



Community Development and Justice Standing Committee

An information paper backgrounding the Inquiry into collaborative or ‘joined up’ government

August 2007

Collaborative or ‘joined up’ government

As in other democracies, Australian governments over the years have endeavoured to make the public sector less costly and better tailored to public needs while providing higher quality services to citizens. In the final quarter of the twentieth century, Australian governments, Commonwealth and state, underwent extensive re-structuring, a process which still continues.

Additionally, in past decades the direction taken in policy and program development in some North American and European countries together with Australia has been the use of collaborative and inter-sectoral (public & non government) approaches to service delivery. This was a means of cost effectively improving responsiveness to the complex needs and issues in different key areas, for example troubled children, adolescents and young people.

As the UK Prime Minister (Tony Blair) put it:

Even the basic policies targeted at unemployment, poor skills, low income, poor housing, high crime, bad health, and family breakdown will not deliver their full effect unless they are properly linked together. Joined-up problems need joined-up solutions.¹

Although nationally and internationally the emphasis on integrated “joined-up” cross-program/sector/departmental practices now occupies a central focus within policy development across multiple government levels, the methods used to achieve this approach have differed and the skills required to achieve their implementation remain challenging.

This Inquiry seeks to identify the possibilities for better government service delivery through fact finding and investigation of collaborative or ‘joined up’ models in Australia and elsewhere.

‘Joined-up government’ is a widely-used term to describe the integration of services, processes, systems, data, and applications that are necessary to achieve a seamless, citizen-centric government. Joined up government is **not** about creating ‘super-ministries’ which can simply worsen the information overload at the centre.

There are essentially two paradigms of Joined Up Government:

1. It must fit in with the traditional structures of departments and agencies, and overcome differences in data and legacy systems. This is a model that is very limited and generally appears to enjoy only limited success.
2. Alternatively, and internationally, the model that is pursued to a greater or lesser degree is that of a vastly more horizontal, matrix like, approach to government services and programs that, by way of example, may variously include:
 - ≈ Joined up delivery units
 - ≈ The creation of joined up budgets and teams to manage them
 - ≈ The appointment of ministers with crosscutting portfolios
 - ≈ The creation of new cross-cutting roles
 - ≈ Joined up approaches to key service areas
 - ≈ The integration of services

¹ *Implementing Holistic Government: Joined-Up Action on the Ground* Retrieved 27 March 2007 from <http://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=JKHEHMsCe5AC&oi=fnd&pg=PR9&sig=ZCc2LcgNPJ-NDGDPFJ2zQKO-LCo&dq=joined+up+government#PPA21,M1>

≈ New approaches to the organisation of knowledge and learning

Amongst the issues faced in implementing such ‘joined up’ or collaborative strategies are:

- ≈ First, a problem of coordination: how to cajole and encourage an often huge flotilla of agencies, departments, units and professions to point in broadly the same direction, and at the very least not to undermine each other’s work.
- ≈ Second, a problem of organisation and integration: how to align incentives, cultures and structures of authority to fit critical tasks that cut across organisational boundaries.
- ≈ Third, a problem of sustainability: in the longer term how is the effectiveness of such government initiatives sustained, and is that sustainability linked to individual leadership?

In the business sector companies have continually wrestled with the problem of horizontal coordination, and some like Shell, have overcome the substantial managerial challenge of implementing fully fledged matrix structures

Geoff Mulgan, previously the Director of Policy at 10 Downing St., and currently director of the Young Foundation based in London and Visiting Professor at University College, London, London School of Economics and University of Melbourne, writes on the background and need for joined up government as follows:

“Joined up government appears radical now in part because British government opted so firmly for departmentalism during and after its great expansion in the late 19th century. A functional division of labour, with large vertically organised divisions or departments, held together by a relatively small head office, made sense not only for governments but also for large firms and city administrations in an era when communication and the management of knowledge were costly, and best organised within institutions and professions. So government was divided into functions. Separate departments dealt with finance, education, defence, housing, colonies, trade and transport. Often departments developed close relationships with particular professions: health with the doctors, education with teachers, the Home Office with the police, in line with Haldane’s belief that the knowledge base was the best determinant of how organisational boundaries should be defined. Funds were then voted by Parliament for specific ends, with tight monitoring to ensure that they were spent correctly.

This model of dividing government up by functions was often very efficient – for example in getting homes built or developing the NHS. It prevented corruption and waste. It ensured clear lines of accountability. It helped to get things done.

Moreover it was not always overly baronial. The Cabinet, and the principle of collective responsibility, ensured some coherence, and it remains the case that the UK government is often much more joined up than others, particularly those based on coalitions.

Over time, however, the weaknesses of this model have become more apparent. The ‘tubes’ or ‘silos’ down which money flows from government to people and localities have come to be seen as part of the reason why government is bad at solving problems. Many issues have fitted imperfectly if at all into departmental slots. Vertical organisation by its nature skews government efforts away from certain activities, such as prevention – since the benefits of preventive action often come to another department. It tends to make government less sensitive to particular client groups whose needs cut across departmental lines (the elderly are a classic example). At worst it incentivises departments and agencies to dump problems onto each other – like schools dumping unruly children onto the streets where they become a

*problem for the police, or prisons dumping ex-prisoners into the community without adequate job preparation or housing to become a burden for social security. Over time it reinforces the tendency common to all bureaucracies of devoting more energy to the protection of turf rather than serving the public”.*²

Why has joined up government risen up the agenda internationally?

There are, from Dr Geoff Mulgan’s perspective, six reasons that drove the UK to consider joined up government:

1. *“The first was that many of the problems that most concerned the new government - poverty, competitiveness, family and environment – were evidently ill-suited to existing structures or tools. The tasks of tackling the problems of run down housing estates, cutting crime or helping industry adapt to global warming demanded organisational forms that were more obviously fit for purpose. Just as important, many of the new ministers and MPs had direct experience from their own constituencies of successful joined up working and couldn’t understand why similar arrangements were impossible at the national level.*
2. *The second factor was the clear evidence of the limits of the previous reform agenda. The new public management of the 1980s had successfully encouraged government to be more focused, more organised around targets and performance, and more governed by market forces. However this model – premised on breaking issues down into their component parts – had turned out to be particularly ill-suited to more complex problems, prone to even worse ‘dumping’ of problems across organisational boundaries, poor at knowledge sharing, and ill-suited to the integrative potential of the Internet.*
3. *The third factor was a rapidly growing evidence base on the interconnectedness of problems. Social scientists had steadily accumulated evidence on, for example, the extent to which the avoidance of social exclusion is bound up with the balance of risk factors and protective factors in early life; or the extent to which crime is influenced by the economy, family and so on. Faced, for example, with evidence that barely a quarter of health improvements come from health services, ministers wanted to know where else they might direct their attention to get better results.*
4. *The fourth factor was rapid progress in technology and organisational techniques – above all the rapid reductions in the costs of horizontal communication and coordination. In the private sector this shift was making networks and projects more important units of activity than traditional structures, as well as making it much easier to organise collaborations, partnerships and joint ventures. Cheaper communications also made it feasible to organise complex systems in different ways – for example setting broad objectives and then monitoring outputs in real time.*
5. *The fifth factor was the influence of consumerism: citizens wanted services that better met their needs, and which did not cluster together in ways that fitted traditional departmental structures. Single mothers wanted better links between benefit offices, job centres and the Child Support Agency; small firms wanted a common access point to Business Links, Customs and Excise and DTI grants. As a result it became*

² *Joined up government: past, present and future - Geoff Mulgan (2005)* retrieved 13 April 2007 from <http://www.youngfoundation.org.uk/node/223>

legitimate to ask how government would be organised if it started from the needs of client groups such as the elderly, young people and small businesses, rather than the interests of existing institutions and professions.

6. *The sixth, less tangible, factor was a broader shift of intellectual attention away from the atomistic models of thinking that dominated the first half of the 20th century towards a greater emphasis on systems thinking, whether in the environment, biology, computing or organisations. As is the nature of intellectual shifts of this kind, the huge sunk investment in older models of thinking meant that the pace of change was bound to be slow. But its direction was unmistakable.*³

Community Development and Justice Standing Committee portfolio areas addressed by this proposed Inquiry:

The members of the Committee recognise that this Inquiry has broad ‘in principal’ applicability to virtually all areas of government. However those areas of government responsibility that are of primary interest to the Committee are those that fall within its portfolio including:

- ≈ Local Government,
- ≈ Community Development,
- ≈ Youth,
- ≈ Women
- ≈ Seniors interests,
- ≈ Disability Services,
- ≈ Indigenous Affairs,
- ≈ Environment,
- ≈ Police and Emergency Services,
- ≈ Culture and the Arts,
- ≈ Justice, and
- ≈ Sports and Recreation

³ *Joined up government: past, present and future* - Geoff Mulgan (2005) retrieved 13 April 2007 from <http://www.youngfoundation.org.uk/node/223>