation, standards, etc) and she immediately found a lot of the staff hungry for help. We also looked at extending the usual cultural training to include more personal content, like getting staff to think about where they are from, where they live, the stories and history of those places, and their own relationship to place. All in an effort to improve the individual connection to Country as a foundation for better engagement and understanding.

In the New Zealand Service Innovation Lab, I was lucky to work with Tiopira Piriti, and we actively looked at a Māori lens for the life journey work we were doing around "moving house", please see the results here, which were surprising and enormously helpful for the government agency we were working with. In the NSW government, we had the privilege and delight to learn from Dave Goddard and Arama Maitara from Walk Together Design, and Dave shared with my NSW Digital Government team his insights in culturally inclusive service design. We also engaged Old Ways, New, an Aboriginal owned and led strategic design company, in our Life Journeys program, which brought different methods and knowledge systems to the important work of understanding end of life ("sorry business"). Their

report, Life Journeys: Death and Sorry Business, created significant opportunities for service improvements, but also ways to identify and address community concerns, ways that could build trust and relationships between community and public sector.

I'll be continuing this work with Angie Abdilla and others moving forward, as we explore what "good public sectors" could look like from a Country-centred perspective. We'll share more on that journey outside of the context of this Pia Review series, because it is a much bigger topic :)

Final word

Public sectors need to own our story better and be proud of the purpose and role we play in society. A lot of people come into the public sector with the assumption that the private sector does everything better, and are shocked (and sometimes delighted) to find that public servants are more capable, innovative and effective that they ever thought possible. This is not the exception that proves the rule, it is proof that the public narrative on public sectors is not reflecting reality.

Working in the public sector is complex, difficult and has wide ranging impacts on society in everything we do. We have a public good imperative that doesn't always align with a business imperative, and myriad (appropriate) accountability measures that try to safeguard the rights, dignity and safety of the people and communities we serve. We are different to businesses — and we should be proud of it.

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