

My submission proposes changes in business structures and work practices to improve workforce flexibility and cross-agency cooperation. My proposal is based on experience working both in the APS, and within a large consulting firm with global reach, which undertakes a mixture of large and small, long-term and short-term contracts. These contracts can have program and policy elements. My model is therefore based on systems that are effective, efficient and currently in operation within the private sector.

Structures within government agencies are rigidly set in teams within branches within divisions within agencies. A person working within a team may, at any time, only apply a subset of their skills and experience to the job they currently occupy. In addition, a person's capacity or inclination to work cooperatively with other relevant agencies will be heavily influenced by their personal inclinations, or those of their manager or organisation (or, indeed, Minister). The discussion paper makes the point that, on the whole, public servants identify more closely with their agency than the public service as a whole.

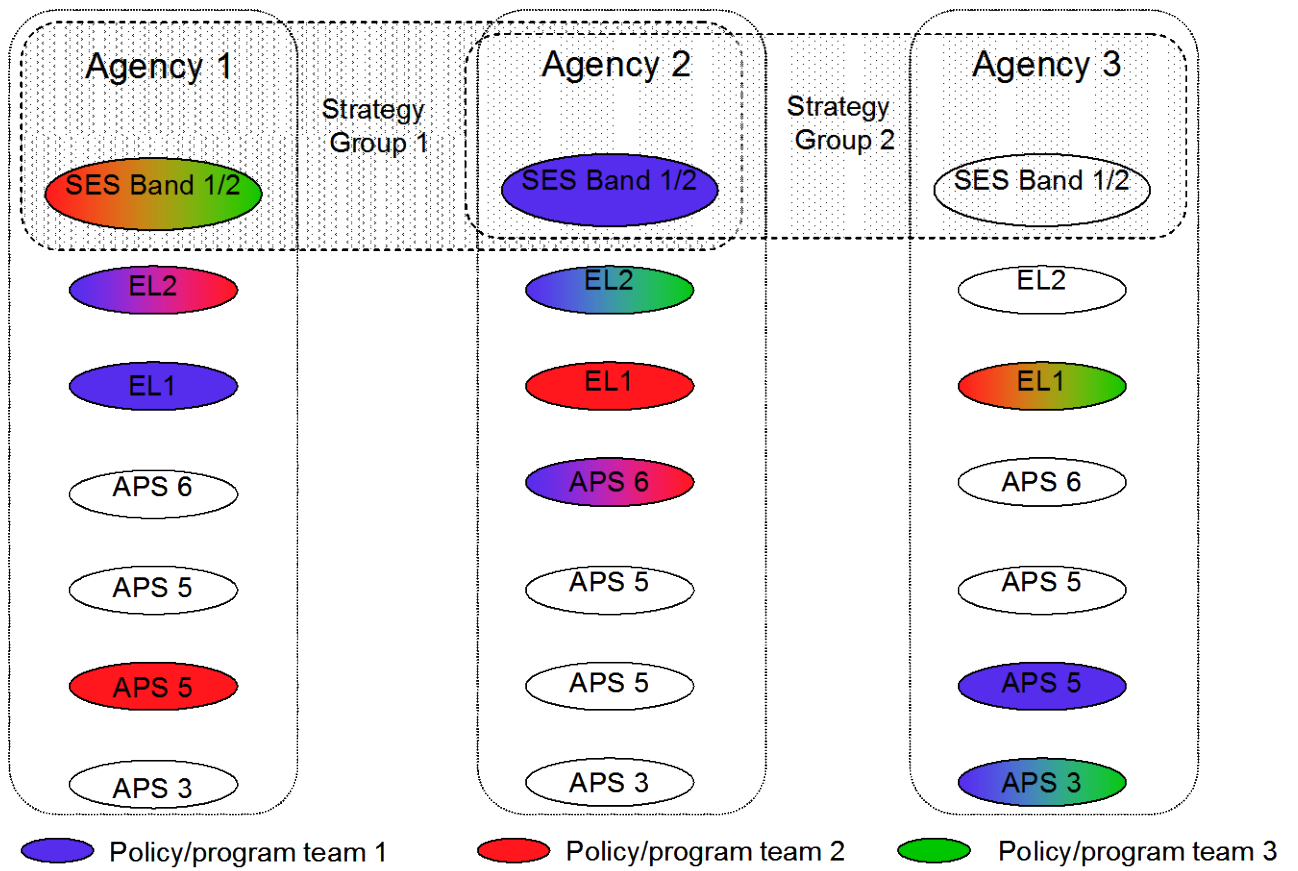
This submission proposes a system of 'virtual teams' that are made up of individuals with relevant experience and expertise working to deliver policies and programs. These virtual teams would be time-limited in nature and do not need to be co-located. Teams would also be made up of individuals from any relevant agency, working under a 'project manager' (EL1 or EL2, depending on the size, complexity or budget) and a 'project director' (SES band 1/2). Any individual could be working on one or a number of virtual teams at any one time. In addition, strategy groups could be made up of senior executives across relevant agencies for long term planning. See [figure 1](#) for graphical representation.

For example, while working in the consulting firm, I would regularly receive phone calls from colleagues within my office, or from elsewhere in Australia, or overseas. They would have searched the staff database for someone with the required set of skills for a project, and had access to my set of 1-page CVs, each with a summary of my experience in a particular area: environmental risk assessment; community consultation; waste management policy, etc. We would have a discussion about what they needed, approximate time requirements and duration of project, and budget available. I would either confirm that I was available, or not. This dynamic was supported by a requirement to have a certain proportion of my time billed to projects ('billable hours').

A proportion of my time was accepted as being spent on 'overhead' activities such as marketing, staff development, internal auditing or other corporate functions. However on average it was expected that over the course of a year, around 70% of my time was allocated to 'billable hours' or projects. My performance rating, performance bonus, and ultimately my employment continuity was judged on the demand for my services.

In terms of management structures, the EL2-equivalent staff would manage a team of professionals. They would provide their expertise to projects, manage the budgets of

projects for which they were responsible, manage staff performance agreements, and ensure that staff were fully utilised. The Band 1/2-equivalents (group managers) would look at overall productivity of the teams, manage staffing levels, act as major client liaison points and provide quality control for work outputs. They also worked with other group managers and senior staff on strategic direction for the organisation.



**Figure 1:** Diagram of virtual team proposal

### **Advantages:**

- Greater use of experience and skills of APS staff
- More responsive and adaptable culture within the workforce, where people are used to working across several mixed-agency teams, and where components of their work are accepted as being time-limited in nature
- Strategy groups keeping an eye to the long-term elements of APS work and ensuring these are catered for amongst the shorter-term agendas
- Workplace culture that is able to quickly mobilise staff with relevant skills and experience to high priority or major program events or roll-outs
- Greater capacity for staff to manage work loads (including part-time), through regulating the number and nature of virtual teams in which they participate
- Tighter budgetary feedback loops would encourage greater focus on fit-for-purpose products, rather than endless 'nuancing' by senior staff (noting that this should not detract from rigorous quality control)

### **Limitations of model:**

- This model is appropriate for the bulk of departmental policy, program and project work however, it may not be strictly applicable to some operational functions, such as Centrelink offices, or Customs or border protection. Within agencies, some corporate functions (such as payroll or other administrative support) may also not fit in to this model.

### **Some key requirements:**

- Significantly improved ICT to:
  - enable staff searches to assemble virtual teams; and
  - provide virtual, password-protected sharepoint sites for work and document management
- Incentive structures to compel staff to ensure experience/expertise data is up-to-date, and to seek participation in work teams
- Budgetary feedback loops on a project basis, and streamlined budget review (variation) processes

- Greater autonomy by staff to allow for some choice in which work teams they participate

This submission provides a brief outline of the model proposed. I would be happy to elaborate on the proposal should the advisory committee wish to explore its applicability in the public service context.