MORAN REVIEW OF THE APS

From Rhetoric to Blueprint: The Moran Review as a Concerted, Comprehensive and Emergent Strategy for Public Service Reform

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On 3 September 2009, Prime Minister Rudd announced a six-month Review of Australian Government Administration. He appointed an Advisory Group chaired by Terry Moran, Secretary of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, to prepare a discussion paper, oversee a benchmarking study and consultations, and craft a blueprint to reform the Australian Public Service (APS) in order to deal with future governance challenges. The vision is to develop a forward-looking, innovative, collaborative, citizen-focused, agile, informed and highly-skilled APS to advise and deliver policy and services for government. Ahead of the Game, a comprehensive Blueprint for action, was released on 29 March 2010. This article provides a high-level review of motivations and process for the Moran Review, an overview of the Blueprint, an assessment of the strategy and process, and suggestions for moving forward on selected issues.

Key words: *Moran Review*, *reform*, *Australian public service*

On 3 September 2009, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd announced a review on the Reform of Australian Government Administration (RAGA) and that an Advisory Group chaired by Terry Moran, Secretary of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (PMC), would draft a discussion paper, review submissions, and make recommendations for his government to consider. Rudd's announcement envisioned the need for bold decision-making to address tough governance challenges which, in turn, would require an innovative, collaborative, and citizen-focused government supported by a forward-looking, agile, and informed public service when designing and delivering policy.

There are several challenges in undertaking an assessment of the Moran Review.[1] First, the review's scope is breathtaking: revisiting APS values, exploring how to improve policy capabilities, bringing a citizen orientation to service delivery, linking front-line staff to policy advice, calling for more citizen engagement, improving recruitment and leadership development, unifying the APS, and encouraging more collaboration across levels of government and other sectors, etc. Second, but not surprisingly, a review of such scope attracts commentary and submissions on almost every conceivable aspect of public sector reform. Third, anyone who has monitored or lived through reform initiatives knows that there are gaps between rhetoric and what gets accomplished, that announced reforms tend to gather up and move along previous reforms, and that many reforms will take years and perhaps a decade to get implemented and achieve desired results. Fourth, since the review was announced, the Rudd government has been under attack for implementation issues associated with the home insulation and other programs which have markedly changed the optics for the reform initiative.

What follows is an attempt to make sense of the Moran Review process, to analyse the Blueprint it forwarded to the government, and to offer some guidance for implementation. The first section summarises the motivations animating the review, important themes at play, and the approach that was taken towards consultation. The second section provides an overview of some of the main features and themes of the Advisory Group's final report, *Ahead of the Game*, which was publicly released on 29 March 2010, and set out a comprehensive framework and aggressive timelines for APS reform.

The third section assesses the Blueprint, even if many of the details of the strategy remain emergent, by design. It does so by invoking some of the standards the Moran Review applied to undertaking high quality policy analysis (strategic orientation, evidence and analysis, engagement, performance and innovation), through the lenses of rhetoric and symbolism, and the overarching challenge of balancing and realising competing aspirational values with limited resources. The fourth section looks forward and offers ideas on selected topics: broadening the current focus of citizen-satisfaction surveys; ensuring strategic taskforces can work well with stakeholders; proposing a research agenda to inform specific initiatives and revitalize networks of public management experts; exploring the links between capability reviews and cross-jurisdictional benchmarking; tackling the APS values with different perspectives; and suggesting a sequencing strategy for building out a new Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) over several years.

1. The Moran Review: Motivations and Process

By 2009, the APS was overdue for a comprehensive review of its capabilities in the context of emerging policy and governance challenges. First, there had not been a significant review since the 1980s, notwithstanding the reforms of the 1990s to the Australian Public Service Commission, the senior executive service (SES), and the broader industrial relations

regime that affected the public sector. Second, it is not surprising that the Rudd Labor government would assess the state of the APS after serving under the Howard government for over a decade (March 1997-December 2007). Third, the global financial crisis posed long term policy challenges for many governments which had implications for public service reform. Fourth, the New Public Management had lost its lustre as guide for reform, with increasing scholarly and practitioner speculation about the features for the next wave of reform (eg, Christensen and Laegreid 2007; Bourgon 2008; Lindquist 2009a).

Prime Minister Rudd and Terry Moran, the PMC secretary, used several occasions to articulate their views on the nature of the challenges confronting the Commonwealth of Australia and the implications for the Australian Public Service,[2] which were echoed in the discussion paper circulated by the Advisory Group in October 2009. In outlining their case for a review and reform, the prime minister, the PMC secretary, and the Advisory Group developed a comprehensive perspective on governance challenges and implications for the APS. Rudd and Moran were careful to laud the traditions and the performance of the APS in their speeches, particularly with respect to advising the government and implementing early policy decisions of the government. On balance, the argument for reform was rooted in an urgent sense of a need to 'pull to' better ways to deal with complex challenges, often crises.

Crisis emerges as a multi-faceted touchstone for thinking about APS reform. First, Rudd and Moran depicted the global financial crisis and the Victoria bushfire crises as examples of how the APS rose to the occasion to provide advice under pressure. Second, the quick APS response to recent crises was depicted as evidence of its potential to address other issues with the same degree of urgency and innovation (Rudd 2009b) Third, the crises were seen as evidence of a larger set of transformations under way, which require 'the public service to develop new structures and skills, and find talented new people' (Rudd 2009a). All of this led to the conclusion that the APS needed more

capability for 'transformational thinking', which encompassed several intertwined ideas:

- Policy innovation and creativity;
- Policy advice and contestability;
- Evidence-based analysis and pilots;
- Strategic policy capability;
- Whole-of-government perspective;
- Collaborative approaches;
- Effective programs and services;
- Engaging outside experts;
- Connecting front-line experience to policy design;
- Engaging citizens on several fronts;
- Effective programs and services;
- Measuring performance and benchmarking;
- Agility, flexibility and mobility; and
- Efficiency and review.

This is a comprehensive, aspirational list of capabilities, practices, and discipline that public service institutions and their leaders should have for dealing with future challenges. Running across all of the speeches and discussion paper is a sense of urgency and need for excellence in every direction.

Rudd and Moran set out these ideas while saluting the values, traditions and responsiveness of the APS. The prime minister emphasised that his government 'came to office pledging to *reinvigorate* the Westminster tradition of a merit-based, independent public service committed to the highest-quality policymaking. We chose the word reinvigorate carefully. We did not say 'reinvent', because the APS is a strong, professional public service that has served successive governments very well' (Rudd 2009a). However, one can sift through the speeches and discussion paper to find a trenchant critique of the APS, informed by a mix of personal observations and evidence from the benchmarking paper commissioned by the Advisory Group.[3] The deficiencies noted include:

- Policy advice is too often reactive and narrow;
- Too little genuinely strategic policy capability;
- Policy advice is not sufficiently connected to implementation;

- Insufficient feedback and learning on the quality of policy and advice;
- Insufficient external engagement with stakeholders and citizens;
- Lack of a common APS identity to build experience and cross-boundary thinking;
- Insufficient investment in learning and development;
- Insufficient creativity and innovation; and
- Insufficient management skills.

In short, despite lauding the performance of the APS in advising the government on the global financial crisis and the Victorian bushfires, significant concerns had arisen in key quarters about its performance and ability to address future challenges. Such concerns could only have been amplified after the release of the Advisory Group's discussion paper, with the controversies over the home insulation and school infrastructure programs. In short, there was a significant push-from-the-present complementing the pull-to-the-future rhetoric animating the reform process and its goals.

The Advisory Group and Secretariat

In announcing and shaping the Reform of Australian Government Administration process, the prime minister opted for a conventional blue-ribbon taskforce approach, with a time-limited mandate to produce a discussion paper. The Advisory Group, chaired by Terry Moran, Secretary of Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, was comprised of several public service, private sector, and university representatives.[4] While some observers have suggested that there were too many insiders and mates among the Advisory Group, there can be little doubt about the diversity of their collective experience, their acumen and their ability to speak truth to power based on experience as well as having a zone of comfort with the prime minister and the PMC secretary.

The Advisory Group met six times over six months, supported by a secretariat consisting of seven public servants and a similar number on tap for special projects. Early on it seemed that the review was structured so as to distil and test existing ideas, to identify new ideas and

articulate an approach to the prime minister about the policies, actions and capabilities required to move forward.

The Advisory Group's Discussion Paper

Reflecting the ideas and concerns of the prime minister and the PMC secretary, the review and the *Building the World's Best Public Service* discussion paper (AGRAGA 2009) were organised around five themes:

1. A values driven culture that retains public trust;
2. High quality, forward looking and creative policy advice;
3. High quality, effective programs and services focused on the needs of citizens;
4. Flexibility and agility; and
5. Efficiency in all aspects of government operations.

The overarching theme tabled by the Advisory Group, and presumably endorsed by the prime minister, was identifying reforms that would lead to the 'best public service in the world' (AGRAGA 2009:10).

Although a bewildering number of themes and initiatives were flagged in the speeches and the discussion paper, several big ideas that stood out from the rest:

- Re-think and modernise the APS values and convey in a more concise format;
- Develop a unified APS and more corporate SES leadership;
- Dramatically increase the mobility within and from outside the APS;
- Develop strategic policy hubs to pull together public servants from departments and agencies across the APS and experts from outside government;
- Develop new modalities of engagement with citizens, including using information technology to increase the transparency of government, to improve service and choice in government services, and to increase citizen engagement;
- Develop an APS-wide human capital strategy and a new generation of leadership, in-

cluding centralised approaches to recruitment and learning and development;
- Deepen relationship with external institutions such as the Australia and New Zealand School of Government (ANZSOG) and universities for research and professional development, although the Australian National University (ANU) was singled-out as potentially playing a special role;
- Rethink the performance management system in support of proposed reform priorities, including cross-government priorities and achieving outcomes, and supplement this with a commitment to benchmarking, evidence-based decision-making, and measurement; and
- Move beyond reliance on the efficiency-dividend approach to securing efficiency in government operations and explore alternative approaches.

Each of these initiatives constitutes a significant undertaking on its own terms and is comprised of several related initiatives. Indeed, many of them overlap with cross-cutting themes that inform directions and proposed solutions. Stepping back, it seems clear that the broad goal of the Reform of Australian Government Administration is to put the APS on a fundamentally different footing with a different culture, integrated approach, and new expertise and repertoires.

The discussion paper, released in October 2009 by the Advisory Group, was 48 pages in length and reasonably accessible and engaging. While acknowledging past reform initiatives and the current strengths of the APS, the Advisory Group did not dwell on them. It provided high-level background and facts on the size, attitudes, and other features of the APS, and set out the strategic challenges and aspirations for the APS. At the heart of the discussion paper were five chapters, successively organised around the five main substantive themes noted above. Each set out the expectations for making progress, ventured an assessment of current approaches and capabilities, offered some reform directions and specific ideas to consider, and concluded with a handful of broad open-ended

questions. It is not a full analysis and dissection of the issues, but rather, sought input and reactions.

The Benchmarking Report

When Prime Minister Rudd announced the review, he indicated that a benchmarking study had been commissioned. Undertaken as a nine-week engagement, the resulting study was released in early November (KPMG 2009). Several performance areas, requirements and indicators were chosen in negotiation with PMC, which could be drawn from existing studies with rankings or other sources of information. Eight benchmark countries were chosen in consultation with the RAGA secretariat in PMC – Canada, Denmark, France, Netherlands, New Zealand, United Kingdom, and United States – based on the extent of recent significant public sector reform experience, perceived commitment to excellence, and, interestingly, the jurisdictions' awareness of and ability to achieve reform.

The methodology section acknowledged the limitations of data, gaps and insufficient cross-jurisdictional data series, and the inherent difficulty in trying to capture and rate progress across countries with respect to variables such as quality, innovation, whole-of-government, collaboration, etc. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this report, and the least commented on, was a decision to rate how Australia stood (high, medium or low) with respect relative to the benchmark countries: it is important to recognise that all of the countries were generally high performers, so the notion of high, medium or low is certainly relative!

The result was a quasi-systematic first-cut survey of readily available information, data, and rankings of public service performance on certain variables, and best practices. It was an interesting attempt to identify a framework and then populate the requirements and indicators with evidence. However, even where data and practice seemed credible (and these were references to the existence of institutions, processes or charters devoted to certain purposes), there was no attempt to assess effectiveness and relative impact, nor was any effort made to differ-

entiate, compare, and evaluate best practices.[5] This study did not inspire confidence in the Review.

Other Information and Sources of Ideas

The Advisory Group did not limit its information-gathering, of course, to the KPMG benchmarking study. Along with other background information cited in the discussion paper, its deliberations were informed by the APSC's recent *State of the Service* reports (APSC 2002-2009) and several other taskforces either in motion or recently completed. The taskforces included:

- The APS Management Advisory Committee (MAC) was sponsoring a project on public sector innovation, building on the most recent Commonwealth Budget and other initiatives (Australian Government 2009a; MAC 2009; RNIS 2008);
- The Government 2.0 Taskforce (2009) produced its final report in late 2009 which, among many other things, explored how to share data and information, increase the openness of government, and use new web 2.0 tools for engaging citizens and stakeholders;
- The final report of the *Review of the Australian Government's Use of Information and Communication Technology* (Gershon 2008) which, beyond advancing thinking in this area, led many executives to wonder about broader application the logic of APS-wide approaches;
- Two APS MAC reports, *Reducing Red Tape in the Australian Public Service* (2007) and *Connecting Government: Whole of Government Responses to Australia's Priority Challenges* (2004), continued to serve as touchstones; and
- Lurking in the background was work proceeding under the aegis of the Remuneration Tribunal on the responsibilities and compensation of APS secretaries and agency heads (Remuneration Tribunal 2010a).

Several papers in the APSC *Contemporary Government Challenges* series drew attention

focused on wicked problems, evidence-based policy-making, and smartly choosing policy instruments (APSC 2007a, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c).

The Engagement Process

The Advisory Group and its secretariat were responsible for consulting public servants, experts, and the public about their perspectives on the challenges, aspirations, and proposed strategic directions for the APS. The consultations were comprised of the following elements:

- *Traditional Submissions*. When the discussion paper was released by the Advisory Group on 1 October 2009, members of the public was invited to make written submissions to the PMC 'Reform of Australian Government Administration' web site. With a closing date of 30 November 2009, there was an 8-week window to draft and send in submissions. More than 200 written submissions were received (AGRAGA 2010:13) and, of these, 181 were posted on the PMC web site.
- *Online Dialogue*. During October and November four 'online discussion forums' were held in parallel to the written submission process, hosted the PMC online forums web site (see URL: <http://forums.pmc.gov.au/>). The forums were comprised of four sequential three-day waves of dialogue revolving around selected questions identified in the discussion paper:

  - ➤ *15-17 October* – What are the most important challenges facing the public sector in the next 10 years? What are the implications for how the public service will need to operate? 51 posts
  - ➤ *21-23 October* – What should be the aspiration for the public service? Do you consider the following aspiration appropriate ' . . . . to be the best public service in the world, unified in pursuing excellence and putting Australia and Australians at the centre of everything we do'? 20 posts

  - ➤ *27-29 October* – What three things do you think most need to change in the public service so it can operate effectively in the 21st century? 613 posts
  - ➤ *2-4 November* – Should the APS Values as contained in the *Public Service Act 1999* be streamlined and simplified? What values do you consider should be included in a revised set of APS Values? 103 posts

  A total of 805 posts were made across the forums (this compares to 77 for the electoral reform discussion, which took place from 9–27 November).[6]

- *APS Forums*. Though not flagged on the PMC web site, several forums targeted current members of the APS (Brisbane, Melbourne, Newcastle, Perth, and two in Canberra) and focused mainly on eliciting views on the challenges and APS values. A 'Recent Entrants' roundtable also explored perceptions of the APS and recruitment.
- *Internal Reference Group*. Complementing the Advisory Group was an internal reference group comprised of a standing representative from APSC, four from PMC's executive group, one from Department of Finance and Deregulation (DOFD), and only two from departments or agencies.
- *Senior Australian and International Experts*. The final report *Ahead of the Game* mentions that many experts were contacted, but no mention was made of how many, whom and for what purpose, such as informing the drafting of the benchmarking paper.

Given the very public build-up to launch of the RAGA process, the government knew it could also count on the reactions of key commentators in *The Public Sector Informant* (*Canberra Times*) and *Public Administration Today* (Institute of Public Administration Australia (IPAA)), some of whose views were well-known, as well as editorials and coverage in major Australian newspapers.

The Moran Review consisted of a non-trivial consultation process, with several means for engaging the rank-and-file and executives in

the APS, and interested associations, experts, groups, and citizens outside the Commonwealth government. There is not the space here to report on the nature of publicly available submissions and postings,[7] however one way to evaluate RAGA as a process is the extent to which, by its own standards, it fully engaged stakeholders and whether the information it supplied could lead to the best possible advice.

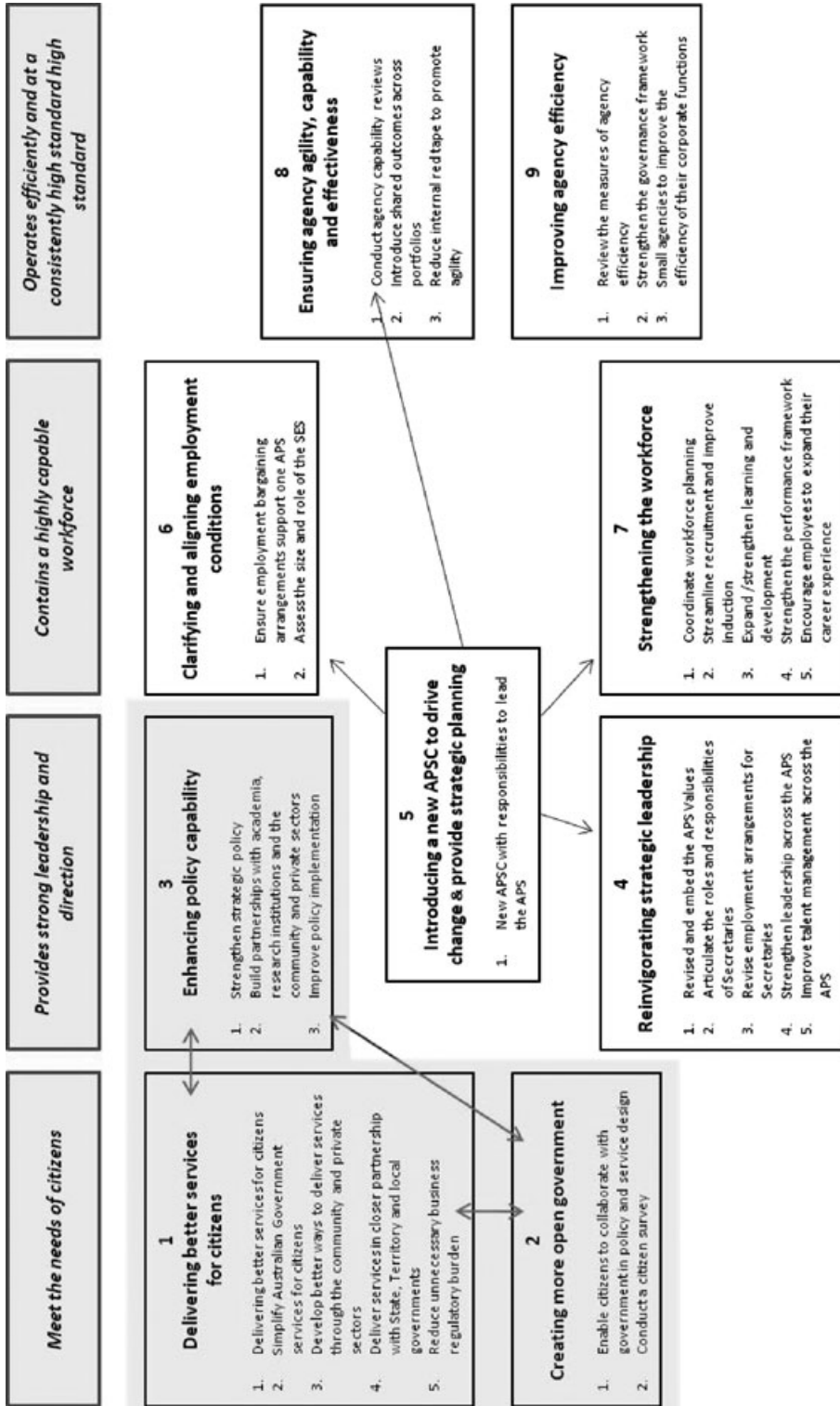## 2. *Ahead of the Game:* An Overview of the Blueprint

Seven months after its commission from the prime minister, the recommendations of the Advisory Group were officially released on 29 March 2010 in a report entitled *Ahead of the Game: Blueprint for the Reform of Australian Government Administration*. The government had suggested that the Moran Review would take six months to be completed and report early in the year, and its release, amidst several other pressing government priorities was on time when compared to withholding of the findings and recommendations of the Henry taxation review. This section reviews the content and organisation of the review, key recommendations and whether key ideas were dropped or new ones emerged, and, finally, the reactions of key commentators.

Ahead of the Game is nicely laid out, incisive, and well-organised. The executive summary lays out high-level recommendations and an organising framework (p.xii) (see Figure 1), which provides the backbone of the report and the basis for organising the recommendations (itemised in Appendix 4:80-81). The first half of the Blueprint, in many ways, uses the background in the discussion paper to ramp up the Blueprint. It pulls together more explicitly and satisfactorily the key themes found in the Rudd and Moran speeches and the discussion paper. It does a better job of acknowledging and citing other reports and initiatives. The 'How Are We Going' section is weak, relying heavily on judgments made for the discussion paper. Throughout the document support from selective submissions is noted, without in any way indicating the nature of evidence in those reports or

the number of submissions that had been made in support of the point in question. However, as the reader moves further into the Blueprint, it becomes very action-oriented: each reform area (four in total with two or three sub-areas in each) to setting out a 'vision for the future' (equivalent to a PowerPoint slide), supporting comments (usually not evidence-based), then specific recommendations buttressed by high-level action items and responsibilities. Many of these ideas restate previously identified challenges, and the report clearly acknowledges they require considerably more consultation and research in order to develop a strategic focus and operational plan to move forward.

Indeed, *Ahead of the Game* reads more like a party manifesto with a checklist of undertakings and highly aggressive timelines (p.79), even if the 'world's best' theme is nowhere to be found in the final report except in an allusive reference in the foreword. Viewed this way, the Blueprint functions more as a directional and an accountability document, and one that won't address the criticisms by observers of the discussion paper about a lack of depth and careful analysis (however, in my view the balances that were struck in terms of mechanisms and assigning responsibility were very creative and feasible). This, in turn, raises important questions about sequencing, pacing, phasing, capacity to drive the reforms, etc. Presented as a two-year transformation, it will more likely be a decade-long change process that will move forward in fits and starts even if there continues to be political cover and active top APS engagement. The short Implementation section (p.71) identifies short term, medium term and long term activities, requiring extensive consultation and more detailed implementation planning (and, one might add, considerably more research and analysis). It also proposes, similar to Canada's Prime Minister's Advisory Committee on the Public Service (Government of Canada 2008, 2009), that an external panel would receive progress reports on the Blueprint from the Secretaries Board (supported by the APSC) and, in turn, report to the prime minister. But APSC has overall responsibility, and would use a model like the Cabinet Implementation Unit (CIU) in PMC to monitor process (p.71). Presumably

Figure 1. Key Reforms Recommended by Blueprint

Meet the needs of citizens

Provides strong leadership and direction

Contains a highly capable workforce

Operates efficiently and at a consistently high standard high standard

1

Delivering better services for citizens

1. Delivering better services for citizens
2. Simplify Australian Government services for citizens
3. Develop better ways to deliver services through the community and private sectors
4. Deliver services in closer partnership with State, Territory and local governments
5. Reduce unnecessary business regulatory burden

2

Creating more open government

1. Enable citizens to collaborate with government in policy and service design
2. Conducts a citizen survey

3

Enhancing policy capability

1. Strengthen strategic policy
2. Build partnerships with academia, research institutions and the community and private sectors
3. Improve policy implementation

5

Introducing a new APSC to drive change & provide strategic planning

1. New APSC with responsibilities to lead the APS

4

Reinvigorating strategic leadership

1. Revised and embed the APS Values
2. Articulate the roles and responsibilities of Secretaries
3. Revise employment arrangements for Secretaries
4. Strengthen leadership across the APS
5. Improve talent management across the APS

6

Clarifying and aligning employment conditions

1. Ensure employment bargaining arrangements support one APS
2. Assess the size and role of the SES

7

Strengthening the workforce

1. Coordinate workforce planning
2. Streamline recruitment and improve induction
3. Expand /strengthen learning and development
4. Strengthen the performance framework
5. Encourage employees to expand their career experience

8

Ensuring agency agility, capability and effectiveness

1. Conduct agency capability reviews
2. Introduce shared outcomes across portfolios
3. Reduce internal red tape to promote agility

9

Improving agency efficiency

1. Review the measures of agency efficiency
2. Strengthen the governance framework
3. Small agencies to improve the efficiency of their corporate functions

Source: Adapted from AGRAGA 2010:xii.

oversight of the APSC and its Commissioner will be obtained through its minister and the PMC secretary.

In terms of substance and emphasis, the ordering of priorities changed with Blueprint: rather than lead with policy and values, as was the case with the discussion paper, it begins by focusing on citizens, then policy capability and engagement, and finally the leadership and institutional capacity in the APS to drive the change. The first set of concrete proposals centred on an aggressive approach to getting citizen views on services and other matters (pp.38, 40), taking advantage of international practice on citizen services *and* building on and rationalising what APS departments and agencies are already doing. The second set of proposals focus on expanding the mandate and strengthening the APSC and its commissioner, with a view to: improving industrial relations; developing an APS-wide strategic approach to recruitment, leadership and professional development; having a greater role for the APSC Commissioner in providing advice on the appointment of secretaries and monitoring the performance of secretaries and departments, particularly with respect to meeting APS-wide policy, service delivery, and institutional development priorities. Finally, the goal of developing and using metrics for measuring progress and performance remains a prominent theme.

Several new ideas emerged in the Blueprint, including interesting variations on earlier themes and new ways to lever existing institutions, while others slipped away. These include:

- Establishing a Secretaries Board, chaired by PMC secretary, and superseding the established Management Advisory Committee (p.49) – a broadening and modernisation of an existing institution to encompass policy capability and the recruitment and leadership development files. Recognising the pressures already on secretaries, and the need to develop the generation of top executive talent, the Blueprint proposes drawing a circle around and naming the 'APS 200' comprising executives below the Secretaries Board who will be the fulcrum for carrying out many of the reviews

and initiatives identified in the report, and presumably will be the focus of leadership development opportunities, including the imagined taskforces (p.49) (see Figure 2)

- While the idea of developing strategic policy hubs in each portfolio melted away, presumably because many departments believed they already possessed such capabilities and because many initiatives would span portfolios in any event, the Blueprint recommend cross-agency teams reporting to the Secretaries Board and overseen by APS 200. The Blueprint calls for development an APS Strategic Policy Network – to promote the sharing of learning and increased expertise across taskforces, departments, and further down the SES administrative chain – along with assessing policy capacity as a key element of department and agency capability reviews (p.42).

- Complementing this focus on assembling expertise and learning about how to address policy challenges is another on implementation: an expanded mandate for the CIU to foster implementation and project management skills in departments and agencies,[8] some departments could develop Implementation Boards, and the CIU would develop and anchor a functional community Policy Implementation Network to share experience and perhaps even to set standards. Finally, the DOFD would convene a cross-portfolio Regulation Network (p.44) and, working with Treasury, would implement the Standard Business Reporting plans and then explore how to extend the Standard Business Reporting (SBR) logic to reduce reporting burdens in other parts of government (p.37).

No determination was made on which APS values should be retained and new ones identified, other than to indicate that a shorter list was strongly preferred; rather, it was determined that there should be more consultation and reflection.

The Blueprint recommended that the APS as an institution, and at the level of specific agencies, should build better relationships, more

Figure 2. Proposed APS Structural Changes
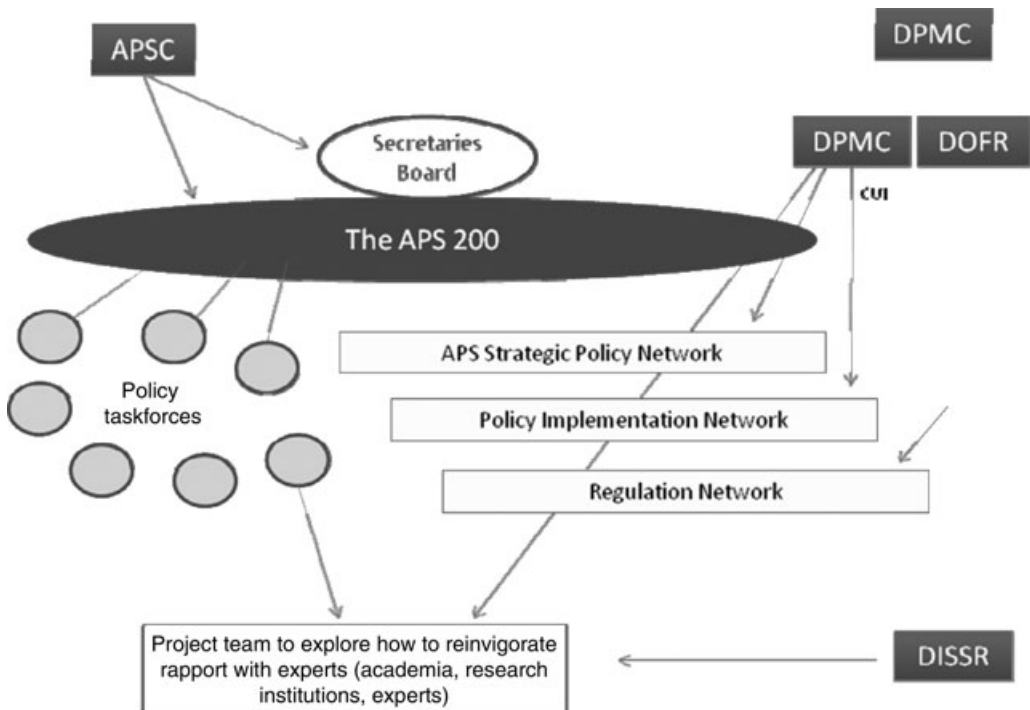
formal policy networks and partnerships with academic, think tank, community and private sector institutions for the purposes of research, testing ideas, and monitoring programs. The Blueprint made specific mention of the proposed China Centre and the National Security College at ANU, and a stronger relationship with ANZSOG and think tanks as examples of where these links could be strengthened (p.43).

The Blueprint was officially released on Monday, 29 March 2010, at a by-invitation event at Old Parliament House. The format was a dialogue facilitated by the Editor of the *Griffith Review* with Terry Moran as Chair of the Advisory Group, Ann Sherry (member of the Advisory Group and private sector representative) and Liza Carroll, Executive Coordinator, APS Reform, PMC, who coordinated the secretariat supporting the Advisory Group. Moran provided a summary of the essence of the report and the origins of the initiative, along with a question and answer period with the audience, a mix of executives, media, scholars, and other interested individuals, many of whom had made

submissions to the Advisory Group. Even more interesting was the release of the Remuneration Tribunal's first report in its review of the role and scope of Secretaries' responsibilities (Remuneration Tribunal 2010b). It is unclear as to whether this was a coordinated approach or if the Tribunal saw fit to ride the media wave generated by *Ahead of the Game*, but, given that its early findings portend a recommendation of compensation increases, this report had great potential to displace scarce media bandwith on public service reform (Taylor 2010).

Comprehensive public service reform strategies always generate many questions, and the Blueprint sets out design and delivery targets in 28 significant areas (p.89). Each initiative is to bear fruit by the end of 2012, with virtually all of the design for the initiatives and supporting government legislation completed by the end 2010. A significant number summarised in Appendix 4 require government approval, likely complicated by policy initiatives and election-year posturing, and, at the time of writing (early May 2010) had yet to be announced. As lead

on the majority of initiatives, the APSC must also secure sufficient budget (which requires providing sufficiently worked out rationale) so it can rapidly build its capacity to move forward on specific projects and coordinate and monitor other projects across the APS. Even beyond the APSC, there are interesting questions about the sequencing of steps and building capability in a broad and multi-year reform agenda. The timeline of the implementation of guidelines is shown in Figure 3.

3. Assessing the Review: Perspectives on Comprehensive Reform

The Moran Review is significant, if only because of the breadth of its remit. This section attempts to provide perspective by, on the one hand, tapping into my abiding interests in comprehensive policy innovations, public service reform, consultation and engagement strategies, emergent strategy and decision-making, research utilisation, and think tanks (Desveaux, Lindquist and Toner 1994; Mintzberg and Jorgensen 1987; Lindquist 2006b, 2000), and, on the other hand, using the standards of the Moran Review for evaluating the merits and gaps in the review process and its final report. Accordingly, the section proceeds by considering the Moran Review as: strategic choice about scope and process; evidence-based analysis and design; engagement and Government 2.0; performance and innovation; rhetoric and symbolism; and, finally, balancing competing values.

### *The Review as Strategy: Comprehensive Reform and Concerted*

The Moran Review is best analysed as a comprehensive reform intervention. It is useful to consider why a comprehensive as opposed to a selective approach emerged and was warranted, and why the instrument of a time-limited taskforce was chosen as opposed to a royal commission, as well as the limitations of these strategic choices.

Several factors pointed towards a comprehensive approach. First, the APS had launched several initiatives on different facets of reform, and some, such as the whole-of-government

and one-APS initiatives under the auspices of the Management Advisory Committee, had not been grounded into the repertoires of the APS. Second, the more one scratched below the surface of these initiatives, the more it became clear that each one had implications for the others, and, indeed, could not be fully addressed without broader thinking about the authorities and administrative policies of central agencies. Third, there had not been a comprehensive review of the APS since the early 1980s, and even if the APS had become an exemplar of New Public Management approaches to administering public service institutions (Halligan 2003), arguably they had run their course insofar as a fit between its decentralised structure and the decision-making demands of the new governance environment in Australia. For these reasons alone, a comprehensive review was required for addressing a complex administrative challenge.

The interests of political and administrative leaders reinforced the recourse to a comprehensive intervention. The Rudd government had new perspectives and expectations, including its recent experience and disposition for large-scale interventions, and a sense of urgency that the aftermath of the global financial crisis portended rethinking and innovation on every front. And, the timing was right: it had developed a better sense of its own governance style, what it could expect from the APS, and was looking towards its second term of government. Under Moran, with a new mix of executives in the APS, many with state government and other experience, there were ideas about how the public service could change, particularly with respect to more integrated and flexible responses for meeting government needs. To the extent that such change was viewed as a wholesale matter, requiring an integrated approach, it would require the political stamp of the government, as well as internal and external endorsement. Moreover, Prime Minister Rudd did not shy away from and, arguably preferred, comprehensive perspectives and intervention to address complex challenges, particularly so if such administrative reform might meaningfully touch on all aspects of governance: designing policy, improving service delivery, and

Figure 3. Implementation Timeline for Reform of the Australian Government Administration
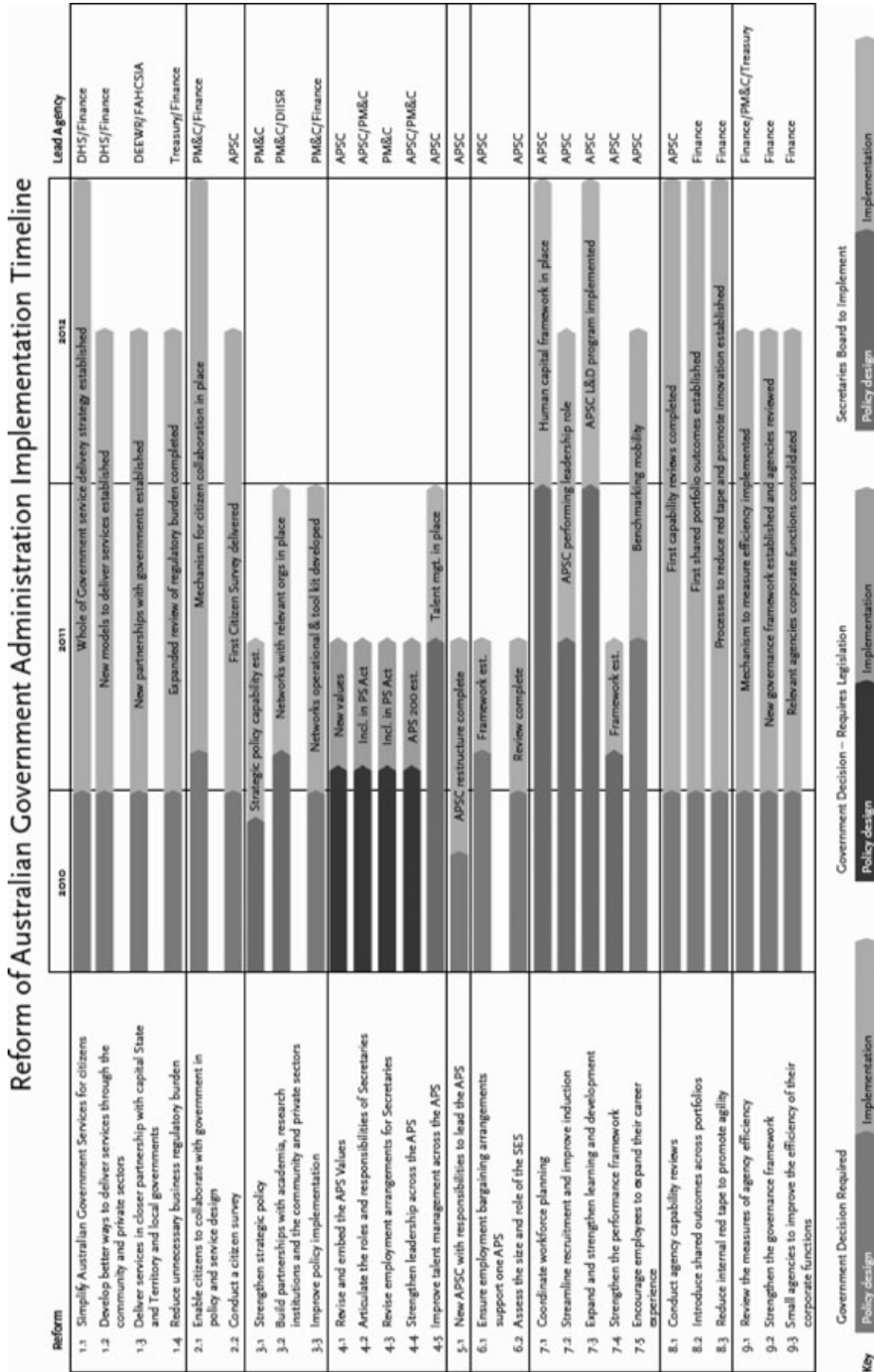
Source: AGRAGA 2010:79.

engaging citizens and key stakeholders. However, this confluence of interest was time-sensitive: if new directions were to be debated and set in motion, they would require endorsement before the next Commonwealth election, and this pointed to a time-limited but comprehensive review.

The gaps and limitations of comprehensive policy and administrative reform interventions are well-known (Lindblom 1959; Etzioni 1967; Schulman 1975, 1980; Desveaux, Lindquist and Toner 1994; Lindquist 2005). The pertinent issues are: inability to muster sufficient analytic expertise and design capability to meet the needs of decision-makers; inability of decision-makers to anticipate all aspects of complex challenges when choosing strategies and design; comprehensive interventions inevitably are open to greater interpretation and lead to increased politics inside and outside the institution; unless comprehensive reforms are purely symbolic and evanescent undertakings, greater effort and capacity are required to sustain momentum and implement announced reforms; and the coherence of large-scale reforms will soon be superseded by subsequent initiatives by current and successive governments, producing new challenges for sustaining coherence. *However, to the extent that top APS leaders knew the issues they wanted to address and the broad directions in which they wanted to move the APS, as well as had access to sufficient research and advice from other initiatives, ready access to best practices, and the goal of preparing a framework blueprint, they could proceed with a comprehensive approach with more confidence.*

Comprehensive strategies do not necessarily imply comprehensive interventions, nor do they necessarily imply significant research, analysis and consultation strategies (Lindquist 2005). Indeed, given the ambit of the envisioned reforms, the choice of the instrument for developing the Blueprint – a taskforce with short timelines – raised more than a few eyebrows. Several observers wondered why, in light of the ambitions of the review, a royal commission or more substantial review process was not chosen (Nethercote 2010). Many academics and public servants recalled that, in the past, governments

in many countries had responded to the need for comprehensive reviews and reform by establishing royal commissions which commissioned and reviewed research, produced substantial discussion papers, invited submissions, often issued mid-term reports, and undertook consultations in advance of making final recommendations. These limitations of the royal commission as advisory, research and consultative instruments are well-known inside and outside public service institutions (Prasser 2006). Indeed, commissions (as opposed to inquiries) have fallen into disfavour because of mandate creep, an inability to meet deadlines, and exceeding budget parameters. Governments often made significant decisions on key matters before commissions complete their work, essentially pre-empting emerging lines or evidence and advice. However, I believe that the real disappointment of observers concerns an important function of commissions: the drawing together of experienced and new talent from the public service, private sector, and universities to grapple with issues, learn about and assess international experience, and grapple with new ways to improve an important democratic institution. Such moments shape scholarly as well as public sector careers, and often affect and inform the trajectory of research inside and outside universities.

Proceeding with a concerted, time-limited approach produces real trade-offs with respect to the quality of research that can be undertaken, and the testing of ideas with interested observers. Indeed, when considering reform – especially comprehensive interventions – there is a need to acknowledge enduring issues and tensions in public administration and public sector governance that deserve, to locate current enthusiasms and future possibilities in historical context, and to get underneath rhetoric and announcements associated with best practices and models from other jurisdictions. At their best, royal commissions can address such informational needs. However, the half-lives of touted best practice, the length of time that reform windows remain open, as well as the time it takes to produce credible research, makes it difficult to justify launching substantial programs of applied research and thorough

consultation which are not likely to usefully feed back into advice within reasonable time-frames and meet the needs of commissions and governments.[9]

At the outset, it was not clear that the Moran Review was aiming for the high-level Blueprint that it eventually arrived at, that the Advisory Group had a solid appreciation of the need for careful and contextualised research, or that it was committed to systematic consultation and dialogue. The nature of the discussion paper and benchmarking report perplexed many observers. However, whether by design or discovery, the final Blueprint addressed these issues by *not* over-designing the intervention with uneven and incomplete information. Instead, the Advisory Group produced a high-level and integrated framework that key identified goals and linked them to pragmatic actions, proposed workable and internally consistent proposal for re-assigning and enhancing some authorities for the APSC and its Commissioner, engaged APS constituencies on the challenges and generated some enthusiasm for reform directions, and set out a menu of shorter term priorities on which to focus and from which to build momentum. To its credit, the Advisory Group acknowledged the longer timeframes required for designing, informing and anchoring the envisioned reforms, identified and bracketed the areas that could benefit from more detailed analysis and engagement, and proposed an oversight process that should keep the APS leadership feet to the reform fire. This is what Mintzberg and Jorgensen (1987) would characterise as moving forward with a balance between deliberate and emergent strategy.

The Review as Evidence-Based Design

The introduction to the Blueprint observes that 'Each of the reforms has been developed through a careful analysis of feedback from consultations, as well as research into leading international and domestic public services and private businesses' (p.32). Given that readers are not provided with summaries of the findings from consultation, nor an extended bibliography on various reforms considered by the Advisory Group (contrast the often extensive

references accompanying MAC reports), it is difficult to assess this assurance.

Outside the APS there was a negative reaction to the KPMG benchmarking study, and it is easy to see why. There was little or no analysis of the integrity, depth, validity and reliability of the indicators, nor of their relevance to this review – even the introduction to the study by its authors evinced significant caution. It did not provide a fine-grained analysis of what the indicators and findings might have really measured and mean. It gave considerable credence to rankings by other organisations, and sometimes emulating the best practices approach of the OECD, offered virtually no context or analysis. As the only research product issued under the auspices of the Advisory Group, with its early findings informing the Rudd and Moran speeches leading up to and supporting the review, its publication unintentionally and misleadingly sent poor signals about what the Advisory Group thought constituted evidence and research, and created an credibility issue in the media and elsewhere early on about the Review.[10]

This was unfortunate because the prime minister, the PMC secretary, and the Advisory Group had relied, directly or indirectly, on a considerable body of data, research, and suggestions that had built up over several years about the evolution of the APS and its challenges, international developments, and possible directions for reform. In addition to other recent taskforces and reviews undertaken by or under the auspices of the APS, perhaps the most intriguing and comprehensive monitoring of developments and issues came from the most recent seven of the APSC *State of the Service* reports (from 2003 to 2009). Not only did these reports report on survey data collected by the APSC from agencies and staff, they closely reviewed and integrated a series of well-documented reports from the Management Advisory Committee (MAC 2001, 2003, 2004, 2005a, 2007) on organisational renewal, whole-of-government, reducing red tape, a unified APS through the SES, etc. These reports led to the insertion of new questions into future staff and agency surveys, fuelling future reporting and assessment. The *State of the Service*

reports also noted and used the findings from public inquiries[11] and key taskforces on a variety of issues, ranging from information technology management (technology and strategic human resource issues) to staff conduct, to inform how it drew on and interpreted survey data and shaped future surveys. The *State of the Service* reports show continuing interest in several themes such as staff mobility, organisational renewal, work flexibility, workforce planning, citizen and community engagement, e-government, adherence to APS values, and leadership effectiveness and development. The APSC also closely monitored emerging international practice and summaries of reports from international agencies and other governments on key issues. Over time reporting of these issues would be grouped under different broad themes.

From the reports and other sources of information on international developments – including a variety of IPAA and ANZSOG roundtables, conferences and publications[12] – a set of issues and broad strategic directions for addressing them had coalesced before the Rudd government arrived. To the extent that the *State of the Service* reports levered and used MAC reports – reviewed and endorsed by participating secretaries – to shape future data collection and assessment, there had emerged a shared sense of findings and strategic challenges. For example, it was understood that SES staff increasingly had less external and other-agency experience, 60% of the SES identified more with their agencies than the APS, more jurisdictions were taking systematic and cross-public service approaches to measuring citizen satisfaction, there was increasing disparity in compensation for similar work across agencies, the need for more whole-of-government perspectives and capabilities was increasingly widely recognised, and increasingly agencies were grappling with recruitment, retention, and skills gap issues. The APS values were generally viewed as being sufficiently well-known among APS staff and adhered to. However, as the research utilisation and agenda-setting literature predicts, a consensus can emerge over many years among experts, leaders, and advocates on what constitute key issues and workable directions for re-

form (Weiss 1977, 1980), but for policy change to occur requires a precipitating event, decision windows to open, shrewd advocates, and sufficient energy to overcome existing repertoires and inertia (Kingdon 1995).

Here, the arrival of a new prime minister and PMC secretary, each with their own motivations and perspectives on the APS, along with the urgency and aftermath of the global financial crisis, led to action. Interestingly, some matters the APSC had been monitoring took a turn for the worse after the April 2008 speech to the SES by the prime minister (Rudd 2008). These included a further increasing of identification of SES staff with agencies as opposed to the APS, perceptions of staff that top executives were not as receptive to innovation, even more countries were systematically using surveys to measure citizen satisfaction across agencies, and a significant number of agencies did not have strategic workforce plans or succession or talent management strategies, a surprise given that recruitment and retention challenges had grown in urgency and scope.

By 2008, even without the arrival of the Rudd government, there was a broadening constituency for developing a stronger central capability to drive strategic human resource development and whole-of-government initiatives on several fronts to departments and agencies in the APS. But Rudd and Moran added their special focus on whether policy advice was sufficiently high quality and forward-looking, raising the profile of adopting citizen orientation in service delivery and policy design, calling for increased innovation in the public sector, use of Web 2.0 technology, and modernising the APS values. Many of these themes had previously been taken up in the *State of the Service* and MAC reports, but the strong interest of Rudd and Moran led the APSC to modify and intensify language, and regroup key categories, in the 2007-08 and 2008-09 *State of the Service* reports, demonstrating that the APSC and the APS had heard the message and possessed reinforcing evidence. One of the most interesting aspects of all of this reporting was the way in which the APSC, despite monitoring and drawing attention to these

issues, *never* argued for strong central intervention or an increase in its own authorities and capabilities for pursuing them.

In short, before the arrival of the Rudd government, a considerable amount of research, problem and issues identification, and ideas for moving forward were readily available. Against this backdrop, the prime minister and his new PMC secretary probably surmised that the focus of a review of the Australian Public Service was to identify a workable strategy, a concrete set of initiatives among many available for consideration, and specific capabilities for moving forward. Where evidence was concerned, the Moran Review provided an opportunity for gathering, sifting and focusing existing data and research. That said, there was a depressing lack of analysis and testing of the ideas and evidence on the table, of exploring the extent to which conceptualisations of issues and the chain of reasoning in support of certain initiatives stood up to scrutiny. Consider just four brief examples:

- *Unifying the APS*. The notion of unified public service is advanced in several ways: one that in even decentralised form shares similar values across departments and agencies; the SES and perhaps feeder groups sharing similar values and identification with the APS as opposed to their own agencies; an APS with shared classification categories and compensation; and an APS with a single employer. Aside from this conceptual confusion, there are analytic questions that should have been posed and argued: Will a more standardised classification and compensation system lead to more innovation, better performance, and lower costs? Can such a system lead to fairer pay in light of different demands and workloads in different agencies? Under a new system, will agencies simply adopt a different array of positions? Is the proliferation of SES positions out of step of other jurisdictions? How much of this is due to the changing nature of work and/or the boomers moving through the system? How will a new system deal with the real challenges of recruitment and re-

tention in a competitive labour market, particularly if the APS follows through with moving more positions outside the ACT? How will this square with broad-banding?

- *Encouraging mobility*. Aside from appealing to the idea that more mobility is a good thing for aspiring leaders and the APS as a whole, there is little sense of what might constitute optimal patterns of mobility, what the trade-offs and costs would be, and what the limits or boundaries to increasing mobility might be. Various *State of the Service* reports show there is considerable mobility under the current system of incentives and constraints, and executives rotating in from outside the APS have insufficient experience (but they are mobile), and the latter is bound to be the same for the next generations of leaders in feeder groups, who will have less time to acquire experience before taking up top leadership positions. Is the goal to increase mobility at certain levels, occupational categories or agencies by some increment (say, by 20%), at particular stages of career development, or as a percentage of promising leaders in different cohorts? Can too much horizontal rotation in the feeder and SES levels diminish the grooming of strong managers in agencies? It is already clear that the perceptions of SES leadership by staff lower in agencies are not as strong as the APSC would like to see, but more mobility will not help. How can this be squared with intentions to have top executives stay in positions for longer periods of time?

- *Increasing policy capability*. Increasing the number of APS staff who can undertake high quality policy analysis, the amount and quality of data at their disposal, and their access to experts from other governments, universities and sectors is a highly desirable goal. However, no workforce data was provided on the size of the policy functional community, where the greatest gaps were across the APS, and whether universities and other institutions were generating the kind of expertise to deal with emerging and future challenges. While the notion of

strategic policy hubs was intriguing, no options were tabled about how these hubs would intersect with central and agency policy units, whether they would be time-bound or quasi-permanent, how many might materialise across the APS, and how many staff might be required. More interestingly, there was little discussion of how independent – in the sense of undertaking more forward-looking and speculative research and analysis on emerging challenges – such hubs could be, particularly given the experience of other countries like Canada. Finally, given that these entities were to engage experts, other governments and sectors, and citizens, some analysis should have been tabled on how such capabilities might intersect with Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and similar processes.

• *Citizen engagement*. There many assertions about the benefits of engagement, but the call for more engagement implied insufficient engagement in the past. But was this implication and conclusion reasonable? First, there was no probing of the Commonwealth's track record on engagement, where there had been successful and less successful efforts, and whether policies that had been developed without any engagement which had failed. Second, even if there was demonstrably insufficient engagement, and more needed to deal with future challenges, no effort was made to probe why previous governments might not have done more: What were the perceptions of the value of public input in the APS, the risks, the costs and timeframes for different consultation instruments? Third, there was no assessment of the effectiveness of various forms of public input, engagement and deliberation over the last 10 or 20 years. Fourth, would certain forms of engagement work in certain jurisdictions and not others, with respect to scale, nature of issues, political culture, and related factors. And, there was no analysis of the extent to which information technology increases the accessibility of a representative cross-section of

citizens when dealing with specific policy and service delivery issues, the extent of their willingness to participate and, when they do, how well-informed and valuable the advice.[13]

Generally, then, little analysis accompanied the ideas and proposals put on the table by the Advisory Group and for those who responded to the call for submissions and dialogue to consider. Even if there was a larger corpus of government and other studies available, there was little analysis of their salience and lessons. There was no use of counterfactuals, analysis of trade-offs, and testing of ideas under different scenarios. In many instances, it is easy to imagine initiatives producing different than intended results. The review proceeded with pre-formulated notions of issues and solutions on several fronts, and, as discussed in further detail below, little effort was made to test them with staff and outsiders in a meaningful and informed manner.

This is not an argument, of course, for exhaustive studies in the context of a concerted review: much could have been achieved with short, analytic discussion notes relying on existing data and research. An initiative calling for high-quality policy analysis should have modelled greater commitment in this regard, and presumably this will be remedied in the future as various strands of the Blueprint requiring additional research, analysis, and engagement proceeds.

The Review as Engagement and Government 2.0

Engaging citizens and experts outside government to develop new approaches for addressing policy and service delivery issues was a dominant theme throughout the Moran Review. Earlier we noted the Advisory Group hosted on-line submissions and dialogue forums during October 2009, organised six forums with public servants, contacted some senior Australian and international experts, secured advice from the internal reference group, relied on expertise and experience around the Advisory Group table, and undoubtedly monitored commentary in

the media. What can we learn from the Moran Review about doing better in this regard, since developing a blueprint for APS public service reform is essentially developing *policy* for management (Barzelay 2001)?

The RAGA consultations constituted a modest exercise in public consultation and staff and expert engagement, even for the tight timeframes. Even though the consultations may have yielded useful feedback and intelligence for the Advisory Group, is important to be clear about their scope and limitations.[14] Few details were made available about the consultations, so the observations below are based only on publicly available information, but are meant to elicit further reflection and debate:

- *Traditional submissions*. The online submissions did not differ from traditional submissions, other than that they could be posted almost immediately and were available for others to review. As noted earlier, there was considerable balance in the sources of submissions, but great diversity in the issues brought forward and the sophistication of the contributions. There was no effort to provide a roll-up and summary of these submissions, nor a sense of whether they were generally supportive of different ideas tabled in the discussion paper or identified new themes to address.

- *Online dialogue*. The online forums relied on successive rounds of dialogue that addressed selected questions from the discussion paper. One the one hand, they did engage outsiders (although the vast majority were APS staff!) and were transparent. On the other hand, the forums were passive: they were not moderated (to the extent that there was facilitation, it was done by self-appointed outsiders), and opportunities were missed to further explore issues and access additional information. Posters could not even insert links to other web sites for informational purposes! This combination of primitive online technology and no moderation meant that the postings could not be organised into more productive discussion threads,

summarised and moved along on a daily basis, nor were summaries of key insights and observations provided at the end forum. More effort in design and process could have led to much higher informational yields. The vast majority of the commentary came from APS staff, which meant that, with the exception of the handful of traditional submissions to the PMC site, there was surprisingly little citizen input to the forums.

- *APS forums and internal reference group*. It is not possible to venture views on how the internal dialogue sessions with APS staff and the internal reference group worked since there has been no reporting on high-level themes emerging from those sessions (which would be standard engagement reporting practice). However, it seemed clear at the 30 March release of the Blueprint that RAGA staff were pleased and excited about the feedback received from those sessions.

- *Australian and international experts*. Likewise, it is not possible to assess the completeness and appropriateness of these consultations. No list of names or the institutions that were contacted have been publicly provided – a standard consultation and engagement practice. Several authorities in certain areas covered by the Moran Review were not contacted at all, others contacted the secretariat to supply information, and many others, I think, presumed that there would be some additional forums for this purpose.

There were sceptical and sometimes acerbic comments in the media and some submissions, and a bewildering array of perspectives and issues identified in the submissions and online dialogue from diverse quarters. However, there was surprisingly little dispute about the challenges identified by the Advisory Group, the comprehensive approach it advocated, and giving more authority and clout to the APSC (Lindquist 2010b).

Generally, the consultations did seem to inform and influence the Advisory Group's thinking, and, as noted elsewhere in this article, some

good progress and genuinely interesting strategic approaches emerged in the Blueprint. Moreover, the Advisory Group and its staff were themselves enthused by the feedback, energy and ideas that emerged from the APS forums in particular.

Recognising the time constraints, there were nevertheless some important gaps in the consultation strategy. Several practices could have moved the consultations more in the direction of engagement at relatively little cost and yielded better insight. These deficiencies are as follows:

- *Insufficient reporting back on consultations*. As can be construed from the observations above, the Moran Review did not report back on what was learned from the public (the online submissions and forums) and the more intimate consultations (the APS forums, the internal reference group, and discussions with selected experts). Indeed, detailed roll-ups of what was learned from each strand of consultation had to have been prepared by staff for the Advisory Group to consider, and summary versions of these roll-ups could have easily been distilled for public consumption. Good consultation practice recommends this important step (Lindquist 1994): it acknowledges the contributions and time of participants, shares publicly-funded information, demonstrates how advisors and decision-makers learned from the process, and shows outside observers the kind of issues that decision-makers had to balance, which eventually should lead to better contributions in future consultations on similar topics. Surmising what the Advisory Group learned, through reviewing this information and its own internal dialogue, can be inferred by comparing the discussion paper and final Blueprint, but it is long-standing best practice to meet interested publics and contributors to consultations more than half way.
- *Limited availability of information*. The thinking of the government and the Advisory Group were informed by several previous, recently completed or ongoing

reviews, as well as to OCED and other reports. The speeches and the discussion paper referred, sometimes only in passing, to associated documents. However, the RAGA web site provided no links to this information. Indeed, the web site – aside from hosting the discussion paper, benchmarking study, submissions, and the online forums – contained no other information, not even direct links to the speeches by the prime minister and Secretary Moran. Interested observers had to locate the information at other parts of the PMC web site, different parts of the APSC web site, and other APS departments, let alone securing offshore reports. The result was that contributors were less likely to have access to this information when preparing to make submissions and postings to forums, and those that did were likely to advocate for the selective areas on which they knew a bit. Similarly, relevant publications, including papers and remarks by practitioners, scholar, and other experts could have been uploaded directly or linked to the RAGA web site. Arrangements could have been made with the OECD and other publishers to provide summaries of reports, and reports and links could have been given to key best practice examples identified in the discussion paper. Making this happen could have easily been done using SharePoint and other web technologies.
- *Little engagement of external experts*. The Advisory Group did not systematically reach out to external experts, even though some overtures were made (unlike most engagement initiatives, no list of experts consulted was released).[15] Rather, its approach on this front was passive: it was largely left to individual scholars, research centres, and firms to choose whether to submit briefs or directly contact the Advisory Group. For scholars and other experts, most of the discussion paper questions were so general that, they read more like comprehensive examination questions – lengthy submissions could have been made, but the early strategic focus of the Advisory Group were unclear. This was

a missed opportunity: the applied public administration scholars inside and outside Australia are very strategic, and at the very least for incremental costs, could have been utilised to vet and test some of the emerging ideas and trade-offs identified by the Advisory Group, the state of the literature on key issues, provided internationally informed advice and context into the process, and raised the game of others who contributed submissions. Two or three forums should have been held with scholars and experts adept at providing applied, contextualised and strategic advice. Participants who could have been invited might have included scholars from applied public administration and policy programs, as well as colleagues with relevant expertise from cognate disciplines and professional schools, and mixed with top executives and other experts to address specific strategic issues. An opportunity was also lost to draw a new generation of scholars towards public management issues.

The quality of citizen and expert engagement depends on the time available, the quality of the information supplied, the purpose of the consultation, and the focus of questions on the table. While the Moran Review had some shortcomings as an engagement process, this has to be weighed against its relatively modest goals of securing internal and external support for broad strategic directions and realigned authorities (as opposed to working through and mapping out the details of a comprehensive reform initiative) and the relatively short time for producing the Blueprint. As is discussed later, if the government and the APS want to raise their game with respect to policy and service delivery initiatives and step firmly into the Government 2.0 and citizen/expert engagement worlds, these shortcomings can easily be addressed when implementing the Blueprint agenda.

The Review as Performance and Innovation

The Moran Review placed great stock on innovation and performance as important standards

against which to assess modern public service institutions. To what extent did the Moran Review live up to these standards? In what follows we first take up the question of fidelity to different notions of performance, and then consider whether the Moran Review and the Blueprint can be thought of as innovative in international terms.

Where performance is concerned, the Moran Review achieved its goal of delivering a Blueprint for consideration by the Rudd government by early 2010. While there may been some disquiet about the discussion paper, the benchmarking study, and the attenuated engagement strategy and spotty analysis, a credible and coherent blueprint emerged. Indeed, arguably the Advisory Group should receive an award for 'undertaking the most comprehensive public service review and producing a blueprint in the shortest time'! Although it is not yet certain whether the government will adopt most of the recommendations, but presuming so, the Blueprint articulates an aggressive high-level implementation schedule, one that should ensure that the Rudd government and the APS can launch key initiatives but allows for flexibility in the precise design and volume of those initiatives and not a slavish effort to hold leaders to account for the details of a design that has yet to be fully elaborated. As noted earlier, the theme of performance permeates the action plan, with respect to capability reviews, secretary accountabilities and reviews, the new powers and responsibilities to the APSC and its Commissioner to move this part of the agenda forward, adoption of citizen surveys about service quality, as well as the oversight of the Secretaries Board of the strategic policy taskforces.

Evaluating whether the Blueprint qualifies as innovative is an interesting task. Many of the ideas that animated the Moran Review were well-known in the literature and the focus of government interventions around the world: citizen-focused service delivery, better quality policy advice, fostering leadership and coherence in the executive ranks, strategic public-service-wide workforce planning regime, improved performance measurement, and more. Indeed, some like collaborative policy design

and service delivery, citizen engagement, and securing efficiencies are hardly new: their origins can be traced back at least 20 years as part of the complementary alternative service delivery and New Public Management reform movements, and the notion of securing efficiencies is more than 100 years old.

The prime minister, Secretary Moran, the Advisory Group, the APSC, and many others have continuously scanned and monitored other jurisdictions for intriguing practices: from the UK came strategic policy hubs, capability reviews, implementation challenge function from the centre; from New Zealand has been the example of the strong State Services Commission with authorities for strategic human resource management as well as evaluating and nominating secretaries; from Canada there were the Citizens First, Common Measurement Tool, and Management Accountability Framework initiatives, as well as an external advisory board to monitor public service reform;[16] and, with respect to encouraging service delivery pilots and innovation from a citizen perspective there were the examples of Denmark (Mindlab) and Singapore (The Enterprise Challenge),[17] although it should be acknowledged that pilot projects and taskforces have previously been used extensively in Australia and elsewhere. To the extent that Australian political and public service leaders have been aware – or only just discovered – many of these practices, then the Blueprint could be seen as playing catch-up or a smart game of monitoring 'early adopters' for innovations that prove their worth. As the Australian government adopts workable variants of these innovations, it will have proceeded in time-honoured way to modernise its public service.[18]

The search for a new encompassing framework to guide public service reform is not out of step with thinking in other jurisdictions and the scholarly literature. There has been considerable interest in identifying a new integrating framework to go beyond the New Public Management to guide the next wave of reforms (Christensen and Laegreid 2007; Bourgon 2008; Lindquist 2009a), for which Australia was an exemplar for this approach, in part because of its incremental, steady approach. Although no new overarching label or acronym has emerged, the contenders include integrated governance, joined-up and whole-of-government, collaborative governance, e-government, Government 2.0, the 'New Synthesis', and undoubtedly others. The irony, though, is that many of these contenders gather up many of the themes embraced by the New Public Management family of ideas and tap into notions of citizen engagement and collaboration that have existed for three or more decades – the twist and the excitement, it would appear, derives from the possibilities afforded by new technologies to give new means for ensuring integration, performance, engagement, and sharing of information. The Blueprint, then, can be seen as part of this drawing together of many familiar themes into newer integrated approaches, in step with leading international thinking.

Innovation may have less to do with whether one or more initiatives are genuine inventions, and more about the starting point, setting out and implementing what others have only talked about, but failed to accomplish in a convincing way, and striking a distinct balance unique to a particular jurisdiction, with reforms continuing to evolve in interesting ways. Here we consider two features of the APS that Australians take for granted, but external observers would see as unique. First, despite the political concentration of power under Australia's Westminster system of governance, the APS has become a significantly decentralised institution: its departments and agencies have status as separate employers and relatively few corporate services are shared. Second, the organisation of the 'centre' with respect to strategic human resource management, and the particular capabilities of the Australian Public Service Commission, has been remarkably thin with it serving mainly as a monitoring, data collection, and appeals agency. In a sense, the innovation *is* the starting point: the government and APS have close to a blank slate in developing new central capabilities for strategic human resource management, and will be building a new APSC institution. This could provide an opportunity for fresh thinking, new tools, and better systems, but the APSC will have to build credibility with

departments and agencies accustomed to considerable operational autonomy.

Finally, several aspects of the Moran Review and its Blueprint hold promise of being considered innovative in the years to come. First, there is the decision to adopt a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach to public service reform without relying on an extensive review process and leaving room for emergent strategy development (Mintzberg and Jorgensen 1987), which may come to be seen as a 'smart practice' for other jurisdictions under the right conditions (Campbell 2006). Second, the idea of re-profiling the Management Advisory Committee into a Secretaries Board and broadening its mandate beyond management issues to oversee the APS 200 SES-3 group and proposed policy taskforces – all part of a larger leadership development and innovation strategy – is a potentially elegant innovation which may succeed. Finally, the ambition of systematically informing policy development and service delivery with input from front-line staff, citizens, other governments, and experts from other sectors (universities, private sector, think tanks, and community organisations) across an entire public service seems daunting, but if this can be achieved in a credible and inclusive way, it will be surely viewed as distinctive and innovative. As will be discussed below, achieving this goal may need to rely on an elaboration of the ANZSOG model, already an innovation by international standards, in order to take up the challenge of better linking programs of action-oriented research to policy development and other challenges.

The Review as Rhetoric and Symbolism

In reviewing the speeches and discussion paper it is difficult to ignore the extent to which rhetoric was utilised and laid the groundwork for the Moran Review, particularly by the prime minister. From the discussion paper's theme (*Being the World's Best Public Service*), to the title of the review (Review of Australian Government Administration),[19] reveal no shortage of ambition and rhetorical license. But even the fundamental reforms, after they are announced, soon dissolve into a series of parallel and more incremental initiatives, eventually superseded by new reforms and almost certainly destined to be outshined by substantive policy and service delivery challenges. Media observers and scholars will feast on inconsistencies, oversights, and contradictions in significant initiatives and, eventually, implementation gaps. *Indeed, as the scope and complexity of reform increases, there is even more opportunity for tensions and contradictions surrounding the objectives and means of reform, as well as poor performance or implementation*. In the case of the Moran Review, ambitious goals and rhetoric were invoked by experienced political and executive leaders, well aware of the difficulties and pitfalls of heightening expectations, and deserves further consideration.

The use of rhetoric was an important element of a deliberate strategy to secure sufficient support for comprehensive change in the face of complexity, rapidly evolving environments, and tough competition for scarce time and resources. There is insufficient recognition that rhetorical strategies seek to demonstrate and elicit support for significant change, however evanescent the public's attention, and to provide context and perspective on the need for the reforms, as well as coherence and integration of variously related initiatives. Consider this: if citizens are rarely seized by public sector reform, if politicians are likely to gain only passing credit for public sector reform, if finding evidence and demonstrating impacts is inherently difficult, and if political or senior officials understand previous experience with fundamental reform, but believe reform is necessary, then momentum must be generated, and the endorsement and concurrence of key internal and external stakeholders demonstrated. In this context, invoking rhetoric is an important strategy, particularly when resources have yet to be allocated. It does lead to paradoxes and contradictions, and easily identifiable gaps between rhetoric and reality, but this comes as no surprise under such circumstances, and particularly with comprehensive reforms.[20]

Throughout the Moran Review process, however, one could discern lessening reliance on rhetoric. The early speeches by Rudd were

forward-looking, ambitious, and had a keen sense of history; the Moran speeches were pragmatic, uncompromising, and steady, but had a clear focus on APS setting as its goal 'world's best'. These constituted important symbolic moments that were used to send key signals. The commissioning and use of the benchmarking study, whatever the perceptions of its quality and whether it a useful point of departure for dialogue and debate, was highly symbolic and consistent with the early rhetoric of the prime minister: it was intended to send a strong message about the need to strive for excellence by international standards, to use evidence when developing policy, and to indicate that performance would be monitored.

Once the Advisory Group took over, there were fewer rhetorical flourishes even as they continued to work with the broad framework and problem definition, perhaps realising that it was important to become pragmatic and demonstrate some autonomy from the government of the day. This is not unusual: most public service reform initiatives in countries like Canada are owned and managed by the public service. Maintaining status an independent, expert and competent institution – one that serves different governments – requires demonstrating the ability to self-diagnose, learn, and self-reform. Even though the approval and endorsement of sitting governments is necessary, such reform initiatives tend to be lower key and preferably less connected to the government of the day.

It is not surprising, then, that the Blueprint contains less in the way of rhetoric, but works hard to demonstrate widespread public service, scholarly, and other external support for the initiative. The Blueprint, though comprehensive in scope, seems pragmatic, operational, comprehensible, and geared more towards an internal public service audience. Its real goal is to bolster the argument for securing necessary administrative authority and budgetary resources to support front-end changes and quickly build momentum, and to elicit the voluntary engagement and energy of the SES. As drafted, the Blueprint should also serve as a useful touchstone and performance management

framework for several years forward, one that allows for evolution and emergence in the precise instruments and institutions for achieving and balance several enduring goals.

The Review as Advocating and Balancing Competing Values

The first section of this article demonstrated that advocates for reform have a long list of worthy aspirational goals and values for the APS to respectively achieve and inculcate: all are *good* things (except, apparently, a decentralised public service)! For many observers, this list might seem either unachievable or inviting significant trade-offs as a priorities in a resource-constrained environment. Figure 4 identifies several potentially contending ideas from the Moran Review as couplets.

These couplets, of course, do not exhaust the possibilities for tensions and trade-offs among the larger list of goals and values. For example, Mulgan (2010) noted the potential trade-off between citizen focus and top-down accountability to governments, when the latter tends to trump other accountabilities. Interestingly, in his Dunstan Oration, Terry Moran drew on Michael Porter's work on strategy to argue that a good policy strategy inevitably requires identifying the difficult trade-offs and choosing among them (Moran 2009c).

The challenge of identifying and balancing desirable organisational goals and values is well recognised in the leadership and management literature. To gain some perspective on what the Blueprint has accomplished, it helps to turn to the work of Quinn and several of his colleagues. Quinn (1988) wrote an insightful book entitled *Beyond Rational Management: Mastering the Paradoxes and Competing Demands of High Performance*. There he argued that top executives have the ability to navigate competing and sometimes contradictory values in order to ensure that the organisation could realise its potential.[21] The 'competing values' framework he developed and elaborated with others revolved around four distinct traditions in leadership and organisational analysis: fostering *clan or collaborative culture*, with a focus

Figure 4. Some Competing Values in the Moran Review

Policy development	*vs.* service delivery
Responding to government priorities	*vs.* responding to citizen demands
Ensuring effectiveness	*vs.* securing efficiency
Building internal capacity	*vs.* tapping outside expertise
Horizontally-focused SES	*vs.* organisation-focused executives
Innovation/flexibility focus	*vs.* implementation/accountability focus
High-quality workplace	*vs.* performance orientation
Collaborating across APS entities	*vs.* collaborating with other governments/sectors
Increasing central agency capability	*vs.* department/agency capability
Government 2.0 precepts	*vs.* Westminster governance norms
Inspirational 'stretch' goals	*vs.* pragmatic 'doable' orientation

on employee engagement; *managing hierarchy or control culture*, emphasising efficiency, routines, rules, and systems; developing a *market or competitive culture*, with a focus on achieving goals and meeting customer needs; and *adhocracy or creative culture*, monitoring evolving environments, identifying new opportunities, and seeking innovation. Each tradition has differing clusters of values, styles of leadership, cultures, notions of effectiveness, and a variety of leadership and management competencies (Cameron and Quinn 2006; Cameron et al. 2006), and they vary along two dimensions: having an inward focus versus an outward orientation, and having a drive towards stability versus embracing change.

There are several key insights from this approach: first, all of these values and competencies can and should be found in all organisations, but high performing organisations have to achieve unique and evolving balances at different points of time that do not require *fully* trading-off those values; second, the apparent tension between the opposite traditions – clan vs. market cultures, and hierarchy vs. adhocracy cultures, can be sources of insight; and, third and related, transformative leaders reject trade-offs, confront duality, and begin to see

new balances and sometimes innovation from them (Quinn 2004). The leadership lesson is that the best executives are Janus-like: they can see diametrically opposed values and approaches at play, and identify possibilities by recognising multiple levels of analysis and by sequencing concrete actions (Cameron et al. 2006:53).

There is not the space here to delve into the full implications of the Competing Values Framework (CVF) for the Moran Review process and Blueprint or to work through how it could be adapted and fully applied for analysing public service institutions.[22] However, Figure 5 provides a start and illuminates some challenges the Advisory Group had to grapple with. It may seem audacious, but I would argue that the APS 200 and next generation of APS leaders should work to grasp the implicit theory underpinning the creativity in the Blueprint's design, which will also be at play for successful implementation and monitoring – not all of the intriguing proposals have emerged simply from sifting best practices and adopting a pragmatic posture.

At the most basic level the chart, superimposed on the CVF, shows several streams of public management values and reform

Figure 5. The APS Blueprint and the Competing Values Framework
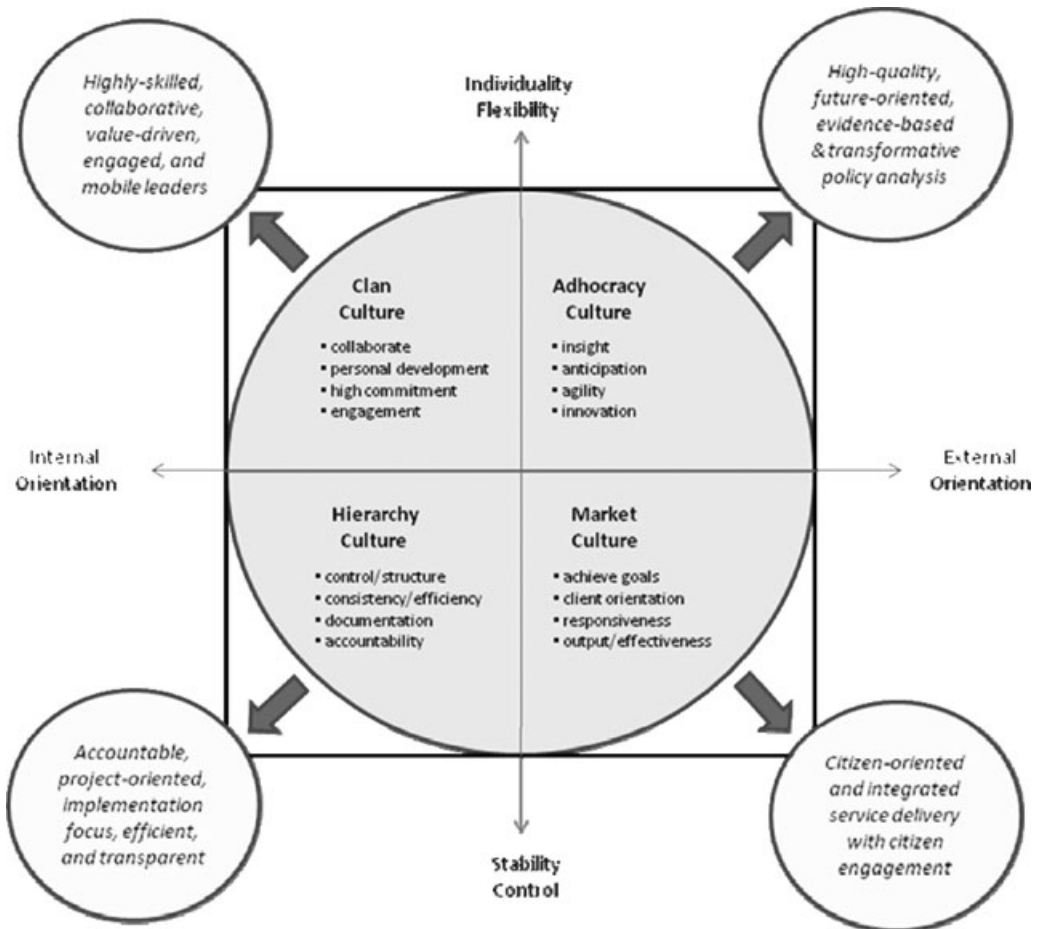
orientations addressed in the Moran Review: improving service quality and addressing citizen needs, providing responsive and forward-looking policy advice, increasing staff engagement and capability, and ensuring control/efficiency. For some observers such breadth in coverage demonstrates a lack of focus, but for others it is a welcome, encompassing perspective. From this latter perspective, the Blueprint's final framework is important: it is a remarkable device to show the SES and entire APS how all of the worthy and contending values relate to each other. The Blueprint framework shows that it is impossible to talk about one aspect of public service reform without directly or indirectly implying the others. It provides perspective on why and how a new

generation of leaders might get trained and developed: yes, focus on improving skill in areas of responsibility and broaden them over time, but ensure they are increasingly comfortable with a Janus approach to seeing and working with public service values and challenges. Finally, a competing values perspective accounts for the diverse and sometimes strong reactions to the Review from inside and outside the APS since public servants and observers align with different value clusters and accompanying diagnoses.

If the Blueprint provides a shared picture of the whole terrain for public service reform, and works at several levels of analysis (values, leadership, culture, capabilities, etc), does this mean that difficult strategic choices have

been avoided because 'no value has been left behind'? The short answer is 'no'. The longer answer is that balances will get struck among the values in different ways over time by means of the programs giving expression to them. This is where the distinctive nature of the Australian government's wrestling with the next wave of public management reform will be realised. And, early on, the Blueprint is showing where such choices will get made:

- It identifies priorities for investment in the first few months, allocates responsibilities to certain agencies, and proposes a sequencing of steps over time (still daunting nevertheless);
- It proposes limited adoption of some of the Government 2.0 Taskforce proposals consistent with Westminster governance principles/realities;
- It did not require all departments to set up strategic policy hubs, instead proposing a taskforce approach that builds on previous repertoires and can be extended to APS outsiders;
- It commits to implementing a citizen service survey, but is strongly inclined to adapt existing models from Canada, New Zealand, and other jurisdictions;
- In establishing a Secretaries Board, strengthening the APSC, and drawing a circle around the APS 200, it links them to each and other initiatives in a remarkably creative way;
- It identifies key leverage points in the system for the purposes of accountability and linkage across competing value orientations;
- Its early practical steps, notwithstanding early rhetoric, have a distinct internal APS focus to them. The implication of this choice is: let's get our own house in order, then pragmatically work out to the partners we want to engage as we can; let's learn and get better by starting small, and build capacity and credibility; and, this latter point applied to the new APSC; and
- It provides an accountability framework, which will allow for monitoring, reviewing best practices in each area against Aus-

tralian approaches, and experimentation, learning, and recalibration in light of experience – the framework is not too binding, but will require reporting, accountability, capability and secretary reviews, etc, to ensure learning.

Finally, the Blueprint – when juxtaposed with the competing values framework – allows one to see and anticipate important strategic issues when driving APS-wide values into departments and agencies: which balances and priorities need to be acknowledged in distinct portfolios, departments and agencies? How will this affect leadership mandates, recruitment, and capability reviews?

The Blueprint seems sensible, pragmatic, and likely to work, although it would be foolish to attempt to predict what precise suite of realised reforms will have emerged in, say, five years time. Realising the Blueprint's promise as a touchstone for the APS will require sustained attention, congruence and overlap with other processes to ensure mutual reinforcement, and inter-generational leadership. Having reviewed Ottawa's experience with announcing the 'management board' concept in 1997 and only realising the promise of the concept 10 years later, and how the Modern Comptrollership initiative eventually drew into the Management Accountability Framework over the same period (Lindquist 2009c), the lessons to draw are as follows: it would be better that the APS begin with several modest initiatives consistent with touted goals (rather than start with elaborate designs), adopt an emergent approach, and eventually the institution will develop a portfolio of workable, deeper, and more effective initiatives.

The search for pragmatic approaches always means striking an initial balance among competing values, leading to a rolling balance that will be shaped by Australia's political and bureaucratic realities, which would be consistent with the Australian government's modern reform style when it comes to public service reform. A pragmatic, balancing approach could lead to some innovation by international standards: following through and grounding the rhetoric on matters like citizen engagement,

mobility, APS-wide leadership and development strategies, rather than inventing something totally new, will constitute innovation. Closing the gap between rhetoric and practice, and describing how well several initiatives worked, and learning from and moving forward with new approaches, would be a significant accomplishment.

4. Building Momentum: Selected Issues

The Blueprint outlines a multi-year process for implementing the envisioned reforms, with a focus on concertedly building momentum within the first two years (and there is plenty to do during the rest of 2010!). What follows identifies a diverse set of matters – expanding the reach of the proposed citizen satisfaction surveys, ensuring that strategic taskforces can work well with external stakeholders, proposing a research strategy that will engage and revitalise external networks of experts on public management issues, conceiving of capability reviews as useful substitutes to cross-jurisdictional benchmarking, thinking of the APS values in different ways, and seeing the APSC restructuring as a longer term strategy with crucial choices along the way – for the purposes of encouraging discussion and with the goals of closing gaps revealed in the Moran Review process (insufficient analysis and engagement) and more fully realising the potential of the Blueprint, and perhaps yielding additional innovation.

Building Beyond Citizen Satisfaction Surveys

Well before announcing the Moran Review, it was clear that, based on *Citizens First* and *Kiwis Count* models, the prime minister and Secretary Moran were keen to have the APS adopt a systematic regime for eliciting citizen views about the quality of services delivered across the APS. The Blueprint (Recommendation 2.2) proposes a strong commitment to moving forward in this area. Adopting or adapting these models to the Australian context would be feasible and lead to an easy tick on promised Blueprint deliverables, and might attract the interest of state and territorial governments.[23]

However, given that these models have existed for some time and, given that the Moran Review contains broader notions of citizen engagement, the APS should consider broadening the proposed approach. In this connection it is worth drawing attention to Howard (2010) who provides a critique of the *Citizens First* survey methodology, noting it only measures citizen satisfaction about services offered to citizens, and not what combination of services citizens might want given their particular circumstances. The APS could ensure it adopts a variant of the *Citizens First* methodology, and develop a complementary instrument to secure this additional feedback.

It would be innovative and consistent with the interests of the Moran Review where citizen engagement and international benchmarking are concerned. Finally, of this can be seen as regularly engaging citizens in dialogues on emerging issues. A strategic taskforce should be struck to more fully probe the APS experience with such engagement, explore the possibilities afforded by new technologies, and more carefully identify when different instruments and information sharing can be used productively and efficiently.

Circumscribed Stakeholder Engagement

A reassuring feature of the Blueprint is the pragmatic focus on first getting the APS house in order with strategic policy and service delivery taskforces by additional internal reflection, coordination, and capacity-building, instead of attempting to wade immediately into processes involving other governments. Indeed, the actions under Recommendations 3.1 and 3.2 are notably silent about working with state, territorial, and local state governments. This implicitly recognises that, if public servants from other governments joined strategic policy taskforces, ministers might 'COAGify' the process, losing the learning and frank dialogue benefits.

Rather than toss out the worthy goal of collaborating with other governments in reviewing issues and research, consideration ought to be given to alternative models for fostering collaboration. The Victorian government's

submission suggested that, since policy and delivery challenges crossed jurisdictions, several initiatives might broaden horizons and increase capabilities: sponsoring research on emerging issues confronting governments, hosting an annual forum to exchange views on developments in public administration, encouraging secondments across institutions, and sharing professional development across public service institutions. It noted examples like ANZSOG, the State Services Authority-Demos collaboration on agility in government, and the New Synthesis project.[24] Such mechanisms would foster the sharing of ideas and perspectives rooted in research, and dialogue would not be complicated and undermined by political considerations.

Tapping Experts with a Rolling Research Agenda

The Advisory Group may not have reached out to external experts, leaving untapped a significant amount of research and strategic expertise on public management issues and practice in the university and private sector, but the Blueprint indicates many areas for further scrutiny, research, and dialogue. This is not a matter of reifying external experts: university scholars and other experts are heavily involved in training and encouraging students and young professionals to become the next generation of public servants; they often have fine-grained understandings of context of public service institutions of other jurisdictions, critical for interpreting the salience of best practices and reform developments; and they are often called on to provide accounts of reforms and emerging challenges. And, little effort has been made to cultivate the next generation of public administration scholars in Australia.

This suggests that APSC and PMC could work with an intermediary like ANZSOG and partner institutions to develop a rolling medium term and longer term research agenda,[25] which could identify topics for preliminary literature reviews on selected issues and for expert dialogue sessions with executives and experts from inside and outside government. This would yield insight, information on tap, and identify

areas requiring deeper research and analysis. The reviews and dialogues could match established experts with emerging scholars, as well as colleagues in cognate disciplines on a selective basis, rejuvenating the network of public policy and management scholars and broadening research networks for government and scholars alike.

Capability Reviews and Benchmarking

The KPMG benchmarking study prepared for the Moran Review is best thought of an exploratory study, one that identifies the availability and focus of international benchmarking studies and products, and shows their weaknesses and usefulness when evaluating performance and considering reform. The Blueprint, despite its broader goal of improving performance and monitoring across the APS, concluded that, going forward, most of its benchmarking activity would be internal in nature, comparing the performance of agencies. However, informed by the experience of the UK, Canada, and New Zealand, the Advisory Group recommends proceeding with capability reviews of agencies with small review teams comprised of an external expert, top central officials and others as required.

The Blueprint proposes that the capability reviews use the P3M3 methodology because it would provide a consistent evaluative framework.[26] Interestingly, this recommendation is not presented as an external benchmarking strategy. However, the external representative on the review team could come from peer institutions in other jurisdictions, and some sense of comparative practice and performance could be more systematically ascertained. If other jurisdictions were willing to more share information from respective capability reviews among themselves, this could be seen could be seen as de facto benchmarking strategy.

This may seem beyond the pale, but the government should consider involving scholars in such reviews. It would lead to a much greater appreciation of agency challenges and review processes, and serve to inform and influence scholarly research agendas. Such engagement

might also lead to constructively critical perspectives on the review methodology.

Values, Memes and Ethical Competence

Early on, the Moran Review attached a high priority to assessing whether to modernise the APS values and develop a more concise and memorable list. The Advisory Group put this as the first substantive matter to be addressed by the discussion paper, and one round of the PMC online discussion forum was devoted to APS values, as were the afternoon sessions of the six APS forums. Interestingly, though, the feedback from the discussion and APS forums was not what I think the Advisory Group anticipated: considerable value was seen in the current APS values, and it was difficult for participants to see how to more concisely render these ideas and fold in more contemporary themes, without losing the nuance and meaning that increases their power. As Mulgan (2009:1) pointed out, the fewer values one is given, the more they need to be explained, and this dynamic was reflected in those discussions! Everyone had different emphases and starting points, perhaps reflecting roles and experience, and this did not emerge as a priority given the other issues embraced by the Moran Review – while the Blueprint did not produce a solution, the Advisory Group nevertheless recommended 'simplifying and rearticulating' the APS values (p.46).

Let me simply assert that simplification may fit with a branding strategy and ensure more staff can remember them (and always more modern ones, like innovation!), but this will not increase ethical awareness and competence in particular situations, which requires a willingness to reflect, appraise, perhaps engage colleagues in dialogue, and then act (Langford 2004, 2007; Heintzman 2008). Likewise, asserting new values may be conceived as part of a culture change strategy, but even significant investment in leadership development programs and top-down encouragement, may have little effect: the experienced incentives and work of public servants have to change before value orientations shift (Vakil 2009). This is consistent with casting values as memes (Blackmore

1999; Dawkins 1976), which draws attention to the fact that, while the APS values may be repeatedly promulgated and referred to, only certain sub-sets of those values will spread, replicate, take root and get manifested as behaviours in congruent and sufficiently enabling environments.

These observations suggest that the matter of identifying, conveying, encouraging, and monitoring ethical competence deserve considerable and close attention. It is another area that would benefit from sustained dialogue with external experts.

Strategically Building the New APSC

The APSC is the only agency singled out for mandate and structural change in a Blueprint that otherwise avoids using machinery-of-government solutions to address the challenges it identifies. It will be an exciting and daunting time. APSC has built its reputation over the years by promoting and upholding the APS values, systematically collecting data and reporting and producing well-researched and highly-regarded studies on the state of the APS and on selected issues for the Management Advisory Committee. The irony, of course, is that the Blueprint now challenges the APSC to take on a leadership role in addressing the very challenges it has drawn attention to over many years.

The APSC will continue to collect data and produce studies on the state of the APS and on leadership and management issues, and uphold a revised set of values. However, it will be moving from a questioning, encouraging, and best-practice posture that relied on information and suasion, to a monitoring, assessing, and regulatory posture that will rely on data and reviews on the capability and performance of agencies, and on the classification and compensation system. Expectations will be high; the new APSC will be the lynchpin of realising the Blueprint's goals.

The APSC needs to receive sufficient funding, space, and time to succeed. Working in its favour is its current size (small at about 200 full time equivalents) and the joy of far less human resource clutter among central agencies

in the APS compared to other jurisdictions[27] – neither Treasury nor Finance should have interest in taking on or resisting a renewed APSC unless it becomes costly or compromises their own recruitment and leadership development repertoires. This suggests that the APSC will have running room to hire new staff, establish new repertoires, build credibility and expertise in those domains, and broaden out. However, fully shifting to its new role will take at least five years.

A critical matter concerns whether the APSC should focus on and more quickly build in the areas of strategic workforce development, capability reviews, or classification, while maintaining its current portfolio of responsibilities. Regardless of which areas it chooses, it should begin with a state-of-practice and collaborative approach with departments and agencies to build frameworks and knowledge, steadily building expertise and improving repertoires (supported by centres-of-excellence), and later broadening this expertise and repertoires. In this way it can steadily move towards an increasingly sharper assessment posture when ready. As the APSC takes on more 'assessment' and 'regulatory' repertoires, it will be interesting to see if agencies continue to share as much soft information, outside of the capability and other reviews, as they have in the past.

5. Conclusion

Given the breadth of the Blueprint, and the interests of different observers of the APS, there will be other perspectives on what constitutes worthy issues to explore. Certainly, there will be no shortage of issues to monitor and engage over the next few years. While the Moran Review may not rival the Coombs Commission from the perspective of research and analysis, it nevertheless constitutes an important benchmark with its synoptic view of the APS and the directions in which it should move.

On 8 May 2010, Prime Minister Rudd announced an agreement with the Australian National University for a new Australian National Institute for Public Policy located at the Crawford School of Economics and Government, which will work with the APS and other ANU research centres and collaborate with the Australia and New Zealand School of Government to better inform and debate public policy (Rudd 2010c). This culminated in two other announcements realising commitments identified in his Garran Oration (Rudd 2010a, 2010b). The prime minister also used the occasion to announce that his government had accepted all of the Advisory Group's recommendations in the Blueprint which, in the context of the forthcoming budget, suggests that sufficient funding will be allocated to the APSC to realise its expanded mandate. The APS's top leadership and its next generation of leaders have a good basis for building momentum to implement the Blueprint's multi-faceted and interlinked recommendations, which will require as much concerted attention as the Moran Review.

If the APS is similar to other public service institutions, and despite these recent announcements, there will be sceptics with a 'show me' attitude and others prepared to weather the latest reform fad. The path to success will hinge on starting on all of the fronts identified in the Blueprint, nevertheless choosing priorities and starting small, decisively, and securing good feedback from the system and outsiders. Despite its decentralised agencies and operations, the APS' responsiveness and pragmatism will increase the chances for success over the longer term. This should make it easier to build an expanding circle of interest and more confidence in the reforms, despite a tightening in operating budgets. In addition, this article has suggested more systematically engaging outsider experts and institutions in this process as envisioned by the prime minister, undertaking fuller analysis, and relying on more regular and sophisticated means of engagement should have pay-offs in the shorter and longer term. It is a big, nationally worthwhile agenda, and the APS will need all the hands and perspectives it can get.

Endnotes

1. This is an abridged version a much longer discussion paper intended to provide background for an Institute of Public Administration

of Australia Roundtable on 18-19 May 2010 in Canberra to review the Reform of Australian Government Administration (RAGA) initiative (or the Moran Review). Relevant excerpts from the longer paper were circulated to the IPAA roundtable as two annexes (Lindquist 2010a, 2010b). I wish to acknowledge the support of IPAA, the Australian National University and the Australia and New Zealand School of Government, as well as the encouragement of John Wanna, but emphasise the views contained here are mine alone.

2. These included the following: Prime Minister Rudd's 30 April 2008 speech to SES Groups (Heads of agencies and SES); Secretary Moran's 15 July 2009 speech (IPAA Conference – Canberra); Prime Minister Rudd's 3 September 2009 John Paterson Oration, Canberra (launches RAGA); Secretary Moran's 6 Nov 2009 Dunstan Oration, IPAA, South Australia (Adelaide); and Prime Minister Rudd's 20 November 2009 Garran Oration, IPPA, Brisbane.

3. See Lindquist 2010a for more detail in support of these points, including direct quotations from the speeches of Prime Minister Rudd and Secretary Moran, as well as from the discussion paper.

4. *Chris Blake* (EGM Business Strategy and People, National Australia Bank); *Glyn Davis* (Vice Chancellor and President, University of Melbourne); *Jo Evans* (Assistant Secretary, Department of Climate Change); *Ken Henry (*Secretary, Treasury); *Robyn Kruk* (Secretary, Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts); *Carmel McGregor* (Acting APS Commissioner), later replaced by *Steve Sedgwick* (APS Commissioner); *Ann Sherry* (Chief Executive, Carnival Australia); *Nick Warner* (Director-General, Australia Secret Intelligence Service); and *Patrick Weller* (Professor of Politics and Public Policy, Griffith University).

5. So, for example, Canada may have strong commitments to citizen satisfaction surveys and evaluation, and the government may con-

tinue to support the Policy Research Initiative, but do their reports and other outputs get used and have influence? If a country does well in some areas, does it get traded off against other areas? Why do some countries do well in some areas with respect to their public service institutions and not others? Does country size and nature of governance system (unitary state vs. federation) matter?

6. Figures calculated based on the postings available at URL: <http://forums.pmc.gov.au/forum>.

7. Lindquist (2010b) contains a high-level analysis of the documentation of publicly available consultations.

8. Surprisingly, this had not been done before since the CIU was informed by the UK's Prime Minister's Delivery Unit (Wanna 2006; Lindquist 2006; Barber 2007). And, given that CIU was offered as a model for how the Secretaries Board might support the proposed task forces, the Blueprint was silent about its effectiveness given the controversies around the home insulation and Building the Education Revolution (BER) programs.

9. These comments are offered with modest expectations about the extent to which research should and does have immediate impact on decision-making, and with full appreciation that good research is about developing the stock of personal and corporate knowledge, which may get applied and be useful in many different contexts and often years into the future, often through future generations of officials and public servants (Lindquist 1990, 2009b).

10. This begs the question of why such a paper was commissioned and released. The benchmarking paper is best evaluated in symbolic as opposed to substantive and influence terms (Feldman and March 1981), as explored later in this article. It could have been positioned as 'a preliminary scan, because we believe benchmarking will be a key element of any reform strategy we develop', but this was not the case.

11. The implications for the Comrie (2005) and Palmer (2005) inquires are discussed in the 2004-05 *State of the Service* report (APSC 2005:6-7), and in the two subsequent reports.

12. See Wanna 2007; O'Flynn and Wanna 2008; Bouckaert and Halligan 2009; Argyrous 2009; Wanna, Butcher and Freyens 2010. These reports captured recent thinking, and at the very least indirectly informed many of the ideas animating the Moran Review. Whether this range of thinking and information optimally informed the review's engagement process was a different matter.

13. There was a significant missed opportunity here: ANZSOG has published several studies on citizen engagement (see, for example, Stewart 2009) and there has been world-class research on leading-edge approaches to engagement at the Australian National University and other Australian universities. There is no evidence that this research and expertise was tapped into during the Moran Review.

14. Was this gap in the process deliberate or an oversight? If a set of specific research questions had been set out in September, there would have been more response from university scholars and academic units. But this presumes that applied scholars only respond to a well-specified research agenda. Perhaps the process was *not* designed to elicit advice from these quarters due to time and resource constraints, and an Advisory Group sure about the directions it wanted to take. More worrisome is the possibility that APS leaders believed little insight could be gleaned from public administration scholars, that the extent and depth of this source of advice was 'thin' and predictable. This matter is worth probing further because *Ahead of The Game* calls for strengthening links with universities and the strategic policy taskforces are to tap into the best talent across the APS, other governments and the university, non-profit and for-profit sectors.

15. Lindquist (2010b) provides more detail on the nature of the contributors and contributions to traditional submissions and the online fo-rums, which were publicly available. It also contains a high-level summary of commentary and other media coverage of the Moran Review.

16. On the origins of Citizens First and the Common Measurements Tool, see: Dinsdale and Marson (1999), Erin Research (1998), and Schmidt and Strickland (1998). For a fully up-to-date compendium of Citizens First reports and related materials, see the Institute for Citizen-Centred Service at URL: <http://www.iccs-isac.org/en/>. On the origins and evolution of the Management Accountability Framework, see Lindquist (2009c) and the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat web site on MAF at URL: <http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/maf-crg/index-eng.asp>.

17. Denmark's Mindlab is a small innovation hub, sponsored by three government departments and comprised of an interdisciplinary team (six permanent staff and another nine seconded staff including PhD students), that scopes out innovations in the delivery of services to citizens utilising a citizen-informed methodology (URL: <http://www.mind-lab.dk/en>). Singapore's Enterprise Challenge solicits proposals from inside and outside government to improve the delivery of public services, providing seed money to develop and test the ideas. When funding is available, it uses a review to provide reviews within two weeks (URL: <http://www.tec.gov.sg/about-us.html>).

18. Indeed, much innovation occurs because after scanning elsewhere for ideas and practices, and adapting them to a home institution, there will often result imperfect replication. This may occur through adaptation to local needs, incomplete understanding of the context and workings of the emulated innovation, or 'borrowers' see better approaches, which become innovations in their own right. Imitated innovations, of course, may fail because local circumstances are not appropriate or conducive to replication or success (Rose 1991; Bennett 1997; Dolowitz and Marsh 2000).

19. The title is evocative of the Royal Commission on Australian Government Administration

(the Coombs Commission), announced in 1974 and, buttressed by a significant program of research, reported in 1976.

20. Indeed, when it comes to mounting cases for comprehensive reform, I do not think that administrative reformers behave any differently than those who advocate reform of political institutions or of sectoral policy regimes.

21. Years later, Roger Martin would publish a well-known book, *The Opposable Mind* (2007) with similar insight.

22. This framework does not address the political dimension, which permeates and constrains the intersecting and privileging of these values and associated initiatives. Indeed, the Blueprint also does not address the political dimension, as Mulgan observed at a 31 March 2010 seminar by the Public Policy and Governance Group at ANU's Crawford School to review the report.

23. In Canada, collaboration with *Citizens First* includes partners from different levels of government under the Institute for Citizen-Centred Governance. See URL: <http://www.iccs-isac.org/en/>. For information on the *Kiwis Count* initiative, see State Services Commission (2010).

24. See State Services Authority (2008) for more details on explorations on agility. For more information on the New Synthesis project, see URL: <http://www.ns6 newsynthesis.com/>.

25. This would be consistent with Prime Minister Rudd's observation that 'for too long in Australia, thick walls have existed between places of research and learning, and places of policy-making and implementation. Those thick walls do not enhance either the quality of public administration or the quality of academia' (Rudd 2009a).

26. See UK Office of Government Commerce web site at URL: <http://www.p3m3-officialsite.com/home/home.asp>.

27. In Canada, there is no shortage of central agencies and literally hundreds of staff with fin-

gers in the strategic human resource development pie and, compared to Australia, it already has a largely unified public service (a separate employer, common classification schemes, and an executive group that thinks of itself in those terms, etc), with the exception of a few separate employers like Revenue Canada.

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