Dr Brian Gordon
Principal Research Officer
Community Development and Justice Standing Committee
Legislative Assembly
Parliament House
PERTH WA 6000

Dear Dr Gordon

I enclose a paper I presented at the IPAA conference in Perth in September 2007 as a submission to the Inquiry into Collaborative Approaches in Government.

This paper is based on research I am conducting for my doctoral studies which are focussing on coordination in the Gallop Government. As part of this research, interviews were conducted with a range of individuals who worked in key roles in the Gallop government, in the public sector at that time, or as critical observers of, or consultants to, the government.

In all, 39 people participated in an interview between 1 September 2006 and 29 March 2007. This included six people who were ministers and/or parliamentary secretaries in the Gallop government, seven senior ministerial advisors, 15 senior public servants who were or had been a director general during Gallop's term of office and 11 critical observers including watchdogs, members of Parliament and consultants to government. Nine of the interviewees were women.

I also attach a short extract from my draft findings that gives an overview of perceptions of the nature and relative success of coordination generally in Western Australia.

I would be happy to elaborate further on any issues and will get back to you with an overview of some of the literature about the circumstances that motivate public servants to work collaboratively.

Lesley van Schoubroeck

7 February 2008

Perceptions of nature and success of coordination in the Western Australian public sector[1]

This paper provides insights into perceptions of the nature and success of coordination in the Western Australian public sector. It needs to be acknowledged that collaboration is not the same as coordination, none the less many of the comments are considered relevant.

People interviewed in this research were not asked for a definition of coordination but concepts were implicit in their conversation. For several, it was about coherence, about working collectively to a common vision and to common goals. A small number used "joined-up" as a concept but as a ministerial staffer said that "if you are not able to focus on a specific problem, you end up with management clichés like "joined up government" which rolls off tongues but has no substance in delivery." Perhaps the following definition provided by an observer best sums up the sentiment of most contributors:

> *So it is a one goal, many solutions model, not a best solution. The focus should be on a coherent philosophy, and we should not worry about a coherent set of solutions. It does not really matter if there is some duplication.*

Most people interviewed expressed a view that coordination was very important although there was a view that perhaps it resulted in just too many meetings. Views as to how well the Western Australian government managed coordination were mixed. While comments from ministers were more likely to assign fault to agencies and a lack of capacity within the public sector, others generally agreed that more should be done. A selection of comments on the importance and relative performance of WA from each of the groups interviewed is in Box 1.

There were two quite different views expressed about where the emphasis should be in getting better coordination. For some, it was about first of all having a common vision that was communicated to, understood and accepted by all actors. The alternate view was that coordination efforts should focus on specific problems rather than some more general approach to "whole of government" coordination and that this should result from a willingness of actors to work together. The first view establishes the environment in which coherence may emerge from multiple leaders. The second approach is more reactive and may well be the pragmatic approach in the political environment. Understanding of these different concepts is important particularly when focussing on what premiers can do because they are rarely responsible for departments with service delivery roles where they can have direct influence. Their capacity to influence service delivery comes indirectly through ministers or through mechanisms established at the interagency level and often led by the premier or his department. Nonetheless, premiers are best placed to mobilise the political support that Geoff Mulgan asserts is necessary for a coordinated approach to policy development.

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[1] Extract from draft doctoral thesis by Lesley van Schoubroeck, Griffith University

Box 1: Comments on the importance of and relative performance in coordination in WA

Comments from ministers

Whole of Government coordination is "hugely important". Compared with other states I think we do quite well, we do not seem to be as obsessed with fiefdoms as some of the others. And compared with the previous coalition government we are doing well.

There is a lack of people who can work across agencies.

Lack of collaboration is "appalling in some agencies."

Comments from ministerial staffers

"This is close to my heart"

We haven't understood or appreciated the benefits of a whole-of-government approach

As in all States, WA does whole of government work badly.

Comments for senior public servants

We do it bloody awfully in WA

There seems to be a lack of will on the part of Ministers and the public service to work in a whole of government way

"I have a sense that we meet too often on too many things, we need fewer meetings, fewer committees." But we need to acknowledge that some people need information sharing forums, while they annoy others. Some people don't need to have formal meetings to talk about things

It is more successful to coordinate around issues and "governments should not try to coordinate the life out of everything."

This is a very important topic. Something that we should do better.

Coordination is really important and it has to occur through official channels.

Comments from critical observers

So is whole of government coordination important? "My word, it is."

We don't do whole of government coordination well.

Coordination is vital if you want to get the big things done

(Comments provided between Sep 06 and March 07)

Coordination in the Gallop government: a little more conversation please.[1]

Lesley van Schoubroeck

BSc, BEd, MEd, Grad Dip Gov & PubAffs

This paper will address the importance of and challenges to communication in Executive Government as a tool to foster coordination across government. It builds on a series of interviews about coordination with individuals in executive government in Western Australia and critical observers of that government in the period 2001 to 2005 were conducted between September 2006 and March 2007. These interviews provided insights as to what people involved in the day to day process of government and public administration considered important for coordination. Interviews confirmed the importance of cabinet processes and its various committee structures, machinery of government changes, the Strategic Management Council of Directors General and strategic planning. However a strong theme emerged arguing for more dialogue between actors. The paper also compares aspects of those arrangements with other jurisdictions providing insights about the options that different leaders might choose to adopt.

[1] This paper is background for a presentation to the national IPAA Conference in Perth Western Australia, on 20 September 2007. It draws on research being undertaken as part of a doctoral thesis. The views expressed are those of the author who is a long term public servant in Western Australia. Comments should be sent to

Introduction

The trouble with coordination is that governments can never get it right. Not enough, and they are charged with inconsistency, incoherence and gaps in services. Too much, and they are too controlling and employing too many bureaucrats who spend too much time in meetings instead of getting on delivering services. And of course, everyone has a different view of what "just right" might be and probably changes their view according to their last dealing with government.

The last decade has seen resurgence around the world of calls for, and promises of, greater coordination. Phrases such as "joined-up government", "collaborative approaches", "better communication", "avoidance of overlap and duplication", and "more consistency and coherence" permeate political speeches and public sector strategic plans. The critical roles of central agencies and cabinet in whole of government coordination have been identified in academic literature and in public sector reports for more than a century. It is an essential role of the premier and of the premier's department (Davis, 1995). However, as O'Faircheallaigh et al put it: "Whenever there is a cry for better or more coordination, it is necessary to ask what is to be coordinated, by whom, with what processes and to what end?" (1999:183).

This paper is drawn from research which sets out to review systemic strategies to improve coordination in government using a case study approach based on the initiatives introduced by Dr Geoff Gallop as premier of Western Australia from 2001 to 2005. Improved coordination was a key theme in the election platform. Among the promised outcomes were a whole of government approach to addressing community problems to give more coordinated and integrated service delivery, a reduction in the duplication of policy advice and reform of cabinet structures (ALP, 2001:7). This paper argues that the mechanisms were necessary and appropriate but their

success depended on the unwritten rules, “the way things are done around here.”

The research includes interviews in 2006-07 with 39 participants and observers of that government. In this research, coordination is taken to be what governments do to minimise gaps and overlap in policy and programs and also how they go about solving complex problems – problems which generally involve competing objectives and stakeholders with competing interests. It is this group of complex problems that is the real and growing challenge.

First of all, the paper provides a brief overview of some of the influences on Gallop’s government. It then outlines the changes he made in cabinet and in public administration to improve systemic coordination. This is followed by discussion about one of the emerging themes, the need for more conversation among the key actors.

Key influences

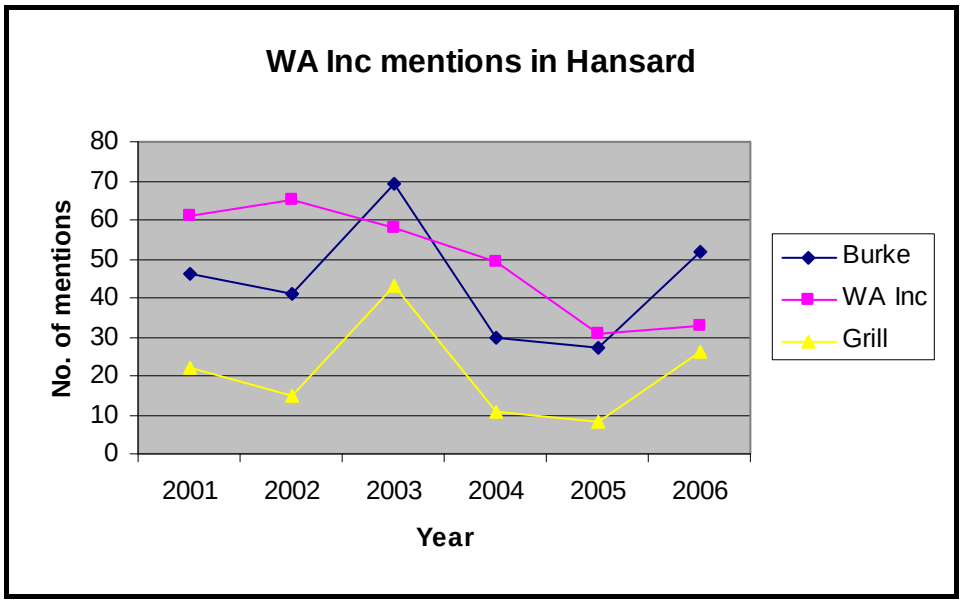
There is no doubt in the minds of academics around the world that managerialism has had a significant, and negative, impact on the capacity of governments to coordinate (Helleiner, 1996; Weiss, 1998; Pierre and Peters, 2000). It has resulted in strong line agencies and corporatised bodies, reducing central controls and a sense of government as a single enterprise. Western Australia embraced so called New Public Management (NPM) in the 1980s. In the 1990s, the separateness was further emphasised with industrial relations legislation that resulted in enterprise bargaining so that standard rates of pay and conditions of employment no longer existed across agencies (WAIRC, 2001:14). Whether as result of NPM or simply the local culture, there is also no tradition of rotation of the SES or CEOs across agencies.

The second factor that shaped the approach of the Gallop Government was WA Inc, which Allan Peachment (Peachment, 2006) has described in terms of

a seismic shift in the way in which government operates here. In short, WA Inc refers to the actions of the Burke and Dowding Labor Governments in the 1980s when due process of government was set aside. The resulting royal commission (W.A., 1992) found, among other things, inappropriate financial dealings with business[1], instances of political appointees being "parachuted" into the public service, and that the conventions of cabinet government had been largely set aside in many instances. In fact one minister interviewed for this research observed that an overriding constraint on Gallop's government was whether or not the Labor party had done "sufficient penance" for WA Inc when they were re-elected after only two terms in opposition. It made the government very cautious and focussed on due process.

To get some understanding of how much Burke and his colleague Julian Grill were "present" in Gallop's government, the graph below shows the number of mentions in Hansard of both players. Mentions only started to decline after Gallop had banned ministers from meeting with them in 2003. The data also show an increase in 2006 following Gallop's resignation and a lifting of the ban on meeting with Burke and Grill. Their activities have been played out in the State's Corruption and Crime Commission in 2007 (see www.ccc.wa.gov.au.)

Taken together, these factors provided an environment in which there was strong separation between agencies arising from managerialism and between the political and the public sector domains in response to WA Inc.



Reforms

At the cabinet level

Gallop's first cabinet was only 14 rather than the usual 17 which is the maximum allowed under W.A. legislation. He was reportedly "not unhappy" with his team. There were four women and only three other than Gallop had any significant experience in cabinet in the previous Labor government. Portfolio groupings contributed to coordination putting like issues together but at the end of the day, portfolio allocation was, and is, more about politics than about coordination.

In line with the government's election commitments (ALP, 2001), a public servant was appointed as cabinet secretary and a set of committees, including an Expenditure Review Committee (ERC), was established. Cabinet procedures were reviewed to strengthen requirements for consultation and adherence to the 10 day rule. There was also a requirement that all submissions with financial considerations be agreed by the ERC prior to going to Cabinet. While this was seen as necessary, it was also seen by some as the beginning of too much influence by Treasury officials on policy.

Despite the new procedures, walk-ins remained too common and were reportedly the subject of some heated debates.

There were calls for a “more assertive, more political” role for the cabinet secretary to ensure the procedures were adhered to and take a more active role in considering the implications of some of the submissions. It is worth noting that unless such positions are CEOs or term of government employees, the WA legislation means that ministers can have no input to the selection of the cabinet secretary.

The number of submissions considered by cabinet ranged between 16 and 20 per meeting, reaching almost 1000 in total in 2002/03. Some ministers thought this could be cut but others were of the view that it was important for cabinet to be across the agenda. However, the problem with overload is that it can lead, as Pat Weller puts it, to “collective acquiescence” rather than “collective responsibility” (Weller, 2002:2) and there was evidence of this in the comment by a minister that “at the end of the day, if things don’t affect your portfolio, you just let them through.”

In the first year there were 10 cabinet committees which had varying degrees of success. From the perspective of the participants, features that made sub-committees successful included a clear focus; a political imperative; undoubted backing of the full cabinet; a strong Minister as chair; “important Ministers who actually went to meetings”; and support staff with the “right personality and the right expertise, high level capable policy people, who can get the commitment of other CEOs” and who understood the value of and were good at informal networking. Support for the cabinet subcommittees came from various policy areas rather than the cabinet secretariat so procedures in those committees tended to differ. This led to frustration for some CEOs who were not aware of significant issues that were being considered by committees.

Policy advice to Gallop on cabinet submissions came from the policy division of DPC direct to him and was not circulated to other ministers – this is a point of debate among “cabinet academics,” some arguing that it is better to share the briefings with all ministers and others arguing that this means that the

debate that should happen in cabinet actually occurs outside in the preparation of the briefings (Weller, 1991; Blondel, 1993). Certainly, there were some participants in Gallop's government who would have preferred more input to the policy advice.

Opportunity for cabinet planning days also contributed to coordination at the highest level and Gallop did this in two ways. Firstly through formal planning days, although some thought there should be more of these, and more regularly through pre-cabinet meetings. Regional cabinet and regular meetings of the premier with backbenchers and community groups augmented the planning function.

The one thing that Western Australia did not do, but which is emerging as a feature in some other jurisdictions, was to establish a cabinet implementation unit which is a feature in Australia at the federal level and in Queensland, and in the UK. Still these appear to be features of long term governments (Lindquist, 2006).

Public administration reforms

Public administration reforms for systemic coordination were set out in a Machinery of Government review (Hicks et al., 2001) undertaken in the first six months of Gallop's term. This section outlines the three key reforms: machinery of government changes, a forum for the premier to meet with directors general and a state strategic plan.

Machinery of government

The previous premier Richard Court was already on record as describing the public sector in Western Australia as "the most complex and fragmented of all jurisdictions in this country" (Legislative Assembly, 19 June 1997). In fact his father, Sir Charles Court, when premier, had announced a review of machinery of government in 1978 that did not eventuate (Wettenhall, 1986).

Many of the recommendations addressed major structural issues including a reduction in the number of departments from 46 to 23 and a review of

statutory authorities to see if they could be merged into departments. Ministers were responsible for reviews of statutory authorities within their portfolios with a view to merging them with department where possible. However, apart from the abolition of a raft of health boards across the state, few were abolished.

A subsequent functional review in 2002 headed by Michael Costello made further recommendations about structures but was largely focused on efficiency measures.

A total set of department amalgamations over the first two years is attached to this paper but small departments like Fisheries and Sport & Recreation continued whereas, in most other Australian jurisdictions, these have generally been merged into bigger departments. Since 2002, a new Department of Water has been created, the departments for Community Development and Justice have both been split and Environment and Conservation & Land Management have been merged. To some this might indicate that MOG got it wrong. An alternative view is that it shows confidence on the part of government to create and abolish agencies as a strategy for change.

The capacity to retain and recruit people able to lead major structural reform and complex agencies was identified regularly as a major concern and critical to the success of structural reform. Concerns related to the loss of "good people in the process" as well as the appointment of the "wrong" people, including at the second tier where legislation does not permit the government to be involved in the process. It has to be remembered that for every agency that is abolished, government loses the capacity to appoint a CEO of their choosing. To some this is seen as an advantage, to others it is a loss of capacity for governments to exert appropriate influence.

Mergers reportedly led to difficulties for outsiders, including ministers, in accessing expertise, undue centralisation and, in the extreme, dysfunctional agencies where people "will not sit around the table together – they are

passionate people who cannot see an opposing view." But overall, the view was that this was a necessary first step to better coordination.

Coordination through policy offices without departmental status is also a well established mechanism. Across Australia, coordinating policy offices of greater and lesser impact have been established to address issues of social justice such as Indigenous Affairs, Women's and Seniors' Interests and, more recently, environmental issues. Often in their early stages such offices are established in the Premier's Department supporting the Ministerial portfolio. However, the intention when establishing these agencies should be to wind them back after a period of time and merge them in more permanent agency structures (Shergold, 2004). At the very least, they need to move out of the premier's department.

Comments on the effectiveness of the trend to establish separate policy units varied from grudging acceptance of their need in the short term, to a view that they were ineffective to a concern that they simply created "all that stuff, all that paper work." From the perspective of a ministerial staffer there "is nothing wrong in a complex area in having more than one source of advice as long as the groups don't trip over one another" whereas an external observer was concerned that these entities "tend to be in the central agency and often develop into oppositions to the line agencies." There were mixed views as to whether or not such units were more effectively placed in the premier's department with his "imprimatur to get off the ground" but some ongoing ministerial involvement was important including a minister "with his finger on the pulse."

Strategic Management Council

A Strategic Management Council (SMC) of directors general chaired by the Premier was established as the interface between the premier and the public sector to improve whole of government coordination. The Council included all directors general of departments of state and numbered between 21 and 23

over the five-year period. It did not have any legislative base and met six to eight times a year with a focus on information sharing.

Similar forums operate in other jurisdictions in Australia but it is understood that the SMC was not continued as a regular forum by Gallop's successor Alan Carpenter. Western Australia appears to be the only jurisdiction where this forum has been chaired by the premier on a regular basis. The SMC was preceded by a variety of arrangements over the previous decade but this was the first attempt to bring the directors general together on a regular basis with the premier. The most recent previous forum had been chaired by a department head. As one of the participants said:

> *The previous CEOs consultative forum was a bit smaller – one person per portfolio, by invitation and chaired by a CEO selected by their individual characteristics rather than their position. The Premier did not attend. Perhaps it was a bit 'clubby' but they seemed to work through issues.*

The loss of the forum following Gallop's resignation was a concern to several of the senior people interviewed although they were of the view that a different approach should be considered. For some, the solution was to reduce the number of participants to 10-14, whereas others suggested developing different ways of engaging 20 to 25 people in debate. Its potential as a channel of communication between government and the bureaucracy was a clear message in many of the comments.

State strategic plan

Finally, the development of a state strategic plan was proposed as a whole of government coordination strategy. In November 2003 the first state strategic plan, Better Planning: Better Services (BP:BS) was published (DPC, 2003). It enunciated a vision for the public sector, five goals and against those goals a total 72 strategic outcomes. The goals were essentially triple bottom line reflecting the Government's commitment to sustainability and to the regions. In this regard, it did overlap with the government's sustainability strategy and over time they became more complementary. The fifth goal focused on governance.

For four of the goals there was a cabinet standing committee which it was anticipated would take a key leadership role in monitoring progress towards the achievement of the outcomes. Ownership by the committees was, at best, variable.

After initial involvement of the full SMC, the key strategy for involvement of agencies was through a small sub committee of the SMC and the final plan was promulgated through a Premier's Circular, an administrative tool for disseminating whole of government policy, and was linked into a number of strategic processes. Critically it was included within the budget framework requiring all funded government agencies to address the goals and where possible the strategic outcomes (DTF, 2004) thus providing an incentive for "budget" agencies to become cognisant with BP:BS. There was concern expressed however that "the document became the outcome" and replaced the dialogue that needs to occur in strategic planning.

A revised plan Better Planning: Better Futures was released in November 2006 with five revised goals supported by 21 strategic outcomes rather than the 72 in the previous plan.

Reactions to the plans gathered in this research varied. From the perspective of some of the senior public servants and critical observers it was a useful guide and something that governments "should do". Others considered that without targets and measures of progress it was too unfocussed, but these were countered by those who were of the view that any measures were far too "brave". Thus it was variably described as a good outcome, laudable, essential but needing to be more specific, a book on a shelf and too abstract to get traction with ministers.

State strategic plans in other states have been developed over the last decade although it was not until the end of 2006 that New South Wales published a plan. However, in terms of profile in government documents and websites, the Western Australian plan is probably the least visible which

reinforces a perception that it is simply a document for the public sector and does not drive decision making.

Key features of the plans from all Australian jurisdictions are summarised in an attachment to this paper (corrections to any errors of fact or interpretation would be appreciated).

Western Australia is not alone in seeking to increase the involvement of politicians in longer term strategic planning. For instance, Finland has recently concluded that attempts to introduce a strategic role for politicians have not been successful noting that:

> *Politicians are not eager to define goals and to set priorities, nor are they motivated to consider issues that are not realized in the immediate future. In addition, they tend to focus on specific issues and to intervene in details. Consequently, it may not be relevant to ask whether ministers are able to adopt the strategic role but to consider the possibility that they do not, and will not, have incentives to do so … (Tilli, 2007)*

Discussion

As expected, the interviews identified a range of things that are likely to make coordination more or less successful. However, a strong theme emerged about "conversation," and it is the key theme that will be discussed here. It emanates from a perceived need to address a culture where both ministers and senior public servants are too risk averse. In the words of one observer:

> *Our CEOs are not sure what to do – they do know to stay quiet and not make mistakes. They can't work out what constitutes success, apart from doing nothing wrong.*

There was no doubt in the minds of all participants that Gallop had a clear social justice and capacity building agenda. What was less clear was, as one observer put it, "the extent to which the entire Cabinet, the Caucus, the DGs and the bureaucracy knew it, shared it, and helped him pursue it."

Thus there were calls for someone to take the premier's agenda and develop the script, to turn it into a narrative – to take the premier's sense of direction

and turn it into something that agencies could use to help resolve policy conflicts.

“Conversation” and “dialogue” were used by several participants to illustrate the nature of the interaction they saw as necessary to gain an appreciation of the nuances of expectations

Public servants called for “more discussion, time to talk and to debate contentious issues and fewer briefing notes” and a ministerial advisor lamented the lack of opportunity “to invest time in the interface between ministers and CEOs talking through issues to get a prospective rather than reactive focus - more conversation and not just responding to immediate pressures from the media.”

Observers commented on an absence of “trusting dialogue,” “meaningful conversation” and “opportunities for intellectual debate.”

These phrases are the language of “strategic conversation” which is seen as a way of interaction to develop a coherent view on complex issues. Strategic conversation is a culture that leads to reflection and to action (Van der Heijden, 2005). In fact, this approach was adopted in the Western Australian Department of Housing and Works in 2006 when it was initiating significant reform as a means to develop the acceptance of critical thinking as well as the capacity for it. The purpose of those conversations was to enable senior staff to get to the same point in thinking about the nature of the particular issues and to challenge past thinking. It preceded the stage of deciding on specific actions.

Conclusion

In concluding, it would seem that the structures and routines that Gallop introduced were necessary and appropriate but they were, as one ministerial staffer said, “the first stages in creating a coordinated and coherent public sector.”

What is also required to make best use of those structures and routines and so that they continue to evolve, are opportunities for conversations about the complex issues. This requires some change in culture within the public sector and at the interface of the public sector and the political realms. And this is where WA Inc, which has resulted in clear lines of demarcation between the political staff and public servants, has arguably made such conversations less likely to occur in formal or informal settings. It is also where the separateness of agencies and the limited movement of staff between agencies hamper development of a collaborative culture.

Unless these barriers to on-going communication within the political and public services domains and at the interface are challenged, it is argued that the public sector disaggregates into “circles of solace” each populated by like minded individuals who congregate to bemoan the present and the future, reflecting on some utopian state that has not been seen before but could emerge if only “they” would listen to “us.” Such a state of mind hinders a coordinated approach to solving complex and interrelated problems.

A broad set of coordination mechanisms implemented through a program of cultural change which necessarily includes sharing and debating ideas as well as administrative processes, is necessary to make coordination a feature of the “way things are done around here”.

However at the end of the day, a leader in government has to strike the right balance between allocating resources to activities required to remain in office in the short term and those devoted to solving the longer term interrelated and “wicked” issues. Assigning more resources to the bureaucracy will not get a government re-elected but incoherent policies and programs will contribute to their downfall. This is the political challenge.

Box 1: Department mergers 2001-2005

- *Department of Consumer and Employment Protection created merging the former Ministry of Fair Trading, Department of Productivity and Labour Relations and WorkSafe WA (1 July 2001);*
- *Department of Education and Training comprising the former Departments of Education and of Training (3 February 2003);*
- *Office of Water Regulation was abolished on 1 January 2004 with some of its functions merged with the Department of Environment and others transferred to the Economic Regulation Authority;*
- *Department of Housing and Works combining the functions of the former Ministry of Housing, the Government Projects Office, the Western Australia Building Management Authority and parts of the Contract and Management Services department (1 July 2001);*
- *Department of Local Government and Regional Development combining the roles of the former Department of Local Government with the regional functions formerly undertaken by the Department of Commerce and Trade (1 July 2001);*
- *Department for Planning and Infrastructure created combining the former Department of Transport and the Ministry for Planning and parts of the former Department of Land Administration (1 July 2001);*
- *Department of Industry and Technology formed comprising each of the Contract and Management Services department and the Department of Commerce and Trade (1 July 2001);*
- *Department of Mineral and Petroleum Resources formed comprising the former Department of Minerals and Energy and the Department of Resources Development (1 July 2001); subsequently renamed the Department of Industry and Resources absorbing some of the functions of the Department of Industry and Technology (DOIT). Other functions of DOIT were transferred into the Department of the Premier and Cabinet and the Department of Treasury and Finance. The Department of Industry and Technology was abolished (3 February 2003);*
- *Department of Treasury and Finance combining the former Treasury Department and State Revenue Department (1 July 2001).*

(Source Legislative Council, 14 March 2006:416).

Table 1: Features of jurisdictional strategic plans in Australian states

State	Title	Date published	Scope	Timelines	Measures	Process	Accountability
Australian Capital Territory	Canberra Plan Broad	2004?	Broad	No	No	Not specificed	Not specified
New South Wales	A New Direction of NSW: State Plan	2006	Broad	No	Yes	Community input	Within government
Queensland	Smart State Strategy	Updated 2005	Focussed	2015	No	Community input	Within government
South Australia	South Australia's Strategic Plan 2007	Updated 2007	Broad	2014	Yes	Community input	Executive Committee of Cabinet
Tasmania	Tasmania Together	Updated 2006	Broad	2020	Yes	Community input	Tasmania Together Progress Board
Victoria	Growing Victoria Together	Updated 2005	Broad	2010	Yes	Community input	Within government
Western Australia	Better Planning: Better Futures	Updated 2006	Broad	No	No	Within government	Within government

Source: (ACT, 2004; Victoria, 2005; DPC, 2006; NSW, 2006; Qld, 2006; S.A., 2007; Tas, 2007)

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COLLABORATION – WHEN WOULD PUBLIC SERVANTS BOTHER?

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Overview

This paper draws on research being undertaken by the author as part of her doctoral studies which are examining coordination more generally in the Gallop government. It draws on national and international research over the last decade that points to the importance of focussing on the routines that are put in place and on the individuals who work in the public sector rather than new structures if collaborative approaches to solving complex issues are to become "the way business is done around here." As Guy Peters puts it, "(g)overnments can depend upon the formal structures of the public sector to produce coordination even less than in the past, but the incentives that individuals have at the same time become less collective and more personal." (Peters, 1998:309).

The paper provides a short overview of the current climate for collaboration, some of the challenges to governments seeking a collaborative approach and then discusses in more detail the directions that might be adopted (the way) and then what factors might motivate public servants to collaborate (the will) arguing that it is essential to address both reasons why public servants might want to work towards a collaborative agenda as well as strategies that will assist them. If there is no incentive for public servants to collaborate, then the best designed instruments in the world will be to no avail.

Why Collaborate?

Collaborative approaches can fulfil one of three aims – they can minimise overlap and duplication, they can identify and fill gaps in policy and service delivery, and they can address inconsistencies in government approaches to policy development and service delivery. This may simply require less effort in one area and more in another with participants in the process agreeing on where the emphasis should lie and how resources might be redistributed. This is the easy part. More importantly, however, collaboration can bring together otherwise disparate activities, enhancing their compatibility to create

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something that could not otherwise exist. Thus, many collaborative exercises will, by their nature, involve tradeoffs between interests groups and competing policy objectives.

It is in the creation of these "new solutions" that governments must take the greatest risks but where there is greatest scope for innovation. New solutions will not be tested. Ideas spring from experimentation and trial and error which can result in overlapping and potentially conflicting directions. They can also fail, risking government resources and reputation. .

Why is it so hard?

In the traditional Westminster systems, consistency across government was achieved through hierarchical structures and routines that set to control who did what, when and how. Reforms from the 1970s through till the end of the 20th century replaced many of these sometimes overly bureaucratic mechanisms with the tools of private enterprise. These changes, while very positive in many aspects, were detrimental to a collaborative approach to shared problems. At the same time, governments have become faced with more complex social problems and increasing numbers of well educated and informed stakeholders who expect a say in what governments do and how they do it. Three specific challenges to collaboration which arise from this environment are discussed briefly in the following paragraphs. These include changes in the relationship between governments and their stakeholders, the impact of New Public Management on the capacity of the public sector, and, in Australia, the capacity of governments to develop a long term agenda.

Up to the 1980s policy was largely determined within specific areas by a close relationship between government, the bureaucracy and a key interest group, commonly a peak industry body (Jordan, 1990). Such arrangements, sometimes called 'iron triangles', frequently had the capacity to survive changes of government. Where these closed arrangements have gradually evolved into more open policy communities and wider issues networks, there are both opportunities and constraints for governments. Issues networks bring many different perspectives but, while all participants may share a common concern, they are not all necessarily seeking the same policy outcomes and will not operate within a pre-determined set of parameters (Rhodes and Marsh, 1992; Rhodes, 1997).

Another aspect of the relationship between government and their stakeholders is the level of regard in which politicians are held. Trust in politicians has shown significant decline over the last two decades (see for example several articles in Burchell and Leigh, 2002), yet trust is essential to successfully working together (Hindmoor, 1998). Finally the perceptions and expectations of governments in the eyes of the electorate are influenced by the media as it shapes issues and shifts community focus to "newsworthy" arenas (Cowan, 2002).

Secondly, research has shown that the administrative reforms embodied in the New Public Management approach have had a negative or eroding impact on state policy capacity. Career paths for policy and planning staff have been depleted. In rolling back the state, retention of policy capacity has not been a priority yet this capacity is essential to solving the intractable problems governments face (Painter and Pierre, 2005). The very success of the focus on core business that was the hallmark of the earlier reforms, meant that the skills to focus on those problems that fell between the gaps were not fostered and developed.

Thirdly, the capacity to develop ideas and to use the structures and routines that are established, or to establish new ones, will determine the extent to which coordinated outcomes are developed and implemented. This capacity will also determine the extent to which governments can maintain coherence, and a perception of coherence, as they grapple with conflicting goals and obligations. As Peters (1998) points out, a coordinated policy outcome is likely to be essentially a political process where there are tradeoffs between different value sets. This is not to say that people do not behave rationally, rather that the incentives for their behaviour are political rather than economic.

Marsh and Yencken (2004) identify a decline in government capacity to articulate a coherent long-term policy agenda and attribute it in large part to changes in the routines within the political structures in Australia. This puts more onus on government and the public sector to fill the gap. High level strategic plans have been mooted as a strategy to address this. Minns (2004), for instance, uses the policy document *Growing Victoria Together* as an example of a strategy to coordinate policy across government and over the longer term. Most state governments have developed similar documents and such plans are an integral part of Geoff Gallop's "Strategic Government" which he suggests is the new emerging paradigm in public governance (Gallop, 2007). The current plan in Western Australia *Better Planning: Better Futures* however lacks the level of specificity and targets that are required to give focus and help balance competing priorities. International examples suggest that it is difficult to involve politicians in this process (Tilli, 2007) and to incorporate this high level planning in the existing political, planning and budgeting cycles. Unfortunately, resolution of many of the complex issues requires a collaborative approach over the longer term yet there appears to be limited capacity within the political system to provide the necessary support for the longer term planning that is required.

The way: what is needed?

Horses for courses

Achieving clarity about the problem and the perceptions of stakeholders is an important first step in deciding the overall approach to the "collaboration project." Gottweis (2007:237) argues that whereas certain policy issues, such as the reform of banking regulations, seem to be dominated by the exchange

of rational argument and deductive reasoning more typical of a hierarchical approach, other policy areas, such as the introduction of laws dealing with aspects of global warming or measures dealing with abortion, are characterised by impassioned speech challenging deeply held beliefs. Such differences in dealing with policy issues must significantly affect the group dynamics and the required skills of the coordinating staff seeking a coherent outcome.

Even though there might not be one way forward, however, the literature provides pointers to guide the establishment of a collaborative project and this section examines some of the issues that might be considered. Research suggests that new structural models are not a priority and it is a matter of ensuring the political, cabinet and public administration structures that exist are adjusted to meet the priorities of government (Davis, 1995; Keating and Weller, 2000).

Cabinet leadership

Cabinet is the pre-eminent coordination mechanism and, while committees are able to come to grips with the more complex information, they need the support of the full cabinet to be effective. Where the collaborative project involves agencies from more than one portfolio, the support of relevant ministers is essential. Whether this is through a formal committee structure or some other arrangement, cabinet support is fundamental. Further, as expected, the more specific that cabinet is on the parameters and objectives of the project, the more likely it is that the desired outcomes will be achieved.

However, as academics such as John Kane point out, the complex world in which governments operate means that there often conflicting objectives so that leaders will find "it often difficult … either to be entirely frank about their reasons or to keep explicit promises however sincerely made" (Kane, 2005:10). Governments have to negotiate and seek compromises with people in and out of politics. Any statement that appears in any way detrimental to one group will be seized by the opposition or the media and hailed as an example of a broken promise or a poor service. For the leader, who speaks on behalf of the government, this requires crafting a message which is at once clear and unambiguous to the target audience but which leaves room to accommodate the expectations of other interest groups (Keating and Weller, 2000).

Leadership from premiers' departments

Stronger leadership from premiers' departments has been called for in several studies as jurisdictions grapple with ways to achieve coordination across government (see for instance the report from Canada by Bakvis and Luc, 2004). A specific initiative has been the establishment of policy implementation units in central agencies as "the latest instrument unsheathed by some first ministers to design, assist, and embed critical policy initiatives"

with a strong focus on interagency activities (Lindquist, 2006; Wanna, 2006). These have been established at the federal level in Australia, in Queensland and by the Blair government in the United Kingdom. In the case of the Blair government, a "Prime Minister's Delivery Unit" was established in his office (Richards and Smith, 2006) providing "formal, direct control over the implementation of policy". The success of these units has been found to be contingent on the willingness of political leaders in particular to provide the political support and the resources to achieve their aims.

Climate

Both the traditional management literature and the public administration literature point to the importance of appropriate organisational climates to foster collaboration, particularly in client oriented services. For example, Canadian Henry Mintzberg argues that client oriented services need to be delivered in a governance context that is rooted in values and beliefs at the superstructure level. Market models may be appropriate for utilities and regulatory services may be delivered in hierarchical environment, but he argues that these are inappropriate for client oriented services (Mintzberg, 1996). Guy Peters argues for a collaborative approach that involves changing behaviour by first changing attitudes thus developing a willingness to create a "public value", which is not necessarily in the interests of individuals. "(T)he collaborative approach argues that the most effective way of obtaining coordination is to construct issues and interactions among organizations in ways that create a common understanding among the participants in the potential coordination exercise[a]."

The other element of climate that cannot be overlooked is trust – trust between individuals and trust between organisations. Hindmoor (1998) has emphasised the contribution of policy communities built on trust and cites findings that cooperation in one situation may be contingent upon cooperation in others. According to Hindmoor, trust between individuals is necessary but not sufficient for joint action. It also requires that a trusting relationship is developed among the institutions in the network, be they government and the community or industry, or between departments. It is generally the institutions rather than the individuals who have access to resources that will be allocated to the joint solution so despite the importance of interpersonal relationships, there is a need for that to be translated into trusting inter-organisational relationships.

Tools

A critical review of the implementation of environmental policy in Europe by Schout and Jordan (2005) describes some of the necessary administrative

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routines for successful policy implementation involving a number of agencies where collaborative arrangements between networks are essential ingredients to success. This administrative capacity, according to Schout and Jordan, includes matters like:

- mechanisms to distribute information at each stage of the policy cycle;
- problem solving mechanisms;
- the coordinating agency must be able to proactively monitor emerging policy proposals so as to influence or input to them; to put pressure on line agencies to address their issue; and to work proactively on the agendas and work plans of other stakeholders;
- line agency chief executives need to be motivated to keep an eye on the consequences for a particular coordinating problem; and
- because no chief executive wants to intervene routinely in the work of others, there is a need for mechanisms to routinely assess their compliance with sector wide policies.

Partnerships in any form are also an important tool to achieve a coordinated response to complex issues. They can bring together diverse resources, from government, industry and the community, and are attributed with providing the foundations for innovation particularly if they are undertaken in an environment of trust and collaboration (Lowndes and Skelcher, 1998). In some instances the solutions can be found in formal agreements; in other circumstances greater flexibility is required despite the imperfect models of governance and accountability that go with these models. There is no best solution. Pierre and Peters argue that the changing relationships with external players would suggest that the traditional hard instruments such as legislation and regulation should give way to softer instruments that provide "maximum of compliance with a minimum of coercion' (2000:105). Each situation must be judged on what suits the current context. The challenge is to get the balance right and to avoid "a severe control surplus" (Koen et al., 2006:11).

Staff skills

Appropriately skilled staff are essential to any successful enterprise. Supporting a collaborative endeavour requires very different skills from the traditional centralised control model of coordination. The roles of public sector managers are likely to vary between situations - in some they can be the maestro, controlling information flows and manipulating relationships, but more often they will be facilitators, with the power to bring people together but without the authority to decide (Rethemeyer, 2005). Sheehan (1999) reinforces this theme arguing that new ways of effective policy coordination will be required that are not likely to be centralised but will need to rely on tools that can respond to the diverse situations in different organisations, industries, regions and nations. Others (for example Chapman, 2004) argue for a systems thinking approach which seeks to develop a learning cycle in which all stakeholders, central government, other public sector agencies,

professionals and clients continually engage in the development, implementation and review of strategies.

It has also been argued that government's role must be to consider policy coordination as a process of arbitration or conflict resolution and its routines and products must therefore be established to resolve conflict (Painter, 1987; Craswell and Davis, 1993). This creates a potentially new skill set essential for central agency staff. Research elsewhere suggests the policy capacity of central agencies needs to be addressed and for career paths for the brightest and best to be considered (Pollitt, 2005).

The will: why bother?

To drift is rational

Even when the appropriate environment and strategies for collaboration are in place, governments remain reliant (to a greater or lesser extent) on the public sector to implement those strategies. There is a considerable body of research on ways in which governments can have confidence that the bureaucrats they employ are implementing the government agenda. This section examines some of the research that considers factors that influence the extent to which public servants are motivated to engage in collaborative projects. It is built on an understanding of "bureaucratic drift" which is a term used to describe the situation when the outcome being sought moves closer to what suits bureaucrats (agents) than what the politicians (principals) want, by means such as creative use of budget or broad interpretation of rules.

It has been demonstrated that the greater the disparity between the objectives of the principal and the agent, the greater the level of incentives that will be required to minimise drift (Shepsle and Bonchek, 1997). Incentives of course are not simply financial. They can relate to reputation, career prospects and being able to act in accordance with one's own beliefs. Other research has argued that where there are multiple principals and stakeholders with competing interests "virtually any path will alienate someone, so it is more rational to change gradually" and that "the signals sent by central institutions often conflict with the interests of bureaucracy. When this occurs, bureaucracy is alleged to display a so-called "shirking" tendency. Under these conditions, it is natural for bureaucracies to react slowly; the greater the preference gap between the principal and the agent, the more laggard should be the response" from rational agents (Wood and Waterman, 1993:504).

These are the circumstances that are likely to surround any complex collaboration project. It is, therefore, to be expected that the public sector will respond cautiously to such initiatives unless additional factors can be brought to bear to encourage a "less laggard" response.

Interests and beliefs

Work by Sabatier and others (Sabatier, 1993; Zafonte and Sabatier, 1998) shows that strong coordination is achieved when a proposed policy supports both the interests and beliefs of participants in the policy process. They argue that an understanding of belief congruence and interdependence (functional overlap) is essential to understanding coordination in policy communities. Where interdependencies are imposed, Zafonte and Sabatier concluded that "… organisations with conflicting beliefs … are more likely to work against each other than to cooperate." Their model of the expected behaviour of policy communities (termed coalitions in their research) is shown in Table **1** and they note that it can take some years for policy communities to develop a similar set of fundamental beliefs. It is not something that can be imposed.

Table 1: Zafonte and Sabatier's proposed model of coordinated behaviour

Functional overlap	Beliefs	
	Congruent	*Divergent*
High	(1) Strong coordination	(2) Strong conflict
Low	(3) Weak coordination	(4) Weak conflict

Adapted from Zafonte and Sabatier, 1998

However, further work by Fenger and Klok in the Netherlands (2001) argues that the dichotomous variables provide insufficient understanding of behaviours and developed their more complex table which includes the possibility that actors could be indifferent to one another's beliefs as might be expected between, say, an economic and a social scientist and that interdependencies related to functional overlap could be either positive (symbiotic), independent or negative (competitive), resulting in quite different behaviours. Their model is depicted in Table 2.

Table 2: Modified hypothesis for coordinated behaviour (Fenger and Klok)

Interdependency	Beliefs		
	Congruent	*Indifferent*	*Divergent*
Symbiotic	(1) Strong Coordination	(2) Coalition of convenience	(3) Unstable conflict
Independent	(4) Weak Coordination	(5) No coalition	(6) Weak conflict
Competitive	(7) Coalition with severe problems for collective action	(8) Weak conflict	(9) Strong conflict

(Adapted from Fenger and Klok, 2001:164)

This research argues that strong coordination will only arise if beliefs are congruent and interdependencies are symbiotic (Cell1). Even if participants share beliefs, where they are functionally competitive there will be "severe problems for collective action" (Cell 7). It goes without saying that the strongest conflict will arise in those circumstances where the interests of the participants are competitive and their beliefs are divergent (Cell 9). This is further supported by Mulgan's (2002) call for career rewards to be established so that contribution to whole of government and interagency initiatives are valued, making cooperation in the interests of public servants.

A local point of view

In 2006, a number of key actors in the Western Australian government and public sector were interviewed by the author who was examining at coordination from a premier's perspective. Views differed as to whether coordination in Western Australian was more or less successful than comparable jurisdictions, but there was a definite view that much more should be done and a strong theme emerged about the need for more interaction between key actors and the constraints of a very risk averse environment. Whereas a senior public servant observed on the lack of unity across the public sector, noting that the "sense of unity that was a feature of the public sector has been lost," an external observer took the view that CEOs "can't work out what constitutes success, apart from doing nothing wrong" leading to very risk averse environment. The on-going political scandals that have been a feature of Western Australia for more than a decade (Peachment, 2006), must also contribute to a culture of avoiding risks of things going wrong.

"Conversation" and "dialogue" were used by several participants to illustrate the nature of the interaction they saw as necessary to gain an appreciation of the nuances of expectations and help resolve policy conflicts. Public servants called for "more discussion, time to talk and to debate contentious issues and fewer briefing notes" and a ministerial advisor lamented the lack of opportunity "to invest time in the interface between ministers and CEOs talking through issues to get a prospective rather than reactive focus - more conversation and not just responding to immediate pressures from the media." Others commented on an absence of "trusting dialogue," "meaningful conversation" and "opportunities for intellectual debate."

These phrases are the language of "strategic conversation" which is seen as a way of interaction to develop a coherent view on complex issues. Strategic conversation is a culture that leads to reflection and to action and is integral to the now widely accepted scenario building approaches to strategic planning in an uncertain world. This approach is increasingly a feature of successful businesses in both the public and private spheres (see for example Van der Heijden, 2005) and supportive of building the climate of trust advocated by Peters and Hindmoor referred to earlier in this paper. It was also a feature of the approach taken by the Victorian State Services Authority in the development of their paper looking at the future of the public sector (SSA, 2006).

Conclusion

This research suggests to a government seeking collaboration within complex areas with potentially competing objectives, that an effective approach must establish mechanisms which address the knowledge and beliefs as well as the interests and incentives of the actors. In short, successful collaboration requires that the participants in the process have the will to work together as well as the skills, tools and opportunities. Having the will, requires incentives to make the effort and as well as a common set of fundamental beliefs in the policy direction. Conversation has been shown in the literature and identified by local participants as a key tool to such a collaborative approach, clarifying goals, developing trust and reaching common understandings. Without conversation, it is argued that the public sector disaggregates into "circles of solace" each populated by like-minded individuals who congregate to bemoan the present and the future, reflecting on some utopian state that has not been seen before but could emerge if only "they" would listen to "us." Such a state of mind hinders a coordinated approach to solving complex and interrelated problems.

This conclusion in turn reflects on the need to ensure that staff in central agencies have the skills and the mandate to engage with stakeholders in the wider public sector, with industry and the community making it in the interests of public servants to address the inherent tensions in collaborative exercises.

No one would argue that governments are faced with increasingly complex social problems. As the number of players increases and issues become more interrelated, so too does the need for collaboration increase. At the same time, there is greater awareness and questioning of the role of government and, with that, increased scrutiny and challenging of the resources used by governments. Not only do stakeholders question duplication of services and gaps in service, they also criticise governments for any increase in "bureaucracy" which may in fact be necessary to address the very problems that concern them. While the continual drive to focus resources on service delivery is not decried, all politicians must accept that unless resources are also devoted to careful analysis, planning and monitoring, successful resolution of complex issues is unlikely. Without support from all sides of politics, it is unlikely that career paths in the bureaucracy will be attractive to the brightest and best or that there will be incentives to contribute to identifying or solving problems that span election cycles and terms of government.

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