

Public Sector Service Delivery: New paradigm, or déjà vu all over again?

Professor Anne Tiernan

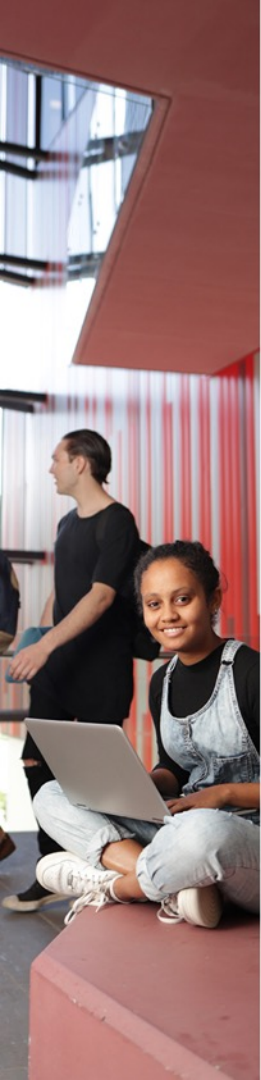


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Paradigms old and new

Successive waves of reform and change to the public sector:

- Traditional public administration
- New public management
- Network governance



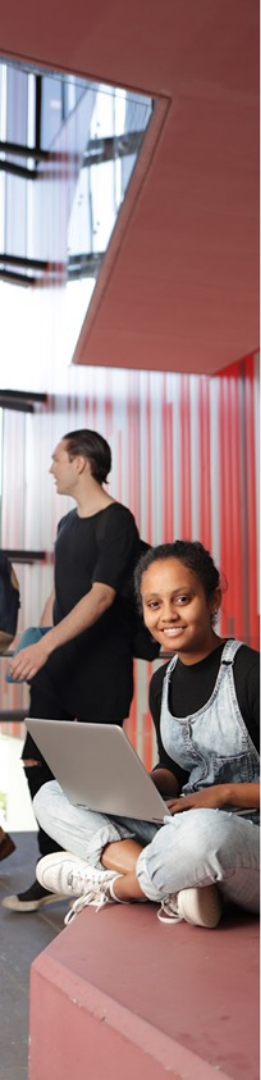
Reckoning with the legacies of continuous reform and change

Unintended consequences:

- Problems of fragmentation, coordination, consistency and accountability.
- Tensions in the political-administrative interface associated with the changing nature of politics
 - Professionalisation, hyperpartisanship, the 'permanent campaign.

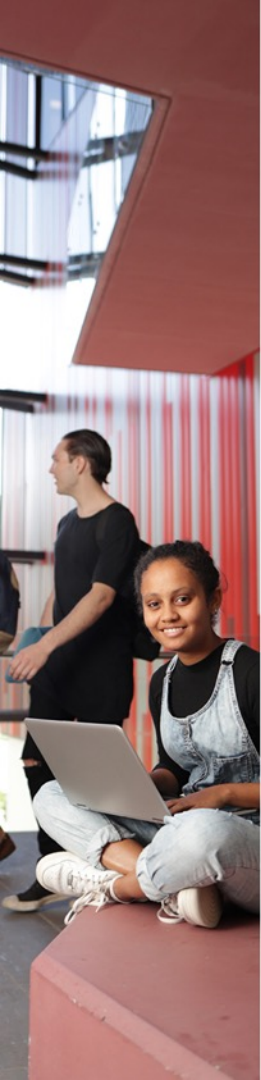
In Westminster-style systems, political practice has outstripped traditions, beliefs, conventions and accountability arrangements. They do not reflect:

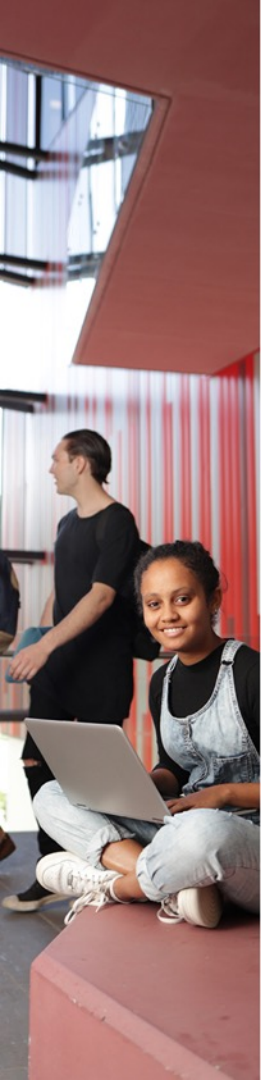
- That the political executive has higher expectations of public service responsiveness.
- That the public service is not the only, and often not the dominant, source of policy advice.
- That partisan staff have become a central and permanent part of the core executive.



Centralisation of policy and service delivery

- Commonwealth expansion into areas of sub-national responsibility.
 - Extreme vertical fiscal imbalance and constraints on own-source revenue for sub-national governments
- Perceived homogeneity Australia's federation obscures growing territorial, spatial, ethno-cultural, socio-economic and policy-political differences
 - Public expectations for equality and uniformity due to high rates of internal migration. Business expectations of consistency across national markets
 - Simultaneously, demands for responsiveness to local needs and contexts.





In *The End of Whitehall? Government by Permanent Campaign* (2019), academic and former SpAD Patrick Diamond chronicles the blurring of boundaries between politics and administration and loss of trust in the relationships between Ministers and civil servants.

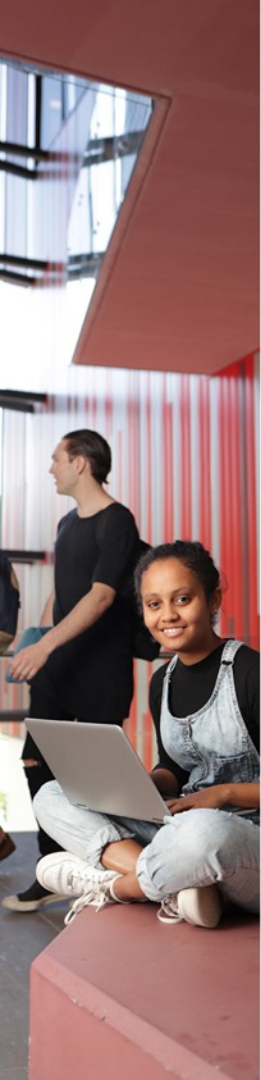
While noting the need to restore constitutional propriety and principles of accountability, he argues:

‘....The central issue is about what the state has the capacity to do and how the system of government is organised to deal with the most pressing social and economic issues of our time’

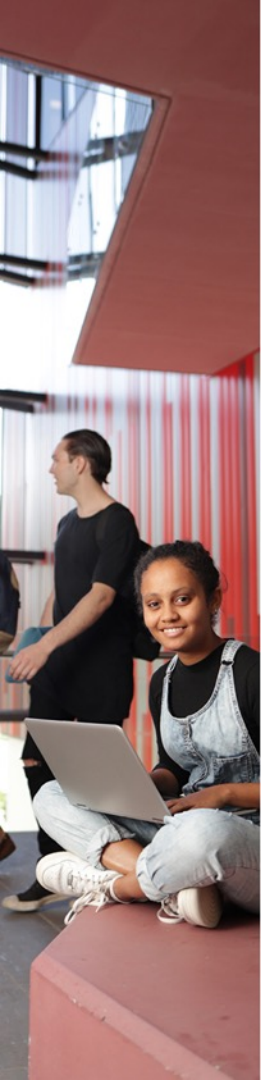
(Diamond, 2019 p. 89)

Five propositions

1. The problems that we face are complex and interdependent. They require integrated, interdisciplinary and sustained collaboration and engagement.
2. The knowledge, expertise, capability and resources to address them are embedded in and distributed across inter-sectoral and inter-jurisdictional networks.
 - There is substantial (and under-recognised and under-valued) capacity and expertise at State and local government levels, in not-for-profit organisations, universities and research institutes, local communities and in the lived experience of citizens.
 - The public service's role may be to help to design arrangements that harness these capacities for public purpose; to convene those interests to design and implement contextualised actions that are iterative and adaptive to insights from experience and social learning.



3. However, government is one among many actors who share responsibility for responding to complex challenges. Adapting to a changing climate, supporting social cohesion and fostering inclusive growth, is a shared task.
- Hyper-partisanship and declining trust in political institutions and processes presents opportunities for ‘unconventional alliances’ to achieve outcomes in the long-term public interest.
 - There is growing interest in ‘mission’ or ‘purpose’ oriented collaborations that harness dynamic capabilities from diverse sectors to address societal challenges – both at the system and the local/place level.



4. Collaboration and collective action necessitates that we broaden our understanding of the concept of ‘stewardship’.
5. Governance and accountability frameworks need to accommodate vertical and networked arrangements.

At the Crossroads

- Our challenges are complex, but we have navigated complexity successfully in the past.
 - Two World Wars, economic shocks, frequent and severe natural disasters etc.
- Those efforts combined capabilities and resources drawn from diverse sectors. They were collaborative and purpose-oriented and reflected a willingness to embrace collective leadership and responsibility.
- They were also relational rather than transactional, reflecting the best traditions of Australian democracy and governance:
 - Political and parliamentary leadership at all levels.
 - Trusted and respectful partnerships between governments and their public services.
 - Respect for knowledge, expertise and experience; and for alternative perspectives from the networks outside of government.
 - Willingness to debate, compromise, make decisions in the national, rather than the narrow sectoral or self interest; and to experiment and learn.
- The challenges we face, and the tensions exposed in the May 2019 Federal election highlight the enduring relevance of Australia's federal design and the principle of subsidiarity.
- A new paradigm should seek to recover and rediscover strengths and capabilities that are inherent and just waiting to be successfully tapped.

THANK YOU

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