

The Gendered Tertiary Education Transition: When Did It Take Place and What Are Some of the Possible Policy Implications? _____ 4

Paul Callister, James Newell, Martin Perry
and David Scott

Policy Thinking: From 'If ... Then' to 'What If ...' _____ 14

Amanda Wolf

New Governance, New Dilemmas: Post-Reform Issues in New Zealand's Public Sector _____ 24

Richard Norman

Tomorrow's Primary Schools: Time to Evaluate Governance Alternatives? _____ 32

Liz Springford

Beyond Westminster: Thinking the Aotearoa/New Zealand Way of Governing _____ 40

Bill Ryan

Editorial Note

The articles in this issue of *Policy Quarterly* address five very different topics: the increasing disparity between the participation rates of men and women in degree-level programmes in New Zealand; the need for new and innovative ways of thinking about policy issues; the many recurring tensions and dilemmas that are a feature of contemporary systems of public management; the weaknesses evident in the current governance arrangements for New Zealand primary schools; and New Zealand's gradual move away from its Westminster origins and the implications of recent constitutional changes for public servants.

In the first article, Paul Callister, James Newell, Martin Perry and David Scott present empirical evidence showing that New Zealand has experienced a significant gender transition in tertiary educational enrolment and attainment during recent decades. As a result, whereas the country's universities once had more male than female students, the pattern is now reversed. Indeed, amongst domestic students, there are now significantly more women than men enrolled in higher-level qualifications, including diplomas, bachelors degrees and postgraduate degrees. The disparity is particularly marked in the case of Māori and Pasifika students. The authors explore the possible reasons for, and implications of, the new gender disparities, and conclude with a plea for the topic to be given greater attention by policy makers.

Amanda Wolf reflects on different modes of 'policy thinking' in our second article. She considers the need for new and innovative thinking in policy advising and examines the thinking and reasoning processes that analysts could adopt to encourage creative outcomes. She argues that policy analysts should be asking questions of a "what if..." nature, rather than the more traditional questions based on "if...then" reasoning. Similarly, she contends that analysts need to embrace doubt, contradiction and conflict, and supplement 'critical' modes of thinking with more creative modes. She concludes with some important observations about how creative thinking might be encouraged, both by policy managers and by those charged with educating policy advisers.

As is widely known, New Zealand's public sector was radically reshaped during the 1980s and early 1990s, with a range of new governance structures and organizational forms being created. In the third article, Richard Norman examines the nature of these 'structures' and the recurring dilemmas faced by those who work within them (e.g. the tensions between centralised direction and localised autonomy). More specifically, he identifies, and outlines the dimensions, of eight common dilemmas encountered by those at the coal-face of the 'New Zealand model' of public management, each of which involves the balancing of opposing principles, considerations or propositions. He argues that such dilemmas cannot be 'solved' in any fundamental sense, and thus must be 'managed'. The question, of course, is how best to manage them and what lessons can be gleaned from the past two decades of experience under the New Zealand model.

In the fourth article, Liz Springford raises concerns about educational disparities and the problem of under-achievement in New Zealand's primary schools. This prompts her to consider whether one of factors contributing to poor educational performance may be the governance arrangements introduced in the late 1980s under the reforms known as 'Tomorrow's Schools'. In her article she presents evidence – based, for instance, on the regular school reviews undertaken by the Education Review Office – suggesting that a significant proportion of Boards of Trustees of primary schools are under-performing and failing to meet their statutory obligations. She concludes her

analysis by considering how these problems might be addressed, including the establishment of new governance arrangements based on multi-school clusters. While some may question the need for such radical change, there can be no doubt that there is scope for improving the current administrative systems.

The final article, by Bill Ryan, addresses broad questions of a constitutional nature. Ryan's thesis is that the constitutional framework that New Zealand inherited from the United Kingdom – the so-called Westminster system – is gradually evolving into a rather different model, and that this is generating new and complex challenges for public servants. In particular, the traditional conventions of public service anonymity, neutrality and loyalty no longer apply in the way they once did, and the distinction between politics and administration has become even more blurred. Such changes, according to Ryan, are not something to be feared. Indeed, they are partly the result of processes of democratisation and greater governmental openness. Nevertheless, he argues that it will be important to confront the new realities and develop new understandings of how public officials should manage their many and varied relationships and responsibility.

The views of readers on the articles contained in this and other issues of *Policy Quarterly* are always welcome.

Jonathan Boston
Managing Co-Editor

The Gendered Tertiary Education Transition: When Did It Take Place and What Are Some of the Possible Policy Implications?

Paul Callister, James Newell, Martin Perry and David Scott

Introduction

There has been much publicity in recent years about how girls are performing better than boys in many areas of schooling (Driessen, 2005). But in recent times New Zealand has also experienced a gender transition in tertiary educational enrolment and attainment, with, for the first time in our history, women participating in tertiary education at a significantly higher rate than men.¹ This article sets out the magnitude and timing of the changes, highlights some of the reasons being put forward for them, and considers how the changes might influence a range of behaviour.

Background

Overall, the New Zealand population is considerably better qualified than it was 25 years ago. Using census data, Newell and Perry (2006) show that between 1981 and 2001 the proportion of New Zealand residents aged 15 years or older with no educational qualification halved, from 55% to 28%, while those with a degree tripled, from 3.8% to 11.8%. Newell and Perry caution that while this increase was impressive it was typical of changes taking place across the OECD.²

An expansion of the traditional tertiary education providers, namely universities, polytechnics and colleges

of education, facilitated the initial growth in educational attainment of New Zealanders. In recent years, enrolments at non-traditional providers, including wānanga and private institutions, have augmented the expansion. All of these institutions have attracted New Zealanders but also foreign students. These trends are well known. Less well known are the gender imbalances in some specific areas of tertiary education.

The Human Rights Commission and the Ministry of Women's Affairs have pointed out that men dominate modern apprenticeships, with, in 2005, women holding only 8% of the more than 8,298 apprenticeships.³ In wider industry-based training as well men dominate. In 2004 there were 102,567 men involved in industry-based training, as opposed to 37,030 women. Less recognised, and perhaps equally important in the long term, is the overall shift in the gender composition of tertiary educational enrolments. There are now substantially more women than men enrolled in tertiary education. Tertiary educational enrolments include many of those studying via industry-based training, including modern apprenticeships, as a significant number of these students are enrolled in courses at polytechnics or other institutions. In 2000 there were just over 41,000 more women enrolled than men, but by 2004 this had increased to over 75,000 (Table 1). In overall numbers this imbalance dwarfs by an order of ten the excess of men in modern apprenticeships.

Not all enrolments result in qualifications, but qualification data support the overall picture of a major gender shift having taken place in tertiary education. The 2001 Census of Population and Dwellings shows that across the whole population aged 15 and older there were still marginally more men than women with a non-degree post-secondary qualification (21.2% versus 19.7%), as well as more men than women with a degree (12.4% versus 11.2%). However, if only younger age groups are considered there are more women

1 US data shows that in the period from the late 1890s through to the end of the 20th century there were times where there were slightly more women than men enrolled in tertiary education. However, more men than women graduated (Goldin and Katz, 2006). While similar long-term research has not been carried out in New Zealand, case studies indicate a comparable pattern. For example, in the case of enrolments at Victoria University, Barrowman (1999) shows that in 1920 women made up 42% of enrolments, but this had declined to around 25% by the 1950s and 1960s.

2 In fact, in 2001 New Zealand was still marginally behind the OECD country average when degree qualifications for 25 to 34 year olds were considered (Newell and Perry, 2006).

3 The Human Rights Commission has developed a modern apprenticeships strategy that aims to promote the inclusion of women (<http://www.neon.org.nz/eoissues/modernapprenticeships/mastrategy/>).

Table 1: Enrolments in tertiary education from 2000 to 2004, all age groups but excluding foreign students

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Male	144,101	158,054	171,568	200,888	219,284
Female	185,508	208,405	240,696	269,117	294,439
Total	329,609	366,459	412,264	470,005	513,723

Source: Ministry of Education (2006)

Note: Enrolments and actual student numbers do not match as some students are enrolled in more than one course or institution.

than men with degrees or non-degree post-secondary qualifications. In 2001, in the 25-29 age group 20.8% of women had attained a degree versus 17.2% of men. The transition has already taken place for Māori and Pacific people. For example, 5.2% of all Māori women in 2001 had earned a degree, as opposed to 4.3% of Māori men.

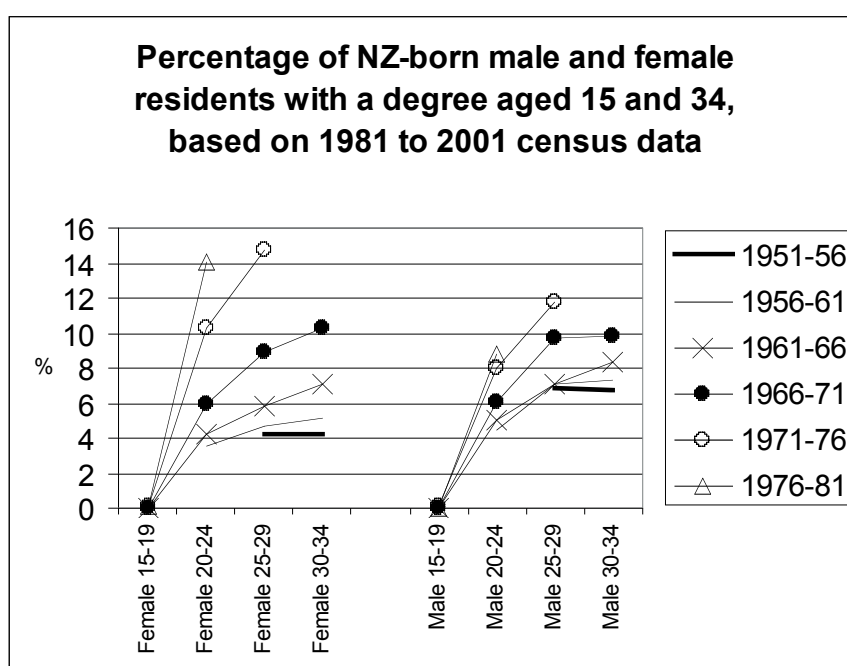
Qualification trends are influenced by both inward and outward migration. Given that the ‘best and brightest’ tend to be the most mobile internationally, the balance of well-educated New Zealanders leaving and well-educated migrants arriving in New Zealand needs to be considered as well as participation in local education institutions. When the data are restricted to New Zealand-born residents the same pattern of

an increasing number of well-educated young women relative to men emerges. For example, Newell and Perry’s cohort analysis shows that in the 1951–56 to 1961–66 birth cohorts men were more likely to have earned degree qualifications. In later birth cohorts the rate at which women earn degrees outpaces men. The changes are particularly strong for the 1971–76 and 1976–81 birth cohorts. For example, of those women born in the period 1976–1981, and who were aged 20–24 in 2001, 14.1% had earned a degree. In contrast, for men in the same cohort 8.8% had earned a degree (Figure 1).

Annual enrolment data provide a more precise indication of when the tertiary education transition commenced than the five-yearly census. Focusing on those under the age of 30, an indication of likely future trends in educational attainment can be given, unaffected by any differential rate at which older persons re-engage with education. On this basis, the education transition can be dated to the late 1990s (Figure 2).

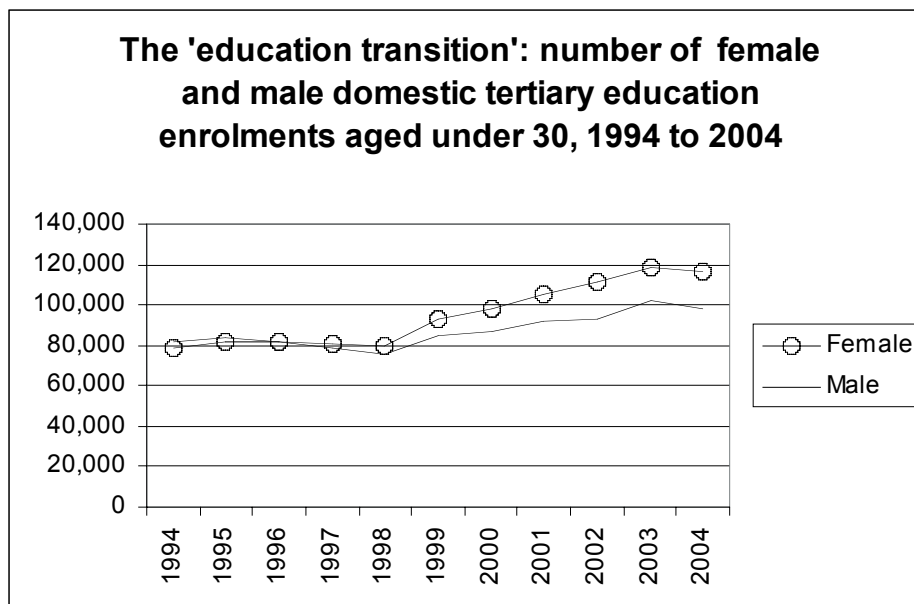
Figure 2 includes certificates through to postgraduate degrees. When educational enrolments are considered by level of education, additional important patterns emerge. The ratio of women to men in the mid-1990s shown in Table 3 indicates that there were considerably more men than women undertaking certificate courses. However, by 2004 there were 7% more women under 30 enrolled in this type of course. Of note also is the

Figure 1



Source: Newell and Perry (2006), based on census data.

Figure 2



Note: In this figure and subsequent figures and tables that show enrolments from 1994, data prior to 1999 excludes enrolments in private tertiary education providers. Given that the numbers in these institutions prior to 1999 were very small, this exclusion does not change the overall trends.

Source: Ministry of Education (2006)

ratio of bachelor's degree enrolments. In 1994 there were 13% more young women enrolled in degrees, but by 2004 this had increased to 32%. While total numbers are relatively low, there has also been a major shift in postgraduate enrolments,

with, by 2004, 42% more women under 30 enrolled than men. This is primarily due to an increase in numbers of women undertaking such study, while male enrolments have remained relatively stable (Table 2).

Table 2: Number of female and male enrolments in tertiary education for those under 30 years of age, domestic students only, 1994–2004

	Certificate		Diploma		Bachelor's		Postgraduate	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
1994	25,015	33,544	16,690	15,191	35,854	31,828	4,381	4,759
1995	27,232	35,651	15,125	14,114	37,732	32,766	4,801	4,973
1996	25,995	34,016	14,754	13,313	39,134	32,587	5,377	5,349
1997	23,348	30,006	14,110	12,425	41,044	33,712	5,361	5,144
1998	22,869	27,573	11,653	11,255	43,511	34,944	5,585	5,070
1999	32,492	35,403	13,398	11,198	45,441	36,071	5,791	5,018
2000	36,809	38,164	13,828	12,389	46,206	36,137	5,811	4,628
2001	43,497	42,253	13,926	12,393	46,873	36,495	5,955	4,383
2002	48,236	45,192	14,082	12,855	48,644	37,026	6,182	4,561
2003	49,307	45,886	13,804	12,321	49,809	38,048	6,499	4,796
2004	53,217	49,513	13,861	11,416	50,584	38,310	6,872	4,845

Source: Ministry of Education (2006)

Table 3: Ratio of female to male enrolments in tertiary education for those under 30 years of age, domestic students only, 1994–2004

	Certificate	Diploma	Bachelor's	Postgraduate
1994	0.75	1.10	1.13	0.92
1995	0.76	1.07	1.15	0.97
1996	0.76	1.11	1.20	1.01
1997	0.78	1.14	1.22	1.04
1998	0.83	1.04	1.25	1.10
1999	0.92	1.20	1.26	1.15
2000	0.96	1.12	1.28	1.26
2001	1.03	1.12	1.28	1.36
2002	1.07	1.10	1.31	1.36
2003	1.07	1.12	1.31	1.36
2004	1.07	1.21	1.32	1.42

Source: Ministry of Education (2006)

Within these changes are some important ethnic differences. Table 4 restricts the time period to 2000–2004. In terms of total tertiary enrolments for domestic students under 30 years of age in 2004, the gender ratios range from a low of 6% more Asian women than Asian men through to a high of 66% more Māori women than Māori men. These ethnic differences show up in all levels of qualification. In enrolments for bachelor's degrees, for example, the ratios of women to men within the Māori ethnic group are particularly extreme. In 1994 there were 21% more Māori women under 30 years of age enrolled for a bachelor's degree, and by 2004 this had lifted to 77%. But in 2004 the ratios for Pacific people and Europeans were also very much in favour of women.

Institutional differences

Are there institutional differences in the sex ratios of enrolments? Looking at gender imbalances for domestic students under 30 years of age by institutional types, of the eight universities only Lincoln and Canterbury had more men enrolled than women in 2004. The newest university, the Auckland University of Technology, had the highest proportion of women, at 60% of its students. Some of the differences will reflect gendered subject choices, with, for example, Lincoln University specialising in agricultural and horticultural courses, while Canterbury University has a large engineering school. Overall, in 2004 there were 26% more women than men aged under 30 enrolled in universities

Table 4: Ratio of female to male enrolments for those under 30 years of age in each main ethnic group, domestic students only, 2000–2004

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Asian	1.02	1.04	1.03	1.03	1.06
European	1.11	1.11	1.10	1.11	1.12
Māori	1.29	1.50	1.67	1.67	1.66
Other	1.03	1.06	1.08	1.23	1.19
Pasifika	1.24	1.30	1.35	1.40	1.45
Total	1.13	1.15	1.17	1.17	1.18
Unknown	1.10	1.12	1.16	1.20	1.23

Source: Ministry of Education

Ethnicity is based on total counts, so some people will be counted more than once.

The gender balance of individual polytechnics is more mixed. Again, this is likely to reflect subject specialisation, but also whether study can be carried out extramurally. For example, reflecting its agricultural courses, Telford Rural Polytechnic had few women enrolled, whereas the Open Polytechnic had over twice as many women enrolled as men in the under 30 age group. Reflecting the imbalances in trades training in favour of men overall, in 2004 there were 13% more men than women aged under 30 enrolled in polytechnics.

Teacher training is undertaken by a number of institutions, including colleges of education that have merged into universities. According to Ministry of Education data, by 2004 there were only two separate colleges of education. Reflecting a pattern of more female than male teachers in early childhood education and care, primary schools and secondary schools, these colleges have for a number of years had a greater number of young women than men enrolled. Overall, in 2004 there were 3.7 times as many young women enrolled as men.

Wānanga are a relatively new type of tertiary education provider. In 2004 Māori comprised 60% of those enrolled in wānanga under 30 years of age. In all three wānanga there were more young women enrolled than men in 2004. The highest ratio was in Te Wānanga O Aotearoa, with nearly three times as many women than men. In contrast to other institutions, where it is Māori who have the highest ratios of young women to men

enrolled, across the wānanga in total in 2004 it was amongst Europeans that the ratio of females to males was the highest.

Finally, recent decades have seen the emergence of many private providers. Taking these as a group, there were just under 40% more young women enrolled in these institutions than men in 2004.

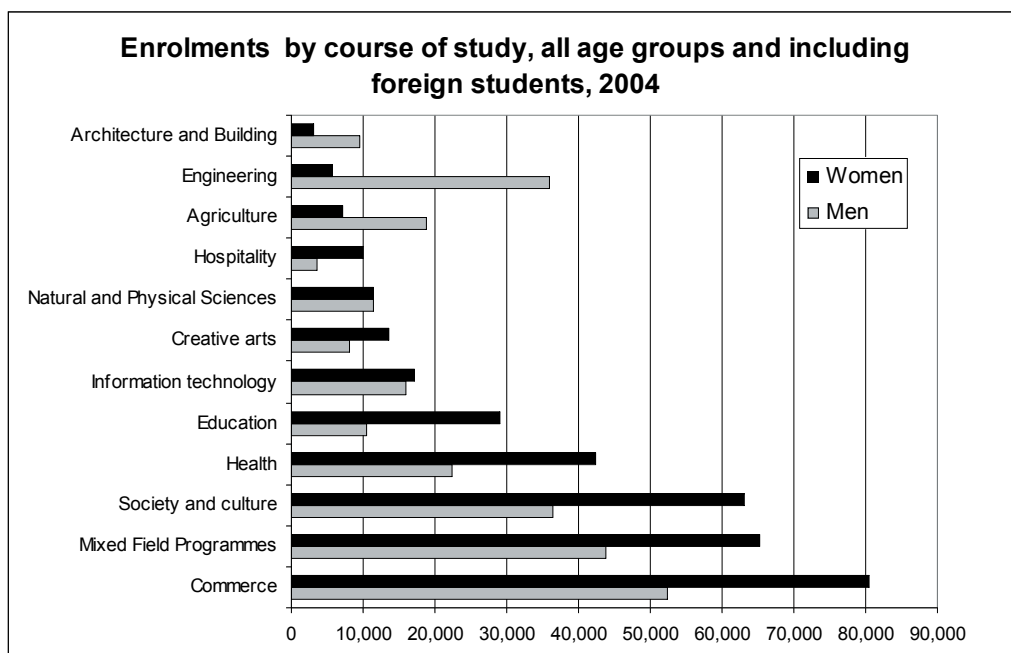
Field of study differences

In commenting on the higher overall numbers of women in tertiary education, McGregor and Gray (2003, p.9) state that female areas of study are concentrated in relatively few areas. Certainly, enrolment data show that there are some areas where women are under-represented, but they do not support this view of women being concentrated in only a few fields of study. Figure 3 shows total enrolments across all age groups, and includes foreign students, and is an update on the 2002 data used by McGregor and Gray. It shows only three broad areas of study in which, in 2004, men were enrolled in greater numbers than women. These are architecture and building, agriculture and environmental studies, and engineering and related technologies, fields of study with much smaller numbers enrolled overall than the larger areas such as commerce or society and culture.

When a finer level of field of study is used, there are some areas where women dominate, such as nursing, midwifery and teacher training, and areas where men dominate, such as automotive engineering and technology.

Table 5 again restricts the data to those under 30 and excludes foreign students. It also only includes those undertaking degree-level or higher study. There were two areas of study that were male-dominated in 2004, engineering and computing; and a further three where men significantly outnumbered women: architecture, town planning and resource management; mathematics; and religion and theology. In the areas of natural and applied sciences and sport and recreation there were slightly more men enrolled than women. In 11 out of the 19 study areas there were more women enrolled than men. Again, within these data are some finer field of study differences. For example, in the medical and health area at the degree or higher level in 2004 there were considerably more women enrolled in nursing, midwifery and radiography courses, but in the traditional male areas of study of audiology, dentistry, medicine and surgery, and optometry there were also more women than men. While there are certainly some areas of study where either men or women are concentrated, these fields of study data do not support the view that women are concentrated in just a few areas of tertiary study.

Figure 3



Source: Ministry of Education (2006). Note: 'Mixed field programmes' consist mainly of shorter courses in areas such as employment skills, literacy and numeracy, and life skills. However, while not a major component, this category also includes most doctoral studies.

Table 5: Main fields of study in 2004, degree- and higher-level enrolments for women and men under 30 years of age and excluding foreign students

	Female	Male	Ratio of women to men
Agriculture, forestry, fishing	755	711	1.06
Architecture, town planning, resource management	794	1,041	0.76
Art, music, handicrafts	2,335	1,404	1.66
Commercial & business	9,536	9,493	1.00
Computing	316	1,365	0.23
Education	5,543	1,311	4.23
Engineering	1,653	4,818	0.34
General programmes	1,536	1,281	1.20
Humanities	10,640	5,737	1.85
Industrial trades & crafts	157	20	7.85
Law	3,932	2,367	1.66
Mass communications	720	244	2.95
Mathematics	13	17	0.76
Medical & health	6,466	1,886	3.43
Natural & applied sciences	7,064	7,401	0.95
Religion & theology	69	91	0.76
Service trades	117	83	1.41
Social, behavioural, communication skills	1,732	512	3.38
Sport and recreation	926	998	0.93

Source: Ministry of Education (2006)

Why have the changes taken place?

New Zealand is not the only country experiencing these changes, but it is among a small group of countries, including the United States, where the shifts have been particularly marked (Freeman, 2004). In the US context, Buchmann and DiPrete (2006) suggest that understanding both the causes and consequences of

the growing gender disparity is a very important area for researchers and policy makers. Yet, despite this significance, little research has been carried out. They suggest that the US literature on gender inequalities in education still focuses primarily on female disadvantage, with, for example, concerns about the few areas where women are under-represented, such as engineering. This seems to be the situation in New Zealand as well. In addition, in both New Zealand and the US there continues to be a greater focus on gender imbalances among senior university staff, still markedly in favour of men, than in the make-up of the student body (Curtis and Phibbs, 2006).

It is perhaps not surprising that in New Zealand policy circles gender analysis focuses on female disadvantage, and that when a group of men are slipping behind this is neither highlighted nor researched. For example, the Ministry of Women's Affairs (1996, p.3) states that gender analysis:

- examines the differences in women's and men's lives, including those which lead to social and economic inequity for women, and applies this understanding to policy development and service delivery;
- is concerned with the underlying causes of these inequities;
- aims to achieve positive change for women.

While supposedly coming from a more gender-neutral background, the Families Commission has recently published a report entitled *Methodologies for analysing the impact of public policy on families* (True, 2005). Of relevance to female advantage in education, the cover of this report shows a mother helping her daughter with homework while her son appears to lie listless on the couch. Within the report, in a section on gender analysis the author notes that among other goals gender analysis 'highlights the practical needs and the strategic interests of women in the context of societal gender inequality' (p.32).

Given the focus on female disadvantage amongst policy makers and advisers, and, potentially connected with this focus, the paucity of both national and international research on the changing gender balance in education, understanding of the drivers of change currently relies heavily on theory. Drawing on a mix of theoretical and analytical work by Buchmann and DiPrete (2006), Dee (2006), DiPrete and Buchmann (2006) and Goldin and Katz (2006), current theories include that:

- the schooling system has become feminised, in terms of both curriculum and teaching staff, which assists a greater proportion of girls to move on to tertiary education;
- more boys are being raised by mothers, without good male role models present in the family;
- new courses being developed by tertiary education providers tend to be in 'female dominated' subjects;
- women have seen better gains than men in earnings and other material benefits from their participation in higher education;
- women are genetically 'brighter' than men but have historically been held back by discrimination within the family, within schools and in the wider society;
- boys have slower social development and more serious behavioural problems than girls, so fewer advance to tertiary education;
- the increase in the age at first marriage has enabled women to invest more time in education;
- more effective birth-control methods have helped women invest in education and their careers.⁴

Tertiary institutions in New Zealand have also been encouraging women to enrol, and often their promotional literature has reflected this. For example, Massey University's 'Welcome to Massey University' web page for future students in August 2005 featured six women and two men. While the ratios were not as high on the other universities' welcome pages, overall more women were portrayed than men.⁵

One of the theories put forward as to why women are gaining higher education is that through such education they gain better earnings. This is, of course, a complex issue. While on average those with a degree or higher qualification earn more than those people who have earned their qualifications through schemes such as modern apprenticeships, where it is men who still dominate, with current shortages of trades workers in New Zealand, males opting for some trade occupations may, at least in the short term, be considerably better off than many of those women gaining a non-trade degree or postgraduate qualification.

As the empirical literature builds up, it is unlikely that there will be one main cause found for the change in

educational participation and attainment by women relative to men, and some of the current theories may find little support.

Longer-term implications of the changes

The rising female advantage in college completion is an important topic of study both in its own right, as a rare example of a *reversal* of a once persistent pattern of stratification, and because of its potential impacts on labor markets, marriage markets, family formation, and other arenas. (Buchmann and DiPrete, 2006, p.3)

Buchmann and DiPrete set out a number of areas where the changes could have an impact. These include wage gaps, labour force participation, and other labour market outcomes; and trends in educational assortative mating, such as women marrying down educationally, delaying marriage or not forming couples. These changes, in turn, may have an impact on parenting decisions. The authors note that, in the US context, the gender gap is causing some concern among college administrators, as it is potentially detrimental to campus diversity. They also suggest that some university admissions officers are now considering issues of affirmative action for male applicants.⁶

The full effects of these changes may not be apparent for a number of decades. But some initial New Zealand data are available, and it is possible to speculate on what might be some of the effects. First, it is clear that rising educational outcomes for women has, overall, been a very positive trend. But it is possible that leaving a

4 In the longer term, the shifting of training into the tertiary sector will also have had some effect on the trends. For example, nursing education moved from hospitals to polytechnics, and then, in part, to universities. However, this took place in the 1970s and 1980s so is not a cause of the recent trends.

5 <http://futurestudents.massey.ac.nz/>. At this time Auckland University had a 3:1 ratio of women to men on a similar web page (<http://www.auckland.ac.nz/uoa/for/prospective/home.cfm>); Waikato University also a ratio of 3:1 (<http://www.waikato.ac.nz/student/future.shtml>); Victoria one woman and one man and a mixed crowd scene (http://www.vuw.ac.nz/home/prospective_students/index.html); Canterbury University and the Auckland Institute of Technology both had a 4:1 ratio of women to men (<http://www.canterbury.ac.nz/prospectivestudents.shtml>); www.aut.ac.nz/students/; and Otago one man and one woman (<http://www.otago.ac.nz/prospectivestudents/index.php>) (all accessed 2 August 2005).

6 Affirmative action is always a very difficult issue. If we knew for certain that differences in the numbers of men and women enrolled in particular courses was due to discrimination, there may be a case for having quotas in these areas. However, if such evidence is not available we should not automatically assume differences in enrolments show discrimination at work and that, as a result, affirmative action policies are appropriate.

group of men behind will have some negative outcomes. If New Zealand is to become a high income, high employment society, with, for example, greater parity in wages with Australia, there will have to be increases in productivity. Given the links between education and productivity, further improvements in educational participation and performance at both school and tertiary levels are essential. Understanding why some groups of men, particularly Māori and Pacific men, have seen a deterioration in their relative education participation rates will assist with the development of more effective interventions to lift levels of performance not only in education but also in the labour market. The Human Rights Commission's concern with male dominance in modern apprenticeship participation, as expressed by McGregor and Gray (2003), takes on another light when the larger gender imbalance in tertiary education completions is considered. 'Recruiting from only "half" the population will not serve New Zealand well,' they state (p.2); but when it comes to wider tertiary qualifications it is now the male half that is being under-recruited. This suggests that policy makers should have some concern about recent trends in educational enrolment and attainment by young men relative to young women.

The direct labour market implications of the changes in education are difficult to predict. Employers will be recruiting from a larger pool of well-educated women and, in theory, this should result in an increase in the longer term in the proportion of women holding managerial and professional positions. However, these outcomes will be influenced by a range of factors, including the choices the women themselves make about career versus family roles, how employers and the wider society support women as well as men to integrate work and family obligations, and how, in the light of the changes in educational participation and attainment, men change their own expectations of work-life balance.

Not unconnected with labour market decisions, changing patterns of education can influence marriage and fertility choices. They may also influence household income inequality through changes in marriage choices. International research suggests that gaining higher levels of education, and the increased earning potential associated with better education, allows women to search longer for a suitable partner. Employment not only subsidises the marital search process, but it

potentially reduces the economic rationale for marriage. Well-educated women are particularly likely to set higher standards for partner selection. When women start to become better educated than men, trying to maintain a pattern of 'marrying up' educationally will inevitably result in a decline in partnering for women. Alternatively, women may lower their relative educational expectations. Examples of marrying down educationally have always existed in New Zealand: for example, female school teachers or nurses marrying farmers without formal qualifications. This pattern may become far more common in the future. Census data through to 2001 suggest that already both these outcomes are becoming more widespread in New Zealand (Callister, 2006).

Mare and Schwartz (2006) argue that who marries whom has implications for the formation of families, the extent of inequality among families and individuals, and intergenerational inequality. Their research shows that over the past 40 years in the US the similarity of husbands' and wives' educational attainments has increased markedly. They note that although rising inequality among households may be a consequence of increasing spousal resemblance in terms of education, due in part to the strong increase in female educational attainment, increasing income inequality among individuals may itself be a cause of trends in educational assortative mating. In the US, as in New Zealand, increased earnings inequality for individuals has, in part, been an outcome of a rise in the number of people returning to education (O'Dea, 2000). This increases the incentives to either 'marry up' or, at least, not 'marry down'.

All these outcomes may in turn influence fertility decisions. Fertility may be increased through specialisation of roles if women are 'marrying up' and are encouraged to downgrade career success. On the other hand, if there is a shortage of well-educated men to partner well-educated women, there may be greater pressure on women to be 'breadwinners' rather than 'caregivers'. Equally, where couples are both well educated there are strong incentives for both to be breadwinners. Fertility may reduce unless the men that women are marrying have strong caregiving ideals, caregiving is strongly supported by the state through policies such as independent rights to paid parental leave for fathers (Callister and Galtry, 2006), or care outside the home is better supported, such as through low-cost child care.

Finally, the changes in education may even influence patterns of ethnic intermarriage. For example, well-educated Māori and Pacific women are far more likely to have a partner outside their ethnic group than those with lower levels of education (Callister, Didham and Potter, 2005). In part this is likely to reflect the gender-based educational imbalances within these groups. If education increasingly plays a more important role in partner choice than ethnicity, as seems to be the situation in most industrialised countries, we can expect more 'outmarriage' by Māori and Pacific women. The changes in educational participation by Māori and Pacific women are also likely to have some impact on Māori and Pacific organisations. If, for example, Māori wish to have well-educated Māori lead iwi development, it will increasingly be young women rather than young men they will need to turn to.

Conclusion

The educational disparity between women and men within tertiary education, now in favour of women, is a relatively new, but very significant, change within society. Yet despite the magnitude of the change, policy makers currently seem somewhat oblivious to this shift. As one consequence, little is known in New Zealand about why this quite significant change has taken place and the possible long-term implications in areas such as the labour market and family form and function. We therefore suggest that New Zealand policy makers need to place this topic on their research agendas.

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Policy Thinking: From ‘If ... Then’ to ‘What If ...’

Amanda Wolf

Now, more than ever before, good advice is held to be a function of its knowledge base. Advisers seek connections between information, knowledge, policy and outcomes. Given issue complexity, multiple values and competing sources of information, lively debate focuses on various qualities of knowledge, and its production, management and relevance. Some policy advisers and decision makers equate ‘good’ knowledge with expert and scientific ‘evidence’. Others proclaim the worth of local and ‘interpretive’ knowledge, which arises from consultation, dialogue and mutual learning processes. Unfortunately, debate centred on the qualities of knowledge tacitly assumes that good qualities automatically increase the odds of good policy. In my classes, I point to the floor, and ask participants to imagine it occupied by a gold-star ‘evidence base’. I ask them to imagine walking up to that heap, and begging it to speak. They laugh, for no matter how much information and knowledge is amassed, how excellent its qualities, policy advice is a function of both knowledge *and* capable thinking and reasoning.

effectively pursue ‘what if ...’ inquiry, who think ‘laterally’ and who exhibit a bloodhound’s skill in nosing out promising ideas are held in the highest esteem by their peers and superiors.

Two additional modes of thinking fall between the critical and the creative (see Table 1). First, multidisciplinary thinking, which is essentially the application of multiple critical frameworks, differs from basic critical thinking in that the inquirer uses different lenses to investigate the same issue and emphasises the integration of the resulting knowledge. Some proponents of creativity (or its synonym, ‘innovation’) equate it with the excellent conduct of tasks *within* a critical framework, whether single- or multidisciplinary, noting that ‘creativity is the child of technical excellence’. Others, however, who sustain a clear distinction between the realms of analytic and innovative reasoning, evoke a second additional mode of thinking by claiming that both critical and creative thinking is needed – to one degree or another, depending on context – to produce excellent advice.

Table 1: Modes of thinking

Modes of thinking				
	Critical/Analytic	Multidisciplinary	Creative/Critical	Creative/Synthetic
Inquiry	If ... then	If... If ... If ... then	What if ... then	What if ...
Source of new ideas	Application of rules	Integration, synthesis	Experience, knowledge, logic	Hunches, open inquiry

Current rhetoric suggests a dichotomy between thinking that is either critical and analytical, or creative and synthetic. Managers and decision makers value – as they should – analytical and technical competency in advice. They give keen attention to analysts’ ‘if ... then’ inquiry and its application to scientific evidence in justifying recommended actions. Nevertheless, calls for ‘innovative’ or ‘creative’ thinking resound in contemporary policy-making circles. Advisers who

This article is about thinking for policy advice. (See Box 1 for some definitions of thinking, reasoning and related terms.) Guidance for critical thinking is readily available. But regardless of whether creative thinking is part of, or complements, analytical thinking, little practical guidance is available for increasing its amount and quality. As a result, policy advice may remain poor in ‘new’ ideas, even as new ideas are widely regarded as keys to progress.

Box 1: Some definitions

In everyday use, and as used generally in this article, 'thinking' serves for a range of related concepts. This box introduces some of the mental activities and qualities as they apply in policy analysis, with assistance from the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

Thinking is baseline mental activity – cogitation, meditation or similar. To think is to form a thought or other product of a mental process, to exercise the mind, to form connected ideas of any kind; to have, or make, a train of ideas pass through the mind.

Reasoning refers to a particular kind of 'train of ideas', in which one judgement is deduced from another or others which are given, or, more loosely, in which various given elements are ordered in some manner. That is, to reason is to think in a connected and sensible manner.

In the public sphere we are particularly interested in reasoning that is both 'public' and 'practical'. *Public and practical reasoning* is a social and ethical interaction regarding what we should or will do. The locus or ownership of reasoning is public. It may be collective, in a 'civic discourse' manner, or it may be done by individuals, such as public servants and politicians, on behalf of the public. Its purpose is decision making. It draws on reasoners' beliefs and experiences. It relates to some specific impetus to act, such as a defined policy problem that requires a decision, and it focuses on guiding action. Public and practical reasoning, whether good or not, thus has real-world consequences.

Reasoning as I have defined it is systematic, but it may, or may not, be logical. *Logic* is a slippery term that connotes both a particular way of 'exercising the mind' by making inferences, and the 'art' or 'science' involved in making inferences.

Two examples

Before turning to more detailed consideration of policy thinking, I set out the main argument (in the next section) with the assistance of two examples presented

here. The first example illustrates the emergence of a technically competent researcher's new idea. Richard Ellwood reports what he calls 'critical research insights' in the case of poverty policy. Using longitudinal data on family income, Ellwood shows that there are two sides to poverty and public assistance:

Most of those who were *just becoming needy* for the first time and most of those who were *just beginning aid* for the first time had relatively short episodes. Thus, most of those who had ever had an episode of poverty or public assistance receipt moved off assistance fairly quickly. Yet, seemingly in contradiction, most of those *poor at a point in time* or *receiving aid at a given moment* [i.e. those picked up in 'snapshot' cross-sectional data studies] were in the midst of a much longer period of need [emphasis in original].

Since only a small minority of new entrants at any point in time become long-term recipients of assistance, Ellwood argues for a shift in policy focus. The new approach would address ways of reducing long-term welfare use, why a person's poverty status changes, and how to 'dampen movements into poverty and facilitate movements out of poverty'.

The 'hairdresser-counsellor' is an example of creative thinking based in everyday experience. As reported in the *Chicago Sun Times* on 25 April 2006, 'Cut It Out' is a nationwide programme in the United States to train hairdressers to recognise warning signs of abuse and safely refer clients to local resources. This programme was initiated by salon professionals, but clearly resonates with policy knowledge. The banner headline on the Cut It Out website reports that 31% of women report being physically abused by an intimate partner at some point in their lives. Yet a Chicago official cites evidence that most victims of domestic violence never call the police or go to social service agencies. Hairdressers have an intimate association with their clients. Cut It Out trains them to observe bruises and places where hair has been pulled out, or to appropriately interpret 'No, he won't let me' when they suggest a new style. Clients may then be directed to discreet referral cards, which salons report constantly need replenishment.

What Ellwood knew scientifically and practically grounded his problem-solving, 'if ... then', thinking, which led to an insight with significant policy

implications. With extensive experience in both policy and research, Ellwood knew enough about poverty and welfare dependence to resolve the ‘seeming contradiction’ in new longitudinal data. Equally, he was able to connect the resolution of the data issue to an appropriate policy focus. Someone trained in data analysis, but lacking Ellwood’s policy experience, might measure and observe, but not interpret effectively. Similarly, someone steeped in a particular government’s welfare policy might not have had the selectivity of focus to shift attention to the ‘switch points’ into and out of poverty.

The hairdresser-counsellor example is emblematic of what inquirers can come to know for themselves as they observe, deliberate, or learn from their own or others’ experiences through a creative ‘what if ...’ inquiry. In these cases, no particular technical expertise is called upon, nor must the analyst already be a subject expert. The expert on domestic violence and the salon owner are equally able to ask, ‘What if we found a way to safely make referrals in a salon?’ and to follow through to organise training and materials.

The argument in a nutshell

If policy advice is to address more effectively issues like the poverty-welfare dependency or the domestic violence referral challenges, I argue that we can do with less attention to specific facts and mechanistic knowledge-handling skill. Instead, we need to pay more attention to the analyst-advisers’ inquiry, and to the internal resources from which that inquiry emanates. Internal resources include a person’s natural capacities, strategies, thoughts, experiences and disciplines, and their mental activities in the process of reasoning.

A crucial capacity is the ability and willingness to embrace contradiction, conflict, or what Charles Peirce, the late 19th-century pragmatic philosopher, called ‘genuine doubt’ in order to be effectively primed for new ideas. Embracing genuine doubt means pausing at the open point in an inquiry (though not for too long – many open inquiries need to be closed by some resolution, however provisional). The analyst must resist artificially constraining the ‘ifs’ in order to achieve a tidy resolution. The analyst must be able to initiate new chains of ideas by engaging fully in the inquiry.

Embracing genuine doubt will often lead an inquirer to consider the relational nature of social or human behaviour. Often what is new in policy is hidden in plain

sight, just as hairdressers have been talking and listening to clients’ woes since the first commercial haircut. Detecting something new requires the analyst to adjust the focal depth of her inquiry, to reframe the question. We know, for instance, that out of all the people who know how much alcohol is safe or legal to consume before driving, and who drink past that point, only some will then drive. Researchers often examine the aggregate characteristics of the drivers and the resisters, compare the two groups, and propose some interventions to turn drivers into resisters. Nobel laureate Thomas Schelling, a genuine doubter and reframing wizard, suggests that many people are simultaneously drivers and resisters. Among the drink drivers on any given night are resisters whose self-control has lapsed. The relevant comparison may be between person *A* who has vowed never to drive drunk and person *A* who nevertheless drives drunk.

In addition, more attention is needed to the collective resources that can be brought to bear on policy advice. These, most simply, include the combined internal resources of others – contemporary or historical – that are available to the analyst. In particular, collective resources are available in the institutional and political contexts in which an inquirer engages, and might include essentially, and not only instrumentally, ecological and cultural resources.

Commentators, in the main, assert that poor analysis is analysis that fails to use information well, or to select and apply models correctly, and so on. Public policy and social research educators are urged to improve the technical competency of graduates and practitioners. I argue a different point. Education and professional development, while continuing to support analysts’ development of problem-solving analytical approaches, might inspire analysts to rely somewhat less on external aids to thinking – the raw ingredients and tools such as stocks of information, pre-set problems, textbook solutions, ‘best’ or ‘smart’ practices, and knowledge management systems – and more on their experience and innate capacity to come up with new ideas worth considering.

The case for new ideas from policy thinking

Paul Callaghan, reflecting on a project supported by the Smash Palace Fund that brought writers and physicists together to imagine and share in the ‘what if ...’ activities at the centre of both art and science, quotes Richard Feynman on imagination. The conviction holds equally

for policy, as I show with my bracketed inserts:

Our kind of [*policy*] imagination is quite a difficult game. One has to have the imagination to think of something that has never been seen [*suggested/tried*] before, never been heard of before. At the same time the thoughts are restricted in a straightjacket, so to speak, limited by the conditions that come from our knowledge of the way nature [*society/human behaviour*] really is.

‘Innovation’ and ‘creativity’ have not always been part of the analyst’s job description. Even so, a two-sided, or hybrid, capacity has long been endorsed. As early as 1979, in *Speaking Truth to Power*, Wildavsky cast analysis as both social interaction (politics and preferences) and intellectual cogitation (planning and causal knowledge). Since then, no one can have missed the ‘art and craft’ or ‘art and science’ descriptions which he originated. He wrote that ‘analysis is imagination’ and ‘analysis is creating and crafting problems worth solving’. More recently, we have Bardach, author of a slim distillation of advice to analysts: ‘policy analysis is more art than science. It draws on intuitions as much as methods’.

However, in Wildavsky’s and Bardach’s texts, and indeed in all my investigations, I have found that the practical meaning of ‘the art of policy analysis’ is either ignored once the dutiful rhetorical flourish is ended, or it is applied, in its craft interpretation, to elements of technical professional skill: skill in the selection and use of materials (information, data) and tools (methods, models), and skill in tailoring or constructing policy solutions from generic inputs (theories, interventions, New Zealand-specific conditions). The ‘imaginative art’ is simply not taken up in the sense in which Feynman presented it: as the genesis of new ideas, or seeing-the-as-yet-unseen. Instead, in an environment of ever more information, ever less time, ever more complex problems, and ever less taste for inadvertent failure, the call goes out for improved rigour, greater technical competency and superior critical thinking skills.

Nevertheless, there are indications that the profession may be ready to embrace the ‘imaginative’ alternative. Calls for innovation and creativity arise often in the context of hard or perplexing policy challenges. In these cases, analysts may face an abundance of information, but also a long history of policy development and change. For example, we have a

good deal of information on behaviours that endanger health and safety, and yet frequently wonder whether policies are making much progress. It is often too easy to traverse the same old ground. In an information-rich environment, analysts working conventionally face diminishing returns as they work and rework their explanatory models in ever finer detail. Different thinking might offer fresh ways of looking at the ‘known’ and fresh ideas about what to do.

The challenges of ‘joined-up’ or ‘cross-cutting’ policy making highlight another limitation of conventional approaches. While these terms call attention to the fact that social reality is holistic, government responses – and the research and analysis that underpin them – tend to be fragmented. Disciplinary models, theories and variables of all descriptions comprise the piecemeal ingredients for whole-of-government efforts, but sentence specialist analysts to painstaking re-assembly work. Different thinking might provide an integrating framework to enable them to work more productively with the inevitable fragments of knowledge.

Even when attempting to address hard and cross-cutting issues differently within an integrating frame of reference, analysts may retain a ‘fix-it’ orientation. In this view, cross-cutting issues, and even genuinely complex issues, are just bigger and more unruly than the old ones: analysts need to try harder to get answers, make better use of what they know, have better strategies to exert greater control over the unpredictable mess. But what happens if that control remains elusive? If, try as they might, analysts have scant ground to stand on before it is swept away by some new current? Different thinking might facilitate the design and continual improvement of flexible, resilient, perhaps systemic, policy suited to a complex situation that lacks ‘answers’. A recent statement from the Hon Pete Hodgson on obesity evokes this challenge: ‘making rules before changing attitudes is pointless. This is about changing our lifestyles. Quick fixes don’t happen. No country has cracked this or begun to. We want to be among the first.’

Robert Klitgaard, reflecting on Schelling’s contribution to policy analysis, notes that

in real policy making the intellectual problem is often ... how to discover, how to be more creative about, the objectives, the alternatives, and the constraints. In other words, how to

understand, expand, and enrich the ‘if’. The rejected [rational] paradigm says that the policy maker’s problem is deciding among many given courses of action. Schelling’s version turns this radically around. The problem is understanding, indeed generating, the objectives and the range of alternatives. Once policymakers have done that, they usually do well at making decisions. They are already pretty good at the ‘then’ part; they may need help on the ‘if’.

The time appears ripe in New Zealand for moving beyond new-thinking rhetoric to practical, enhanced production of the ‘if’. In the lead article of this journal’s first issue, Gary Hawke, writing as head of the School of Government, and Michael Wintringham, writing as the outgoing state services commissioner, noted that ‘governments want a public service which is innovative, able to respond to new challenges and not merely one which maintains familiar routines’. They further noted that agencies need to adjust ‘international best practice’ with understanding of the local context, which requires ‘creativity and innovation’.

Alternative types of thinking and reasoning

In this section I contrast critical thinking with creative thinking, and other overlapping and interrelated types of thinking that may, or should, be exercised by otherwise competent analytical or critical thinkers. However, there are plenty of common elements among the various modes. In particular, they all imply a certain searching and discerning inquiry, grounded in the requirements of public and practical reasoning. It is both possible and necessary, in my view, for policy thinkers to move beyond stale arguments that critical and creative thinking are ontologically and epistemologically too different to be joined together.

Analytical, or critical, thinking

In the State Services Commission’s list of core competencies for policy analysts, two types of thinking skills are noted, the first of which is analytical:

the ability to analyse issues from a multi-disciplinarian focus, to unbundle problems and reconstitute them, to develop concepts based on sound theoretical and empirical knowledge, to be logical, to critique and be sceptical, to perceive

the requirements for action or implementation, and to simplify complex problems.

Analysts break apart a problem, seeking to understand its components and relationships, then address the search for a solution by considering the array of ‘evidence’ that helps to explain the components and relationships. Careful logical work results in the selection of the ‘best’ advice to offer a decision maker. Great critical thinkers work brilliantly with existing knowledge to reach a definitive conclusion. It is *Star Trek’s* Spock’s exemplary ‘if ... then’ reasoning, as summarised by Walters: Spock can ‘get to the heart of an argument by stripping through rhetorical gloss, emotional ephemera, and cognitive confusion’. The critical thinker, Walters continues, ‘draw[s] conclusions only when there is enough evidence to warrant them and refuse[s] to go beyond the limits of logical probability’. Critical thinking can be explained by a series of logical rules. It is also entirely reactive, finding application to existing arguments and problems.

Within this overall paradigm, creativity shows in two activities. First, after taking a problem apart, analysts seek to recombine elements, to reconstitute them in more informative ways. Second, creativity emerges in the thinking of the most adept critical thinkers. Such a person knows the rules of problem solving so thoroughly that she can apply them in new ways and in new situations. Dora Costa and Matt Kahn, for example, used economic thinking to discover how social capital worked in the American Civil War. They showed why some soldiers risked death despite ubiquitous low pay and weak punishment strategies, while others shirked their duties.

Creative, or design, thinking

In the State Services Commission’s list, the second thinking competency is defined as ‘innovative’. It is ‘the ability to think laterally about a policy issue, to challenge existing concepts and assumptions, and to propose creative alternatives’. Creative thinking is this domain of ‘what if ...’. Walters contrasts the pure critical thinking of Spock with tacit, non-reductionist, non-sequential, hunch-pursuing thinking. Many state servants exhibit such thinking: the social worker who develops a feeling for ‘risks’ in a household, the teacher who works out a way to engage a previously uninterested student, or the conservationist who conceives of land encircled by a predator-proof fence. Creative thinking,

by definition, enables a person to formulate new ideas, and, indeed, new problems. It has also been called ‘synthetic’ thinking, which draws attention to making connections between seemingly disparate pieces of a puzzle. Its outputs can then become inputs for critical thinking. Creative thinking naturally retains wholes, and concentrates on broad patterns rather than fine detail. Significantly, creative thinking arises within a discrete context and on the basis of a background of established knowledge and conventional perceptions. It is not a case of ‘anything goes’. ‘What if ...’ constructions must be genuinely capable of extending understanding or action (not merely odd or unconventional).

‘Design’ thinking is a special case of creative thinking, with an express practical aim. It is the practical reasoner’s creative thinking. Whether one is designing a toaster or a local tourism campaign, design thinking skills include: objective-led, constrained inventiveness; ability to visualise; bias for adaptivity (solutions that not only solve the immediate problem but can be adapted to changing demands and needs); systemic vision; ability to use language to reveal and explain patterns and distil complex phenomena to their essence; self-governing practicality (tempering unconstrained creativity with practicality); and the ability to work systematically with qualitative information.

Case-based/analogy/legal reasoning and interpretation

Legal reasoning is Janus-faced, mindful of precedent, encompassing both a backward-looking conserving component and a forward-looking creative one. Treating cases as discrete, but composed of a number of elements, analysts ‘solve’ new problems by analogy and controlled interpretation of the current case with others. Analogical thinking works with patterned wholes, unlike analytical thinking, which seeks to unbundle the elements. Its logic is abductive, characterised by the creation of plausible hypotheses (see Box 2).

Cognitive scientists have shown that people naturally think with patterns, and with vague or approximate categories. A variable, such as ‘health’ or ‘old’ or ‘fluent’, has blurred, or ‘fuzzy’, edges. In fuzzy set theory, degrees of set membership are allowed, such as ‘fully healthy’ and ‘neither healthy nor unhealthy’, using categories established by the researcher. Fuzzy logic, underpinned by analogical reasoning, allows social scientists to make

Box 2: Abductive logic

Recently, *abduction*, a mode of logic first defined by Aristotle, has been revitalised in applications ranging from artificial intelligence and criminal investigation to business strategy. Following Peirce, abduction is the mode of inquiry for making plausible explanations for interesting or puzzling observations. Abduction produces an initial inference, which can be further investigated via inductive and deductive rules: some observed anomaly leads to a hypothesis that would (if true) explain the anomaly.

For example, the Ministry of Social Development recently investigated Sickness Benefit and Invalid Benefit clients’ needs and aspirations by drawing on the belief systems, values and attitudes of the clients themselves. In a small pilot study, the research team observed a suggestive difference in the responses of Māori and New Zealand Europeans to the benefit system. While 14 of 20 New Zealand Europeans in the study were associated with the ‘unhappy’ or ‘negative’ attitude clusters (e.g., having a ‘sense of being entitled to support’ or a ‘sense of being a victim of stigma’), all Māori who showed strong views were associated with ‘happy’ or ‘positive’ attitudes. This observation could be followed up with more study and discussion with caseworkers.

Abduction, crucially, describes a wide range of intrinsically creative acts of thought sparked by perception. An abductive thought may be an insight, as in Archimedes’ original eureka moment in the bath. Abduction comes into play when a thinker forms a metaphor to convey a fuzzy, relational or holistic resemblance (e.g., of a school as a ‘prison’ or a ‘garden’), and when she, like Sherlock Holmes, deciphers a clue or detects a pattern. Finally, abduction is the logical means by which a thinker resolves the *meaning*, for her, of some facts, patterns and so on.

inferences based on such vague concepts systematically. It sets up ‘if ... then’ rules but applies them holistically, as in the rule, ‘if a person is unhealthy, then treat with care’, where both ‘unhealthy’ and ‘care’ can vary over

a continuous range. Fuzzy logic in policy analysis can assist in the detection of similarities and differences between cases and in systems analysis.

Strategic thinking

Strategic thinking contributes to a form of practical reasoning specifically highlighting the consideration of assumptions and alternative courses of action where there is significant and challenging uncertainty, and where there is heightened recognition that new courses of action are needed. A prominent school of strategic thinking explicitly evokes thinking's creative qualities. Liedtka defines strategic thinking as a blend of critical and creative thinking. She notes that it is abductive, future-focused and inventive. Similarly, Mintzberg notes that strategic thinking is a synthesising process utilising intuition and creativity, whose outcome is 'an integrated perspective of the enterprise'. The strategic thinker marshals a broad range of inputs – existing knowledge, constraints, objectives, multiple points of view and so on – and tests various configurations for their coherence and fit within the given parameters. Strategic thinking exemplifies continuous learning, involving trial and error, iteration and the 'emergence' of learning.

Reflective thinking

Reflective thinking is not directly practically focused, but instead serves to strengthen the practical thinker's capacities. In thinking reflectively, an individual inquires inwards to help refine her understanding of an experience, which may lead to changes in her perspectives and in subsequent behaviours that result in turn in new insights and deeper understandings of her experiences. Reflection is evaluative and judgemental. It allows for the interconnections between observations, past experiences and judgement to come to the fore in decision making. It suggests the meaning of experience and promotes a deep approach to learning because it encourages problem reframing, questioning assumptions and considering multiple perspectives. Importantly, reflective thinking is invoked when analysts look at the moral dimensions of their work, which can lead to modified practices in the future, or to more direct actions, such as protest.

Collective thinking and wisdom

Like reflective thinking, collective thinking can work indirectly to strengthen other thinking. (It can also

malfunction, a phenomenon known as 'groupthink'.) However, whereas reflective thinking must be specifically attended to if it is to be of value (and so is often considered a luxury by continually time-pressed public servants), all thinkers automatically tap into the broader flow of human knowledge and experience to some degree. At one level, this statement merely acknowledges that culture and society condition our thoughts by providing language and selecting facts and theories for our possible attention. However, a 'switched-on' thinker is alert to these influences and actively copes with them. At a somewhat less obvious level, the notion of collective thinking suggests that, particularly with public and practical reasoning, knowledge is systemic. No one person can have the whole answer.

Further, in everyday usage 'wisdom' – although conceived as an individualistic quality – is defined with reference to some jointly produced knowledge and applies, according to Baltes and Staudinger, to the 'fundamental pragmatics of life', which are, at least in part, social. That is, despite the guru on the mountain-top cliché, a person cannot be 'wise' without rich practical knowledge, and knowledge of the relativities of values and their social priorities. In addition, the 'wisdom of crowds' attracts contemporary interest. Especially as popularised by Surowiecki, in a wide range of examples, the many reach better decisions than the few, even if the few are considered 'experts'. Finally, wisdom is creative. For McKenna and Rooney, wisdom arises in a 'subjective, transcendent, imaginative mental process'.

Towards a renewed focus on the inquirer and the inquiry

The time is ripe to consider how educators and managers can better encourage analysts, new and mid-career, to think creatively using cases and design thinking, and to draw more effectively upon reflective and collective thinking. In this final section I propose some ways to support and enhance other ways of thinking. First, however, I consider the case that, notwithstanding the interrelatedness of critical and creative thinking, we would be best advised to focus solely on improving analysts' critical capacities.

Do nothing/focus solely on increasing the rational critical skills of analysts

The case against increased emphasis on teaching and developing creative thinking includes three arguments.

First, if creativity is viewed as a higher-order skill, then users have to be ready and able to use it. There may be concerns that people are expected to run before they can walk. Undue focus on creativity might undermine the priority of analytic and critical capacity. Second, even if we did try to develop more creative analysts, they would not last. They might become frustrated at the failure of politicians and other officials to take up their ideas. Or they might find their ideas usurped by a political system that reserves for itself the right to be creative. Third, emphasising creativity could create an upsurge in pseudo-creative razzle-dazzle, attracting people with modest technical skills but over-sized notions of the worth of their ideas. The clear communication of critical thinking might be stymied or perverted in a more hyped-up atmosphere.

Ultimately, the reasons against focusing more on creative thinking and its hybrids lack persuasiveness. Pure creative thinking will remain a minority occupation for most policy advisers. But creative, abductive thinking is natural and it would require draconian, not to say counter-productive, methods to check it. Nurturing creativity is not zero-sum with developing critical thinking skills. Running through the case against is a fear that the overall quality of advice will suffer because creative thinking squeezes out critical thinking. If so, it is a minor risk worth taking. As story after story in science and art attest, dissatisfaction or some other discomfort with the status quo, along with curiosity about the unknown, is precisely the spur to new, breakthrough ideas.

Education-based responses

Creativity can be taught, although it is also clear that people naturally vary in their talents. For example, variously talented art students may all be taught how to observe, copy, work with their materials, but their results will not all be first-rate. While I am aware of some scattered efforts to develop creative thinking skills for policy analysis, there is little supporting literature beyond that treating techniques (such as brainstorming) or providing mere exhortation. Other elements of alternative modes of thinking are better established: strategic thinking, reflective practice and ‘thinking in time’ as a policy analytic technique have been taught for years (though, arguably, not with enough attention). Moreover, if these are taught only in programmes that otherwise feature analytic and critical thinking, then creative production of

new ideas could be constrained within the critical paradigm.

Several joint design and professional practice business programmes have been established in recent years, including at the Rotman School of Business in Toronto and at Stanford. At Stanford’s ‘D-School’, students from engineering, social sciences, education and design form collaborative teams to solve problems and learn creative methodologies. The Institute of Design at the Illinois Institute of Technology, another design school leader, has developed a ‘blueprint’ for a master’s programme with a goal ‘to fuse design skills and methods with policy knowledge and techniques to create an individual capable of developing innovative and relevant solutions to the many problems facing public policy today’. In all of these examples the pedagogy stresses learning by doing in diverse teams, rather than learning and practising techniques. The underlying principles embrace complexity and the designer’s own situatedness in the problem context. But, because the designers are practical reasoners, their ideas have also to pass muster in a business or public setting.

An ‘intensive’ or ‘immersion’ course, long established in US pre-career policy programmes, and increasingly popular at Victoria University’s School of Government, might be adapted to foster creativity. Like the design school models, an intensive course could mix together people of very different experiences, set a real task and (possibly) forgo the classroom setting for the real-world laboratory.

Within the regular curriculum, some additional proposals include:

- Students could be encouraged or required to undertake some historical inquiry and courses in literature and arts.
- Reflective journal-keeping could be mandatory, with students encouraged to reflect across both the curriculum and their experiences.
- More class time could be devoted to the complex and challenging problems (those that do not make good ‘textbook’ examples), and explicitly approached in different ways.
- Multidisciplinary methods could be explicitly taught, modelled and practised.

Workplace-based responses

Professional development opportunities might usefully be developed along the educational lines sketched above (such as work-release to take part in design intensives). A range of additional workplace efforts could enhance and support creativity. Apprenticeships and mentoring both establish intensive relationships (one-to-one or one-to-team) that foster learning through practice, open questioning of practice and reflection. While some departments already have some mechanisms to close the learning loop on completed projects, more could be done to disseminate examples of good and bad thinking, and to maintain a clearing-house-style repository of good examples. These suggestions transplant the 'case-based' model of learning in an educational setting to the practice setting, so that practitioners can better draw lessons for their own practice from narratives of others' practice. A key would be to present these narratives with explicit attention to multiple frames of analysis, the ins and outs of iterative learning towards a solution, and reflections on any direct engagement with 'creative' thinking. Finally, there is scope for departments to target more resources towards encouraging creativity to flourish within policy-realistic constraints. Such efforts need to be more than flash-in-the-pan sessions, and might perhaps become a regular facet of departments' forward-looking research plans.

These suggestions emphasise the development of thinking and reasoning, rather than the development of knowledge-handling skills only. They require a culture of 'space and safety' that would provide the necessary conditions for creative and innovative thinking. They have implications for the manner in which staff are recruited and managed, both as individuals and as members of teams, and for life-long learning. They privilege the experience that is a *sine qua non* of professional practice. The case for encouraging the flourishing of creative thinking for policy analysis and advice is robust. The time is right. What ideas do you have?

A note on sources

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New Governance, New Dilemmas: Post-Reform Issues in New Zealand's Public Sector

Richard Norman

Introduction

During fast-paced reforms of the 1980s and 1990s in New Zealand, the emphasis was on 'problem solving' to create a new system of governance. With 'new governance' structures in place for nearly 20 years, a major management role is that of reconciling dilemmas arising from prescriptions for reform. The art of managing dilemmas – the balancing of competing propositions – is described in this article. Eight dilemmas are identified to encapsulate the tensions that are evident in a model which gives managers considerable delegated authority for finance and people, while holding them accountable for results.

New governance, new dilemmas

As an early and comprehensive adopter of theories described as New Public Management (NPM) or 'reinventing government', New Zealand now has 20 years experience of what Salamon (2002) terms 'new governance'. This term helps distinguish between advocacy for reform which was a feature of the late 1980s and much of the 1990s, and the new systems of public management created as a result of reform. While before 1984 'old public administration' was delivered through centralised bureaucracies with distinctive employment and accounting rules, new governance involves the use a 'dizzying array' of tools for delivering government objectives.

The essence of new governance is the use of private sector-style techniques and instruments that seek to encourage and cajole performance. In place of steep public sector hierarchies are networks and contracts for performance with a variety of public, private and non-profit agencies. Where the task of management previously meant command and control within self-contained bureaucracies, a significant element of the work now requires negotiating, persuading and

enabling the delivery of services through contracts and partnerships (Salamon, 2002, p.9).

The skills required for such work are significantly different from those required for past, rule-based systems of bureaucracy or the entrepreneurial freedoms of the private sector from which many new governance techniques have been drawn. Ironically, perhaps, clear prescriptions for reform have created a performance system which contains a series of paradoxes, the 'simultaneous presence of contradictory, even mutually exclusive elements' (Cameron and Quinn, 1988, p.2; Norman, 2003).

Paradoxes include:

- Freedom to manage gives managers freedom over resources, but has also increased the desire of politicians to scrutinise this freedom and rein it in (Maor, 1999).
- Clear objectives and targets for performance can sharpen the focus of public agencies, but can also distort results when clear goals displace longer term and less measurable outcomes (Blau, 1963).
- Quality information is needed to ensure that managers can be held accountable. However, accountability agencies are constantly open to the temptation to increase the information they require, particularly if they don't directly pay for its gathering (Feldman and March, 1981). Increased quantities of information can be at the expense of its quality.
- Accountability for results, which is intended to improve performance, can pressure managers so that they opt to volunteer only safe, easily achievable (and sometimes trivial) objectives that minimise the risk of political embarrassment (Thomas, 1998).

The performance framework that resulted from NPM creates a series of contrasting propositions which present themselves as dilemmas, or polarities to be managed,

mapped, navigated and reconciled (Johnson, 1996; Hampden-Turner, 1990).

Dilemmas are inherent in public sector roles. Many issues in 'the public domain' typically do not have simple solutions. With the privatising of the most easily marketised services during the 1980s and 1990s, this is even more the case for the remaining publicly-owned activities. Public services often involve dilemmas because decision makers must 'weigh the balance of benefit and disadvantage for the well-being of the many and of all' (Ranson and Stewart, 1994, p.90). Whereas private sector organisations can solve dilemmas by writing them out of their area of organisational concern and focus on the bottom line, public organisations must reconcile the values and interests of a range of competing claims. One of these is the conflict between citizens' interests as clients and the interests of citizens as taxpayers, which means that 'street level bureaucrats', those in charge of day-to-day client service, must make constant rationing decisions in the face of potentially unlimited demand and fixed budgets (Lipsky, 1980).

Recurring dilemmas for New Zealand public managers

The following eight dilemmas, which have been distilled from earlier research (Norman, 2003), illustrate tensions experienced by managers working with a complex 'new governance' system, created in New Zealand since 1984. The first four dilemmas take an inwards focus on the 'how' and 'who' of government, while the second four focus on 'what' government organisations are expected to deliver.

The how and who of government

Partners or arms-length deliverers?

With approximately 40% of the New Zealand budget being delivered through 'third party' agencies rather than ministerially-controlled departments or ministries, the dilemmas of steering for results are a central feature of the system.¹ Staff of ministries and departments in charge of managing the funding of third parties, predominantly publicly-owned agencies, but also private

and non-profit organisations, need to steer for results while also guarding against politically embarrassing risk, without stifling the innovation, flexibility and savings that such sub-contract systems are intended to encourage. How do people in these roles reconcile the dilemmas of centralised direction and localised autonomy? How can they steer without stifling?

Performance or capability?

Public sector reforms have sought to shift 'entitlement focused' organisational cultures towards performance. Efficiency, effectiveness and outputs have been the language of performance. The overall theme has been one of managing for results within specified time periods. Yet for many public services, such as defence, emergency services and biosecurity, capability building and being prepared is the major part of performance. For professional groups in the health, education and welfare sectors, which constitute the largest proportion of government budgeting, capability is directly linked with performance. Too much focus on performance can reduce the opportunity to invest in capability building, while too much focus on capability can result in a 'gold plating' of public sector roles.

Focus or collaboration

Organisation structures need to accomplish both focus and collaboration, but achieving such balance is the core dilemma of organisation design. Functionally organised and focused services are frequently expected to collaborate in the delivery of services to particular communities to avoid local confusion. Whether the term is 'joined-up government' (Britain) or 'strengthening the centre' (New Zealand), the dilemma is how to create goal-driven, focused organisations which also collaborate effectively. For central agencies in particular, the challenge is similar to the dilemmas faced by managers of third-party deliverers: how to steer for collaboration without stifling the initiatives that can come from organisational focus.

Central control or autonomy of decision making in financial management

Central agencies within government face a dilemma similar to that faced by contractors in charge of third-party delivery. There is an absolute need to safeguard taxpayers' funds, but also the need to encourage those

¹ For the 2005-06 financial year, non-departmental and other spending was \$NZ23.5 billion, compared with \$9.4 billion of departmental spending. Non-departmental spending was nearly 40% of total spending of \$57.5 billion, with health and education agencies receiving the bulk of the funds. Other major items were benefits (\$16 billion), borrowing costs (\$2.6 billion) and capital (\$5.5 billion).

closest to the creating of public value (Moore, 1995) to take responsibility for determining the best forms of delivery. The budget cycle of approvals for operating and capital spending, monitoring and auditing creates a framework of incentives or barriers to effective financial management. Too little delegation of authority can stifle decentralised agencies; too much delegation of authority, and too little power held at the centre, can make it difficult for government to tackle large issues requiring coordinated effort and risk lapses in ethics and performance by peripheral agencies.

The 'what' of government

Referee or coach?

In deciding how to deliver public value, governments as legislators have a considerably wider range of options than do private sector corporations in their creation of private value. Elected representatives and officials can choose to be enablers or regulators, developers or conservers. After a trend towards deregulation during the 1980s and 1990s, when governments came to see themselves as largely passive referees, issues such as energy, transport infrastructure, climate change and regulation of globalised industries such as telecommunications require a more active 'coaching' role. Governments around the world face the dilemma of how much to intervene on behalf of their geography-bound citizens in the face of mobile capital. Finding the appropriate balance between acting as a bystander referee and an activist coach is an ongoing issue about the desirable boundaries for governments.

Outputs or outcomes

Performance management and strategic planning instruments can have a powerful effect on the focus of public sector employees. Tightly-defined outputs can create focused effort within short-term horizons. The strategic planning and budgets that are at the core of the management cycle are annual reminders of the tension between organisational purpose and organisational control. Outputs and their associated performance measures are the primary method of control in the New Zealand public sector model; outcomes are declarations of purpose. The dilemma lies in finding a productive balance between clear and measurable outputs and potentially more motivating but difficult-to-assess outcomes.

Political responsiveness or frank advice

With their emphasis on the achievement of managerial results, and use of the language of clients and contractors, public sector reforms have heightened expectations by politicians for 'responsive' rather than 'neutral' competence (Rockman, 1998). In New Zealand, the pre-reform public sector model emphasised ministerial responsibility and public service anonymity. The contract-like relationships have had the effect of creating greater distance between political and administrative leadership, encouraging politicians to name and blame public servants for failures in delivery. Given employment conditions which place public service chief executives on fixed contracts, how do senior public servants reconcile the professional expectation that they provide frank and fearless advice with the possibility that career safety might lie in minimising the frankness?

Client or citizen?

One of the ironies of public sector reform is that improvements in services can result in increased demands for better services from clients, who may also be the same taxpaying citizens who are unwilling to fund the increasing expectations. Unlike private sector managers, public managers are continually challenged to balance the interests of clients who are usually not meeting the full costs of a service with the interests that citizens and their representatives have in tax levels, political goals and the fairness with which state resources are used. How do the 'street level bureaucrats' of Lipsky's (1980) study experience the dilemmas created in mediating between the demands of citizens as clients, and the restricted budgets that citizens as taxpayers are willing to provide? Given that public organisations usually have little or no choice about the clients they must serve, and that in services such as probation or compulsory education the clients have no choice either, how far can private sector analogies work in the public sector?

Working with dilemmas

One of the features of rhetoric for reform is the zeal with which arguments for change are put. The New Zealand reforms argued the superiority of private sector structures and techniques, of separating policy and delivery organisations, and the importance of 'busting bureaucracies' and replacing them with client-focused units performing with the prompting of real or potential competition.

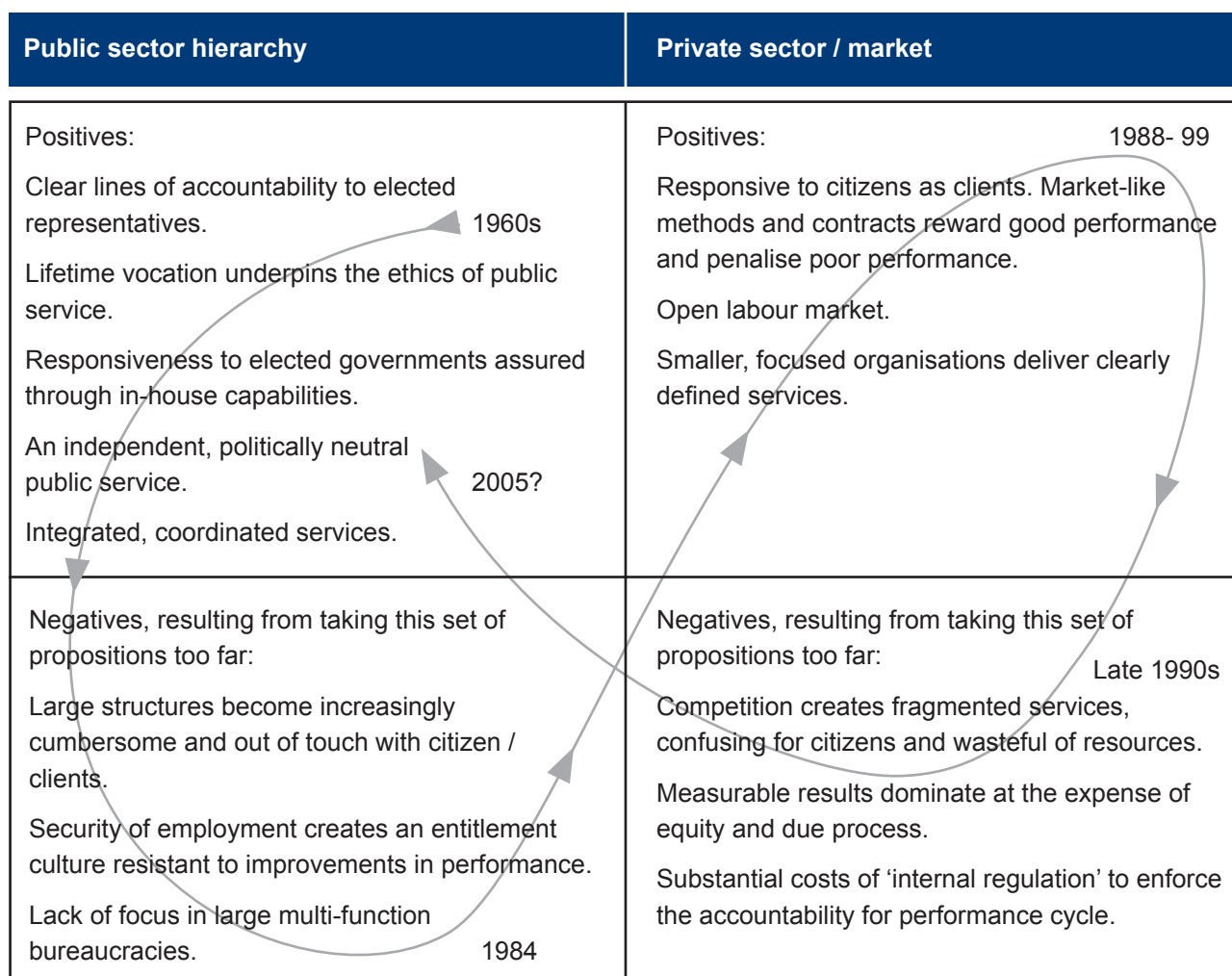
Such advocacy was in the tradition of the ‘best way’ problem solving techniques of Frederick Taylor (1911), or the Boston Consulting Group matrix of the 1960s, which steered private sector managers towards focusing single-mindedly on definitive niches such as low cost or quality. Acknowledging the dilemmas inherent in many public services provides an antidote to ‘one best way’ thinking. Viewing public management as a series of dilemmas involves the balancing of competing values (Quinn, 1988) and requires skills that are more like those of ‘map making’ and navigating than problem solving.

Dilemma management has been most fully developed as a technique by Hampden-Turner (1990) and Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars (2000) to map how multinational corporations can more effectively work across national cultures. Cross-cultural management in multinational corporations is surprisingly relevant

- 2 Briefing for the minister of state services, 2005, http://www.ssc.govt.nz/downloadable_files_briefing_for_the_minister_of_state_services_2005.pdf, accessed 4 August 2006.
- 3 January 2004 figures for IBM taken from *The Register*, an on-line journal for the information technology industry, http://www.theregister.co.uk/2004/01/19/ibm_to_hire/, accessed 24 August 2005.

to public sector roles. Working across cultures involves reconciling national differences about fundamental values, such as communitarianism and individualism, or equality and hierarchy. Public managers also work amidst clashing values, created by politics and the cultures that surround very different government functions. Government organisations are as large as the largest of multinational corporations. New Zealand’s central government organisations employ approximately 190,000 people,² compared with IBM which employs 330,000 people worldwide.³ The new governance tools are strongly based on techniques of large corporations,

Figure 1: Dilemmas of public management delivery



particularly the use of the 'financial control' style (Goold and Campbell, 1987), through which subsidiary organisations are given considerable managerial freedom provided they demonstrate measurable value.

The mapping of the emphasis on public and private sector techniques in the New Zealand public sector shown in Figure 1 uses the approach developed by Johnson (1996) to track the positives and negatives of dilemmas and map changes in emphasis on the polarities.

The hierarchies of 'old public administration' and the market-like methods of 'new public management' each contain useful wisdom about the creation of public sector performance. The way the propositions have interacted in New Zealand has been a pendulum swing from one set of extremes to another. Johnson (1996) analyses the process of change as being a contest between crusaders and traditionalists. Change results from rhetoric that acts as a key to politically unlock a new set of doctrines, change that resembles fashions in consumer industries (Hood and Jackson, 1991). The private sector techniques adopted as solutions were in the late 1990s creating increasing concern about lack of consistency in ethics across the public sector and a fragmentation of services. A pendulum swing towards more centralised coordination has been the result, with the current tension being whether recentralisation will trigger a new cycle, or a more effective balancing of the best features of the two sets of propositions. The risk is the creation of a continuously recycling loop in which the grass always looks greener on the other side of the fence, as the positives of one set of propositions are contrasted with the negatives of the existing dominant proposition. While the map in Figure 1, derived from Johnson, charts the stages of response to a dilemma and focuses on the risks of alternating between negatives and positives, Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars (2000) focus on how dilemmas might be reframed into new and potentially more lasting shapes.

Managing dilemmas or solving problems?

A persistent image of the role of a manager is that of a determined identifier and solver of problems. Hampden-Turner suggests that 'the admission that dilemmas even exist tends to be difficult for some companies and discussions may show strain or embarrassment'. Raising the dilemma is to suggest the 'absence of a perfect

consensus' (Hampden-Turner, 1990, p.109).

The use of hard-edged management is a potentially appealing solution to the complexity, compromise and politics involved in many public sector challenges. Yet, as Downs and Larkey (1986, p.3) observe, if the performance of government could be solved by 'hard charging, tough minded business executives', the problems of government would have been solved following the adoption of this method during the era of the city manager movement in the late 19th century in the United States.

The English word 'manager' has two distinctly different origins (Garratt, 1987, p.103). Its macho characteristics relate to the 16th-century use of the Italian 'maneggiare', which meant 'one who breaks horses'. The more nurturing side of management can perhaps be related to the derivation from the French word 'ménager' – the management of the domestic economy of a household or kitchen.

Dilemma management requires an active-reflective approach to management issues, one more resembling household management than horse-breaking. It is a contrast to the 'take charge' analytical form of management that seeks to reduce or ignore contradictions and value clashes. The acronym POSDCORB (Gulick and Urwick, 1937, pp.12-13) persists as a powerful idealisation of such managerial rationality, summarising the management role as planning, organising, staffing, directing, coordinating, reporting and budgeting. A role description of this 'take charge' type of manager, given by Schick (1996) in an analysis of the New Zealand public management model, only slightly exaggerates the expectations still placed on New Zealand departmental chief executives:

They must weed out weak managers, shed redundant workers, re-examine or sever long-standing relationships with suppliers, actively recruit from outside the Public Service, negotiate the wages of senior managers, revamp operations, abandon low-priority activities, manage their assets, commit in advance to output and cost levels, take responsibility for the volume and quality of services, negotiate employment, purchase and performance agreements, respond to numerous inquiries from Parliamentary committees and central agencies, represent

the department to the media and public, be responsive to the Minister, and more. They must drive the department to be more efficient, productive, and responsive. They must act as if their own job is on the line and their own money is being spent.

Focusing on dilemmas acknowledges the competing values contained in new governance. In most public sector roles the lack of direct connection between funds and clients creates a greater set of dilemmas than in most private sector roles. Performance assessment is mediated by an ‘authorising environment’ (Moore, 1995) of political decision making and accountability agencies rather than direct market-place transactions. Conflicting expectations for public sector performance are systematically captured by Hood and Jackson (1991), with their collection of 99 doctrines about how best to organise public services. For each doctrine there is a set of contrary propositions, and the acceptability of doctrines changes over time in a manner similar to changes in fashion for clothes or cars.

Contested views are the essence of democracy, and public managers operate within a context of shifting views about how best to tackle what Rittel and Weber (1973) termed ‘wicked problems’. Whereas problems in the natural sciences can be defined and separated, and may have solutions, many government challenges, particularly in the area of social policy, are ill-defined, and rely upon political judgement for resolution. ‘Solutions’ are not an option, as social problems are never solved, but at best resolved over and over again.

In his classic book *The Art of Judgment*, Vickers (1965, p.112) observed that management is fundamentally a skill of balancing, involving ‘constant evaluation and appraisal of risks, limitations, opportunities, and resources’. It requires integrating into one solution ‘aims which first seem incompatible’ and a ‘rare measure of mental discipline’ to determine priorities for the present, while also dreaming about future possibilities.

Perhaps it is no accident that the traditional road to major roles in the British civil service, which for almost a century ruled a quarter of the globe, was study of Greek and Latin, the ‘Greats’ as the syllabi for Oxford and Cambridge described them. Classical learning, in contrast to the analytical techniques of economics, accounting and statistics-based policy

analysis, emphasised human interactions and processes, offering no easy once-and-for-all solutions. One of the recurring themes of classical education is that heroes are liable to overdo their winning combinations. ‘Yesterday’s triumph becomes tomorrow’s excess’ (Hampden-Turner, 1990, p.74). British colonial officers were schooled in the lessons of the triumphs and failures of the Roman empire as preparation for their own imperial duties.

Homer’s story of Odysseus navigating between Scylla and Charybdis, between the rock and the whirlpool, for instance, provides a dramatic analogy for the management of dilemmas. Navigate too close to the whirlpool of soft, difficult-to-see currents and the ship will be sucked to destruction. Navigate too close to the hard, visible features of the rock, and the ship will be smashed. Navigating dilemmas is the art of finding a route ‘between a rock and a hard place’. It is the process of finding one’s way through the ‘horns of a dilemma’ – avoiding being impaled by either horn.

Rock-like, straight-line thinking has made a major contribution to public sector efficiency during the past 20 years. It has helped clear out the clutter of nearly a century of bureaucratic tradition, with its inwardly focused employment and performance systems. New governance organisations now have the accounting, human resource management and information technology techniques used by private sector organisations. The constantly changing, ‘whirlpool’-like issues cannot be solved but only managed. Acknowledging the challenges created by opposing propositions makes it possible to map possible directions, reduce complexity and seek to reconcile opposites.

Conclusion

The distinctive feature of a dilemma is that there is no ‘right answer’. Clashes of perspectives based on values fit uncomfortably with formal reasoning processes, in which objective criteria and ratios are sought.

Hampden-Turner (1990, p.xi) uses the term ‘encompassing reason’ to describe a process of managing dilemmas. Formal reasoning is linear – the decision maker reasons, acts and achieves. By contrast, encompassing reason ‘is circular and iterative’: ‘You probe, discover something interesting, reflect, cogitate, and probe again.’ Dealing with dilemmas is a process of learning, working through the processes described in

Kolb's (1984) learning cycle – experiencing, reflecting, conceptualising, planning and generalising. Learning moves from the concrete to the abstract or vice versa. The process of encompassing reason, with its probing of dilemmas, offers the possibility of combining values that initially may appear to clash and resist each other.

Mapping a dilemma, as demonstrated in Figure 1, is part of a learning process through which seemingly opposed propositions can be reconciled. The visual representation makes explicit the opportunities for trade-offs and reconciliation. As Hampden-Turner puts it (1990, p.xii), 'like navigators, we can steer by our judgment, while periodically checking our position on the charts'. Living with and reconciling dilemmas is the essence of the art of public management.

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THE POLICY IMPLICATIONS OF DIVERSITY

An Institute of Policy Studies

Publication by Jonathan Boston, Paul Callister and Amanda Wolf

Diversity matters. It furnishes the texture and variety of social life, thereby extending choice and opportunity. It can be a source of economic strength, cultural vitality, national pride and solidarity. But it can equally generate social conflict, ethnic tension and political instability – as witnessed, tragically, in many parts of the world.

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Tomorrow's Primary Schools: Time to Evaluate Governance Alternatives?

Liz Springford

Introduction

It is almost two decades since the reforms known as 'Tomorrow's Schools' radically decentralised the administration of New Zealand primary schools. Designed to improve the responsiveness, accountability and community control of schools, the success or otherwise of these administrative reforms has not been formally evaluated. Meanwhile, expectations of what schools should deliver have changed markedly, with policy makers increasingly concerned with reducing educational disparity. This concern has led to Parliament's education and science select committee announcing in May 2006 that it will hold an inquiry into 'making the schooling system work for every child'. The Education Review Office (ERO) – which is responsible for reviewing school effectiveness – is also currently including 'the extent to which ... [schools are] providing a good education for those for whom the system is not working' in its reviews of schools.

If policy makers are serious about addressing student underachievement, perhaps it is time to examine the governance of our primary schools.¹ Although there are many factors affecting student achievement, logically it can be argued that improving the quality of governance should improve school effectiveness.

This article examines evidence for the effectiveness of primary school boards of trustees and suggests how governance may be improved in the interests of reducing educational disparity and raising overall student achievement. The article is based on recent research by the author (Springford, 2005).²

A brief background

Around half a million children are involved in primary schooling, which is compulsory from the age of six. Although New Zealand has high rates of student achievement, it also

has one of the widest gaps in the OECD between the highest and lowest achieving students.³

In 1989 the Tomorrow's Schools reforms decentralised primary school administration, from highly centralised control by ten education boards to over 2,000 boards of trustees controlling individual schools. New Zealand primary schools are relatively small, with the median school size being 150–199 students. The same governance structure is used for schools as small as nine students in remote rural localities as for the largest schools of over 1,000 students, despite widely varying needs and pools of potential trustees. The predominantly parent-run boards of trustees are responsible for setting the strategic direction and values of each school, and rely on the professional expertise of the school management for advice and to implement their decisions.

Boards of primary schools comprise between three and seven (commonly five) parent trustees elected by school parents, plus the school principal and a staff trustee elected by the school staff. The accountability of boards to the government and their local communities is expressed in the school charter.

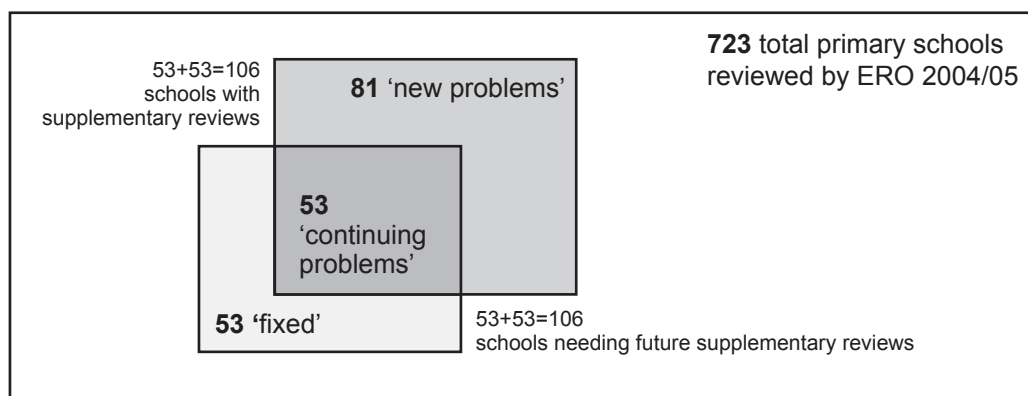
Elections for boards of trustees are mostly held every three

1 Primary schools include full primary schools (years 1–8), contributing primary schools (years 1–6) and intermediate schools (years 7–8). These are both state and state integrated schools, including those kura kaupapa which cater for year 1–year 8 students.

2 I would like to thank Scott Metcalfe, Jonathan Boston, Liz Gordon, Cathy Wylie, Daniel Bulman, Andrew Ladley and Sunniva Zoete-West who commented on earlier drafts of this article. I would also like to acknowledge the generous help from the staff of the Ministry of Education, the Education Review Office, Multi Serve and the New Zealand School Trustees Association, Michael Mintram, Amanda Wolf and Deborah Laurs, especially with the original research paper.

3 International studies like the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) have significantly influenced government expectations of the school system. The 2000 literacy results for 15 year olds showed that the average level of literacy achievement was high, but New Zealand had an unusually long 'tail' of underachievement. These 15 year olds had between one and three years of secondary school, with their main literacy development occurring in the first eight years of schooling at primary school.

Figure 1: Primary schools reviewed by ERO in 2004/05, including current and future supplementary reviews (to scale)



years, although some boards also have mid-term elections. Almost anyone can stand as a trustee to represent the school community, but in practice trustees over-represent New Zealand European students and under-represent students from other ethnic groups. Over half of parent trustees on primary school boards were newly elected in 2004. For most trustees this is their third job, competing for time with paid work and parenting commitments, and averaging three hours a week.

How effective are primary school boards of trustees?

Many factors affect student achievement – the student's natural ability, family influence, early childhood experience, effectiveness of teaching, principal leadership, school governance and the external resourcing of the school. It is difficult to isolate the impact of school governance. Even evaluating the performance of primary schools by measuring the difference the school makes to student achievement, between school entry (usually at age five) and the end of year 6 or 8 when students go to the next stage of schooling, is impossible because of the current lack of uniform, comprehensive student achievement information across primary schools.

Instead, this article examines the effectiveness of board governance in terms of the expected role for boards within current government expectations of the school sector. Those expectations are that:

- Effective teachers work in partnership with students' families, recognise students as individuals with diverse needs and respond with appropriate teaching strategies.
- The principal is responsible for the day-to-day management of the school.

- Boards ensure that their schools are quality providers through evidence-based planning centred on student learning needs, a robust self-review programme and an effective principal performance system.
- The Ministry of Education monitors schools and quickly identifies and supports any boards which are struggling with their role.
- In the rare situation where ERO finds a school is not meeting expectations, the ministry ensures swift support to reduce the educational risks for students.⁴

Boards of trustees appear to have substantial responsibility for raising student achievement and reducing educational disparity. Boards are expected by the government to set and monitor the strategic direction of the school, based on student learning needs and in consultation with their communities. To this end, they employ school staff and approve the school budget. Accountability to both the government and local community underpins these responsibilities. These aspects of board effectiveness are examined in turn,⁵ beginning with evidence of overall school and board effectiveness from ERO review reports.

1. ERO review reports

Evidence for assessing the overall effectiveness of schools and their boards comes from regular ERO review reports. When ERO decides that the school is failing to meet

⁴ Drawn in part from the following ministry documents: *The Schooling Strategy 2005–2010*, *Statement of Intent 2005–2010*, *Quality Teaching for Diverse Students in Schooling: Best Evidence Synthesis* and *Working in Partnership 2004–2007*.

⁵ The board's financial role is not discussed, as the government is currently reviewing school operation funding, with a report expected by 31 October 2006.

student learning needs⁶ or that the safety of students is at risk, a supplementary review is scheduled. Such follow-up visits usually occur within 12 months.⁷

The aggregated data from ERO review reports suggest that one in five primary schools are under-performing (with half of these having persisting difficulties), and that the frequency of supplementary reviews is increasing. More specifically:

- 18.5% of primary schools were identified by ERO in 2004/05 as being of sufficient concern to warrant a supplementary review within 12 months.
- Half of the boards that had a supplementary review in 2004/05 (due to previously identified poor performance) were not able to 'fix' their school prior to ERO's return (usually one year later).⁸
- The proportion of schools requiring closer monitoring through supplementary reviews has steadily grown in recent years, from 14% in 2002/03 to 19 % in 2004/05.⁹

The data also echo the findings of earlier research on the greater vulnerability of schools that are small, low decile, rural or have a higher proportion of Māori students, (ERO, 1998; Connelly, 1998). The rate of supplementary reviews in 2004/05 for decile 1 and 2 schools (those with the lowest socio-economic status) was four and a half times that for decile 9 and 10 schools. Similarly, 'very small' schools (with fewer than 50 students) were four times more likely than 'large' schools (over 250 students) to need a supplementary review. Some 38% of students in schools identified as poorly performing in 2004/05 were Māori, yet Māori students comprised just 23% of the total primary student population at 1 July 2005.

As well as 'snapshot' data from schools reviewed in any year, aggregated ERO review data can give a longitudinal view of students' educational environment as they move through their primary years. This shows similar school performance problems, with adverse effects for students. For instance, 38% of full primary schools attended by the cohort of children starting as new entrants in 1996 came under supplementary or special review during the children's eight years of primary schooling.¹⁰

The evidence from ERO reviews if anything understates the extent of poor performance because of the following limitations:

- Schools are reviewed on average every three years. This is potentially a long time in the education of a child (who is at primary school for six or eight years or at intermediate for only two years) and can mean a significant delay in identifying a decline in school performance, which may adversely affect particular children.
- Such reviews provide only a 'snapshot' in the life of the school. Schools are notified of a review about a month in advance of visits by ERO officers, and these visits last from two to eight days. However, ERO does look at the school's documentation, including policy documents and the school's records of student achievement, before the on-site phase of the review.
- ERO relies to some extent on boards' ability to self-review through the board assurance statement (BAS) and the self-audit checklist, yet evidence discussed later in this article suggests that trustee self-awareness may be limited.
- ERO does not report on other agencies in the school sector, which may be better placed to influence some aspects of school effectiveness than individual boards.

2. Planning, monitoring and reporting

Boards have been increasingly encouraged to focus on raising student achievement. These requirements have existed for some time, with the first national administration guidelines (NAGs) in 1993 requiring

6 Some students may still experience effective teaching in a school under supplementary review, just as a school on ERO's regular review cycle may have classes where teaching is ineffective.

7 The Picot report, which ushered in the Tomorrow's Schools reforms, recommended reviewing all schools every two years. The current official expectation is that schools are reviewed three years, and ERO has increased the frequency of its regular reviews from an average of three years and four months in 2004/05 to an average of three years in 2005/06. The goal suggests an incentive to reduce the rate of supplementary reviews. ERO's decision to schedule a supplementary review is based on its confidence in the board to remedy problems identified in the regular review.

8 This pattern of ERO needing to undertake subsequent repeat supplementary visits was also noted by ERO five years ago, when 45% of schools having supplementary reviews did not meet requirements in that subsequent review (Clothier, 2001).

9 The increase may be partly due to the bedding in of both changes in expectations through the Education Standards Act and ERO's new approach to school reviews.

10 The overall proportion of students in these 475 poorly performing schools will be less than 38% of the primary school population, as full primary schools tend to be smaller schools.

boards, through school management, to identify and address barriers to student achievement. The 1999 NAGs, which took effect from July 2000, required that boards address the needs of students at risk of underachievement, consult with and report to their communities, and develop strategic plans.

The most recent development, the Education Standards Act 2001, strengthened the requirement for school boards – ‘like the government departments but with considerably fewer resources’ (Smelt, 1998) – to plan, monitor and report in order to reduce disparity and raise student achievement. Boards had almost a year after enactment – during which time they received ministry-funded training and support – before beginning implementation for 2003. From 2004 boards have been required to give the ministry a copy of their school charter and an analysis of student outcomes against annual targets.

Planning and monitoring a school’s strategic direction based on student learning needs requires complex skills. Primary school trustees need to be capable of robust self-review, to be able to critique aggregated student achievement data, to consult effectively, to base principal performance expectations and school resourcing on strategic priorities, to effectively monitor progress and to take appropriate action as good employers if progress is inadequate. Yet evidence suggests that trustee capacity for planning and reporting was still developing. When the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) conducted its periodic survey of primary trustees in term two of 2003,¹¹ boards should have had their charter and first set of annual targets in place, having analysed their student learning needs and consulted with their communities. Boards would also have been getting reports, over an agreed timeframe, on how well the targets were being met. However, only 55% of trustees reported that they had student achievement data in all areas to use for 2003 achievement targets. In other words, around half of boards had not been able to organise their schools in time to implement the new planning and reporting requirements in their school, although the ministry figures for 2004 show that 89% of primary boards did submit charters. According to the survey, many trustees had not shifted their focus from the traditional parent committee priorities of property, fund-raising and school finances to student learning outcomes.

Given that submitting the annual charter was a clear legal requirement for boards under the Education Standards

Act 2001, and that both monitoring at-risk students and strategic planning had been requirements since 2000, the figure of one out of ten schools failing to submit charters in 2004 seems high.

Further, more than half of the boards in the NZCER survey did not fulfil the Act’s requirements to focus with their communities on student achievement by consulting over ‘strategic planning/charter’. Similarly, half of the two-thirds of trustees who felt their school had an identifiable Māori community had not consulted with their Māori community in the past year. Trustees were mostly unaware of their failures to meet legislative requirements for consultation: when asked if there were any issues for the board around community consultation, two-thirds said ‘no’ and just 17% said ‘yes’.

Worryingly, a study in 2002 of school board chairpersons in South Auckland reported that only two of 16 chairpersons were able to interpret accurately their school’s student achievement reports. However, on average the same chairperson group rated their confidence in their ability to interpret the data as seven out of ten.¹² Trustee capacity ‘has been assumed rather than systematically developed, and the result is, that in the most disadvantaged communities at least, lay governors struggle to perform the governance role that was envisaged’ (Robinson et al., 2003).

In terms of robust self-review – necessary for effective strategic planning – trustees’ perceptions of their performance as recorded in the NZCER survey seem to be much more positive than the reality indicated by the survey results. The similarly high rates of positive relationships reported gives the impression that boards use quality of relationships as the indicator that they are fulfilling expectations.

3. Employer role

Boards appear uncomfortable with their employer role. Where possible, employer responsibilities are delegated to the principal as day-to-day manager of the school, and the

¹¹ The NZCER survey data are now three years old and the trustee response was 50% (albeit from 69% of surveyed schools, which were a representative selection of New Zealand primary schools as a whole), but the revealed attitudes and practices are sufficiently at odds with government direction over the years to cast serious doubt on board effectiveness in meeting current expectations.

¹² The study is of interest because of what it suggests about boards of trustees’ capacity, rather than about South Auckland schools in particular. Since this study, the Otara Boards’ Forum now supports a number of South Auckland schools.

board's role is to receive reports that these responsibilities have been met. With the tasks of principal appointment and appraisal, where delegation to the principal is not possible, most boards contract outside expertise to help. Using outside expertise and delegating to the principal is prudent, but the extent of delegation and outsourcing does raise questions about the efficiency and appropriateness of boards of trustees being employers. Brooking's 2002 study of principal appointments also showed that too often boards struggled with their task of appointing the best-suited person. That 19% of schools reviewed in 2004/05 were judged to be poorly performing further raises doubts about boards' ability to use the principal performance management process to ensure that their school is a quality provider.

4. Relationship with the government

A key assumption of the Tomorrow's Schools reforms is that boards will be accountable to the government. Just as there can be difficulties with the model of voluntary organisations as agents of the government (Cribb, 2005), the evidence from the NZCER survey in 2003 suggests that trustee perceptions of accountability to the government are quite weak. Of the trustees responding to that survey, around a quarter each felt responsible to the government, to the ministry and to ERO. If around three-quarters of trustees in primary schools do not feel responsible to the government, this must have significant implications for the successful implementation of any school sector policies. The only partial success, at least initially, of the Education Standards Act planning and reporting requirements, apparent from the NZCER survey, demonstrates that there are problems with trustees' understanding of, and capacity to implement, the government requirements.

Research by Robinson and colleagues (2003) implied that schools tend to develop their own expectations and ways of doing things that are very much locally driven. And 'locally driven' means not so much by the wider school community of parents, but by the school staff and the trustees, past and present. This local school 'culture' may override boards' responsiveness to government requirements and expectations.

The extent of decentralisation under Tomorrow's Schools creates challenges for the government in communicating required changes, let alone ensuring effective implementation of them.¹³ When the ministry needs to communicate required school changes through

boards of trustees, the circulars and booklets have to reach the board chairperson and the board agenda, and be understood and accepted by both trustees and the school staff. At every stage of this long chain of communication there is a potential for breakdown or misunderstanding. This may partly explain an increasing trend for agencies to work directly with schools (Wylie, 2002).

Boards also appear to be relying increasingly on income from school donations, fund-raising and foreign, fee-paying students. A government review of school operation funding will be completed by 31 October 2006. However, if trustees believe the government cannot be relied upon to fund their school adequately, this may affect their sense of accountability. Trustees will not necessarily share the ethos of New Zealand's public service.

5. Relationship with community

Although ensuring that New Zealand has a school system that works for all students is a government priority, the self-governing nature of schools is not on the policy agenda: the school board model is not open for debate. This suggests, perhaps, that the strongest reason for the continued government commitment to Tomorrow's Schools is the democratic-populist ethos (Fiske and Ladd, 2000), which assumes that local communities should have a real voice in their school.

Newport (2000) used the phrase 'parent power' to encapsulate the uniqueness of the Tomorrow's Schools reforms. Yet parent communities appear to be relatively powerless in their theoretical partnerships with boards of trustees. The option of moving their children to another school is limited for some families and comes with costs for others. The board of trustee model in practice appears to be not particularly democratic, and sections of school communities seem to be disengaged. Issues include:

- Low electoral participation. During the last round of board elections in 2004, almost half of primary schools had insufficient candidates standing to require a voting election. Thirteen per cent had fewer candidates than positions on the board. Where elections were held, the number of candidates

13 John Martin's description of contracting under the 1993 health reforms as a 'long chain of accountability' appears to apply equally to the decentralisation under Tomorrow's Schools (Martin, lecture to Victoria University Masters of Public Policy students, 2003).

standing for election was still small, with, on average, around two more candidates than positions. If Hamilton trustee elections are typical of voting patterns, then in the half of schools that actually hold elections, perhaps only a quarter of parents elect their boards of trustees.¹⁴

- Limited sense of responsibility to the community. Of the trustees who responded to the NZCER's 2003 survey, less than three-quarters felt responsible to their students, less than half felt responsible to parents, and just over a quarter felt responsible to the community.
- Inadequate consultation with the community over strategic direction, as previously mentioned.
- Increasing parental complaints to ERO and calls for an alternative agency to hear individual family complaints about schools.¹⁵

Clarence Beeby provided the ultimate justification for a community voice in schools when he quoted James Shelley from 1921: 'You tell me the aims of life and I'll tell you the aims of education' (Beeby, 1992, p.300). In other words, education concerns all aspects of life, which the community represents. In the Tomorrow's Schools reforms, David Lange sought to create a structure that was 'capable of change in response to what was happening in the wider community', because of concern about the rigidity of the education administration in the 1980s (Lange, 1992, p.43). It may be time to explore, however, whether there are more effective ways of ensuring community voice at school level.

Summary

If reducing educational disparity is a priority for policy makers, then the current governance model needs scrutiny. Although certainly not the only factor influencing student achievement, boards are currently expected to

have a substantial role in reducing disparity. Yet the available evidence suggests that too many boards are having difficulty fulfilling their responsibilities. In order to meet expectations, boards need firstly to accept their responsibilities, and secondly to understand and employ current good practice. Current government expectations imply a high level of managerial skills on the part of trustees for boards to govern effectively; publications to advise trustees require high literacy levels; and much of the training and support provided relies on boards' ability to self-review and recognise need. Primary school boards appear to have made a shaky start to meeting the strengthened legal requirements to plan strategically. They also appear uncomfortable with their employer role. Finally, the dual accountability to the government and the local community that underpins the current governance model appears more theoretical than real.

Future directions

There are at least three possible directions for the future: continue with the self-governing school model, but strengthen support for at-risk boards of trustees; implement a completely different structure for administering schools; or pilot new governance arrangements and evaluate their effectiveness.

Option 1: Better support for boards of trustees

This option would involve enhanced early detection of and then support for at-risk boards. This would build on current structures. The ministry could, for instance, aim to double both its detection rate of at-risk primary boards and schools, and the rate of statutory intervention.

Option 2: An alternative administration structure

A second possibility would be the creation of formalised school clusters. For example, approximately 200 ministry-designated geographic clusters of primary schools could be established, each one under the oversight of a ministry-appointed cluster principal. Features of such a governance system could include:

- the continuation of many of the current freedoms of individual primary schools (such as teacher and support staff appointments, budget-setting and property management);

¹⁴ An analysis of election return data for parent trustees for schools in Hamilton during the 2004 elections indicates that voting turnouts (participation rates) for primary schools were on average 18–28% of potential voters (results compiled by G. Kitto from data published in the *Waikato Times*; personal email, 1 November 2005). This contrasts with the 82% voting turnout for the Hamilton East and Hamilton West seats in the September 2005 parliamentary election.

¹⁵ Although two extra staff to act as advocates for young people in the education system were appointed to the office of the children's commissioner around five years ago, there have been a number of calls for an alternative agency to hear individual family complaints about schools, for example an education ombudsman, or a legal review agency.

- the cluster principal having responsibility for the appointment, support and development of each school principal;
- the cluster principal having responsibility for ensuring that each school's strategic direction was developed in consultation with its community, and was based on valid and reliable student achievement data;
- instead of school boards of trustees, each local school community having the option (depending on community interest) of electing one or two parents to form an advisory group for the cluster principal to consult;
- students and their families having a chain of appeal, starting with the local school principal, then the cluster principal, and finally a highly visible appeal authority within the ministry.

Option 3: Piloting an alternative administration structure

A third possibility would be to establish a series of clusters (as above) on a pilot basis and evaluate their effectiveness. Poorly performing schools or areas would be the priority for inclusion in such clusters, but it would also be important to include a representative sample of primary schools. The measure of success would be whether the cluster approach was more effective in raising overall student achievement, particularly for students at risk of underachievement. The model could be extended to all primary schools if found to be successful.

Such options will need further analysis, including examining overseas experience with clustering and comparative data relevant to New Zealand's current approach. Clearly, the effectiveness and efficiency of more intensified support and intervention (option 1) should be assessed against alternatives for primary school administration. However, the available evidence certainly suggests that intensified early detection and support in itself might be insufficient, for a number of reasons.

The 12–15% of schools identified in the ministry's Statement of Intent 2005–2010 as at risk (primary and secondary), and thus open to possible action, is at odds with the 19% of primary schools identified by ERO in 2004/05 as poorly performing. There is a real risk that the ministry may be reaching only around half of the boards that need support. The low rate of statutory intervention seems to indicate that the ministry is underestimating the

seriousness of an adverse ERO report;¹⁶ and that both the ministry and ERO are overestimating the ability of boards to 'fix' schools on their own, given that only half were able to do so within a year.

Further, aspects of adverse ERO reports are not the only indicators that the ministry uses to identify at-risk boards through its schools monitoring system.

And while the ministry funds four main regional training providers for school boards, and various School Trustees Association services, none of these support contracts have been formally evaluated. In addition, the self-governing nature of school boards means that almost all support of this kind relies on trustees recognising their own needs. Both the NZCER survey results and other literature indicate that board self-awareness is not high.

On the other hand, formalising the cluster approach (either option 2 or option 3) might mean only minimal change in practice for those working in the primary school sector, as many support services for schools are currently provided at a cluster level. Formalising clusters could make it easier for school management to focus on student achievement, by allowing for greater efficiency and support in areas such as professional development, pooling relief teachers and property support.

Whatever the preferred option, it will be essential that any change to the future administration of primary schools is evidence-based. As well as literature on overseas administrative systems, significant New Zealand research will become available over the next 12 months to help fine-tune the way forward: the education and science select committee inquiry into 'making the schooling system work for every child'; ERO's reporting on 'the extent to which the school is providing a good education for those for whom the system is not working'; the government review of school operation funding; the next NZCER survey of primary trustees in early 2007; and the next Best Evidence Synthesis on Leadership report in June 2007. The level of community support and capacity for the current board of trustees model could be ascertained by evaluating voter turnout and

16 Intervention under part 7A of the Education Act – by the minister of education or the secretary for education – ranges from asking boards to supply information to replacing a board with a commissioner. A limited statutory manager to take over some of the board's responsibilities for up to two years is the mechanism most commonly used. In 2005, 4.7% of primary school boards experienced statutory interventions, with the use of 64 limited statutory managers and 28 commissioners.

candidate availability during the next trustee elections in early 2007. There is also considerable potential to get a better picture of board functioning with existing data by matching ERO reports, ministry support and intervention and trustee uptake of voluntary training.

In the meantime, the detection of and support for at-risk and poorly performing boards by ERO and the ministry can and should be intensified, so that students are not put at risk because they are in schools that do not become part of any clustering should such options be pursued.

Conclusion

This article suggests that, given current government expectations, and evidence of ineffectiveness and limited community voice, an unquestioned commitment to the current board of trustees model for all primary schools puts a significant proportion of New Zealand children at risk of failing to achieve their learning potential. While the most pressing priority is quickly detecting and supporting all at-risk schools and their boards, the real challenge is to find the right scale of administration of primary schools, and a system that is evidence-based and can better deliver high achievement and high equity outcomes.

I would like to acknowledge everyone, both paid and voluntary, working in the school sector and doing their best to make Tomorrow's Schools work for our children. I hope this article can be part of a dialogue as we look for evidence of what will reduce educational disparity. There seems to be a consensus in New Zealand that we want all children to get a good education, regardless of where in the country they are, which school they are at or whose classroom they are in. In the face of potential widespread environmental, economic and societal change, it seems more important than ever that all children achieve their potential.

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Beyond Westminster: Thinking the Aotearoa/New Zealand Way of Governing

Bill Ryan

Something intriguing is going on within the political executive. In response to emerging conditions of governing in the late 20th and early 21st century in countries like New Zealand, some public servants are acting in new ways that are quite different from certain key prescriptions of the traditional, Westminster-derived constitutional framework on which our polity is based. The fact of these changes is interesting enough, but, surprisingly, few people talk about it – ‘surprisingly’ because these new ways of working cause tensions that are known (in tacit practice) but remain unacknowledged (in discourse). This paper identifies some of these changes and considers their implications.¹

These emerging changes revolve around the manner in which public servants relate to and work in practice with clients, stakeholders, providers and others in ‘policy networks’, but in a manner that causes unresolved tensions for the officials involved. I argue that these shifts are entirely appropriate given the societal changes they reflect, and, as such, should be regarded as democratically progressive; they signal another significant development beyond our Westminster foundations and come at a time when it is important symbolically and constitutionally to look forward to the 21st century rather than backwards. On that basis, there is much to be gained by recognising these new realities and consciously articulating what we want and believe to be an Aotearoa/New Zealand way of governing, particularly regarding the relationships and activities that constitute the ‘public service’ and the ‘policy process’.

It should be noted that this paper does not deal with the full array of recent and emerging changes to the Westminster foundations of our polity. Several of them (e.g. the shift away from a first-past-the-post to a mixed-

member-proportional electoral system; the role and function of associate ministers; the inclusion in cabinet of non-government ministers; the right of coalition parties in government to break with cabinet solidarity) have been noted and discussed elsewhere (e.g. Palmer and Palmer, 2004; White, 2005).

The public servant according to Westminster

The classic Westminster image of the public servant is that of an anonymous, neutral and loyal official, embedded in a set of hierarchical, rule-driven positions and practices, technically skilled in analysis, administration and management, and serving the government of the day by providing advice and implementing government decisions to the best of his or her ability (see, for example, Cabinet Office, 2001; State Services Commission, 1995). Collectively, the public service is understood to be the technical arm of the political executive.

This model contains certain assumptions about the policy process, the manner in which it is to be conducted and the role of the public servant in it. It assumes a linear and technical process that is closed and vertically-aligned. Public issues appear on the policy agenda via various routes (e.g. research findings drawn to the attention of government, party manifestos, public controversies to which government is forced to respond) but, at a certain point, the minister of cabinet commits to and prioritises particular issues. Public servants then research these issues, and identify and test various options to deal with them. They conduct research and analysis – the expert application of various theories and methodologies to aid decision making – and present the outputs of their deliberations to the ministry. Ministers consider these options, filtering them with their ideologies, values and electoral concerns, and reach a decision, which public servants then implement. In that sense, the Westminster-based policy process combines

¹ In contrast to much public administration analysis, this analysis focuses on enacted practice rather than the institutional framework. In that respect, this analysis is sociological and political in perspective and focuses on the (often tacit) rules of action underlying the work of public servants (Giddens, 1984).

technical and political rationality within the executive, the public servant constituted according to the former and the minister according to the latter, with the former subordinated to the latter.

Policy analysis and advising is ‘backroom’ work. Even the implementation of policy as traditionally defined, wherein a much higher proportion of work is ‘front counter’, open to public gaze and subject to interpersonal influences, it is prescribed in terms of technical expertise in administration of legislation, its application in particular cases, and the accountable management of resources and systems. External relationships such as consultation over policy with interested parties – usually also experts or representatives, and occasionally clients or representatives advocating on their behalf – is handled by ministers and not public servants.

It has been argued for some time that New Zealand had preserved a remarkably ‘pure’ version of the Westminster conventions in its political system, but developments such as the introduction of associate ministers, the replacement of the first-past-the-post electoral system and the qualification of cabinet solidarity indicate that this is no longer the case. Equally, from the 1970s onwards some intra-executive relationships took on a character quite unlike the simple subordination of the classic, abstract model: certain ministers understood the value of internal and robust debate between themselves and senior officials, relied on their mutual interdependence, and realised the benefits to be gained by balancing technical and value-based decision criteria. In these cases, depending on the issue, the minister–senior official relationship was one of ‘teamwork’, albeit one wherein the minister would have the last word (James, 2002). Equally, beyond focusing merely on technicalities, senior officials would often exercise a degree of ‘nous’ in reading the broad social, economic and political context before offering their advice (not the partisan politicisation of advice but a calculation of what might be achievable given the context). And as ‘interest group politics’ became accepted, officials sometimes maintained working relationships, albeit at arm’s length, with peak professional, industry, provider and client groups and/or their representatives as required, on behalf of the minister. Later, as ‘new public management’ took hold, senior officials became more used to being in the public limelight of parliamentary and media scrutiny and lost some of their anonymity as a result.

In short, in the final decades of the 20th century anonymity, neutrality and loyalty for senior officials took on more complex, nuanced meanings, and in some cases diminished, and the line between politics and administration blurred significantly, although did not disappear. On the other hand, where newly-appointed ministerial advisers became increasingly prominent in developing new policies for government, some senior officials came to feel they were being pushed back into a role closer to the classic prescription, although in other situations collaboration between advisers and officials may now becoming more common (Eichbaum and Shaw, 2005). Further, whilst the so-called ‘New Zealand model of public management’ freed up chief executives and senior managers in various managerial respects, they were still bound into a variation on the classic Westminster theme of formal subordination to the minister via output-focused performance contracts. As a broad generalisation, therefore, we can say that Westminster-derived constitutional principles continued to underpin minister–senior official relationships – and set the top-down framework for the conduct of officials more generally – at least until very recent times, and probably still do (James, 2002).

The shifts in public sector practice focused on in this paper, however, are not emerging in the direct relationships between ministers and senior officials. They are arising in the complex relationships emerging between lower-level officials and others involved in the policy process. As will be seen shortly, some of these reveal characteristics that are not consistent with the details of the classic model identified above, although it is difficult to be precise on this point. Documents that might be expected to articulate the norms of official conduct, such as the State Services Commission’s *Public Service Principles* or the current *Cabinet Manual*, seem to be silent when it comes to the operational detail, and present what seem to be principles derived logically from the overall political relationships at the core of the Westminster conventions.² The point raised by this paper, however, is that these emerging changes are altering the realities of public service in contemporary

2 It should also be noted that the current Cabinet Manual has not been updated since 2001 and the SSC Principles, Conventions and Practice guidance series documents have been withdrawn from the SSC website (see http://www.ssc.govt.nz/display/GlossaryItem.asp?id=104&this_window) on the basis that ‘a considerable amount of content relating to process and practice is no longer current’.

New Zealand from the bottom up. As Colin James in *The Tie That Binds* (2002, p.75) has noted:

The principles do seem to have lost some of their force and/or no longer to describe actual practice. This risks incredulity and disrespect among lower-level public servants.

The contributors to *The Tie That Binds* felt generally that there was no need for a 'reformulation' of these principles. This paper, however, argues otherwise.

Emerging trends: officials in policy networks

Empirically, today the precise form of the policy process in any instance varies according to the government of the day, the particular minister, the government and non-government agencies involved, and the complexity and public interest in a particular policy field. There are some cases wherein the process is remarkably like the simple, classic model; others look like a teamwork model.

However, there are ample signs in New Zealand now of what seems like a quite different approach, wherein the constituent relationships and practices – and, hence, the role of the public servant – are quite different. These pockets of emerging practice are found primarily in arenas where groups of citizens have a strong interest in public policy and participate as professionals and experts in their own right; and where government agencies (the leading agency and others, including other levels of government) are involved necessarily in extensive and intensive relationships with individuals and groups. Any and all of clients, stakeholders, providers, intermediaries, representatives, researchers, observers, advocates, critics and opponents may be involved. These relationships are played out in multiple settings in interactions large and small, and occur in a constant buzz of activity. These are the newly emerging 'policy networks'. They can be found in policy development, implementation and evaluation, and in a wide range of policy arenas, such as social policy, including health and education; in policy relating to children, family and the aged; taxation; justice and corrections; regional and economic development; in local government, and in the community sector.

Sometimes, depending on whether they choose to remain above or to join in the fray, ministers, their advisers and relevant parliamentary committee members will also participate directly in these networks in non-

parliamentary settings (e.g. conferences and seminars). Otherwise, they play their constituted role as decision makers in the formal setting of Parliament or cabinet, a setting wherein relationships between the minister and public servant are more traditional; but, since these places too are increasingly part of a continuum of spaces wherein the policy network functions, neither can escape the legacy of obligations built up within and around the network, and which impinges upon both the public servant and the minister in definite and determining ways.

In short, we are seeing the emergence in New Zealand of policy networks as a significant and sometimes essential vehicle for realising the policy process – a widely discussed development in contemporary democracies (e.g. Howlett and Ramesh, 1995; see also Rhodes, 1997; Sabatier, 1988; for a New Zealand discussion and examples of the emergence and character of networks, Gray, 2002; and Ministry of Social Development, 2003). What is not often discussed, however, are the assumptions, practices and effects of policy networks, particularly in relation to the changing role of the public servant, the constitutional implications of these developments, their appropriateness for the 21st century, and how we should approach them – which is what this paper tries to do.³

Sociological realities in policy networks: the social (re)constitution of networked officials

It is a simple sociological fact that individuals may enter into new types of relationships in a particular, previously constituted role but, to establish and build these new relationships, they will need to negotiate new rules of behaviour with other participants that will necessarily modify aspects of their pre-existing role. And to maintain and build these relationships over time, they will need to reproduce these new ways of acting to the point where they become routinised, internalised and experienced as mutual obligations (i.e. as new or variant role prescriptions). They will be penalised by the other participants if these new ways of acting are not repeated.

3 The following discusses the characteristics of policy networks as 'ideal-types': i.e. presents them in the form of typifications that capture the essential features of the phenomenon in focus, as abstracted from known instances. In that respect the typology is 'idealised'. Few empirical instances will evidence all of these imputed features or the internal coherence implied by this analysis.

Moreover, if these new role prescriptions are carried over into other roles, contradictions and conflicts can arise in those settings.

This paper argues that this effect is having an impact on public servants as they participate increasingly in today's policy networks. They are finding that, to be effective in the complex world of policy, they must act in ways that go beyond the traditional prescriptions and proscriptions, which, as previously noted, tend to focus on minister/government–official relationships and say little about the operational realities of the policy process. Inevitably, this effect is feeding back into conceptions of 'how to act' as a public servant, making some of the founding principles seem unreal and unhelpful. Consequently, significant tensions arise that, at this point in time, are not being publicly aired and, therefore, not being resolved. Without this, public servants in networks will continue working in ways that are constitutionally definable as 'risky', 'inappropriate' and even 'disloyal' (so they will continue to keep their heads below the parapets) when, in fact, what they are doing is acting entirely appropriately given emerging changes in the relationship between civil society and government in the 21st century, and should be applauded and built on.

In order to demonstrate how and why this situation has arisen, it is necessary to identify some observable sociological and political features of 'working in policy networks' and the origins of these recent developments.

1. Policy networks are extensive, intensive and porous and extend beyond the political executive

Policy networks emerge as loose but self-conscious collectivities intensively engaged in a particular field of policy, usually centred in and around one or more government agencies. There is usually an active core membership, shading out into others whose engagement is more occasional. Membership is usually inclusive and extensive, comprising public servants who work in that field (including those from lead and other agencies) as well as providers, intermediaries, clients and stakeholders (including opponents). In other words, any policy network is not contained within one agency, even if it is centred there; it may flow across several and out into civil society and/or the economy (which is what gives networks their horizontal and lateral features). And their boundaries are often porous, unlike bureaucratic

organisations that seek to define and close their edges. The trend towards formation of policy networks seems most apparent in (but may not be limited to) areas where policy is complex, uncertain, and crosses the traditional divisions between government agencies and relies on the cooperation of multiple participants, including those who are formally 'outside' government.

2. Relationships within policy networks tend to be flat, collaborative and web-like

Networks are built on 'partnerships'⁴ and not 'hierarchies'. Even if centred on one or more government agencies, the officials involved are not usually 'in command' (they may be 'leaders', but in the 21st-century sense of 'leading': see OECD, 2001a). Nor are they 'arm's length'. Even though the public servants participate officially as delegates of the minister and bearers of government's goals and objectives, and must sometimes seek to influence action in certain directions, there is a genuine interdependence and mutual reliance between all members in defining the problem and developing, implementing and evaluating solutions. They may provide the network with overall strategic goals, indicating the political, budgetary and managerial givens, and steer the process towards a certain framework of goals given by government priorities, but the relationships between network members are more like those between peers and colleagues, with web-like rather than pyramidal patterns of interaction (Gray, 2002; see also OECD, 2001b).

3. Much of the work in policy networks proceeds via collective policy learning

Rather than being driven principally by research conducted by professional experts in back rooms, which is then assessed according to abstract decision criteria, partly because the public problems being dealt with are complex, multidimensional and multi-causal, policy development (and implementation and evaluation) in networks works in a mode more akin to a recursive journey of discovery than to the diagrams of a policy process textbook. Confronted by issues for which there

4 This word is in wide currency, yet may be misleading. Network members usually define each other as 'partners' and enact relatively equal relationships. Ultimately, however, the mandate of the elected government can be invoked, at which point officials, as delegates of the minister, will reassert authority or their vertical accountabilities, often with damaging consequences. There seems little doubt that non-government members of policy networks increasingly expect power relationships in the policy process to be equalised in fact and not just in rhetoric.

are no easy answers, policy networks seek to explore and learn collectively, puzzling over the unknowns, envisaging scenarios, constructing hypotheses for action, trying them out and monitoring and evaluating the journey of discovery – a process more akin to ‘trailing’ and ‘learning by doing’ than to ‘finding correct or scientifically-justifiable answers and applying them’. Experiential understanding and practical know-how brought by practitioners are valued and exploited as much as the technical input provided by professional researchers and evaluators. Multiple problem definitions and plural answers are recognised and taken as normal. Plausibility, precedence and achievability more than ‘(scientific) truth’ are key decision criteria. ‘What works in practice?’ becomes the goal.

4. Public servants participate in policy networks as information brokers and resource facilitators with lateral obligations to the other members of the network

Formally, public servants participate in these policy networks as delegates of the minister, but the very character of the network relationships, the internal interdependence of the members and the exploratory nature of the work, means that, to be effective, public servants cannot simply enact that role. They cannot act in removed or distant or controlling ways, preserving the pristine elements of their role as ‘public servant’. Network relationships are face-to-face, are built on engagement in a collective journey of puzzling, learning and strategy and are underpinned by a constant flow backwards and forwards of ideas, discussion, activities and documents in which public servants act as facilitators and brokers. Even where public servants bring knowledge of government intentions or comprehensive research or evaluation, they must and do engage with network members as something approaching ‘partners in policy’. In doing so, they create mutual sets of lateral professional and knowledge-sharing obligations and responsibilities with other network members, obligations that can cut across those to ministers and cabinet (e.g. where government wants one thing but the answers emerging from the network propose another).

The critical thing about these developments is that for public servants engaged in policy networks, the relationships and interactions in which they participate and the social rules and professional practices through

which they conduct their work are significantly different from those presupposed by logical derivation from classical Westminster conventions, or even the more nuanced forms that emerged in the 1970s and 80s.⁵ Policy networks are an organic form of organisation – in contrast to the mechanical form presupposed by Westminster – that are open, porous and semi-public rather than closed, impermeable and secret. The members interact as collaborators and peers; in effect, the non-government members become akin to partners within and around the political executive. For public servants, accountability to the minister remains a paramount principle, but it is now so surrounded with other obligations that core principles, no matter how often repeated, provide little guidance on how to act appropriately or how to reduce the stresses.

Origins of these emerging realities: society and government

Why is it that complex policy processes seem to be increasingly organised in and around policy networks, and that public servants are active participants in them as facilitators and brokers in a web of mutual relationships, rather than exclusively as emissaries of the government of the day, as technical experts in the service of the ministry? Where and why and how have these new realities emerged? The explanation is important, since it influences whether we should define them as positive or negative.⁶ Two possibilities can be identified: the first is as a response to increasing demands for participation in the policy process; the second, as a response to the problems of knowledge posed by complex public problems.

1. The extension of political rights and the demand for participation

With the progressive expansion of political rights in 20th-century social and liberal democracies, more and

5 It is possible that related shifts have occurred in relationships of public servants with (a) parliamentarians in select committees; (b) associate and non-government ministers in briefing cabinet committees; and (c) clients in case management – in the last case, including a new type of obligation (of service provision, as in service charters) that exists nowhere in the traditions of Westminster and yet which is a 21st-century reality. These are not explored in this paper.

6 For example, some observers might criticise these developments as self-serving ‘interest group politics’. Public choice theorists might see them as ‘rent-seeking behaviour’ by non-government interests and consider the possibility of ‘capture’. As is clear from the following, I offer an alternative explanation and see these trends in positive terms.

more citizens in their various roles demanded the right of input into matters of policy that affected them. The extension of suffrage to working adult males, then adult females, the rights of indigenous peoples, second-wave feminism, the conservation movement and recent talk of the rights of children and animals are illustrations. This trend continues (and has combined with the 'open government' movement that commenced in the 1970s). Less and less are citizens individually and collectively willing to have decisions thrust upon them; they demand the right at least to be consulted, and, increasingly, to participate in (and, conversely, to oppose and undermine) policy development, implementation and evaluation. As citizens force their way into policy through various forms of civil association, governments are finding it necessary and helpful to include them – necessary in recognising new claims to power based on the mobilisation of political rights, and helpful in the sense that they are better able to understand the issues and claim legitimacy for their decisions. Some of these new interactions occur around ministers, advisers and political parties, and some around and with state servants in their roles as policy advisers and implementers. Policy networks are the effect of these new patterns of interactions and blur the boundaries between the governors and the governed.

2. Problems of knowing and acting

Increasingly, the public problems to which government is expected to respond are complex, multi-factorial and look different from different perspectives. They can also appear recalcitrant, inexplicable and intractable (Ryan, 2003). The public sector knowledge sets and policy capabilities available to government tend to be indirect, technical and abstract, based as they are on standard forms of social science research and the application of academic disciplines to problem solving. Effective policy action demands that direct, experiential knowledge of the various dimensions of the issues and possible solutions is brought into the policy process, partly because it has the validity of direct experience and practical know-how, but also because complex problems with multiple causes need to be understood from diverse and relative viewpoints. This is also because scientifically credible knowledge is not necessarily useful or applicable knowledge; effective policy also needs non-positivist knowledge of practice and the conditions under which practice occurs, and is often better developed

through action than discourse. Particularly when they stretch over policy development, implementation and evaluation, policy networks provide one way of combining conceptual and practice knowledge and creating ways of applying one to the other.⁷

In general, then, we can see that the rise and character of policy networks, and, more particularly, the practices that constitute today's public servants involved in them, has been a natural development, occurring partly as the polity responds to changes in the broader society; they are as much a product of government being 'acted upon' as government 'acting'. They are also a result of collective learning over time in the political executive. They have contributed to making the policy process more open, transparent and inclusive and less secret, and have pluralised and diffused the capacity to define and decide, all positive values from an 'open government' perspective. The public servant is at the centre of new sets of relationships and activities that involve a wider range of agents than previously, bringing more complex horizontal and lateral openings and obligations to bear that muddy the simple vertical and functional image of the 'technical arm of the executive', yet which seem essential to the functioning of a modern democracy.

They are natural developments in the constitutional relationships that make up the Aotearoa/New Zealand political system, and, in these respects at least, create a different power map to the traditional one. They are natural developments for sure, but not uncontested ones: governments have not always taken kindly to incursions by civil groupings into the policy process and are still inclined to assert the power of their perceived mandate when regarded as necessary. At such times, state servants in policy networks can find themselves to be the proverbial meat in the sandwich, in situations of considerable tension and risk. Where the stakes are high, we see attempts at reassertion of the 'traditional' line designed to ensure that state servants do not cross a certain line. The reminder to public servants by the state services commissioner at the time of the hikoi in April 2004, whilst nuanced, is probably a good example (Wintringham, 2004); it drew attention to the convention of not supporting groups that opposed government policy, yet made it difficult for those public

7 It also seems likely that a mature 'managing for outcomes' would strengthen these developments (Ryan, 2003).

servants (particularly Māori) who maintained other types of network relationships with those who were on the streets.

Overall, though, it is not hard to argue that these are no more than recent steps in a long journey towards democratisation in which exclusive executive power is gradually reduced and the power of civil society and its parliamentary representation is progressively expanded – not in a zero-sum way, but so that a society can consider public problems in all their complexity. In that sense, the shift towards policy networks, the pluralisation of the power to decide and the reconstitution of the public servant as policy process resource and facilitator are to be celebrated rather than cause for concern.

Beyond ‘Westminster’: talk ‘Aotearoa/New Zealand’

This paper argues that emerging forces impacting on and changing the constitutional role of public servants are natural developments resulting from ongoing changes in Aotearoa/New Zealand society. These forces seem likely to continue into the foreseeable future. In so far as these extend democracy and benefit the public good (and I would argue that they do), they are to be supported, even though they present considerable challenges to the structure and practice of public service and executive government.

The conventions of Westminster maintain a hold on our understandings of how best to relate the public service and cabinet. Yet, in truth, the core conventions apply at a high level of generality and speak to the relationships only between ministers and senior officials. The policy process these days is no longer the hermetic preserve of the executive, with public servants now engaged in extensive and intensive relationships with a wide range of government and non-government participants. Yet those founding conventions offer little guidance on how best to act. Some of our best up-and-coming public servants are struggling with the new realities, trying to respond appropriately to the more extensive demands emerging from civil society and to work in more effective and engaged ways, yet, while doing so, feel they are taking political risks. This is so primarily because the official touchstones are a collection of conventions forged in a different place and at a former time. There is no collective expression of these new realities, or even useful and ongoing discussion of societal changes, of

what sort of polity we want to have, what we want our public servants to be and how we want them to act – in fact, we tend to shy away from anything that has a ring of ‘constitutional debate’.

In order to grant permission to those who are trying to find new and 21st-century ways of conducting the policy process, and to enable discussion of what does and does not work or seem appropriate, we need to acknowledge and be open about the fact that public servants and citizens in various roles are treading new ground. We are, in fact, creating an Aotearoa/New Zealand system of government. The future, in this respect, is not something to be feared but something to be collectively constructed as our journey continues. It is time for the debate.

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