

Collaborative Government

From: Brian Gordon
To:
Date: 27/02/2008 7:28 am
Subject: Fwd: Collaborative Government
CC:

This time with the attachment! (plus the 'Wisdom' one)

Folks - Great initiative - I offer the attached ideas as a contribution - see also Dale Hunter et al's book 'Co-operacy' - and Ben Eltham's piece below (and the book & paper he cites) - Supportively, Stuart

Professor Stuart B. Hill, Foundation Chair of Social Ecology, School of Education (includes previous School of Social Ecology & Lifelong Learning)

From <http://www.newmatilda.com/polliograph/?p=228> ; 4 Feb, 2008 - **What governments do: the Rudd 2020 summit**
 - By Ben Eltham

Kevin Rudd's 2020 summit tells us more about the sort of Prime Minister he will be than perhaps anything he has yet said or done.

Rudd's summit is graphic evidence of his meritocratic, even technocratic tendencies. As Geoff Mulgan writes in his book **"Good and Bad Power: The Ideals and Betrayals of Government"**, there have been two broad views about who should govern. The ancient Athenians saw government as a civic duty to be carried out by all the citizens (though of course not the slaves, women or foreigners). Offices were rotated by lot and justice was dispensed in huge trials of thousands of citizen jurors.

On the other hand, Plato, Aristotle and many other political thinkers have tended to believe that government is best carried out by the wisest and most talented. Plato called them "guardians" while John F. Kennedy famously called them "the best and the brightest."

Rudd is clearly lining up with this second camp, as his rhetoric on this summit shows. The summit will be cheered by Rudd's close friend and ally, the University of Melbourne's Glynn Davis, himself a former high-ranking bureaucrat. It will feature no less than 1000 of Australia's "brightest and best", as Rudd calls them in a self-conscious echo of JF.

As Rudd told Channel 7 this morning,

"... there's a bunch of expertise outside government, and we need to call forth the talents and energies or the nation."

"So for those two reasons, we are going to bring together 1,000 of our brightest and best in these 10 big challenge areas, 100 apiece, in the middle of April, and shake the tree and see what ideas come out of it."

Rudd's announcement describes a summit of experts - not of special interest groups. Those attending can not apply. They will instead be attending by invitation only, and they must pay their own way and cannot formally represent any particular group or special interest.

29/02/2008

No doubt it will produce some important policy ideas. But despite the line Labor is running that it won't be just a "talk-fest," its difficult to see how it can be anything but.

The reason, as Oxford Professor Stein Ringen points out in his paper The Powerlessness of Powerful Governments, is that making decisions is only one of the things governments do. Once a policy agenda has been arrived at, the tricky task of actually implementing change still awaits. And that requires the acquiescence, indeed the positive engagement, of large numbers of government agencies, offices, bureaucrats, law-makers and eventually junior public servants - all of whom have vested interests to protect and human vanities and emotions to placate.

Take climate change, another area where Rudd has sought the advice of an outside expert, in this case Professor Ross Garnaut. Climate change is such a big issue that it demands a truly "whole-of-government" response. Treasury seems to have come on board. But there are already pockets of the Australian Government who are far from "on message" about climate change - including the Productivity Commission. Moreover, the departments that will have to deliver climate change policy range from Environment and Heritage through to Science and of course the various policy areas in charge of Australia's mining, energy and resources sector. Then there's agriculture, transport and innovation. Finally, it will be Finance, Treasury and Prime Minister and Cabinet to regulate the carbon trading system and coordinate the entire strategy. Poor Penny Wong.

The summit will also clearly stoke rumours that Rudd will eventually appoint Glynn Davis to replace Dr Peter Shergold as his top mandarin at the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.

So, while Brendan Nelson finds himself wedged yet again on the question of whether to participate, he should not lose sight of the bigger picture, which is that the policy agenda dreamed up by this antipodean Diet of Worms will need considerable energy, determination and luck to be implemented. It's the kind of detailed plan for the future that so often goes badly wrong in expected ways. In this lies the opportunity for Nelson and the Coalition.

Ten Common 'Mistakes' to Avoid, and 'Needs' to Meet, when Seeking to Create a Better World

Because of the holistic nature of the approach being advocated, all of these areas overlap and are highly interactive and interrelated.

1. **Getting the usual 'experts' together, to then plan for a better future.** This always leads to tinkering with existing (flawed) plans, and excludes those most affected by such plans.

Need: involve mostly 'different' people and start by focusing not on plans, but on values, beliefs, worldviews, paradigms – then feelings and passions – then, emergent from these, hopes, dreams, visions, imaginings, and creative thoughts – only then can 'design/redesign-based plans' (that can proactively enable systems [structures and processes] that meet long-term to short-term, and broad to specific, goals, AND that make systems as 'problem-proof' as possible) be enabled to emerge; and then critically analyse, integrate, and flesh these out, etc – detailing participatory opportunities, responsibilities, time lines, resource and support needs, means for monitoring outcomes, tracking progress, and for ongoing redesigning and fine tuning.

2. **Taking problem-solving** (back-end, reactive/responsive, curative) **approaches.** These tend to focus on symptom management and neglect the need to address the underlying maldesign and mismanagement roots of the problems. They typically over-focus on measuring problems (a prime strategy for postponing action - by those who benefit from the *status quo*), and on efficiency and substitution strategies (eg, improved application of pesticide and on finding less disruptive [but still purchased] substitutes, such as biological controls and genetically modified organisms – same story in other areas, such as medicine and energy).

Need: to redesign existing systems (and design new systems) to make them as problem-proof as possible; and to enable effective change from these flawed/defective systems to significantly more improved ones.

3. **Getting stuck in activities that are 'pathologically' designed to postpone** (feared) **change.** These include particularly measuring problems ('monitoring our extinction!'), endless collection of data (often 'justified' by cries of the need for 'evidence-based approaches'), hearings, committee meetings, report-writing, etc – most of which have NO follow-through, and usually only lead to more of the same.

Need: postponing pathologies must be recognised, exposed for what they are, addressed and contradicted by taking responsible, timely, appropriate, collaborative action. Certainly access to relevant data are important for making responsible decisions. Often, however, adequate data are already available from other places, in other languages etc. Globally, billions of dollars are wasted annually unnecessarily repeating studies in new locations or with mischievous intentions (often related to perceived threats to existing commercial advantage), when the data for responsible decision-making are already available.

4. **Trying to solve problems within the discipline or area responsible for creating them,** or with multidisciplinary teams of selected experts/authorities from favoured disciplines, with others excluded.

Need: genuine transdisciplinary and trans-competency and trans-experience teams, able to access disciplinary and specialised knowledge as appropriate. Competencies relating to holistic approaches to design, sustainability, wellbeing, and effective change processes, in particular, need to be included in the teams.

5. **Patriarchal** (them doing things to/for us, and us doing things to/for them) **and 'driven' do-good approaches** are rarely exactly what is needed. They are generally not sustained or embraced by those being 'helped', and they often have some negative unexpected consequences.

Need: inclusion of those most affected by the proposed improvements as primary collaborators in the change process, from beginning to end. This enables ownership, relevance, achievability, ongoing improvement and openness to unforeseen/surprise benefits.

6. **Planning 'Olympic/mega-scale', heroic initiatives** (from hearings to projects) **with no follow-through or provision for ongoing support** (more than just funding).

Need: diverse, mutually supportive, do-able initiatives that have long-term support and consideration of opportunities for ongoing improvement and learning our ways forward collaboratively towards improved futures.

7. **Over focus on knowledge and data, and neglect of wisdom and experience** (much of which cannot be supported by data, and involves working with the 'unknown' – the majority of what is – not just the limited 'known'); often in ways that rely on intuition and gut feelings etc.

Need: we need to be much better at recognising, valuing and involving the wisest and most experienced in our society, and not so obsessed with 'cleverness'. Whereas the former have competencies that enable them to work with both the 'unknown' and 'know', the latter are largely limited to working with the miniscule 'known'.

8. **Over focus on 'productivity', profit and quick dramatic results** – this predictably leads to burn-out, only short-term, limited benefits, and often unexpected disbenefits (new problems).

Need: we need to focus much more on 'maintenance', caring for one another (other species and the environment), including prioritising time and resources for this, celebration, venting feelings, and 'healing' sessions, etc. These activities need to be 'equally' the focus of the initiative. In some senses, the latter may be regarded as emergent from, and a product of, the former.

9. **Homogenisation tendencies** tend to result in the construction of favoured 'norms' (for people, structures, processes, etc), failure to consider diversity, in-groups and out-groups, inclusion and exclusion, and failure to benefit from the creativity that resides at the margins and in the borderlands of society.

Need: openness to appreciation of the value of hererogeneity and 'functional' diversity within all systems, with its opportunities for synergy, mutualism, lateral thinking, extension beyond the usual competencies, relevance to needs and possibilities, a sense of inclusion, ownership, and a sense of place, etc.

10. **Neglect, or only token involvement, of the arts**, and over focus on the sciences, technologies, business, politics, the professions, the media, and the other major institutions within our society. As a result, the arts are poorly supported, regarded as a luxury or optional extra, an afterthought, or even irrelevant.

Need: recognition of the arts, in its broadest sense, as being an essential part of both the foundation and means for implementation of all efforts to achieve genuine and sustainable improvement.

Shared – dare I call it – WISDOM – 2007 -

- Ask of all action – what is it in the service of? – before supporting or copying it
- Work mostly with 'small meaningful achievable initiatives vs. 'Olympic-scale projects (most of these are abandoned or fail, & have numerous negative side-effects)
- Don't get stuck in 'measuring studies': 'monitoring our extinction' – often designed to postpone change perceived to threaten existing power structures
- To achieve sustainable progressive change, focus on enabling the 'good' agendas of others vs. trying to impose on them your 'good' agenda
- Focus on enabling the potential of people, society & nature to express itself – so that wellbeing, social justice & sustainability can emerge (in integrated, synergistic ways)
- Collaborate across difference to achieve broadly shared goals – don't end up in a 'sandbox'
- Don't let 'end point'/goal differences prevent possibilities of early stage collaboration
- Outcomes are only as good & sustainable as the people creating & implementing them – so start with the people; and remember that we are a relational/social species!
- Use the media – let me repeat, use the media! – such 'political' communication is key
- Work with business & the public/community; government will always follow, but rarely lead!
- Celebrate publicly at every opportunity – to enable the good stuff to be 'contagious'
- Keep working on & implementing – especially with others – your (shared) benign visions
- Most of what is remains unknown – which is what wise people are able to work with – so devote most effort to developing your wisdom vs. your cleverness, which is just concerned with the very limited pool of what is known (Einstein was clear about this!)
- So always be humble & provisional in your knowing, & always open to new; take small risks to enable progress and experience transformational learning & development
- Devote most effort to the design & management of systems that can enable wellbeing, social justice & sustainability, & that are problem-proof vs. maintaining unsustainable, problem-producing systems, & devoting time to 'problem-solving', control, & input management
- Work sensitively with time & space, especially from the position of the 'others' (W5 + How)
- Act from your core/essential self – empowered, aware, visionary, principled, passionate, loving, spontaneous, fully in the present (contextual) – vs. your patterned, fearful, compensatory, compromising, de-contextual selves
- See no 'enemies' – only feedback from (indicators of) woundedness, maldesign & mismanagement – everyone is always doing the best they can, given their potential, past experience & present context – the last two are the most important things to work with
- Be paradoxical: ask for help & get on with the job (don't postpone); give when you want to receive; give love when you might need it, or when you might feel hate
- Learn from everyone & everything, & seek mentors & collaborators at every opportunity