



Imagining the 21st Century Public Service Workforce

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Executive Summary

THE PUBLIC SERVICE WORKFORCE IS AT THE FRONTIER OF MAJOR CHANGE

We are at the frontier of significant changes to the shape and nature of public services. We are also witnessing major changes in the organisation of work. Taken together these developments could transform the activities the public service workforce undertakes and the way in which it operates.

Evidence from both academic and 'grey literature' suggests there will be significant changes in what public services do in the future as demographics shift, new technologies emerge and citizen expectations change. Questions of ethics, emotional labour and relational exchanges between public servants and citizens will inform the desired attributes of the public service workforce. Alongside these, are developments in the nature of work. Career trajectories and structures are changing and the traditional boundaries of jobs are starting to break down as people seek portfolio careers and organisations seek individuals who can move from project to project rather than fit a defined role. These changes to work will require public service organisations to respond if they are to recruit the talent they need.

BUT THERE IS LITTLE DETAIL ABOUT WHAT A FUTURE WORKFORCE WILL LOOK LIKE

However, despite plentiful commentary about the pending transformation of public services there is little detail about what that will mean for the future of the public service workforce: what this might look like, the challenges that it will face, the roles that public servants will undertake and the skills that will be needed, and implications for education, development and recruitment.

This research sought to offer a more informed and detailed account of the implications for the 21stC public service workforce by interrogating the views of senior public servants and a range of experienced partner stakeholders about likely futures and options for change.

A SHARED DIAGNOSIS OF THE CHALLENGES AND TRADE-OFFS

Our findings reveal that the diagnosis of the challenges facing public services was shared across most of the stakeholders consulted. These were: problem complexity, financial constraints, IT developments, employment flexibility and industrial relations models. What was less clear, however, were strategies for addressing these changes, in part because of the trade-offs associated with any action. For example addressing complexity required moving beyond a dominant economic analysis of policy making and reform; responding to financial constraints required a review of the social contract and a challenge to citizens to maybe do more for themselves; IT developments demanded longer term horizons for planning and investment than politicians could allow; employment flexibility bred insecurity and a loss of organisational capacity particularly in policy analysis; and changing industrial relations would challenge the values base of public service work that promoted inclusion as well as effectiveness. The multi-stakeholder nature of public policy and public services means that these trade-offs will always be perceived differently by different groups, and a future public service workforce will need to be able to navigate through them.

THE FUTURE WORKFORCE WILL BE SMALLER AND FOCUSED ON POLICY, NOT SERVICE-DELIVERY

One way into addressing these challenges and trade-offs is to focus on the anticipated change in the balance of what public servants will do in the future. Currently public servants are understood to be those directly employed by government who operate on the border between the political executive and the general population. The major role distinctions are between those involved in developing policy and those delivering services, with the majority currently employed around the latter function. In the future it is anticipated that the public service workforce will be smaller and focused primarily on policy, not service-delivery.

This presents challenges to workforce planners both in terms of identifying and securing the right skill sets, but also in terms of establishing public service workers' claims to legitimacy, i.e. what makes them distinctive. Traditionally many of those who work in public services are attracted by the idea of making a difference and having an impact, whereas once they may have been, at least in part, attracted by the stability that these sorts of roles offer. Stability is likely to be less relevant in the future, but the possibility of making a difference is likely to remain a powerful attractor, and demonstrating how this can be achieved in policy settings where influence comes as much from outside the public service as inside will be challenging.

A NEED FOR PUBLIC SERVANTS TO CONTRIBUTE TO DESIGNING A FUTURE WORKFORCE

Current public servants need to make a decision about whether they are an active contributor to this process or adopt a more passive position whereby they simply serve to implement visions of change decided by others.

If this is to be an active involvement then there is an urgent need to contribute to setting out a view public services of the future and a programme of change to achieve this including change to support the development of a new public service workforce. Participants broadly agreed that public services tend to change at an incremental pace and radical reform is often difficult to achieve. Consequently it is essential that a vision for the future and a program for change are established now.

THE FUTURE PUBLIC SERVICE WORKFORCE NEEDS A COMBINATION OF OLD AND NEW ROLES

This report sets out one possible vision for the future of the public service workforce. In doing so we engage with the ongoing debate about the balance of technical versus generalist skills in the public service and argue that the debate is falsely constructed. What is required instead we suggest is a set of roles that will meet the demands of the future. We offer support for the continuation of a number of existing roles that we believe will continue to be important (expert, regulator, engager, reticulist) as well as identifying a number of emergent roles that will become more significant in the future (commissioner, curator, foresighter and storyteller).

AND A RANGE OF OLD AND NEW SKILLS

A broad range of different skills are associated with the 21st century public service. Some of these relate to technical skills such as decision making and analysis of evidence, and professional and commercial skills as well as the foundational requirement of administrative skills; some to more human factors such as communication, collaboration, co-production, interpersonal, people management and international literacy skills; and others still to conceptual elements such as diagnosis, design and the ability to be flexible. Many of these skills public services already contain although these are not necessarily planned for in a systematic way. Many of those skills that will require further development in the future relate to different ways of seeing the world than necessarily to specific technical or specialist skills.

We argue that many of the sorts of skills that will be important in the future will be 'softer' in nature than the professionalised and technical skills that presently dominate recruitment and promotion processes. In some ways these represent a return to more traditional skills of public administration.

ATTENTION NEEDS TO BE PAID TO STRATEGIC WORKFORCE PLANNING

We do not get the most that we might out of the public service workforce at present because of a lack in terms of strategic workforce planning. The development of skills and availability of training and education opportunities is not always as closely tied to people and performance management as it might be. This needs careful consideration for the future, particularly where we may have a context in which the next generations expect different things in terms of the workforce and respect different forms of levers. Recruiting the future generations may involve more than simply thinking about the types of benefit packages that are made available but will also involve appealing to a value base and interest in making a difference. In attracting new recruits the public service has a challenge in telling a positive narrative about itself, the breadth of different opportunities available and the chance to make a difference.

GO WITH THE GRAIN TO MAKE CHANGE

If, as seems likely from the evidence of our research, change in public services is more likely to be incremental rather than radical, then realising the public service workforce of the future may require a series of incremental changes that together bring about the change that is needed. Working in this way requires very close attention to the smaller, incremental changes that are likely to take effect but are also likely to make a contribution to the broader agenda for workforce change.

Our findings also indicate that any change will not be sufficient without attention to cultural factors; the public service workforce will need to be supported by an organisational and institutional culture that fosters and rewards the roles and skills we have identified and which accords public service workers some agency in the process of re-imagining the service.

Finally we wish to emphasise that we are not proposing here a wholesale adoption of 'the new'. We recognise the ongoing importance of some of the foundational elements of the public service workforce and concur with emerging thinking about the public service craft, which recognises the political and relational nature of the work public service workers are engaged in.

Imagining the 21st Century Public Service Workforce



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1.0 Introduction

MUCH HAS BEEN WRITTEN ABOUT PUBLIC SERVICES IN RECENT YEARS, BUT THE ONE CONSTANT WITHIN THIS VAST SWATHE OF LITERATURE IS THE THEME OF CHANGE.

It has been widely argued that governments around the world are presently teetering on the precipice of significant transformation. Such wide scale and radical reform is necessary so that public services of the future will be fit for purpose within a new rapidly changing world. Whilst some of the drivers of this change are external to government and relate to shifts in the broader population, others relate to the nature of work and employment. Together it is suggested that we are about to see significant changes both to what public servants do and the ways in which they do it.

What public servants do, it is argued, will change due to shifts in the external environment and citizen expectations of government. Box 1 sets out illustrations of these changes. While the literature notes there will be significant changes in terms of the public service workforce, there is often little detail about what these might actually be. Alongside changes to government and public services we are also witnessing significant changes to the nature of work itself. In the future our working lives will be longer and more varied. Many of our future public servants will not be interested in a thirty year career in the same organisation, but instead seek portfolio careers and/or careers that span a number of organisations, institutions and roles. If public services are to attract the brightest and the best then they will need to offer career paths and entry ways that fit with these ideas about the shape and nature of work.

Whilst most of the literature agrees there is significant change ahead, there is little detail about what these changes might look like and how governments might best act to ensure a high quality workforce in the future. This is the gap that this project seeks to fill, building on recent work from Australia and internationally.

In June 2013 the Melbourne School of Government and the Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet jointly authored a publication on the '21st century public servant' (Melbourne School of Government and Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2013). This discussion paper aimed to generate debate about the public servant in the 21st century and subsequently a range of other individuals have contributed to this debate (e.g. Shergold, 2013a). In other countries similar conversations are taking place, most notably in the UK where the Public Service Academy (hosted by the University of Birmingham) has a programme of work on this topic (University of Birmingham Policy Commission, 2011, Dickinson and Needham, 2012). All agree that we will see significant changes in the roles, skills and capabilities of future public servants, but to date we have struggled to detail what these changes might look like and how they might be brought about.

Against this background, this research project aimed to explore these issues but focusing on and working with organisations and individuals with a clear sense of how change might be effected. In this way we hoped to provide a more fine-grained diagnosis of the challenges relating to the future of the public service workforce, and to identify some of the potential solutions that might meet these challenges. The research questions that underpin this project are as follows:

- What is the range of different roles of the twenty-first century public servant?
- What are the competencies and skills that public servants require to achieve these roles?
- What are the support and training requirements of these roles?
- How might government better support and promote public service careers?

BOX 1: THE NEED FOR CHANGE IN PUBLIC SERVICES

'Advances in recent years have created an unprecedented case for change in the ways in which public services work. We are seeing a greater focus on effectiveness, efficiency and accountability and far more demanding citizens who expect an increasingly high level of service delivery, comparable to what they get from the private sector. At the same time, in a climate of budgetary pressures and, in the drive for greater efficiency, politicians and regulatory bodies are expecting government organizations to do more for less. Managers of public services are under pressure to adopt reforms in order to realize the benefits that new processes, systems and technologies can bring. To respond to these complex and changing demands and deliver public service value, government organizations are increasingly considering the ways in which their workforces are configured. Designing new ways of working is becoming a key element of public service reform' (Accenture, 2006: pg. 11 emphasis added).

'We need a 'fundamental thinking of the nature of 'public' administration. Increasingly government, having set the policy agenda and determined the budgetary allocations, needs to become the 'strategic commissioner' of services purchased from a public economy. In order to encourage innovation, the design and delivery of those services needs to be undertaken via increased collaboration between non-government providers and public servants. The role of public servants will increasingly be to facilitate 'co-production' of services. While decisions on the most appropriate approach to service delivery should be based on a careful evaluation of the most effective way of creating public value, the default position should be an expectation that an increasing range of government services will be delivered by non-government organisations' (Shergold, 2013b: pg. 5)

In exploring these questions a number of interviews were conducted with individuals from a range of levels and types of government organisations as well as those from peak bodies, consultancy firms, think tanks and not for profit organisations. Appendix one outlines the methodology adopted for this research.

Writing about a future state is always a challenge. It is inevitable that a number of predictions will not eventuate or unanticipated events will mean that different paths are followed. Future predictions also often appear to be rather far-fetched and difficult to engage with in the very busy context of current practice. Yet predictions of the future are realised sometimes even when they appear quite a stretch from the present. As an example of this, Box 2 outlines some of the predictions made by Jules Verne in the novel *Paris in the Twentieth Century*.

Although Verne wrote this novel in 1863 it was not actually published for 131 years, ostensibly because his publisher felt the book too unbelievable and that sales prospects would be inferior to his previous texts (Verne, 1997). Yet, many of the book's predictions did take shape over the next century, indicating that Verne was able to accurately anticipate a number of future developments drawing on his knowledge of the context that he was writing in.

BOX 2: JULES VERNE'S PREDICTIONS ABOUT PARIS IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Verne set this science fiction novel in 1960s Paris which he predicted would place value only on business and technology. In this bleak dystopian future, art and creativity are stifled in favour of logic, commerce and pragmatism. The protagonist is Michel Dufrénoy, one of the last students of humanities graduating from his university. This is a point of great shame for his family and Michel tries to survive in this new world without losing his identity. Verne predicted a number of things in this book such as the widespread use of automobiles and an infrastructure that would be needed to support their refuelling, and train lines that ran using magnets. Computers appear in the form of sophisticated electro-mechanical calculators being widely used in business. Also described are calculating machines that send information to one another so business can be conducted at great distance and fax machines (picture-telegraphs), predicting the internet and telecommunications revolution. In this book Paris is full of skyscrapers and many of these buildings have automated security systems similar to those found today. Verne predicted many musical trends, the emergence of Hippies and Cyberpunks and the use of capital punishment and in particular the electric chair.

In writing about an anticipated future for public servants it is likely that many things will not eventuate, just as they did not for Jules Verne. Nonetheless we think this is an important exercise to undertake. The literature is rather silent about the detail of reform that we will see in the public service workforce in coming years and this is also an issue that is yet to receive much attention in an Australian context. We hope that this research is able to add to debate about these issues and in doing so encourage governments and public services to engage in a more significant level of strategic planning for future public services.

In taking on such a challenge it is inevitable that we will find ourselves unable to reflect the lived experience of every single public servant. We included people in this work who have a great deal of experience and insight into the issues under investigation both to draw on the best thinking in this area and temper the inevitable challenges. We sought to incorporate vignettes of good or interesting practice in this report where possible to signpost where individuals and organisations are starting to address some of these issues. Some of these are from an Australian context, although we have also drawn on examples from overseas where appropriate.

The report is structured as follows. In sections 2-3 we briefly summarise the literature on the changing nature of the public service workforce and the changing nature of work by way of background. Section 4 sets out the findings, considering firstly who public servants are, what they do, what is distinctive about the public service and what a typical career path in the public service looks like. We then consider what some of the major challenges facing public services might be in coming years, before considering what this means in terms of public service roles. Section 5 outlines the future roles. Here we argue there are four existing roles that will become more important in the future, and four new or emerging roles that will evolve to meet future conditions. In section 6 we detail the skills and abilities needed to fulfil these roles. Section 7 discusses issues relating to training, education, development and recruitment practices. Finally in section 8 we consider the implications of these findings and set out some areas for action. Where possible we have used verbatim quotes from those we interviewed to highlight important points although these individuals are not named in this report (to conform to ethical approval). Rather a code is used to identify different interviewees.



2.0 Background

THIS SECTION SUMMARISES KEY FINDINGS FROM THE LITERATURE ABOUT THE CHANGING NATURE OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE WORKFORCE AND SHIFTS IN EXPECTATIONS ABOUT THE NATURE OF WORK. WE ARGUE THAT THESE ARE TWO MAJOR DRIVING FORCES IN THE CHANGES WE WILL SEE IN PUBLIC SERVICES IN YEARS TO COME.

2.1 THE CHANGING NATURE OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE WORKFORCE

As part of their programme of work into the future of the public service workforce, a team based at the University of Birmingham (and drawing on expertise from the University of Melbourne), conducted a search of the literature relating the public service workforce (Needham et al., 2014). This review explored the academic and policy literatures on public service change and examined how change is impacting on people working in these services. This is an inclusive review to the extent that it draws on a variety of different disciplinary perspectives and includes not just academic publications but also the so-called grey literature which incorporates government publications, practice guidelines, business and industry outputs and others. This review outlines eight lessons from the broad literature about the future of the public service workforce and these are set out in Box 3.

Whilst the majority of this literature comes from the UK and the US and is not necessarily specific to Australia, similar themes are discussed in Australia based reviews (e.g. Advisory Group on Reform of Australian Government Administration, 2010, Shergold, 2013a, Shergold, 2013b).

BOX 3: EIGHT LESSONS ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE WORKFORCE

1. Future public services will require a different set of workforce roles than in the past. Whilst professional skills remain important (also see lesson 3) public servants increasingly have a role in negotiating and brokering interests among a broad array of different groups. The public service workforce therefore require a set of relational skills which aid in forming shared values amongst a range of competing interests. Crucial in this skill set of the ability to understand services from the citizen or consumer perspective.

2. Citizens are changing too. Citizens are less deferential than in the past and increasingly have higher expectations of what public services should offer. Co-production is a central plank of future public services and there are a diverse range of implications for this in terms of the workforce. There are presently gaps in this respect not only in the skills base of public servants, but also in the development opportunities available to hone these skills and the time and space to practice this within organisations.

3. Generic skills will be as important as technical skills for future public servants. This lesson is a potentially controversial one and this is not to argue that technical skills are not needed. Technical skills are required and there are gaps often reported in these particularly in relation to contracting and data analysis.

However, there are a set of softer and less tangible skills that are becoming increasingly important in relation to communication, digital literacy and person-oriented skills.

4. Ethics and values are changing as the boundaries of public service shift. The public sector ethos has been a common reference point in discussions about public service reform for many years. Ethos captures the sense of an intrinsic motivation to service the public, distinctive from extrinsic motivations such as material reward or fear of sanctions. In a context of increased outsourcing there is a question of whether public sector ethos can survive. Better understanding the bundle of incentives that motivate people to serve the public is part of the workforce challenge for 21st century public services.

5. Emotional labour will be a key element of future public service work. Many public service roles are inherently emotionally demanding and there is consensus emerging over the need for resilient responses to this as a dimension of public service practice. The research evidence suggests that emotions are important constituent components not just of the caring professions but also in any roles that involve the spanning of boundaries. If the future of public service roles is to involve greater boundary traversing then this is likely to become of even greater importance to public servants.

6. Perma-austerity is catalysing and inhibiting the emergence of new roles.

Recent UK literature has much to say about the impact of austerity on public service workforces. Whilst austerity is arguably not being experienced to such a degree in Australia it is clear that budget cuts are to come. The evidence suggests that in some places austerity is severely inhibiting the emergence of new roles, whilst in others organisations are using this opportunity to fundamentally transform their services. Understanding the contexts under which successful transformation might take place within circumstances of fiscal constraint is clearly an important task.

7. Hero-leaders aren't the answer. When leadership is spoken about in the media and in the literature it is often focused on individual heroes. However, the evidence suggests that there is a need for a new kind of public sector leader to respond to the changing context, in which leadership beyond boundaries and beyond spans of authority will become important. Rather than focusing on individuals we will need to think about forms of distributed or dispersed leadership.

8. Many professions are coming to these conclusions, but are tackling the issue separately. A striking feature of the policy literature is that lots of different professions are coming to the same conclusions, but there is little dialogue between service sectors about how to share lessons and encourage staff to work across boundaries. Whilst these individual conversations have immense value there may be benefit from bringing together these contributions and thinking about public service issues in a broader way.



2.2 THE CHANGING NATURE OF WORK

Alongside changes to government and what public services will actually deliver, we are also starting to see shifts in broader expectations about the nature of work. Dewe and Cooper (2012) argue that there are three major forces at the heart of these changes: internationalisation and global competition, advances in technology and changing workforces. The first two of these forces have been well-rehearsed, particularly within an Australian context, and we are starting to see more written about the latter as the workforce ages and is more culturally diverse and includes a variety of different aspirations and values with respect to work. In the post-industrial context economies are becoming more dependent on creating value less through 'physical mass, and more and more on intangibles, such as human intelligence, creativity, and even personal warmth' (Coyle and Quah, 2002: pg. 8).

In the future people will work for longer than they have ever done and with the proliferation of part time and casual working it is unlikely that people will be looking for careers with one organisation that span over a period of thirty years or more (Frese, 2008). Individuals will expect to have more than one career and even in professions that have intensive and sustained periods of training (e.g. medicine, academia) will look to have different 'chapters' to this career by taking on different roles over the span of their career (e.g. Dickinson et al., 2013, Lewis, 2013).

Portfolio careers have increased in popularity in recent years where individuals bring together a variety of different jobs which may be paid or voluntary but all of which involve time for personal development. This sort of work is already of interest to those in the early and later parts of their careers as people either seek to transition into or out of work, but it may become a more established option in the future. Job design is also changing. Where once people would have been recruited to work in a particular professional area to do a defined task it is becoming more common for organisations to recruit to projects.

Bridges (1995), for example, provides an account of how Phillips introduced umbrella contracts for staff who were assigned to projects, not roles. In the future it is like that individuals will find themselves less confined to traditional boundaries of professional roles and more engaged in project-based activities which involve a range of different activities.

All of these factors mean that the structure of careers and the sorts of jobs that future public servants will seek could be quite different to those we are used to. Although the public sector has often been viewed as rather traditional in terms of jobs and career development change is likely to permeate as, in an ever more competitive environment seeking to attract the best and brightest will require organisations to respond to these changing trends.

3.0 Who are public servants and what do they do?

IN THIS SECTION WE CONSIDER WHO PUBLIC SERVANTS ARE, WHAT THEY DO, WHETHER THERE IS ANYTHING DISTINCTIVE ABOUT THE PUBLIC SERVICE AND WHAT A TYPICAL CAREER PATH LOOKS LIKE IN THIS SECTOR.

3.1 WHO ARE PUBLIC SERVANTS?

This was one of the few issues generating agreement amongst interviewees. Most of those who we spoke to defined public servants as those who are employed by a level of government. Public servants were described as:

“someone directly employed by the state and/or might be local government, but state or federal government...so directly on the payroll there” (21cps3).

Or as another interviewee described,

“a public servant is, to me, the core government. Not necessarily the peripheral service workers, but the core, administrative and policy arms of the government” (21cps5).

Public service is seen as the core of government and public servants are those directly employed by one of the levels of government.

Where debate does exist is around the margins of the public service where there are individuals who provide public services funded by the government but who work for non-government agencies.

One individual said of these,

“I don’t think most public servants would think that people working in a firm, that are contracted in, are public servants. They may be providing a public service. I think that employment distinction, still kind of holds. In terms of who your actual employer is” (21cps10).

As an example of this distinction, one person explained,

“a teacher works in the public sector, but that’s not really a public servant...So I tend to think of public servants as those people who are in the departments, and possibly in some of the agencies that look very department-like” (21cps16).



However, this was not the perspective held by all. As one interviewee described,

“if there is government funding then I think absolutely you are still a public servant...aged care is very much government funded, pretty much solely apart from interest that’s taken from bonds and things like that. And yet as an employee, you’re employed by the service provider, you’re not employed by the government so it’s a fine line and industrially it’s tricky, but ultimately I would say you are a public servant because you’re doing a public service and—although technically speaking you’re not employed by the government” (21cps1).

We return to the issue of who public servants are in a later section when thinking about the implications of these findings in the context of strategic workforce planning for the future.

3.2 WHAT DO PUBLIC SERVANTS DO?

The question of what public servants do is tricky given that different levels of governments have distinct remits and ranges of responsibilities. These are difficult to sum up in a short amount of space. In this report we acknowledge this diversity and recognise the range of nuances in any debates about the public service in its broadest sense. Whilst being mindful of this, we also believe there are some distinctions we might make in relation to what public servants do.

The primary distinction often made is between those involved in direct service delivery and those broadly in policy (supporting government and legislative processes, making policy, setting budgets, regulation and managing people). In terms of the balance of the workforce, many interviewees described that at present far more are involved in service delivery roles than policy functions.

“Most public sector employees, overwhelmingly—whether it’s at national level, state level or local government level—deliver services.... Most of them do. I couldn’t put a number of it but... somewhere between 80 and 90 per cent” (21cps4).

Looking at workforce statistics at a state level, the predictions of this interviewee are largely supported and at present the vast majority of public servants are involved in some form of service delivery role (e.g. New South Wales Public Service Commission, 2013, Victoria State Services Authority, 2013).

Despite the fact that the vast majority of public servants are employed in these service-facing roles some felt that this is not always recognised by the public. As one interviewee explained,

“When people talk about public service cuts, or public sector job cuts, they promote an image of an office clerk who doesn’t do much really—is just back office and probably answers phones and fills in forms—the problem we have with that is that number one it does undervalue or devalue that type of position, which of course is very important, it keeps the economy ticking; keeps the government ticking. The other thing is, for us a public servant is a child protection worker, it is somebody who assesses your health care claims, it is someone who counsels job seekers...people who provide care to people with an intellectual disability in the community setting... they are all public sector and all public servants and they perform a public duty that is provided... service provided by the government” (21cps1).

This comment is interesting in the sense that the claim to legitimacy suggested here comes from the fact that public servants are seen as being involved in some form of welfare or service delivery (child protection, counselling, caring etc.). Yet, many people suggested to us that the future of public services looks much different, with a far smaller role for service provision and a greater proportion involved in policy functions.

“We want to probably have a...smaller number of really good policy people, and really get the most out of them, and then we want to have ...a group of commissioning contract manager-type people, although the commissioning are probably the policy people, and then we probably want to have most of the service delivery operating quite separately—whether it’s within a public

service arrangement, or a public sector arrangement, or a not-for-profit or private” (21cps16).

Although the reach of government and public services arguably has increased over the last fifty years or so, since the 1980s various functions have been outsourced to other sectors. This is not just a national trend, but one being witnessed in most advanced liberal democracies (Alford and O’Flynn, 2012). The Abbott-led government is clear that it sees the externalisation of government functions as a priority (see, Dickinson, 2014) and this is a trend also being echoed at the state-level with discussions about contestability and productivity. This raises important questions about the future functions of public servants and what their claims to legitimacy will be.

In a more abstract sense many described the role of the public service as sitting somewhere between the political executive on the one hand and the community on the other and working to represent the interests of both in terms of the resultant activities of the government;

“the role of public services ... is to work on that kind of boundary zone around politics and the community really” (21cps25).

As one interviewee described,

“The core public service is...about, what is the right thing to do; managing the political interface; effectively administering programs and regulations. I don’t think the core task has changed too much, just the... *how* you deliver that has changed so much” (21cps5).

Interviewees often described how over time the balance in this relationship has shifted over time and there was often the perception that the public service had moved from its role as an independent and ‘frank and fearless’ advisor to the political executive into an implementer of political directives. This is under revision once more with public servants shifting from being implementers to policy developers, working with a range of other different stakeholders. An important task therefore is to reimagine what the public service looks like within this new context and what its function will be in a context where a delivery role is much reduced.

3.3 WHAT IS DISTINCTIVE ABOUT THE PUBLIC SERVICE?

Respondents reflected here on the importance of values in the context of the public service and this often went beyond simply discharging their legal duty of values and conduct as outlined in state or federal legislation. Instead respondents suggested that public servants are genuinely committed to an idea of creating good for their communities and were attracted to a role in public service as a way of making a difference.

Many of those we spoke to saw a crucial component of the public service relating to a notion of public good or public value. As one interviewee described,

“the public service is ... a custodian of the public good. It’s partly about the long term view. Not making short term trade-offs today to political expediency...I’m talking about doing that not from a normative understanding about the public good... it goes back to the evidence-based public good, if that makes sense, as opposed to a conception of the public good, from a set of value propositions” (21cps6).

This quote is helpful in the sense that it raises the idea of value both in terms of the aim (being a curator of public good) and the process by which we might achieve this, which in this case places a strong emphasis on evidence over an ideological position. Other factors important in terms of process include proximity to democracy and the elected government, accuracy, ethical behaviour personal responsibility, accountability and impartiality.



3.4 WHAT DOES A TYPICAL PUBLIC SERVICE CAREER PATH LOOK LIKE?

Given the range of levels of government and sorts of functions that they discharge there is of course no such thing as one typical public service career path. However, in thinking about what public service career paths might look like in the future it is helpful to consider whether there are any general characteristics or tendencies at present. Linked to the last section, many of those we spoke to believe that today people are attracted to different qualities of the public service than previously.

“When I was leaving school the public service wasn’t seen as anything exciting, but it was seen as a good, steady job. You could rely on good conditions, and if you got a good job in the public service you’d be set for life sort of thing. Whereas now, the young ones really see it I think as a career path, a way to make a difference, they are often burned out a few years down the track because not everybody can rise to the top, but I do think there’s a different attitude definitely. And the young ones I deal with in the public service... they’re quite energetic and up-and-coming...quite ambitious. I think there is a difference” (21cps1).

In terms of entry points into the public service, two major ways to enter were often highlighted. This is not to say that every public servant will have been recruited in this way but that these tend to be the case for a majority of individuals.

As one interviewee explained:

“So there are two ways I think people come in. First, is through the graduate recruitment schemes. So people go through universities, some are university graduates straight out of university. They haven’t done anything else beforehand. Some might have one or two years of experience in the workforce. Maybe sometimes up to four years’ experience if they’ve gone and they might have wanted to be a lawyer, gone into law, but actually don’t want to be a lawyer, so again, they come in through the graduate recruitment scheme. We also had PhDs that come in through the graduate recruitment scheme and might have other areas of work experience. So that’s one significant cohort. The other one would be lateral hires, like me, who come in not at that graduate level, but would come in at kind of like mid-policy officer level. The benefit of the graduate recruitment scheme is that when you come in as a graduate recruit, you will go through a year’s worth of very structured L&D about being a public servant...those sort of like core foundational skills. What will happen to lateral hires, and that might be people like me or, you know, it might be senior lawyers who come into the public service, or social workers or economists, consulting firms, all come in and will have to pick up those skills either on the job or through other L&D opportunities. That to me seems to kind of like the traditional pathway” (21cps6).

What this extended quote illustrates is the importance of a university education as a prerequisite to enter the public service at a particular level and the fact that development opportunities can be more structured depending on your entry point. What this quote does not cover is those who come into public services through a service delivery role. Some of these individuals may be graduates, but some may have vocational qualifications. Within our sample of interviewees a very small proportion of these had entered the public service in this way and worked their way from service delivery into policy and management roles.

This number may be even smaller in future as the amount of direct service delivery done by public servants reduces.

Once in public service roles people may develop their careers in broadly two different directions in the pursuit of more senior roles:

“I think there’s two types of trajectories that I’ve seen anyways so that people who join as a grad and pretty much stay in the department that they joined and progress relatively well try different jobs and move up the ladder sort of in a very conventional straight line fence, and then there are others who may have joined one department as a grad but then moved around to other different departments and diversified portfolios if you want and made their way up that way, so it seems like if you don’t follow that rule you are considered to be slightly different, and people have trouble working out what you do and what you bring to the table sometimes” (21cps12).

These career trajectories might look quite different in the context of local government where departments may not be as distinct from one another. We talk more about development and gaining experience in public services in section 7, but one factor that seemed to be important in making it to a senior level in public service organisations is longevity and having some sort of knowledge of how government operates at a variety of different levels. What this meant is that although some people at senior levels may have had some experience outside of government they need to have a sustained period within government in order to progress within this context.



4.0 Major challenges for public services

TO SOME EXTENT THE BROADER LITERATURE HAS ARTICULATED THE MAJOR CHALLENGES FOR FUTURE GOVERNMENTS AS HAS RECENT WORK SPECIFIC TO THE AUSTRALIAN CONTEXT (E.G. ADVISORY GROUP ON REFORM OF AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION, 2010, SHERGOLD, 2013A).

Whilst not wanting to repeat what is well established elsewhere, we include this section as a way of highlighting issues of particular concern to those we interviewed for this project.

4.1 COMPLEXITY OF PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

The idea that the kinds of challenges contemporary governments face are more difficult, complex and 'wicked' than those in the past is well established. As one interviewee explained,

"If they were easy problems, they would have been solved ages ago....so the problems that are left, that are major, are the difficult problems to solve, that have multiple causes, and where you need to get different parts of the machine working together. Which is pretty difficult!" (21cps5).

The challenge for government is not only that the kinds of problems that government faces are multifaceted in nature, but also that the machinery of government has also become far more complex to operate. As already described, in recent years we have seen a trend towards the externalisation of services and functions that were previously provided by government. Expectations have grown in terms of the ability of governments to deal with multifaceted issues over a similar time period. Taken together what this means is that the scope and remit of government has expanded, albeit whilst direct levers and controls of the means of delivery have reduced.

As one respondent told us

"Governments are...conscious of the fact that the community is becoming, you know, quite unwilling to accept that a problem can't be addressed no matter how complex...or entrenched it might have been. Think of Indigenous disadvantage or climate change... whatever. And they're increasingly intolerant of an excuse that says, well you know, 'Not my job to fix it'. So increasingly, the community's expecting that we'll deal with issues holistically or, you know, kind of in a joined up way if you want to use lay language. And they expect that we will have the...the attitude and the skill to be able ... to look at issues in those, you know, kind of fresh, creative, multi-disciplinary way" (21cps15).

Yet, in practice, it is felt that government and public services often remain rather narrow in their view on the world and potential solutions. Economics stood out for particular criticism in a number of interviews with many suggesting that this way of thinking has dominated policy thinking. This is particularly the case at Federal and State levels, although is thought to proliferate public services more broadly. As one person explained,

"The Commonwealth has become so preoccupied with an economic view of nearly everything, particularly policy but also an economic view of everything doesn't actually allow much weighting for management, for example" (21cps4).

"The dominant paradigm in government is kind of, economics. That's what really drives the framework for a lot of decision making at the upper level, of the bureaucracy" (21cps5).

The implications of this critique is that although there has been a rhetorical recognition of the importance of addressing challenges in a multi-faceted way, in practice responses have remained more traditional. If public services are to address the kinds of issues that the general population expects them to, there will need to be a change not only in the organisation of services and functions of government but also in ways of thinking about wicked problems.

4.2 FINANCES AND EXPENDITURE

Issues relating to finance and spending might appear to be a stock challenge when talking about government, however, many of those we spoke to added that there are new dimensions to this debate that mean it will be an even more important consideration into the future. On the whole interviewees shared the perspective that the future will be a tough fiscal climate. Whilst many pointed out that there is nothing new about this and

“Australia’s small public services has been used to dealing with small resources and doing a great deal with them” (21cps9)

respondents were often concerned about what the limit might be in being able to do

“more and more for less and less” (21cps9).

One of the challenges of limited resources relates not just to the day to day business of public services but also in horizon scanning and working to make sure that improvements and innovations are properly developed and implemented. As one respondent explained,

“the need for traditional core business will limit, if you like, people lifting their heads above the horizon and looking for new ways and new ideas. I mean, people will say that fiscal downturn is the best time to innovate, I think there’s a counter-factual to that. I think it’s actually...we innovate when we have discretionary time to look. That gives us the time to lift our eyes above the horizon, as opposed to focusing down on core business because the demands are more increasing. That’s coupled with cut-backs in terms of budget, and cut-backs in terms of staffing numbers. So that discretionary effort that you might have to pursue a new idea or to

float something isn’t there resource-wise. Either because of funding, or because of time” (21cps6).

Whilst previous discussions of public service spending have typically been preoccupied with issues of productivity and efficiency, and indeed these are dominating the current public service discourse, the general consensus was that future discussions would relate to fundamental principles and ensuring that planning is proactive, rather than reactive. As one interviewee described,

“I think... there’s a growing demand for services that is a result of an aging population, but more importantly, the expectation of different generations. The Baby Boomers and Gen Y and Gen Y demand and expect government to provide for everything in their life... That, combined with, the tightening of revenue in recent times from the GFC, has brought us to an interesting point. Where, in the past, what government has mostly spent on, has been in a social domain. You know, health, human services, justice, education...and they haven’t really reformed the structure of those industries. They’re run on 19th century models. And they didn’t mess with it because they were too political complex. But now, the political pain of not addressing it is getting to be almost the political pain of addressing it...I think that is the single, biggest challenge facing the government, over the next decade. Another way to characterise it, is, what are the limits of the Welfare State? What risks should citizens bear, what risks should governments bear? What is the role of government?” (21cps5).

What the last quote shares in common with the challenges posed by more wicked and complex problems is the idea that solving these issues involves more than just being more productive or more efficient, but fundamentally rethinking the parameters of social welfare. The implication here is that key challenges in the future will not just relate to just doing things better but giving significant consideration to what public services actually do and make sure that these are agile and responsive to changes in the broader environment.

4.3 NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND THE DIGITAL ERA

A key feature of the literature concerning the future of public services relates to the abundance of new technologies and expectations of government to employ these in the delivery of public services.

“I think...that ICT is kind of an existential change for us. It will involve, profoundly different modes of service delivery, it'll involve profoundly different attitudes to information and it should lead to a different conversation with citizens” (21cps14).

The rise of new technologies have not bypassed governments to date, although some we spoke to described experiments with these as being marginalised to the periphery, rather than being applied to the core business of government:

“I think that all governments everywhere are grappling with the digital agenda, and I think that what government agencies have been okay at so far as thinking about how to digitise their...what are essentially analogue business models. But, there's a whole other thing about, I guess, rethinking...well, not just kind of digitizing what you already do, but thinking how the digital capability we have allows you to think about completely new ways of doing things” (21cps20).

As one interviewee observed,

“it's not about whether we can do digital, it's whether we can be digital” (21cps24).

The rise of new technologies has the potential for significant changes in terms of how public services are designed, what public servants do and how public services interact with the broader community. Some new technologies also present implications in terms of issues of data and evidence analysis as they offer the opportunity to

“derive meaning from large data sets, and to inform action” (21cps5).

What is clear is that to date experiments with these have remained limited and there is the potential for far more in the way of untapped resources.

4.4 INSECURITY OF WORK AND LOSS OF ORGANISATIONAL CAPABILITY

The challenges discussed thus far largely relate to changes in the external environment, but there are also a series of issues that are specific to the public service workforce. Many of those we spoke to expressed concern over the fact that the public service workforce is becoming increasingly insecure and also that it has seen the loss of a number of skilled people in recent years.

In relation to insecurity of work this was spoken about in two major ways. The first is in relation to service delivery, where we heard concerns that this is

“one of the most insecure workforces in the country...More and more we're seeing nurses for example, employed in short-term contracts because of the funding system, so more and more health care is being funded on a project or envelope basis. In the public service itself, I've never seen such a demoralised, awful... Really worried, really 'who's going to go next'...In fact people have got to the point where they talk 'I just want to know what my package is going to be, am I going to get paid out ok?' That's what they ask the Union to fight for not to fight to keep their job. Just find out what I'm going to get” (21cps1).

The second way that insecurity was spoken about was at the more senior levels of government. We heard much about a sense that the upper echelons of government becoming more 'political'. Whilst once senior public servants would have effectively had tenure in continuing posts, it is now common to have contracts for a limited period of time. One senior state employee explained,

“I have a 3 year contract, our secretary has a 3 year contract for executives, not 5” (21cps19).

It was also suggested that politicians have also become more influential in terms of these appointments, adding to a sense of insecurity in terms of these roles.

Lack of organisational capability was also an issue we heard much about in interviews. In recent years many levels of government have seen reform initiatives that have reduced their head count. A number of those we spoke to expressed concern that this had led to erosion in the quality of the workforce.

“The real issue is, in my mind is both the calibre and competency of the current public service...I just think it’s been put through the wringer for so many years now in terms of cut-backs, not prioritising, you know, the research policy side of things, always being talked down as being a, as a burden rather than as a...integral part of, you know, the public good, and you know, I’m not surprised that people have left or, or aren’t attracted to, to its ranks” (21cps3).

Successive reform exercises, such as the Sustainable Government initiative in Victoria, were seen to have “hollowed out” public services

“because it’s generally the people who have options who will leave” (21cps6).

As a consequence of this there are

“big capability gaps”

within government (21cps5).

Typically these capability gaps were not described in relation to the provision of services, but relating to the policy capability. We were told that one of the biggest emerging gaps is in relation to the ability to present robust policy proposals that are costed and based on solid evidence. There appears to be a significant capability gap in relation to analytical capability and case building. As one interviewee described, there has been a

“continuing, diminishing quality...your in house capability around policy advice. Some of the is driven through the brilliant way of managing the public service, which is, we pay the brightest people to go away in voluntary departure packages” (21cps10).

Gaps identified tended to be at more senior levels of organisations and relating to driving change processes. As one interviewee explained, there’s

“been a trend, whereby, over a number of governments, ministry offices have grown, policy has been taken out, more consultants have been used, the bureaucracy has been trained just to do administration, to write letters, to administer. Not actually drive, invent, advise, innovate. There are only a few people left that you would trust to do that, who’d actually been through the cycle a few times” (21cps5).

4.5 INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

The government arena has traditionally been recognised as a strongly unionised environment and in reflecting on the abilities of the future public services to make significant changes, industrial relations was an issue frequently raised. Some we spoke to saw the existence of a unionised workforce as a significant barrier in terms of the ability make significant changes. A small proportion of those we spoke to also felt that the public service is currently overstaffed and could be run on a smaller workforce;

“I reckon you can sack 20% of public servants and would lift productivity. If you could pick the right ones you want to go. But...there’s industrial relations environment that mitigates against being able to do that. Political issues around some of the major unions” (21cps5).

This was not an opinion shared by all but is one present in the debate. Another less positive perspective on public servants was the idea that individuals draw on union resources in order to protect their own roles and not for the good of the broader community.



Another interviewee argued that

“what we have here is an industrial relations environment that primarily brings about what is in it for the workforce. It’s not about what is in it for the community... I genuinely believe that the majority of frontline people do it for the community good...But there is an element which is far stronger, about the unions, which is all about me. It’s all about what the union can get for the workforce, as opposed to how do we deliver the best outcomes... this is one of our weaknesses here, is that we look at this very much from a ‘how do I keep the unions happy?’ rather than ‘how do we deliver what is really the right thing for the community?’(21cps7)”

Many we spoke to expressed concerns about the difficulties of achieving major change, addressing underperformance and improving productivity within a workforce that is, in some parts, seen to be highly protected. These challenges were not perceived to be felt to the same extent by those in private or not for profit agencies, and the externalisation and outsourcing of services was seen as a way to address some of these challenges. However, for others, strong industrial relations were seen as crucial and as an illustration of the commitment of public services to a sense of public value. Many saw public services as having a far more diverse workforce than other sectors and actively providing a supportive working environment for employees with range of different requirements. This speaks to the public service as an employer that is motivated by more than simply the provision of the most cost-efficient services.

As one interviewee explained in the context of employing people with disabilities,

“there’s kind of moral/ethical thing, about government being an employer of people with disabilities, which I totally support, and there are people in this building...which is fantastic. I’ve never had colleagues with disabilities; we’ve always talked about it, but never saw it, and here you do see people with disabilities, and that’s terrific...I think there are people here who, genuinely, would be stuffed if they had to go somewhere else.”

What this point illustrates is, that like many other things related to public services, it is not a simple issue one but a case of balancing a difficult set of values and ideas. As we will come back to this is an important point in an instrumental sense of what employment practices look like, but also in a symbolic way in terms of the modelling of particular behaviours and values.

5.0 What roles will public servants play in the future?

GIVEN THAT SO MUCH HAS BEEN WRITTEN ABOUT THE LARGE SCALE CHANGES WE WILL SEE IN TERMS OF PUBLIC SERVICES OF THE FUTURE WE MIGHT CONCLUDE THAT PUBLIC SERVANTS WILL SEE SIGNIFICANT CHANGES TO WHAT THEY DO.

Yet, if history tells us one thing it is that change in the public service is typically incremental, rather than radical (Kotter, 1995). Whilst there is the potential for some transformative changes over the next twenty to thirty years it is likely that many elements of the current public service will persist. In this section we consider both the roles that will continue to be important and those new roles that will emerge. The antecedents of some of these new roles are present in the contemporary system, particularly in terms of those relating to collaboration, commissioning and communication. However, we argue that although aspects of these roles may exist at present they will become much more important to and require careful planning in respect to the public service workforce of the future. The existing roles that interviewees suggest will stay are those of expert, regulator, engager and reticulist. In addition to this, new roles will become important and here we set out four in the form of commissioner, curator, foresighter and storyteller.

Before we set out these roles in detail we first reflect on the balance between specialist and generalist roles. This was a keen topic of debate in interviews and one that many we spoke to felt strongly about.

5.1 GENERALIST AND SPECIALIST ROLES

Like many other industries, public services have traditionally recruited individuals with particular professional qualifications or technical abilities to carry out defined roles. Further, the recruitment and promotion of individuals has also relied on an individual's ability to demonstrate that they were a competent nurse, engineer, accountant etc. Over the last 20-30 years organisations have recognised the importance of another set of skills which are less tangible than these specialised or technical abilities. As we will argue further below, this set of 'softer' skills (e.g. emotional intelligence, communication, collaboration, people management) are becoming more important in the current context and will likely become even more crucial in the future. These kinds of skills are often regarded as generalist in the sense that they are not associated with any particular profession and may reside across the workforce.

One thing we asked interviewees about was the balance between specialist and generalist roles in the future. We were surprised at some responses in the sense that despite speaking at length about the need for more widespread and enhanced skills around communication, team working, problem-solving and so on, interviewees often went on to suggest that public services at present have too much in the way of generalist staff at the expense of more specialist skills. As one interviewee explained,

"I think...it's arguable that we've probably gone too far, so that we don't have enough of what you might call those 'core technical' skills that are needed for what you might say is the more contemporary public service" (21cps2).

One interviewee referred to this as the “myth of the generic manager” (21cps3) where a preoccupation with ensuring that managers have a set of particular skills (e.g. staff management, budgeting, planning) has meant that content knowledge and technical expertise had been underplayed in recent years. Yet other interviewees were at pains to point out that there are pockets of deep specialist knowledge that still reside in the public sector;

“there are definitely quite specialist job families or groups of roles across the public service and they vary in quantity, depending on the nature of the organization” (21cps11).

In the debate over generalist and specialist roles it appears that there are a number of different issues that are being argued about at once. As we mentioned in the previous section, a number of those we spoke to felt that experienced and talented people had been lost in recent rounds of redundancies and people with lesser abilities had been retained. We often heard those who had been retained referred to as generalists. It is well established in the literature that those with more general capacities are able to ‘recycle’ themselves in job roles more easily; it is easier for the general manager to gain another role after an incident than a medical administrator, for example (Ham et al., 2011). Some of the strong reaction to generalists may relate to perceptions of individuals wrapped up in recent iterations of redundancies and promotion rounds. Further, technical expertise is also often very expensive. As one respondent explained,

“These are highly demanded skills, that the government just doesn’t create an environment in which you can attract and retain these people. Either for money, or just the style of work that they do” (21cps5).

This interviewee went on to outline how many of the major areas of expertise that are needed by government – “finance skills, risk management skills, project management skills...[are] all areas that the government is weak in. And again there’s the technology: strategy, technology innovation, implementation of technology, again, all areas that the government is weak in.” We were

told that many of these gaps in government abilities are filled by using external expertise in the form of management consultancies and so on. A key point of exasperation for some was that the consultants doing this work often previously worked for the public services, although typically were remunerated for these tasks at a far lower level than as a contractor.

Some of what people referred to when talking about specialist knowledge was not just necessarily technical or professional knowledge related to a specific role but more generally in relation to domain knowledge about a particular policy area. This relates both to the specific knowledge of that area (e.g. economics, transport, health, human services etc.) but also to the organisational and institutional memory of these areas. When generalists were spoken about in disparaging terms it was often where individuals had been brought into particular service areas which they either had a limited knowledge of or attempted to do things which had been tried before and without drawing on the wisdom and experience of the existing staff members. Many interviewees stressed the importance of having knowledge of that service area within the broad team and preferably any leader would have at least a cursory knowledge, or else risk losing legitimacy. As one interviewee told us,

“I think you do have to have people who know all about the subject matter and have credibility. If you don’t, you know, if you’re in charge of transport planning and you’ve got no background or experience in delivering and doing transport planning, I think the job of being credible is really hard” (21cps21).

Credibility is also important in another way. In order to make significant changes within public services individuals need to be able to illustrate that they accord with the values and ways of working of this institution. At present this tends to be illustrated by longevity and experience within the public sector. Many times we were told that it would be difficult to ever get promoted beyond Deputy Secretary/Secretary level within a department without at least a twenty year history within that context or one in close proximity.

In practice public service organisations do and will, of course, need a mix of both specialist and generalist expertise. As one interviewee explained,

“I don’t think it’s an “either-or”. It’s not a binary decision. You need a mix of generalists and you need a mix of specialists” (21cps6).

The crux of the issue may instead relate not to a proliferation of generalists and a dearth of technical experts but instead to issues of job design and what we ask professionals to do. We were often told that individuals are recruited to particular programmes or professional roles and, as we speak about below in more detail, are performance managed against their ability to discharge this particular process or task. This may mean that a range of the other sorts of skills and abilities that this individual has and that align with broader organisational goals and missions are not fully drawn on. This is often an issue of a lack in strategic workforce planning and performance management, rather than willingness on the part of the individual.

Below we argue that many of the roles that will be important in the future relate to more general skills, but we are not arguing that professional and technical skills will not be important: they patently will and we need to strategically plan for these. Yet we also need to ensure that attention is paid to some of these important generic skills and ensure that these are firmly embedded within teams and organisations.

5.2 EXISTING ROLES

In this section we argue that four existing roles will be of importance to the 21st century public servant: expert, regulator, engager, reticulist.

5.2.1 EXPERT

In the course of our interviews one narrative that was repeated was that of the traditional public servant as the ‘frank and fearless’ advisor to the political executive. Many of those we spoke to lamented the perceived weakening of this role and argued for a need to return to the past and re-establish this role. Although the reason given for this loss was often primarily related to an increase in the number and power Ministerial advisors, other factors cited include the emergence

of a 24/7 media cycle, the rise of think tanks and consulting houses, new technologies and big data, and changes to the processes of appointments of senior public servants. As one interviewee explained,

“the 24/7 media cycle is having a huge impact on the reactionary nature, if you like, because the private office is being driven by the 24/7 media cycle and that’s going to have a flow-on effect. And I think compounding that...there is a national debate to be had about the appointment arrangement of senior public servants who are on contract. Has the change from tenure to contract weakened the capacity for frank and fearless advice? I’ve just seen the diminishing of that in my career. The erosion, if you like, of the frank and fearless (21cps6)”

The context that public servants and politicians operate in has changed significantly over the past twenty years. There are now many more voices offering policy advice and much of this is played out through traditional and new media. As one interviewee explained,

“I feel like the public service institutionally hasn’t caught up with that thing that they are no longer the major source of advice, even though they ... they really stopped being the major source of advice in the 70s... And I feel like the public services ... Sort of still thinks, ‘Well we’re the public service so they have to listen to us’...the role of the public service is increasingly to synthesise and to critique and to say, ‘Well, you know, we know someone told you that, that’s bollocks’. You know?... [we’re] not going back to a world where... the public service has the monopoly on that stuff so the public service needs to get used to it (21cps8)”

Whilst many of these additional voices may be partisan or pushing a particular agenda, some may be well informed and provide resources that government might draw on. One interviewee felt that

“the role of consulting houses as sources of policy advice, in that contestable environment, is significant. In that regard, some of the best, more free-footed policy thinkers, are senior people in the consulting practices. Because that’s what they do all day. They’ll go from issue to

issue, and they've also got a broader system perspective, because they work in different systems" (21cps10).

What this point draws attention to is the fact that public servants are no longer the main source of advice, if they ever has been, and that technological change is further advancing this trend. Although public servants might still provide advice and do so into the future, arguably the role has shifted from being an advisor to being that of an expert.

Being an expert involves exercising judgement in decision making and drawing in relevant skills and experience. This is not an easy role to achieve and involves being more than just being skilled in the abilities of data analysis, for example. As one respondent explained,

"I think, if you build up your capital, and use it wisely, you do need to be speak truth to power, in that sense. And try to synthesize, if you like, the advice that ministers are getting" (21cps10).

This role has arguably become more complex in recent years given the multiplicity of sources of advice and different sources of evidence available. However, many we spoke to believe that this actually makes the role of the public servant as expert *more*, rather than less, important. Yet, many felt that this is an area that has not been invested in.

"Most governments don't put a high premium on certain set of skills and those skills are good policy head, able to generate or at least to understand research, so you see that in all the rhetoric around, you know, cutting back on public sector workforce generally, you know, we're focusing resources on the front, drip-line services, etc., without realising that you need to have sort of the intellectual clout and street smarts I suppose in terms of policy, research, broader relationship management, at more senior levels to actually pull all that stuff off" (21cps3).

The kinds of expertise that we referred to in interviews and the quotes set out above relate to expertise not just in a sense of technical knowledge about an issue or a policy area, but also in relation to the idea of expertise in terms of a process. It is about high quality analytical skills so that

evidence can be synthesised and along with a sense of that specific policy area and its history judgements be reached about a particular issue. Yet, it is also about having an understanding of how to make things work within any given setting and who the major stakeholders are within that particular setting. Technical expertise, though important, can be bought, whereas policy expertise is less tangible and more difficult to seek from external partners.

5.2.2 REGULATOR

As we suggested above, over the past quarter century or so there has been an increasing trend towards the outsourcing or externalisation of particular government functions. This has created a role for public servants relating to the regulation and oversight of these services where the performance of resources is analysed against standards. As one interviewee explained,

"I definitely think that there are some roles in the public service we're seeing privatised shift across, and in my mind they're still delivering public service but it's just created a whole new type of bureaucracy which is regulatory and quality control" (21cps1).

In moving from delivering specific services to performance managing services against contract arrangements public servants have been required to become adept at understanding quality and regulating providers against defined standards.

Despite the fact that the regulator role is not a new one, many of those we spoke to felt that public services were not, in general, always as effective in this role as they might be or need to be.

"I do think this is one of the hardest things for public servants, how do you... get the performance and outcomes and accountabilities, that is what you were aiming for through contracting, purchasing, commissioning-type process, and how do you get a market that's mature enough to know what it has to do?" (21cps18).

Often those we spoke to perceived that the private sector might be more adept at this role than the public sector.

"I think that sort of thing is also in our work there's increasingly, you know, in

the kind of financial constraints that we're facing, there's a real need for people to have a kind of a commercial or business edge... we need some management... financial management and some kind of harder edged skills that don't come just if you've grown up in the service delivery part" (21cps17).

Interviewees spoke about the importance of developing more 'commercial skills' so that they might undertake this role more effectively. This involves much more than simply the ability to make a profit, but relates again to the ability to plan and think strategically and make sure that any decisions that are taken are done so in line with a thought to the efficiency and effectiveness of their impact and implications for intended and unintended consequences.

The final debate to mention in relation to this role is that of the need for core competencies and capabilities. There is a key question concerning which functions government is unable to outsource and should it retain capacity within so it is able to operate effectively as a regulator. As one interviewee explained,

"I worry about government losing the ability to be a smart purchaser, by not having the capability to do this" (21cps5).

In order to be an effective regulator there will be aspects of skills that the public service will need to retain. This will vary across service areas and will need to be carefully planned for in different parts of the public service.

5.2.3 ENGAGER

The Engager and Reticulist roles share some similar characteristics to the extent that both involve collaboration and working across boundaries at their core. Yet we have separated these into distinct roles; the first role principally focusing on the community and broader population and the second more at the level of the public service system. Given that many people talked about the importance of engaging with the community in tackling many of the difficult challenges that public services face, this role is principally concerned with this task.

Although engagement has always been an important component of the public servant's

role those we spoke to suggested it will become even more important to the 21st century public servant and will also become more of "true" engagement role. As we spoke about in an earlier section, public services are under increasing pressure from the broader population as citizen expectations about services increase. As we will talk about more in relation to the curator role, often individuals told us that they became public servants because they wanted to make a difference to the broader community and were motivated by a desire to improve and shape the broader public good. Yet, a remarkably small proportion of the overall interview transcripts discuss engaging with the community. This isn't to say that community engagement was not recognised as an important role. As one interviewee descried,

"there are cases where public servants are finding themselves being much more the face of government than was...has historically been the case" (21cps15).

Yet, the public servants that we spoke to were often far more exercised about their relationship with the political executive and a whole range of different individuals and agencies within the public service sphere, than the general population.

Engagement with the community was seen as important not simply to ensure that policies are informed by the preferences and desires of the general population, but also to ensure that they are afforded political support. As one interviewee explained, only by engaging the population in discussions about the winners and losers of particular policy initiatives can we ensure that an agenda is seen as important in the broader population and enable bi-partisan support of this:

"There's ways of going about making those choices that will indent a consensus within a very large range of people and there's ways...of doing it that won't. And that end up making the thing a political football and ultimately unsustainable. So... not only do you get bad policy, badly designed, but you get uncertain policy easily knocked off" (21cps25).

Engagement is therefore seen to be crucial in terms of the development of good policy

that will stand the test of time and mean that the policy agenda will not shift as soon as the political executive changes.

“Engagement is really the only secret... is the only way you can give good policy that’s durable. And...means that you’ve got to be frank and fearless to your stakeholders. You’ve got to be frank and fearless to your community. You can’t just be frank and fearless behind closed doors, under cabinet confidentiality to your Minister. I don’t think that’s good enough anymore” (21cps25).

Thus the role of the engager is a crucial one which may play an important role in affording political support to initiatives.

5.2.4 RETICULIST

The role of the reticulist focuses not primarily on the relationship with the community and general population, as the engager role does, but on the development and use of networking skills to identify new sources of expertise and support and/or to bring together agents who together can achieve desired outcomes. This role has become increasingly important in recent years given the gradual disaggregation of public services and the rise of wicked and complex policy issues. The industrial models of public services of the past will no longer satisfy the aims of the 21st century public service.

As one interviewee explained,

“when you come in in the morning to your department, you take off your civilian clothes and you put on your dust jacket, and you assume the personality of my program, my department, my division or whatever area it is, but the real world does operate much more collaboratively—when people need something they sort of create networks. So it’s almost like ‘don’t put on your dust jacket, as much as...continue to be a citizen when you come in to be a public servant—yes you understand what it is to be a public servant—but understand that the world is all about networks and whatever flows from that, rather than just about silos. Because silos give you a lots of comfort, but that’s why... and in some cases silos are really, really important, but it’s not how the world

operates” (21cps2).

In the future the ability to build and develop networks will become even more critical to public services.

“The core skill there is the ability to understand and build coalitions and alliances and actually get people working together in partnerships. Now, I mean, I could argue, like I just said, that it’ll be helpful to have that direct experience, but it’s not essential. Your core capabilities are about building relationships and actually figuring out what people are about... getting them to work together, and so on, are really the core of it”(21cps10).

This role involves thinking about the skills, capacities and capabilities of others beyond your own specific organisational setting. Whilst there has been a huge amount of political rhetoric around the need for more ‘joined-up’ government over the past twenty years or so, in practice many believe that this has not impacted on the actual practice of public services in a wholesale way. As one interviewee explained,

“This is what they do: they work in the [name] department. And so, when you get out, and you say, well, have you talked to Victoria Police, or do you know what Australia Post are doing, it wouldn’t have even crossed their minds to even think about it. The sort of work we do ...and that thing about being very insular and very unique, and no one does the work we do...are you sure? There are maybe other people who are doing something similar” (21cps19).

The role of the reticulist concerns understanding the different activities and interests of a range of different individuals and groups and working across a range of different boundaries in order to leverage these. This will involve different sorts of behaviours to those which have gone before;

“There’s definitely a skill and a capability and something that needs to be understood about how you collaborate work with others and how you influence rather than direct because it’s often very ambiguous as to who has the lead on an issue, but there’s a lot of interest in it across government” (21cps11).

5.3 NEW ROLES

Having set out the existing roles and talked about these in some detail, we now move on to define four new roles which we argue will become central to 21st century public services. As we have previously noted, elements of these roles already presently exist within the public service system, but we argue will become increasingly important to the extent that organisations will need to engage in some clear and systematic thinking about how these roles are served. The roles we consider here are those of the commissioner, curator, foresighter and storyteller.

5.3.1 COMMISSIONER

There has been a tendency towards the externalisation and outsourcing of public services in recent years and this trend looks likely to continue into the future with the current Federal government placing great emphasis on the importance of contestability of government services and functions (Commonwealth of Australia, 2014).

Many of those we spoke to recognised that

“the public sector is increasingly getting out of delivery” (21cps18)

which represents a significant change to the role of public servants given the numbers who are involved in direct service delivery roles at present. Rather than being direct deliverers, public servants will instead be

“brokers and facilitators...in many cases” (21cps14).

In recent years the term commissioning has started to enter the Australian public service lexicon and many we spoke to saw a key future role for public servants in commissioning. As one interviewee explained, we

“are also looking increasingly to how we work with the community sector in the delivery of our services so it becomes about the buzz word of the moment “commissioning” but working to purchase the outcomes that we want and having, you know, the appropriate skills to do that, a different skill set to delivering it yourself.” (21cps7).

Whilst commissioning is becoming an increasingly important term, many of those we spoke to expressed concerns that they were not clear what this meant or the sorts of skills that would be needed to make this work. As one interviewee explained,

“so, I’d grapple with this myself about the difference between commissioning and tendering, or just purchasing, and is commissioning just competitive tendering? How do you commission for outcomes? And then when you have, how do you hold people accountable? Are you commissioning in a way that, like we can, at the end of a contract, recommission the transport system and have new providers come in, you know” (21cps18).

If we conceive of commissioning purely as a process of competitive tendering then this has implications for how commissioners might work with providers old and new.

In a system of competitive tendering it may be perceived that commissioners should not have a role in direct and active market management lest they negate formal processes of procurement and tendering. However, a broader definition of commissioning would see a definite role in this process and not see this as a way of breaching procurement regulations.

Although there is some confusion about this role at present, many of the future roles for the public service fit within a broad definition of commissioning which involve more than simply outsourcing or contracting out elements of services. As one interviewee explained, commissioning is about more than just contracting and is about

“how do we get optimal outcomes for the citizens? How would we design the system? How would you configure that?” (21cps16)

At present this role was described as something that the public service is not good at

“because at the moment, our default position is, we’ve got a policy, create a program, deliver it” (21cps16).

The role of the commissioner is complex and involves the ‘full set of activities from needs assessment to service delivery and evaluation’ (Dickinson, 2014: pg. 15).

BOX 4: COMPETENCIES OF HEALTH CARE COMMISSIONERS

The English health care system has experimented with a commissioning approach for around twenty years now over various different successions of reform. In a study of high performing commissioning, Woodin and Wade (2007) argue there are at least fourteen core competencies that commissioning organisations need to pay attention to. Each of these different core competencies is broken down into a series of different domains. The competencies outlined are: prioritisation and decision making; engaging the population in their own health; quantifying, costing and structuring demand; ensuring services are clinically effective and high quality; securing services at the optimum cost; stakeholder engagement; strategy and planning; collaboration and partnership; information and knowledge management; innovation and best practice; governance, compliance and accountability; project and process management; leadership; and, culture, attitudes and behaviour. Some of these competencies will be specific to the context of health and to an English setting of course, although many will be more widely applicable to the role of commissioning. As this set of competencies illustrate, commissioning involves more than just simply the ability to contract and to think in a commercial way and encompasses a whole set of different activities and abilities.

It involves having a clear sense of what the system is aiming to achieve in terms of outcomes and ensuring that the system operates effectively in achieving this. It involves working with a range of different stakeholders and being able to achieve complex process of market and demand management. This task becomes even more challenging in a context where the public sector might have a smaller role in the delivery of public services. In Box 4 we set out a set of core competencies for health care commissioners that were developed in an English setting.

5.3.2 CURATOR

The role of the curator speaks to a number of the different issues relating to values, culture and institutional memory that individuals spoke about during the course of our interviews. This word is derived from the Latin *curare* which means to take care and is traditionally applied to those who work in some sort of cultural heritage institution such as a museum or library. In this sense a curator is a manager or overseer of some form of cultural heritage and the role involves keeping and interpreting this for a broader audience. In recent years this term has started to be used in relation to things like music, fashion and the digital context where it tends refer to someone who chooses items for others to enjoy from a large selection of possibilities. In this context it refers to a new role, but only in the sense that it is a new version of a very traditional role for public services relating to the stewardship of the system.

Stewardship has been a long important component of the practice of public servants which 'requires professional expertise, political skill, and a sophisticated understanding of what it means to be an active participant in governance' (Terry, 1995: pg. 172). This role involves using a variety of these different skills in order to ensure that those within government and beyond remain committed to core values and agendas. It is innately tied to the principles of democracy and ultimately stewardship is about keeping government going and a way that resembles strong rule. As Rhodes (2014) argues, in recent years the idea of stewardship has fallen out of favour in the mainstream literature, with its focus on more 'scientific' practices of management. We argue here that the role of the curator will be the future incarnation of the notion of stewardship.

Many of those we spoke to talked about future public servants as curators to the extent that they will oversee issues relating to the public good. As we spoke about in Section 3, public servants were seen as distinctive in the sense that they are seen as custodians of the public good. Many of those we spoke to saw a primary role for public servants in negotiating the kinds of values that government should principally concern itself with creating. As one interviewee explained,

"so thinking of our community almost as shareholders, and our role as delivering those shareholders in, in measurably improving values" (21cps21).

Yet this role stretches beyond simply the public service having a role in creating public value, but also having institutional memory in terms of previous initiatives and reform endeavours.

“I see the public service as capital. It’s capital that the body politic, the society, whatever you want to call it, has built up, over decades. And it’s also the corporate memory of society. When disasters happen, when bushfires happen, when crises happen, it’s the public service, mostly, who’s supposed to remember, and find out, figure out...the same thing happened 6 decades ago, what we did. So, the loss of that capability, I think is really criminal. In terms of chucking capital away” (21cps10).

As we have previously described, many of those we spoke to expressed concern that skilled and experienced individuals had left the public service in recent years. The loss of these individuals was seen as negative not simply because they were highly skilled individuals, but because they carried with them institutional memory. This is not simply a bureaucratic memory of the architecture of public services but is also reflective of the values of broader society.

This role involves some tough balancing of the memory of the organisation, how to operate the system and the values that have been important at different times, alongside bringing in fresh perspectives to the system. If we think back to the sector that has been most associated with the curator term traditionally – museums – in recent years strides have been made to incorporate new technologies and digital design principles within exhibitions in a sympathetic but helpful manner. This is the manner of challenge that the curator role is likely to face. One individual explained this as follows;

“I think you do need to have some continuity in terms of people who make a career of working in the public sector, you know in healthy ways...the public sector used to be seen to be ...you go there and work for the rest of your life and safe job, and that’s been long gone, at least in Australia, been long gone for at least 20 years...but you do need some people who—you know, cos that’s the only way they learn the machinery of...

the public service and of government, particularly if they move from role to role across the departments over time. But what complements that will have to be people who come in, and they may not be there forever but people coming with a range, a mix of other skills. So I think the vibrancy of a public sector, you need the long-termers who got the, you know, the history and the continuity, but you need to have variety of views and opinions as well” (21cps3).

5.3.3 FORESIGHTER

One of the major criticisms that many of those we spoke to made of in relation to public services is that typically they are lacking in terms of strategic thinking and horizon scanning abilities. Yet, in a rapidly shifting context, many we spoke to argued that this is a crucial role for future public services. The foresighter role involves applying vision and imagination to strategic thinking and anticipating future shifts in the operating environment.

“That kind of long range, strategic planning, I think is essential in public service because political appetite for reform is often quite opportunistic. Forces combined at such a point where an answer is needed. If the answer has to be cobbled together, on the run, then and there, it’s often unsatisfactory. If the answer...or the need for an answer has been anticipated...you’re much more likely to get good policy. But this is where good planning intersects with the realities of politics. Things open up, you’ve got to be ready to advise on those. So I’d just say good strategic planning...is an essence of public service and I don’t think we do that nearly well enough” (21cps25).

This role is about envisaging a future notion of public services but then also working to translate this into carefully considered and costed policy endeavours. It is about anticipating the future but also then having the skill to think through the different steps that will be involved in bringing this about.

The ability to fulfil this role involves more than simply just the skill to be able to think in a strategic manner, but also relates to an organisational willingness to devote time and space to this activity and to allow people to think in quite different ways.

“I do think there is a profoundly important piece, for public servants to use vision and imagination, and think about how the world could be. Now, that comes to a pretty complex, institutional question of what permission you’re given, to think about, how the world could be. What the right forums are, internally, in a department, to allow you to think in that kind of way. And how risk is treated, in a department. How much backing you’re given, to try different things out, and most importantly, how much you’re backed, if things don’t quite work.

So, around the theme of vision and imagination, I think public servants will need to think about the world being quite different. If you work back from that, what kind of capabilities do you need, and what sort of support do you need, to think in that way? You need a bit of license, but you also need a bit of space, and you need a bit of support” (21cps14).

Many of those we spoke to talked about the rise and fall of strategy units in recent years as we have seen a retreat away from those which were created about a decade or so ago. Now that these units no longer exist in the main this raises a question about who should do this work. Many felt that this should be a fundamental component of the activities of all public servants, rather than simply residing in one unit. As one interviewee explained,

“I think the difficulty is taking that strategic thinking or y’know foresighting, scanning type thing in saying “..This ought to be a normal part of your work”, and I think that is one of the other challenges because the assumption is we will all read the though provoking pieces from academia, from opinion makers, from comparative studies and try and see where we can apply that to our work. The reality is probably most people who want to do it probably don’t have time to do it so we aren’t actually developing idea of looking across what’s coming y’know what are the kinds of things that might be useful to us” (21cps12).

5.3.4 STORYTELLER

The final role that we cover in this section is that of the storyteller. This links to that of the foresighter in the sense that it involves authoring stories of how new worlds of public services might be envisioned, but also goes beyond this to communicating these to a variety of different audiences. It is about the ability to fashion and communicate options for the future, however tentative and experimental and is crucial to engaging consumers, citizens and staff in redesign projects. As one interviewee suggested, you change things by

“both doing the compelling analysis and then tell that story in a compelling way” (21cps8).

It is not simply enough to be able to do the analysis, but getting buy in and engagement will come from an ability to communicate this in such a way that it draws in a variety of different stakeholders. This was vividly described by one respondent,

“You actually have to set out what the problem is, what the options are, and then gravitate towards an answer by taking people with you. At the end of which you’ll end up with something which is being done in a more orderly way by the time you make the decision you’ll have buy in. And it’s a decision by decision thing. There are communities of interest that really, you know, cos there needs to be an overall government strategy, but even overall government strategies lend themselves in a sophisticated democracy to that kind of practise” (21cps25).

Another interviewee was at pains to point out that not only do stories need to be compelling and engaging but they also need to be consistent. This was viewed as being particularly important in the context of working collaboratively.

“On one hand, partnership, co-design; or on another hand, a whole lot of organisations losing contracts. People being very nervous on the ground, from a client perspective, thinking well what’s going to happen to me? And there’re mixed messages going out at the same time” (21cps23).

The storytelling role involves the ability to construct a coherent narrative and then to be able to communicate this across a number of different platforms and media in an appropriate way to an array of different groups. The idea of storytelling traditionally has particular links with fiction in terms of literature and we are not suggesting here that what we need are fictional or fantasy accounts of some version of reality. What we are saying is that public services need to communicate the reasons for change and reform, the ways in which this will be done and why to a variety of different audiences in a way that is meaningful for them. This is an idea that is starting to get traction in the broader public policy and management literatures in recent years (e.g. Bevir and Rhodes, 2006).



6.0 What skills and capabilities will we require of the future public service workforce?

IN THIS SECTION WE CONSIDER THE SORTS OF SKILLS AND CAPABILITIES THAT THE FUTURE PUBLIC SERVICE WORKFORCE WILL NEED TO DELIVER THE ROLES SET OUT IN THE PREVIOUS SECTION.

In setting out these skills we are not saying that the stock skills of the traditional public service are no longer relevant. Indeed, as one interviewee explained,

“I think the dilemma is you still need the core skills...I’m not saying that you throw away 20th-century industrial skills. We have to take those as a given now, and not take those as the rock bed, if you like, of our L&D” (21cps6).

As this interviewee illustrates, many of these skills are in addition to those which we have traditionally valued in the public service. In this section we have attempted to develop a framework that does justice to both forms of skills.

It is important to note that the skills and capabilities need to be considered in the context of the broad workforce and how we strategically plan for this mix of skills and abilities across this.

In the Melbourne School of Government and the Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet discussion paper on the 21st century public servant (2013), future skills were set out in relation to three domains: design, delivery and relationships (Figure 1). It goes on to note that not all public servants will need to be equally skills across all domains, but all should have some understanding of each area, and the public service as a whole needs to ensure that it has capacity across all of the three domains.

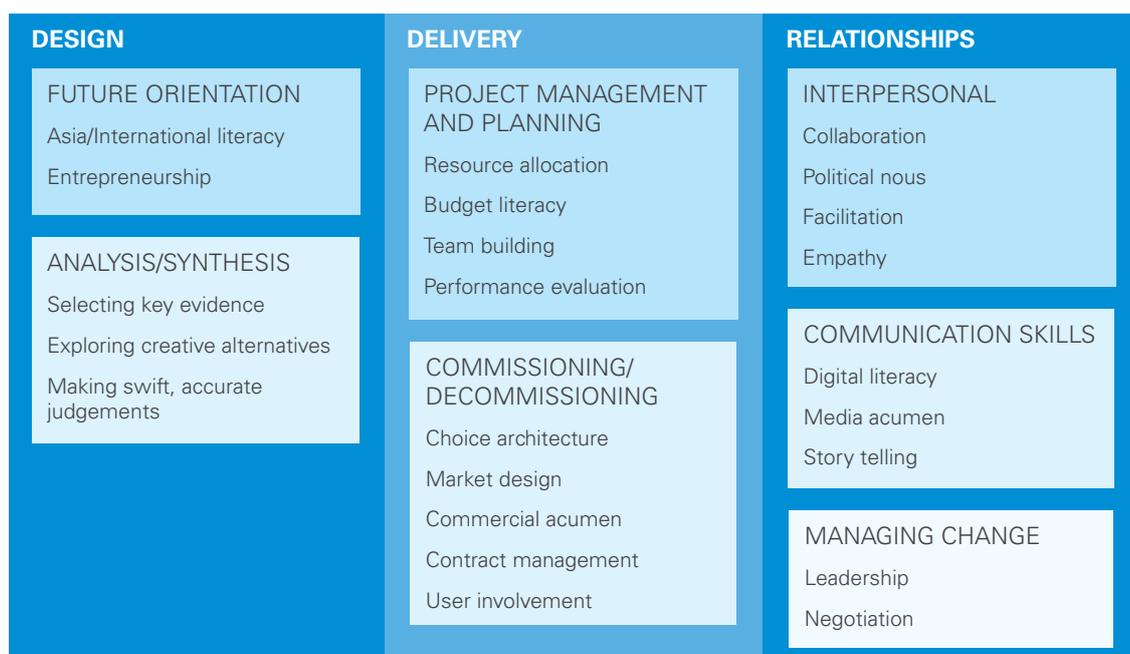


Figure 1: Future skills: design, delivery and relationships (Melbourne School of Government and Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2013: pg. 9)

Although many of these skills were reaffirmed through this process of research we have found that these three categories do not accommodate the full array of skills needed for the future public servant workforce. We have looked to the broader literature instead to help us develop a new skills framework.

About sixty years ago now Katz initially wrote about the sorts of skills necessary for successful performance in managerial roles. This work has been extensively used and a number of subsequent authors have added to and expanded these as the nature of work has developed over time (e.g. Peterson and Van Fleet, 2004). In his initial work, Katz (1955) identified three categories; Technical, Human and Conceptual. Later work has kept these categories but expanded the number of skills associated with each of these areas. Peterson and Van Fleet (2004), for example, identify three skills in each of these categories and argue that the skill of administration is an additional 'integrator' skill for the other groups (pg. 1303). In Katz's original work he argued that the different categories of skills mapped on to different levels of the organisation. Front-line workers needed to possess Technical skills, middle managers Human skills and senior leaders Conceptual skills. In a traditional organisational hierarchy, workforce entrants might start out in front-line roles and work their way up the organisation so that they develop elements of all of these skills.

From our work we have extended this list of skills to fourteen, arguing that some dimensions of public service management are more complex than the more commercial setting in which the work of Katz and others is based. We have kept the grouping of Technical, Human and Conceptual skills that Katz and others use and have added additional skills to the Technical (Professional, Commercial), Human (People Management, International Literacy, Co-Production and Collaboration) and Conceptual (Design) categories. Rather than arguing that Administration is an integrator of all of the other categories, as Peterson and Van Fleet (2004) do, we have included this in the Technical category as a fundamental skill that all levels of the organisation should be versed in. Table 1 sets out an overview of these skills. It is important to note that we are not suggesting that *every* public servant will need to have all of these skills. These are the kinds of skills that the public service more broadly will require and as indicated above, different levels of the organisation will require different numbers of these skills.



TABLE 1: THE SKILLS OF THE 21ST CENTURY PUBLIC SERVICE

| SKILL GROUP | SKILL TYPE | DEFINITION |
|---|-------------------------------|---|
| Technical: ability to use methods, procedures, processes, tools, techniques, and specialized knowledge to perform specific tasks. | ANALYTIC | Ability to identify key variables, see how they are interrelated, and decide which ones should receive the most attention. |
| | DECISION MAKING | Ability to choose effective solutions from among alternatives whilst balancing a range of competing values. |
| | ADMINISTRATIVE | Ability to follow policies and procedures, process paper work in an orderly manner, and manage expenditure within limits set by budgets. |
| | PROFESSIONAL | Ability to apply specialized knowledge and exercise judgement to perform specific tasks. |
| | COMMERCIAL | Ability to understand markets and how to create, manage and support them in the context of public service delivery |
| Human: ability to work cooperatively with others, to communicate effectively, to motivate and train others, to resolve conflicts, and to be a team player. | COMMUNICATION | Ability to send and receive information, thoughts, and feelings, which create common understanding and meaning. Ability to construct narratives and communicate this through an array of different media. |
| | INTERPERSONAL | Ability to develop and maintain a trusting and open relationship with superiors, subordinates and peers to facilitate the free exchange of information and provide a productive work setting. |
| | PEOPLE MANAGEMENT | Ability to motivate and manage staff resources in alignment with organisational goals |
| | INTERNATIONAL LITERACY | Ability to situate self in global context and develop knowledge, attitude and relationships to function effectively |
| | COLLABORATION | Ability to work productively with internal colleagues and external organisations to generate outcomes that could not be achieved otherwise |
| | CO-PRODUCTION | Ability to engage with a variety of different communities in order to design and deliver public services in an equal and reciprocal relationship. |
| Conceptual: ability to see the organisation as a whole and solve problems from a systematic point of view. An important part of this skill involves not simply reacting to issues that are important now but working proactively to anticipate the kinds of issues that will be important in the future. | DIAGNOSTIC | Ability to determine the probable cause of a problem from examining a set of symptoms. This involved the ability to think about complex issues and situations and to pick out the kinds of factors that might alleviate this. |
| | FLEXIBLE | Ability to deal with ambiguous and complex situations and rapidly changing demands. Ability to manage change and respond to shifts in a range of factors including the political executive. |
| | DESIGN | Ability to develop complex systems and processes to deliver public services. This will be done by employing a range of different techniques from engagement of a range of different stakeholder groups to harnessing digital technologies and principles of design. |

Adapted and extended from (Peterson and Van Fleet, 2004: pg. 1303).

In Figure 2 we illustrate how the two frameworks we have used can be combined to include the key skills we identify as being central to the effective performance of the future public service. We illustrate where items in Figure 1 have been accommodated in different elements of Table 1.

MSoG is leading research into these international literacies with a specific focus on those that will contribute to building an 'Asia capable' Australian public service. The project led by Dr Sara Bice (MSoG) brings together expertise in government, public policy, education and performance to articulate the crucial features of an 'Asia capability' for Australia's public service, and to provide performance indicators to support future benchmarking of current 'Asia capability' in the public service and allow for measurement of performance improvement against core capabilities over time.

This project is due to report later in 2014 but early findings suggest that a capability framework should embrace:

- Knowledge – of specific countries and their legal, economic and cultural underpinnings.
- Skills – generic skills in communication, negotiation and relationship building.
- Networks – a facility for developing deep networks within a policy or service area
- Attitude – flexible, appreciative of diversity, respectful and discerning.
- Commitment – to patient relationship building over time.
- Experience – international outlook and experience overseas.

Some of the skills we set out in Table 1 (e.g. Professional, Communication, Interpersonal) we have already spoken about during the course of this report and so will not repeat in detail. In the previous section we spent some time thinking about the distinction between generalist and specialist and the importance of the ability to analyse data and being able to make decisions so we will not rehearse these again here. Instead we talk about two aspects in each of the categories of human and conceptual skills.

| | TECHNICAL | HUMAN | CONCEPTUAL |
|---------------|--|---|--|
| DESIGN | Analytic (incl. planning) Decision making | Communication Co-production | Diagnostic (incl. analysis/ synthesis Design (incl. parts of commissioning) |
| DELIVERY | Administrative (incl. project management) Professional Commercial (incl. parts of commissioning) | People management (incl. managing change) Collaboration | |
| RELATIONSHIPS | | Interpersonal International literacy | Flexible |

Figure 2: Skills frameworks for the future public service combined

6.1 HUMAN SKILLS

There are two aspects of the category of Human skills that we reflect on here and these relate to managing people and international literacies.

6.1.1 MANAGING PEOPLE

A strong theme of the interviews related to the importance of managing people in an effective way. Yet, many of those we interviewed were concerned about a wholesale lack of good management skills across the public sector.

“I think people management is patchy everywhere...Everybody should just have a proper performance plan and have clarity about their job and are meeting with their manager and feel part of a group and so on. But then that’s just basic. Unfortunately that doesn’t...in all sorts of work places not everybody gets that” (21cps17).

Whilst many were able to identify individuals who are excellent at managing people, often people also identified individuals who were lacking in this respect. Where people were good at managing others it was often suggested that this was despite the system, rather than because of it. As one interviewee explained this was due to management skills not being valued, and a process of

“Appointing people with no management skill requirements. Being technically very good but people not. And I see that time and time again of people being appointed” (21cps7).

People management was a skill highlighted as being in need of some attention if we are to make the most of the public service workforce. This involved being,

“very clear about your expectations of people. So, I have a few people in my new team who haven’t got current position descriptions...they don’t have current performance plans...You manage your other assets pretty carefully. People assets...you’ve got to be pretty strategic about it, and you’d get phenomenal results with people who you put on the right program, or get to work with the right person, or give them some different experience” (21cs18).

The ability to performance manage individuals and teams was also highlighted as an area that people management skills are often lacking in the public service.

It was often described that performance management systems in the public sector are fundamentally about “compliance” (21cps21) and involve “tick box exercises” (21cps15) rather than getting the best out of individuals. Performance management systems were explained to have been designed and operated around dealing with underperformance, rather than the alignment of individual performance with the organisation. The irony of this system was described as being equally unable to deal with underperformance as it is to support high performance. All too often performance tends to be aligned with individual roles or projects and not necessarily with the aims of the broader organisation.

One interviewee explained these issues at length;

“we’ve done a fair bit of work in the performance management stage across the system over the last couple of years and...our data shows us a couple of things. One is that everybody’s performance management policies are well risk factors...tick every box. Beautiful, you know, multi-colour, all the right words, right?...You...kind of go in and there is a continuum and for some people, performance management is a compliance exercise...And it’s about colouring the room, ticking the box and get out of here and you’ve taken five minutes. God almighty, that’s four and a half minutes too much. For other people, it’s actually what they do, right? They have...they’re engaged in a continuous process of providing, you know, feedback, inspiration, ideas to their people and they may well discover that when they have the annual performance feedback conversation it takes five minutes. And that’s because they’ve been having it every day for the last 364, right?... performance management is principally about alignment...it’s not fundamentally about managing underperformance.

It's fundamentally about alignment. So it's fundamentally about identifying what the highest priorities are, insuring that those priorities are continuously communicated, particularly as they change and, you know, in our world, we're going through pretty major change at the moment.

So that effort within the organisation is continually aligned with what those changing priorities need to be and therefore you maximise the effectiveness of the organisation, given the resourcing ailment that you've got" (21cps15).

Other respondents echoed these observations and argued that more attention needs to be paid to issues relating to people management and how individuals are performance managed if we are to get the most of the public service workforce. Box 5 sets out an overview of the recent findings of work into performance management conducted by the APS.

6.1.2 INTERNATIONAL LITERACIES

This aspect of skill might fit easily into both the conceptual and human categories and like many of the issues discussed here spans across a number of different categories in practice. In recent years there has been a significant focus on the international arena at all levels of government. This issue has a number of different facets to it with the international having implications in terms of: the markets that Australia might operate within; the diversity of the population; and, seeing issues from a range of different perspectives. As one interviewee described,

"global literacy, Asian literacy, that kind of commercial, global outlook, I think that's going to be increasingly important. Not just at a national level now, but with global economic development, sub-state actors. And social exchange as well, particularly economic...Cross-cultural literacy. And it's kind of stuff that I can talk about, but I know that at some level, I don't have it either...there's cultural literacy, at least how to pick up on a few cultural clues, even if you're dealing in that globalised business culture" (21cps10).

BOX 5: APS PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT PROJECT

The Australian Public Service *Strengthening the Performance Framework* project brought together findings of a review of the existing literature; data from the *State of the Service Report (SoSR) 2011-12*; agency consultations and research undertaken in seven APS agencies; and cross-case comparisons to generate a High Performance Framework for the APS. The Framework comprises four Principles and three Foundation elements. The four principles are: purpose and clarity; alignment and integration; mutuality and motivation; and, adaptability and progress. The foundational elements include: capabilities; evidence and data; and, pragmatism. The High Performance Framework is based on the notion that, to enable high performance, there needs to be a renewed emphasis on performance management as a core activity that is embedded in all management functions. To be meaningful and effective, performance management needs to be integrated with other management and human resource practice in order to develop an integrated system of high performance. This would start with job design and flow through to when an employee leaves that agency. The project notes that many of the mechanism already exist in agencies but their application limited. It concludes that performance management systems might be improved to support employee engagement and high performance. A Diagnostic framework has now been developed which can be used as a tool for agencies to assess their strengths and weaknesses regarding their performance management implementation.



BOX 6: MELBOURNE SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT ASIA CAPABILITIES PROGRAMME

MSoG is leading research into these international literacies with a specific focus on those that will contribute to building an 'Asia capable' Australian public service. The project led by Dr Sara Bice (MSoG) brings together expertise in government, public policy, education and performance to articulate the crucial features of an 'Asia capability' for Australia's public service, and to provide performance indicators to support future benchmarking of current 'Asia capability' in the public service and allow for measurement of performance improvement against core capabilities over time. This project is due to report later in 2014 but early findings suggest that a capability framework should embrace:

- Knowledge – of specific countries and their legal, economic and cultural underpinnings.
- Skills – generic skills in communication, negotiation and relationship building.
- Networks – a facility for developing deep networks within a policy or service area.
- Attitude – flexible, appreciative of diversity, respectful and discerning.
- Commitment – to patient relationship building over time.
- Experience – international outlook and experience overseas.

Another respondent echoed this explaining,

"we've had the various debates about, you know, the Asian century or the China century...But increasingly our outlook has to be global and we'd define global historically in kind of Atlantic-centric ways. You know, either Europe or the US. And now global is actually global. And there is...there's a whole bunch of things around cultural competence and understanding that I suspect are going to be increasingly important to us.

Now the point here is that we live in a multicultural society. If we're going to effectively understand that society and kind of serve it effectively, you know, we need, well, a preferably diverse workforce...if it doesn't exactly mirror then at least, as a sufficient capacity to mirror the community that it's...to properly understand it. But that means we've got a degree of cultural competencies within our workplace where we can deal with difference. Which then supports the...our capacity to outreach in that... in that global sense.

So I think that there's, I mean, historically we've probably seen some of this stuff around, you know, being culturally aware and competent in respect to Indigenous Australians, whether they're in the workforce or whether they're...whether they're in the client group. But, I mean, this... this notion of cultural competence

is actually broader than that and it... and it embeds awareness and cultural competence in respective Indigenous people within that broader set of skills. And I think that we're going to have to get better at that a because we'll have better work places as a consequence and it'll probably be much better at doing the customer interface bits and probably understanding the...community.

But see I think we'll also maximise our effectiveness in the world...it being able to learn from and contribute to those...some of those big global issues." (21cps15)

This last quote illustrates some of the difficulties that individuals had in describing what international literacies would look like and what they would consist of.

Although many we interviewed argued that these skills were necessary, few were able to effectively define what these might look like and consist of.

In part it is likely that this is because being have international literacy is more than just simply having a diverse workforce or a number of individuals who are culturally competent in relation to a few geographical areas; it is about a broader culture of the organisation and worldview. Box 6 sets out an overview of a project which is currently exploring the issue of international literacies, with a focus specifically on Asia.

6.2 CONCEPTUAL SKILLS

In relation to the conceptual skill category we will talk about two specific areas: co-production and design - digital literacy.

6.2.1 CO-PRODUCTION

Co-production is a skill that many highlighted as being absolutely crucial in terms of the 21st century public servant. This involves engaging with the communities that government serves in order to better design and deliver public services in a relationship that is more equal and reciprocal. This involves moving away from traditional paternalistic models of service delivery towards one where the consumer has more control.

This will not only produce services which are more relevant to those who use them, but increase the likelihood that there will be mutual obligations in the delivery of services.

As one interviewee explained,

“I actually think that the public servant of the future... the more they can understand the forces that shape community aspirations and bring those aspirations to bear on what governments do, the more they can get out there and talk to them on their terms, understand them, inform them, you know, just engage with them without sacrificing the— how do you put it?—the neutral or the unconflicted position that public service has as a cultural strength.

But nonetheless to engage more actively with these stakeholders and communities of interest in... broader society to both shape and influence... thinking about good policy is. I think the more they do that, the more likely they are to be effective. I think that bureaucracy is essentially sitting a little aloof from the community to protect its confidentiality and to be a trusted advisor of political process alone, is an increasing ineffective place for bureaucracy to be” (21cps25).

This is not always an easy process as a number of public services are being delivered to people who may not necessarily want these,

“because we actually provide services sometimes when people don’t want them. So sometimes, you know, we’re serving citizens by keeping older children safe, but the people who are actually taking the children away don’t feel so much like we’re serving them...but there’s increasing... you know, policy work and policy direction that we’re going in terms of increasing individualized support. So trying to get away from a program based approach to an individual approach and having the client have a voice in that... it’s quite a big change” (21cps17).

As another interviewee highlighted, co-production takes time and investment to achieve

“co-design and collaboration is really expensive, in time and money...if you’re looking at significant change, it takes time for the change to occur” (21cps23).

It is therefore not simply a matter of developing this skill but also resourcing professionals in such a way that they may be able to use this.



6.2.2 DESIGN – DIGITAL LITERACIES

Design is another skill that was seen as crucial to public servants by many that we spoke to. Interviewees argued that it is imperative that we think about what we are trying to deliver in terms of public services and then the most appropriate means to do this through. Within this context, digital technologies were highlighted as a crucial tool but one, which as we have previously suggested, is underused in the context of public services. As one interviewee explained,

“public services are very bad on the use of technology...and maybe that will just happen over time as people become more used to the sort of technological, the various tools that are available, but that aspect and how it impacts on your job, and how you can actually use it, use it as a way of extending what it is you do...we do that very, very badly. I don't know whether it's done better elsewhere, but you always get the sense that we're always a decade behind” (21cps2).

Whilst public services have embraced some aspects of new technologies, some interviewees felt that it had not been done in a complete way and may, at times, appear a little tokenistic or peripheral to the organisation.

“I think it's very easy to say “oh we'll just have people doing twitter feeds” but it's just kind of like really lame attempt to communicate with people [laughs] it comes across very much as a tokenistic lets-give-it-to-the-crowd y'know” (21cps12).

The use of new forms of technologies and digital media were described as being on the edges of organisations to automate or enhance traditional processes or functions. This is different to designing systems with principles and ideas or digital technology at their core.

“We need to bring people with that frame of reference into the discussions within government about policies that are developing and reforms to, you know, models of service, etcetera. Because, otherwise, what you'll end

BOX 7 UK GOVERNMENT'S APPROACH TO DIGITAL SERVICES AND DESIGN

In 2011 the UK Government's Cabinet Office established the Government Digital Service which is tasked with transforming the provision of government digital services. The core purpose of this team is to ensure the government offers world-class digital products that meet people's needs. This involves three core areas of work: transforming 25 high volume key exemplars from across government into digital services; building and maintaining the consolidated GOV.UK website which brings together a range of government services in one place; and, change the way that government procures IT services. A number of those we interviewed cited this as an example of best practice of government basing reform on 'digital-first' principles.

up with is essentially analogue thinking being somehow either automated or digitised rather than really unleashing the creative potential of some of these new technologies... it's not just about training people to have new technical skills.

This is about new ways of thinking where you actually require people who are... I mean, I don't like the jargon, but digital natives to be kind of in organisations helping them to think differently about things” (21cps20).

There is a key question concerning how public service organisations will be able to develop the skills to design services differently and how they will be able to support individuals with these sorts of design skills to embed change within organisations. Box 7 includes an example of the UK Government's approach to digital services and design.

7.0 Recruiting and developing the 21st century public servant

AS WE HAVE ARGUED THAT THE ROLES AND SKILLS OF FUTURE PUBLIC SERVANTS MIGHT LOOK QUITE DIFFERENT TO THOSE AT PRESENT WE SPENT SOME TIME IN INTERVIEWS DISCUSSING WHAT THE IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION, TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT MIGHT BE AND HOW RECRUITMENT PRACTICES MIGHT NEED TO CHANGE.

It bears repeating here that although what occupied many of the interviews were issues relating to the changing nature of government and public services, the other major driver of the need for change relates to expectations about the nature of work. Where once we could establish a certain degree of stability within the public service because individuals expected to stay within the same organisation for a significant period of time and arguably this is not the case now and will become even less so in the future. As one individual described

“when I first started in the public service it...it was full of people who were career... who were there for life, I’m quite unusual because I’ll actually stay for life...but that’s unusual now days, certainly amongst my senior peers...generally there’s much more mobility” (21cps2).

If we have different expectations about work and expect individuals to perform different sorts of roles and have different skills to those we have had in the past then this will clearly have implications for how we go about developing, educating and recruiting public servants in the future. Further, with a dramatic growth in the number of external organisations who can and will offer advice, the context that this development and education will take place within will look rather different to that of the present. In this section we discuss issues relating to education and development, workforce planning, recruitment practices and attracting the next generation.

7.1 ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

On the whole individuals were very positive about the array of different opportunities that there are available for public servants. It was described that there a vast array of formal education and training opportunities that cover all manner of different learning and development opportunities. We heard about individuals who had been on a while array of different educational and training programmes from Masters courses and Executive MBAs through to shorter training courses related to a whole array of different skills and capabilities. Some interviewees, however, expressed concern that not everyone might have access to these mostly because the quality of their people management. As one individual explained,

“if you end up with a manager who cares about your development, well you’d be great. But I feel like... there’s sometimes some resentment which is probably bigger than it deserves to be around the opportunities people actually get. But it’s about the gap between...what you get promised, you know...my attitude to that stuff, to be honest, personally has always been, ‘Well if you want to do something, you ... you go find out about it and then you go to your boss and say...‘I want to do this and this is why’...and ...if you’ve got a half decent relationship with them” (21cps8).

In terms of the balance between formal education, training and on the job training, many referred to the 70-20-10 principle, where

“70% if your learning will be done working on the job...Most of what you learn is working with smart people in a structure. 20% is focussed mentoring, feedback, on-the-job coaching or specific coaching. 10% is actually formal learning” (21cps5).

However, not all felt that this principle actually underpinned the experience of every public servant and more than one commented that

“I don’t think government do that very well” (21cps5).

In practice many felt that gaps in skills and abilities tended to be filled by education and training opportunities which often take place outside of the immediate organisational context and do not always afford the opportunity to practice the particular skill or capability they are aiming to improve. As we will speak more about in the next section, the distinction was often made that education opportunities were readily available most of the time, but development opportunities through everyday work were often lacking.

Some of those we spoke to were concerned about *who* the main opportunities for development were available to. Most organisations had some sort of leadership or high fliers programme designed to identify those individuals with potential to lead future public services organisations. On the whole this was seen as sensible and an important investment, although we did hear from a few different individuals concerns that public service organisations tend to target potential leaders but not necessarily the ‘middle section’ of the organisation.

“The number of programs that targets that high percentile of people who are already very skilled and very talented and are clearly going places I suspect outweighs the stuff that targets everybody else. So why, why focus on the people who are already going places when presumably what you want to do is sort of take your middle cohort and also lift their game a bit as well so that you actually overall develop more high performing public service, y’know yes I mean it’s great to take the bright spark in the team and say

you’re going places, let’s give you this opportunity and this will fast track you to the next y’know five promotions or whatever, I think that’s still a good thing to have, but what about the person who’s right under them who’s still really bright and really talented but may not be as much or a ambitious minded person or something— I don’t know but I think we need to have better programs that focus on the people who’re still good and who are still effective and are still bright and are still above the average, and give them something too “ (21cps12).

There was a definite sense from interviews that many believed that more work needed to be done to examine which different opportunities should be made available to which levels and parts of the organisation and drive this strategically, rather than leaving this to individuals. After discussing issues relating to development and mobility we will talk about this in more detail.

7.2 MOBILITY AND DEVELOPMENT

As we have already suggested, in addition to more formal opportunities for training and education a number of individuals suggested that developmental and experiential opportunities might have more value. We have argued that a large number of the skills and abilities that public servants of the future will need are ‘softer’, they are less tangible and therefore difficult to teach in a classroom. The following quote is long but we have included it as it encapsulates the many facets of this debate:

“you can do training around knowledge and information and some parts of the skill set so, you know, structuring work, giving/receiving a feedback, you know, those kinds of things. We actually need to invest a bit more in practise so that by the time the people find themselves in the position where they need to exercise those skills... they’ve got enough of a start...that they can get on with it. Increasingly we’re talking to our people about development. Development’s not about an inoculation. It’s not about going on a course. It’s about having access to some input that kind of gives you a few clues but it’s particularly around structured reflection...unique

experimentation. And it's a continuous process effectively lifelong learning where you learn about yourself, you learn about your environment, you learn about what kind of interactions work in particular circumstances and... you're continually curious. Not just about the, you know, intellectually about the issues that you're ...dealing with—because most of us kind of are—but also about the, you know, the techniques and the...arts of leadership and your capacity to be able to, you know, kind of make a difference in your workplace and maximise the effectiveness of that...team. Now training...gives you a few clues but the thing that will develop those skills is you accepting responsibility for your own development and being prepared to be...open minded, to be inquisitive, to be prepared to experiment, most importantly, to be prepared to reflect and to learn from what you ... from your own behaviour. From both your successes and from your failures. That's a very, very different conception of the development of leadership group" (21cps15).

Many of those we spoke to felt that public services are not using all of their possible capacity in relation to developmental opportunities. Public services are incredibly broad in nature and individuals may be able to gain access to a full range of different developmental opportunities by getting experience outside of their employing organisation and yet this option is not used as widely as it might be. Some of those we spoke to called for greater use of secondment and project opportunities than currently exist at present.

"I think that it'll be a good thing for the system if there were a bit more fluidity, I suppose, to allow for people like me, to go and do 6 or 12 months at one of those places, and that was not just "Oh well, that's something that you could do..." but something that was actually encouraged, and facilitated a little more actively. The only kind of dribs and drabs I've seen with that is that some people move in and out of that world, consciously, career-wise, or there's a tiny bit of it that has gone on, almost as an experiment, with leadership development stuff. But I've seen it do very well for people" (21cps10).

Further, some individuals argued that mobility should be encouraged not only between government departments, but also between government and other organisations in the broad public service space.

"Not for profit, the private sector. The consulting house is particularly interesting, because they've got a private sector discipline over them, in terms of their budgeting and time allocation and all that kind of stuff, but they're still working, very much in the trade or the space of what we do" (21cps10).

Box 8 sets out an example of a project which aimed to offer development opportunities through mobility.

BOX 8: DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH MOBILITY

The Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet ran a programme called 'Innovation Transfer' for a number of years. This involved seconding public servants into the private and not-for-profit sectors on a specific challenge over a period of 12 weeks. Individuals essentially operated as internal consultants and were skilled in this area before they went on their secondment. Those who experienced the programme reported being able to see problems in different ways, having an insight into how government is viewed in the external world and developed useful skills which they could apply in their regular role. Some of the challenges this project faced relate to it being quite resource intensive, mostly in time rather than resources, at a time when staff cutbacks etc. were being made.



Whilst many supported the idea of greater mobility in terms of development opportunities, there were a range of challenges related to this process identified;

“what the people who are running the system have got to do is make it easy for people to move around. And at the moment it’s not. You’ve got the pay barriers cos of... the enterprise bargaining stuff. But you’ve also got a cultural assumption which says, ‘Stay close to home’. But you need some people to stay close to home to persist with the...culture of all those different organisations. But you need people who move around and... so a bit of excitement here and there. And learn things from it” (21cps4).

Many of these were seen as challenges in terms of movement between government departments and/or levels of government, but were argued to be even more significant in the context of moving from the public sector into private or not for profit roles. The biggest opposition that we heard to this idea is that people don’t tend to come back once they have taken these opportunities up.

However, one interviewee was at pains to point out that development through mobility need not be as difficult as we imagine;

“I actually don’t think mobility is anywhere as near as hard as we think it is, for those shorter term opportunities. Like, secondments and projects and those sort of things, are just not as hard as we think...I can see that full, different jobs, and coming in and out, is hard. There are definitely structural things around that, and not the least people’s personal circumstances ...that’s physically hard.

Also, there are job conditions that reward tenure, and that also means that it’s hard for people to break, in that kind of way. But, 6 months, 12 months, even, 2 years ... let’s say 6 to 12 months...just shouldn’t be that hard! A particular bug-bear of mine is, the translation between universities and the public service: just really shouldn’t be that hard! It’s not even that you’re dealing with conflict of interest issues, or a bunch of other things that people might worry about.

Now, large corporates, maybe, you might be starting that that’s a little bit trickier, but honestly, I’m not even convinced that it’s that hard, there. So I’ve long been frustrated, that, this is... actually when you examine the constraints, much more about culture and attitude, than it is about actual confines...There is still a profound insularity about the public service, that is a problem. And speaking from our side out, we don’t have anything like the degree of, understanding of different perspectives, or what it’s like, to be in different seats, that would be helpful.

And on the other side, there’s actually, a kind of...there is a bit of a mirror image in this...it’s not quite symmetric, because it is, kind of, one way flow that I was talking about, that there are people who have been in government, that do other things... the understanding government outside, is very poor. So, when I was a management consultant, I was at a top-tier firm, these are incredibly smart people, that said incredibly dumb things, about government. It was just extraordinary! The most fundamental, and basic mechanics of government, were just not understood” (21cps14).

As this quote illustrates it is important that we think through what the real challenges to mobility are and whether they do relate to practical issues or those relating more to cultural factors. New South Wales has recently made some interesting moves in this space through the Government Sector Employment Act of 2013 which has sought to remove internal barriers to mobility and also created some explicit opportunities for movement between the public sector and the other sectors.

7.3 WORKFORCE PLANNING

A number of interviewees raised the issue of who should be responsible for development and this links to a broader issue relating to workforce planning. Many felt that where previously responsibility for skill development had rested with the public service, it now falls much more to individuals to do this;

“all of the onus has been put on the individual to maintain their skill level, their qualifications and their regulation. When I was a girl... Everything was invested in you from the state. It's completely different now... So the whole responsibility, the whole onus has shifted on to the individual. The cost...it's all been shifted...so the whole regulation has set up a whole new public sector, the need for it. And the onus of maintaining your skills, training, etc. has been shifted on to the individual” (21cps1).

This raises an important debate about what skills we expect individuals to develop and what we may need to develop at an organisational level. It also raises important issues about who should be identifying training and development needs – the individual or the organisation. One interviewee echoed the thoughts of others explaining,

“Our succession planning is not good. So we're not growing our people and there are... I don't get a sense of a mandatory cadre of executives... So it is a personal choice whether you go on a leadership or management course” (21cps6).

BOX 9: NEW ZEALAND GOVERNMENT CHIEF TALENT OFFICER

The New Zealand State Services Commission has recently created the role of Government Chief Talent Officer (GCTO). This role is responsible for a programme of work aiming to improve the capability and capacity of senior leaders in State services. In addition there will be a role in identifying skill gaps and developing future leaders. The aim is to take a more strategic approach to developing the skills and experience of potential leaders. This role also involves employment relations responsibilities and will give strategic advice on workforce capability, capacity and change to ministers and chief executives.

Ultimately what this indicates is the importance that the public service workforce is systematically planned for, bearing these sorts of skills in mind. As Box 9 illustrates, New Zealand have recently appointed a Government Chief Talent Officer to take on some of this role in a more holistic way across their public service.

As the previous section alluded to, one of the major issues in relating to the ability of individuals to access development and education opportunities and to use them to best advantage is a lack of systematic workforce planning. As one interviewee explains;

“The public sector does very little of what we would see in the rest of the workforce as workforce planning. So, we tend to manage our workforces according to what we need to do today, rather than dispassionately and with some different time horizons posing questions about, well, where is this heading? What will government's involvement in this look like in two, five, ten years' time? What's the proper role of the public service and the public sector going to be given the way this particular thing is evolving? And therefore, what do we need in terms of particular skill sets inside the public sector, and even, you know... even on basic things where fairly routine things sometimes are outsourced, transactional things? Government's been very poor at identifying what skill sets are required within the sector to be an informed purchaser of those things that you're outsourcing” (21cps20).

As such, a number of people suggested that a priority is not necessarily new or different types of workforce development opportunities *per se*, but instead, a more systematic sense of what skills the public service needs to fulfil its roles and duties:

“If you have a look at the senior executive group in any department and if you ask the fundamental question 'have you actually sat down and thought about what it is you need, and what it is you're going to need, and how you're going to align those two—plan your work force?' It's not a question that's asked. ...And you won't get

it, the reality is, that people will always say 'well all that costs money', well yes it does, it does, but like anything else it's an investment. Not doing it also costs a huge amount of money, the inefficiencies that come from having to have three or four with different bits of the skills set, when it can all be in one person" (21cps2).

Without a sense of what we are attempting to achieve in a more holistic way then it will be difficult to do this workforce planning and to ensure that we have the right skills to fulfil these different roles. Yet,

"we spend too little time thinking about is, what's this mean for the organisation, and how you structure and design organisations? Because if we don't think about that at the same time as we think about skills and capabilities we need, then we've got a disconnected conversation" (21cps16).

We cannot simply blame public services for a lack of workforce planning though; there are many good reasons why this is difficult to do. Often the issue of what should be delivered through public services and to what effect is unclear and with the continued politicisation of services this is not set to get any easier in the future. Further, with a workforce constrained to some degree by industrial relations this can pose some difficulties in terms of workforce planning.

7.4 RECRUITMENT PRACTICES

Within the research a number of suggestions were made about how we might change recruitment practices in the future to ensure that the most appropriate individuals are brought into public service organisations. Many of these are being used already in parts of the public service but these are not necessarily consistent across the whole of the sector.

As we have already suggested, whilst technical and specialist skills will continue to be important, public servants of the future will also need to develop a set of skills which go beyond this. As some interviewees we spoke to explained, already they recruit not necessarily for the person with the best technical abilities, but they also seek out individuals who have an attitude and values that fit within their organisation:

"I don't think it's between technical and generalist. I think it's something slightly more sophisticated than that, ... when you're recruiting, you've got to look for people who can do the job from a technical point of view—they've got the runs on the board, they will have credibility from a technical point of view—and then in making your decision between whether it's x, y or z person, what I'm looking for is their values and behaviours. So I will choose, not necessarily THE best technical person. See for me the technical stuff is a baseline, gotta have credibility, and from that pool, who has the right values and behaviours? And attitude that we can then work with? And for me that's critical, and I know I've made decisions in my recruitment of people here, where I haven't chosen the best technical person, but I haven't chosen a generalist either" (21cps21).

Often it was described that these additional elements were tested through competency-based type approaches to interviews where individuals were asked to recount a time when they had demonstrated a particular way of working.

Whilst there is a desire to recruit for different sorts of skills and abilities that go beyond professional or technical qualifications often people were less clear about how to do this. After all it is far easier to recruit someone who has a professional qualification in a particular area than it is to recruit an individual who is good at collaboration or storytelling. These are arguably less tangible qualities than a qualification and require a re-thinking of some aspects of the recruitment process. Many of those we spoke to expressed a desire to go beyond traditional modes of recruitment through interview processes and assessment centres as they do not believe that they are sufficient to judge candidates appropriately.

"it's not metric testing or different types of...I don't mean testing as in testing, but analysis of what skills people bring in in a more rigorous way because yeah I think when you are building a new workforce you probably have to be a bit more scientific than oh yeah I know it when I see it" (21cps17).

Interviewees spoke about the possibilities of using psychometric testing and other tools, although we did not come across any examples of where these were already in place. One interviewee did mention the Singaporean public service model which does incorporate these kinds of approaches although recognised some of the challenges of using these;

“Whether you pursue more of a Singaporean model where you do psychometric upon day one and people are immediately badged as high potential, high ambition, high skill set— they go a certain way, average people go a different way and that has its own problems because y’know cos not everybody tests well I guess” (21cps12).

Other interviewees spoke about the need to recognise training and development from other institutions within public services. Given the disaggregation of public services in recent years it is suggested that skills and abilities should be more ‘portable’ and recognition should be given to those gained in other sectors.

“More structured training and recognition of skills in...from other sectors...that those skills ought to be valued more than they are” (21cps2).

A few of those we spoke to suggested that they actively recruited individuals who were outside of the traditional sector in order to get different perspectives into their organisation.

“One of the problems we’ve got is that if you’re only recruiting from inside your own sector all the time, all you ever see is what you see. You’ve never experienced anything different...If the only haircut you’ve ever seen is the same one your mother had, you’ll always have your mother’s haircut! Doesn’t change anything...And so, our job is to try to transform things. And so we attempt to do that. Sometimes it’s easy, sometimes it’s hard. It’s hard to move them. Generally, you don’t see them moving outside the scope of their experience” (21cps13).

7.4 ATTRACTING THE NEXT GENERATION

As we talked about earlier, one of the major challenges that public services will face in the future is a tight fiscal climate. This poses some challenges for recruitment and attracting the brightest and best of the next generation, particularly in relation to some areas of highly specialised technical skills where the public service organisations may not be able to remunerate individuals at the same level as the private sector. Whilst this may be a challenge there are many other aspects of public services that are likely to attract the next generation, although some of these will involve working in different ways to that of the present.

Many of those we spoke to felt that the public service has much to offer new recruits although it often does not do a good job of selling these virtues or illustrating the strengths of the sector.

“Government’s efforts at developing talent are pretty bad, as a general rule... Feedback is just terrible!...There are certain things you can’t offer. But what you *can* offer, is pretty special. You can offer a chance to influence something really important in society, you can offer interesting, complicated, challenging work. A lot of people crave that. Not everybody. But a lot of people do. And they’re willing to take less money and/or the frustrations, if they think their agenda is important, that the service they’re delivering is important. Particularly if they’re doing something new and different. You can attract and retain people, if you have that inspirational style of doing something” (21cps5).

Many spoke of the importance of speaking to the value set of individuals when looking to attract the next generation:

“I think that we’ve got to be better at communicating and marketing what...that kind of values based attraction that we could have and we do have because there are a lot of people for whom satisfaction from work comes from more than just financial reward and we’ve got, you know, that’s what we offer in public service. We have decent, very decent conditions in all of our jobs, but we also offer the opportunity for them to contribute

their skills to something greater than themselves and I think that tapping into that group or that segment, which I think is a pretty big group of people and I think it's the same group of people that might otherwise go into the community sector and might otherwise go into a range of jobs, but they're out there and they're the ones we should be attracting in" (21cps17).

One issue that some highlighted is that of rewarding particular sorts of behaviours and practices. Traditionally we have rewarded individuals in public services on their ability to be a particularly good professional with a defined set of skills, but in the future we may need to reward different sorts of aspects. Like recruiting for different skills this potentially poses somewhat of a challenge in practice. As one respondent explained,

"How do you actually reward collaboration, how do you actually teach collaboration, how do you encourage people to operate in the collaborative environment—particularly in systems that are vertically structured and where the rewards have always been for being smart and dexterous, rather than being prepared to put the hard yards in the slow process of collaboration—those things have to be thought through, because most of—even though people don't actually understand it—most...particularly when you've got a public service...a government that is the procurer, you've got another party that is the provider...all this stuff that where you've got to cross organisational boundaries. And active citizenry, particularly when it relates to services that they understand, you've actually got to develop a whole different sort of skill set that is not just about you and your capacity to do the narrow bit of your job. The way you change what you expect of people is if you reward different things, and start being very clear about the requirements that you want from your responsibilities... being a custodian of the public service" (21cps2).

An important component in thinking about attracting new recruits will be considering their expectations about work and how they operate in a work environment. As one interviewee explained, digital natives – those who have grown up with digital technologies

and are used to thinking in this way – have different concepts of organising and power to those we traditionally work with in the public services. As one interviewee explained,

"Digital natives...don't like to be controlled. They have conceptions of control and order and accountability. It's not that they're anarchists at all, but their conceptions of who's in charge and who you listen to and who has respect, and who you follow and who has genuine authority is completely different...My sense is that the digital world works on the basis of earned trust and earned reputations. And you can earn trust and reputation in the digital world in a way which is almost completely independent of positional status, that's the point. So, what people in the digital world look for are smart, clever, hard-working, generous, sharing-type people. They don't particularly get turned on by whether you're a vice president or an assistant secretary or even a deputy secretary or all that kind of bullshit, generally speaking... And that's a problem, because most of the people with whom they interacted, the public service assume that those old levers, positional power status...And, I think to me, you know, all the conversations about the public service of the future and the public servant of the future are...for me, anyway, I've seen through that prism, that the fundamental kind of world view, a kind of framing of life generally, and certainly work totally and utterly different" (21cps24).

As we have spoken about earlier in this report, specialist IT was an area that was cited as being under resourced in the public services and sometimes difficult to recruit to. The reason most frequently given for this difficulty is that these skills are expensive and that individuals can earn more working in other kinds of organisations. Yet, if the previous quote is correct, the challenge here may relate less to the specifics of remuneration and more to how people expect to work. If we want to attract particular sorts of individuals with certain skill sets then it may involve more than just thinking about how we reward particular sorts of abilities. This is not always easy within a context of public services where working conditions and expectations can be highly prescribed.

8.0 Creating the 21st century public servant

THIS FINAL SECTION PULLS TOGETHER WHAT ARE THE KEY THEMES OF THIS RESEARCH AND MAKES SUGGESTIONS IN TERMS OF WHERE IMPORTANT ACTIVITY LIES IN TERMS OF THIS AREA.

Overall we argue that insufficient thinking has been done to date in relation to the future of public services and this is something that is in need of urgent attention. This is an important exercise in terms of planning for the future of public service, but might also be a helpful way of supporting public services to regain somewhat of a voice in a sector where it is in ever more competition with others or being increasingly crowded out. Many of the activities that we suggest are of urgent importance to this sector relate to 'softer' kinds of factors, but this should not undermine their need. As we go on to argue, the sector is in need of rediscovering some of its more traditional skills which have been lost or eroded in recent years.

8.1 AGENCY AND THE PUBLIC SECTOR VOICE

What seems to be clear is that in the future the role of the public service will be somewhat different than it is today. Regardless of whether some of the detail of what is set out in this document comes to pass or not, whilst the majority of public service employees at present are involved in service delivery roles it looks increasingly like this will not be the case in the future. The ongoing push for the externalisation and outsourcing of government functions means that the future public services context will be even more of a mixed economy of providers than at present. On a spectrum there are two possibilities for the public service workforce. At one end we might think about a smaller workforce, one which is agile,

“The facilitator, the contractor of standards, the vehicle for giving advice” (21cps4).

The role for this workforce will shift somewhat;

“Rather than designing a program intervention to try and fix things, you're trying to think about how to set the rules of the game, in a way, that allow natural incentives, in a sense, to take their course... You need people that have enough flexibility. You need a cohort of good, conceptual, analytical people, to be able to do the sort of public policy work that we're going to need to do in the future” (21cps14).

At the other end of the spectrum we might alter the definition we have of the public service and think about this workforce in a rather different way. Rather than a small cadre of policy people and commissioners, we could instead conceive of the public service in a rather broader manner as being those individuals who are involved in designing and delivering public services and creating public value. This is a far more expansive definition of the public service than one that is currently in use.

During interviews we heard time and again that individuals felt that the role of the public servant has become unclear in recent years and requires some sort of re-definition. Yet, we also were often left with the distinct impression that what happens in terms of future public services is not necessarily the decision of those who work in public services but will be a product of decisions made by others – be they the broader population, politicians, business, community organisations and so on. We were struck by the sense that public services and public servants feel a striking lack of agency or the ability to forge the sorts of changes that they want or believe are needed.

Whilst there was a collective sense of what the future would likely look like there were far fewer suggestions of how we might achieve this.

There was a sense that public services would become what others allow, or indeed force public services to be, and will not ultimately be shaped by public servants.

Some of this lack of perceived agency may of course be linked to both the magnitude of these changes and the distance in time and practice that these changes seem from today. As we have previously mentioned, change within government and public services is often regarded as taking place in an incremental fashion and that these systems have a remarkable way of remaking themselves. The kinds of changes set out here are significant and in a context of incremental change will feel some distance from the everyday reality of the moment. These changes will not happen overnight and it is a challenge to establish sustained change within the public service,

“because the system reverts to what it’s comfortable with” (21cps2).

Public services the world over have an innate ability to remain remarkably similar despite what ostensibly looks like significant processes of reform. This is not a criticism of public services *per se*; after all one of the major facets that we tend to value in the public sector is consistency and stability. If we are to make significant changes in terms of what public servants will do then this will involve balancing off a set of issues in a systematic way.

If we want public services to ultimately be concerned with being a custodian of public value and the interests of the community AND be commercially astute, this will require an explicit balancing of a number of tensions. If we want to retain corporate memory and uphold the kinds of values that public services have traditionally been associated with AND recruit from quite different pools of talent outside of the traditional sphere and give individuals experience in a range of sectors and institutions, again this will require a balancing of a number of different factors.

What this points to is the importance of strategic thinking and public services planning now for significant future changes. If change only ever happens in an incremental fashion within this context then it is arguably even more important that we have a sense of the future we would like to move to now and the range of small steps that will be involved in reaching this goal. One interviewee explained that he has used this idea to underpin his Department’s approach to change;

“Using phrases like, ‘incremental revolution,’ or, ‘radical small changes,’ basically trying to get the balance between the need to see that we need to be completely remade or remake ourselves, but do it in a way that maintains continuity of service, doesn’t ... isn’t too radically disruptive, which, you know, can cause too much upheaval. But not be so conservative that we just incrementally, sort of fluff along and then, you know ... lead to a point where we have to be pulled apart. So in the spirit of that, we’ve been actively piloting things, starting quietly doing things that could have quite radical implications. Not to try to do it under the radar, but to do it thoughtfully so that we can actually start to recalibrate our whole systems. But, you know, ... you know, we use phrases like, ‘pushing the peanut forward,’ we just start, and then we just keep going” (21cps27).

BOX 10: THE INCREMENTAL IMPROVEMENT APPROACH IN BRITISH CYCLING

Over the past 10 to 15 years British cycling has undergone somewhat of a significant rejuvenation. Recent Olympics have been dominated by this team and Team Sky have also won a number of the Grand Tours adopting the same approach to improvement. The improvement approach that Dave Brailsford led involves the aggregation of marginal gains. This is essentially about identifying small performance factors that, when aggregated together, can have a significant cumulative impact. When we examine what cyclists wear, how they train, sleep and eat and the bikes they ride over a period of years there have been significant changes, but this has been driven in an incremental way rather than through revolutionary change. Two particular aspects of this approach are relevant in the context of this work. The first is the evidence-based nature of this approach. Brailsford and his team collected only data about their cyclists that is relevant to what they are trying to achieve. An important point being that they have a clear sense of what they are collectively aiming to achieve. All the efforts of the different members of the team are then clearly oriented towards the achievement of these particular aims. They have a clear sense of the performance target they are trying to achieve and how they are tracking against this at all times. The second part of this approach that is relevant here is that where there is a disparity between the desired and current states they invested in individual coaching. Individual development is viewed as absolutely crucial to success. Rather than simply buying a bike that cost more, or looking for another individual who might have more ability than those they are working with, this team invested in quality coaching. No matter how talented the individual, this approach recognises that they are more effective with the support of individual coaching to allow them to make the best of their abilities.

This is an approach that has been used to great effect in some other areas as illustrated in Box 10.

Overall the picture often painted of the public service was one of a sector that is under attack and which has lost its place slightly in the context of recent changes such as the outsourcing of government functions and the rise of ministerial advisers. Thinking strategically and planning ahead was seen as a way of giving back some power and control to the public service, so that change is not driven simply by political mandate or in response to the fast moving media:

“The biggest challenges are...we work for the government of the day and the government of the day can change and have a completely different agenda. So public service needs to respond to that and anticipate so we are flexibly footed and stay abreast of issues internationally, locally, but also with government they have different approaches, beliefs and ideologies to one another...the idea is to be seamless. So seeing as public servants are stewards of the institution because governments come and go and we are sort of the public through government” (21cps11).

One example of a public service organisation that has recently sought to take the initiative and to drive a vision of the future is the Victorian police service. As Box 11 illustrates, a vision for the future was articulated by the organisation in order to start having difficult conversations about issues which are still potentially some years off but will involve significant changes to what the police do and how.



BOX 11: THE VICTORIAN POLICE 'BLUE' PAPER

In June 2014, Ken Lay, the Chief Commissioner of Police, launched the vision for Victoria police for 2025 (Victoria Police, 2014). This document aims to set out an account of how Victoria Police might adapt over the medium to long term, arguing that some of the current challenges faced by this service relates to a lack of forward planning. Three strategic directions are posed in this report that seek to enhance public safety and increase value for money. These relate to better matching of existing resources to demand by rethinking the operating model, improving workforce capability and collaborating through partnerships. In making these strategic recommendations, some fundamental changes are suggested to the way that the police works, where it is physically situated and expectations about the operation of the police workforce. This report received significant media attention and there were strong reactions to these changes from the public, the police workforce, partners of the police and industrial bodies. Many of the issues outlined proved controversial which could be perceived as negative, but this has been successful in starting a conversation about the future of police services and how they will be resourced, structured and our expectations of these.

8.2 CULTURE AND NOT JUST PROCESS AND STRUCTURE

In terms of how we go about making changes to the workforce, many we spoke to suggested that this will about more than just processes and organisational structures and will involve changing cultures and behaviours;

"I'd say, culture and mindset, for me, is the precursor to all the rest that you talked about. Skills, competencies and roles, of course they're important, but I'd give up all of them for the right culture. For the right culture, I could work with whatever hand you're dealt, pretty much, on skills, competencies and roles. With skills, competencies and roles, but the wrong culture, you'll never get there" (21cps14).

As we have suggested, many of the new roles and skills involved in the vision of the 21st century public servant are of a softer nature and so it follows that we will need to focus on more than just processes. Yet, as we will illustrate in this section, there are certain challenges when it comes to trying to address issues of culture.

In recent years ideas of culture change have been prolific within the public service literature. In response to perceived failings of managerial or structural changes, a number of different governments have sought to drive change through a shift in culture. The assumption often made here is that we can identify common aspects of culture, we can change culture, any changes will lead to improvements and, the benefits will outweigh the costs. Yet as Davies and Mannion (2013) note, the research evidence does not support this to be the case. They go on to stress the fact that organisations usually comprise a multitude of different cultures and there will be diversity across different policy subgroups. The implication of this is that wholesale organisational culture change is rarely successful and no, one simple set of prescriptions works. There are a range of different organisational factors that send messages about how it operates and the kinds of values and principles that underpin it. What this means at an organisational level is that all systems and processes are sending implicit signals to employees about the sorts of values and behaviours that are highly regarded.

If individuals are promoted on the basis that they have not led any projects in the past which have been significant failures then this may promote a risk-adverse culture, for example. At a policy level it is important that the broad system provides the foundations to operate in, but that there is also some local freedom in which to operate to accommodate local cultures of practice.

In his review of Victorian community and human services, Peter Shergold (2013b) acknowledges the cultural challenges of this process. He argues that in developing a more cross-sectoral approach to service delivery a 'values-based statements of principles should be developed that explicitly acknowledges the intention to put the interests of the public first' (pg. 47). The research evidence shows that a set of principles or values underpinning a system can be incredibly helpful. However, in order for these to not simply become 'motherhood and apple pie' statements that lack 'teeth' they need to be underpinned by a number of other additional factors such as: formal and informal accountability structures; the range of performance data available; the sorts of targets used to drive performance; the range of motivators available and their application and management style and capacities. As many people told us,

"public servants are rewarded for things not going wrong, rather than pulling off something really difficult" (21cps5).

This is not necessarily a product of a set of naturally risk adverse and inward looking people per se, but is related to what public servants believe is expected of them and how they are encouraged to act.

However, once this becomes an established working routine there is the danger that such a context

"actually attracts risk adverse individuals" (21cps9).

Whilst there is much that is unsure when it comes to issues of culture, although the one factor that is probably agreed upon is that culture change is time intensive. As one interviewee explains,

"inculcating values takes time. And if someone's only with an organisation for 12 months it's very difficult to, you know, not to spend a great deal of that time inculcating the values. So that is an issue. So potentially the public service needs to become better at quickly inculcating the values it needs but that doesn't ... that shouldn't be procedures...that's the easy way to do it" (21cps9).

As this quote further illustrates, embedding an individual within a particular takes time and this is a particular challenge in a context where there is a more agile and less permanent workforce. Traditionally individuals have been immersed in the public service culture by virtue of length of service and only those who fit with this culture seem to rise to the top. There are very good reasons for this, although some we spoke to expressed concerns that this may lead to restricted worldviews and ways of thinking.



8.3 BACK TO THE FUTURE

In recent years Australian public services have gone through some significant changes and it looks like more of these are yet to come. As reiterated throughout this report, public services and public servants may look to these changes in a passive mode as something that might be done to them, or they may seek to adopt a more active role in these, reimagining the public services and the public servant workforce of the future and working towards the achievement of these. As we have suggested in this review, the sorts of skills that will be important in achieving this will be of a softer nature, involving things such as communication, collaboration and political judgement, alongside some harder and technical skills. In some ways these kinds of skills are a return to traditional notions of public service and those associated with bureaucratic stewardship.

Rod Rhodes has recently spoken about rediscovering the 'craft' of public administration (Rhodes, 2014), concurring with a number of the arguments we have set out in this report. In doing so he argues that the shift to New Public Management-type philosophies, notions of scientific management and unfettered borrowing from the private sector has led us to a situation where those kinds of skills that are promoted as important in terms of public services misses those craft elements that are crucial to a well-functioning public bureaucracy that is inherently linked to democratic processes.

Rhodes argues that we need to more explicitly plan for these traditionally-held craft skills identifying counselling, stewardship, prudence, judgement, diplomacy and political nous to be inherently valuable factors. These sorts of skills are not easy to impart through training programmes but are developed through practice and experience.

Rhodes is not arguing for a wholesale return to the past, and identifies a number of limitations in terms of public administration of old. He is arguing that we should identify those elements of past practice that are important in terms of current and future processes. Viewing public service through the lens of these craft skills recognises the inherently political nature of this form of managing and in doing so gives some capacity and agency to public servants. Returning to some of these traditional skills may ironically be a way of helping us visualise and manage for the future.

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Appendix 1: Methodology

A qualitative approach was adopted for this research, which included 27 individuals who agreed to take part in a semi-structured interview. Individuals were identified from federal, state and local governments across Australia along with former public servants and representatives from peak bodies, community organisations and consulting firms and were invited to take part in the research project. The research project was assessed by the Social and Political Sciences Human Ethics Advisory Group at the University of Melbourne (number 1441494) and awarded approval as a minimal risk project.

Of the 35 individuals invited to take part in the research, 27 agreed to take part in the research within the defined data collection time period. Interviews were conducted with individuals either in person (20) or where this was not possible by telephone (7). Interviews lasted from 40 to 90 minutes in length, with the majority being 50 minutes in length. Interviews were conducted using an interview schedule which covered issues about the future of public services including questions relating to major challenges, roles, skills, development, recruitment and attracting the next generation of public servants.

All interviews were recorded with the permission of those being interviewed and were transcribed in full. Interview transcripts were fully anonymised and referred to only by the use of a code (e.g. 21cpsxxx) so that interviewees might not be identified from the transcripts. Any identifying data were also removed from quotes so that these are fully anonymous and non-identifiable. Once all the full transcripts had been obtained these were coded according to a set of themes agreed by the research team and formed both deductively from the existing literature and inductively from themes that emerged as important in the process of research. Data were collated according to each of the themes and drawn on in the writing up of this research report.

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- Knowledge and Expertise in public policy (using different types of evidence and new approaches, and managing competing perspectives)
- Security and Political Engagement (responding to the effects of war, natural disasters, and dispossession, and improving political engagement)
- Governing Markets (improving the instruments that structure relationships between governments, governing institutions, and private actors)



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