

Chapter 2

Q3.

One of the primary challenges facing the APS and its ability to provide a whole-of-government and across-APS approach is the hard boundaries that separate staff; whether they be physical or psychological. The first place this mindset change must occur is within those in a position to implement change and wield influence. A systems thinking approach would indicate that the system (the APS) cannot function effectively if each part is not considered in relation to the others. The concept applies itself to this discussion paper by stating that reform in one agency will never be isolated to that agency, it will always have flow-on effects to other parts of the APS. It is how these effects are understood and managed that provides the foundation of successful reform. The strength of this discussion is that the need for a whole-of-government and across-APS approach has been identified; the challenge is how to break down the barriers of entrenched mindsets, patterns of behaviour and bureaucracy that stand in the way.

Barriers such as differential pay scales across agencies work against mobility and therefore against professional development, sharing of expertise and innovation. With the current global village type mindset, Australia needs a public sector that is more outward-looking and able to meet the challenges of being part of a global system (economic, environmental and societal). It needs to be able to plan for the future and will require systematic information dissemination in specific areas about the ways systems are arranged elsewhere (read internationally), the benefits and pitfalls, etc. This also has the added benefit of encouraging a learning environment.

Q4.

One of the key implications noted in the discussion paper is the need for systemic reform. With a desire to create a more holistic APS, as opposed to agency, culture and identity proposed in the discussion paper, the concept of systemic reform (or systems thinking) is integral to this process. Systemic reform would presume that in order for a reform to be successful, parts the greater APS system cannot only be considered individually, they must also be considered in relation to one another. The current prevailing culture, as indicated in the figures presented in the discussion paper, is one of belonging to a department/agency. You are either an employee of DIISR or DEEWR, etc and whilst you may reply to the question of “what do you do for a living?” with a casual reply of “I’m a public servant”, rarely does this translate into identifying yourself as an employee of the APS.

Chapter 3

Q5.

I believe the aspiration could be adjusted to:

*The best public service in the world, unified in pursuing excellence **and integrity through putting Australia and Australians at the centre of everything we do***

Whilst the changes are not sweeping, the addition of integrity signifies a commitment to transparency and the rewording to “*through putting Australia and Australians at the centre of everything we do*” reinforces the concept that the main objective of the public service is to

ultimately serve the Australian community through the government of the day. I use the word community here deliberately. In my opinion there is a significant difference between a citizen focus and a community focus. A citizen focus implies that the individual is the target. Using the plural simply indicates a group of individuals. By moving to a community focus, the ability to recognise the relationships, corporate elements as well as individual members of the community (which can be as small as a town such as Wombat, NSW or as large as the entire country) is gained, the concept of the Australian community recognises that Australia today is comprised of more than just the individuals that live here. In line with this, the Government planning must shift to be long term, beyond the electoral cycle with the ability to shift direction as needed. The Government should take a holistic view, working across relevant agencies when delivering a policy. For example: water buy back schemes have implications for not only the irrigators, but small business in the area, community structures, hospitals and schools. Another example would be Aboriginal Community development: instead of simply providing housing for communities, why not train members of the community to construct the housing; whilst this may take longer, it not only provides infrastructure but develops the community as well as the individual.

Chapter 4

Q7.

Yes, the values should be streamlined, if not completely overhauled. The current list of values does not provide a focus; instead they aim to cover elements of policy, function and aspiration. It smells very heavily of a set of values written by committee. The APS values should clearly state what principles the APS considers integral to its aspiration (or mission statement). Many of the remaining values on the list could be worked into a revised code of conduct. Based on the ideas presented in the discussion paper, a new set of APS values (in no particular order) could be:

1. Leadership
2. Community Service
3. Innovation and Creativity
4. Accountability* and Transparency
5. Collaboration
6. Efficiency and Effectiveness

* This is not red tape, but true accountability of high level decision makers to the Australian Community (a common misconception of accountability is that it is ensuring you are covered in the event of a problem; this works directly against innovation).

In tandem with a streamlining or revision of the APS values, a similar process should be undertaken for the code of conduct. The current code of conduct could be strengthened to include some of the current values. For example:

c. provides a workplace that is free from discrimination...

l. promotes equity in employment

m. provides a reasonable opportunity to all eligible members of the community...for APS employment

o. provides a fair system of review of decisions taken in respect of employees

It could be argued that these four values are all following the same theme and could be rolled in to a single entry in the code of conduct.

The APS values should state what it is that the APS values and aspires to, not a list that attempts to cover all bases. One of the primary failings of the current list is that they are easily paid lip service to with the proper paperwork. Take for example *b. is a public service in which employment decisions are based on merit*. Whilst the majority of appointments are most likely based on merit, it is not difficult to appoint outside this value whilst following due process. Process cannot and should not be expected to replace culture, accountability and sound management. Although this is a part of the systems Westminster heritage and is critical to retain, it does not need to be explicitly stated in the values, I believe it is covered by the inclusion of accountability and transparency. It could however be explicitly stated elsewhere.

Extra Comments

One statement in the discussion paper under *Chapter 4, Outward focus* jumped out. It states that “***While internal recruitment to leadership roles is an effective way of utilising and rewarding corporate knowledge and experience...***” I believe that this take on what makes a good leader is part of the problem of why only 45% of employees agreed their agency was well-managed. Corporate knowledge and experience does not ensure a staff member is suited to a leadership role. One of the core failings of the APS is the number of staff recruited to positions of leadership who are not suited to such a position but are able to rise that far because the system inherently allows it. It is recognised that the APS, especially in the larger agencies is a cumbersome beast and someone has to do the job, but not enough attention is paid to whether or not leaders are actually suited to their roles. From this position the problem is further exacerbated by the red tape that prevents proper action being taken if it is obvious a person is not suited to a leadership role. What tends to occur is problematic leaders simply get shuffled from team to team, leaving devastation and mismanagement in their wake.

One potential way to identify staff suitability is a 360 degree appraisal as part of the recruitment process. Selection criteria can be useful and referee reports are critical (provided the old glowing report is not a way to palm off a problem staff member) but appraisals from staff the applicant has worked with or previously managed can provide valuable insight.

Chapter 5

Three key problems beset policy development in the public sector.

Firstly, the sector has had a culture of engaging policy officers with little expertise in the specific area under consideration, on the basis of developing “evidence-based” policy (ie. as long as we have good analytical thinkers, they can work out the best logical approach to determining an appropriate policy). However, policies are often value laden and unwittingly based on personal experiences. Having expertise in an area will bring to the fore a raft of understandings that can inform decision-making. A good approach would be for Government to lay down the values it espouses (for which it has been elected), allow experts to advise on the policies that would help to deliver the values, and use evidence to determine the most efficient and effective mechanisms for implementing the policy. Experts here should encompass all relevant aspects of a policy, regardless of which agency has responsibility for an aspect.

Secondly, monitoring and adaptive management have to a large degree become systems of reporting on minutiae, rather than truly assessing the outcomes of policy. This is partly due to a culture based on a poor balance between accountability and innovation (ie. too strongly weighted to accountability, actually leading to very poor accountability in the truest sense).

Thirdly, consultation in policy development has been corrupted through overuse and misuse. Organised groups and loud voices will usually overwhelm majority views, and many communities have had enough of lip-service consultation which consumes their energies to little effect. If agencies nurture and truly support their special interest groups, ensure that the interest groups reflect general community views, and ensure that these groups have access to experts, this issue can be largely overcome.

Chapter 6

We dispute the need for a “citizen centred philosophy in all aspects of program and service design and delivery.” Government should focus on the needs of communities, recognising their internal and external relationships and interdependencies. While it is important to have recourse to individual rights, it is also important to build a culture based on individual responsibility to the group. Our current legal system does not do this sufficiently, and our public sector must focus its considerable resources and expertise on building future societal structures that can weather the significant challenges facing Australia. This can only be done by making communities strong. Government information and services do need to be available to individuals, but even more so to communities. For instance, enabling and supporting communities to support immigrant families will be far more effective than considering each immigrant as a separate, unconnected individual.

Chapter 7

Mobility in the public sector can be viewed as both internal mobility and mobility in and out of the public service. Mobility between agencies is very important in career development and sharing of expertise and experience. Having a single pay scale will help tremendously. Mobility in and out of the public service is sorely needed. The service should have the ability to attract the best from the private sector and from overseas to build its capacity. Equally, employees should feel that leaving the public sector is an option for them in developing well-rounded careers.

Top three ideas to encourage the pursuit of continuous improvement across the public service:

- Top down reform (ie. start with PM&C and move to agency Secretaries and Dep Secs) based on reducing red tape, encouraging, rewarding and recognising innovation and risk-taking.
- Look for attributes of innovation, risk-taking and good judgement in recruitment processes, and work closely at recruitment to plan the recruit's time in the agency. (Match recruitment requirements to the position, not to a set agency culture.)
- Require greater collaboration and learning exchanges between agencies on policy development, implementation and service delivery. This will lead to continuous improvement and innovation across the public service.