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**The Government Service Delivery Project: A Case Study of the Push and Pull of
Central Government Coordination**

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ABSTRACT

Fragmentation and the lack of appropriately coordinated government services are widely considered to be costly problems impeding effective and efficient government service provision. Moreover, there is a growing realization that many modern social issues have developed into meta-problems that cannot be resolved by the traditional single agency approach. Coordination of services through more cooperative and collaborative networks of relationships between government agencies has become a preferred strategy for many public administrators. In this way, actors from a range of sectors form and reform into action networks to respond to existing and emergent issues. Managing these networks in order to achieve appropriate policy outcomes is an important aspect of modern day governance and strategy development. This issue is particularly important for the central agencies of state since they have a responsibility for ensuring consistent and cohesive government policy and service delivery. This paper gives an account of a public sector initiative aimed at enhancing service provision through the formation and management of inter-departmental networks of coordinative and cooperative action. It concludes that although networks are a useful mechanism of social coordination, their inherent benefits may be jeopardized when network management issues make them vulnerable to pressures from the centre.

Keywords: Networks, government, public management

INTRODUCTION

Throughout history governments have oscillated between three main forms of social organisation – the market, the state, and the community - to maximize social cohesion and coordinate resources in order to achieve protection and progress for society. The process of creating the conditions for this ordered rule and collective action is termed ‘governance’ (Stoker, 1998) and its various formations are underpinned by a set of ideological assumptions and principles that guide their operation and seek to establish optimal operating conditions. Under the state or bureaucratic model, coordination is achieved principally through the hierarchy and legal authority that regulates relations. By contrast, the market model relies on price signals and contractual relations to bring dispersed competitors – buyers and sellers – together. Finally, within the community, coordination arises out of the solidarity shared and interpersonal relationships established out of coming together to deal with mutual issues (Scott 1981; Thompson et al, 1991; Davis and Rhodes, 2000). The perceived failure of any one model provides the rationale for the introduction of another (Colebatch and Lamour 1993; Tshuma 2000), although generally the market and the state modes have dominated with the third pillar, the community, traditionally providing a ‘safety net’ or ‘watchdog’ role (Ryan, 1998:11).

Over the past century this shifting between paradigms can be seen in the initial intervention, albeit limited, of the state to counterbalance the ‘unchecked capitalism’ of the late 1800s. Overtime as governments took on more responsibilities for universal service delivery and became increasingly bureaucratic and rule bound they were challenged by a growing sense of individualism within society as well as perceived inefficiencies and rigidity of the state. Since the 1980s government service provision has been replaced increasingly by more flexible market based initiatives aimed at improving cost efficiency and effectiveness ratios (Considine and Lewis, 1999; Brown, Ryan and Parker, 2000). The net effect of both sets of

policies as they replace or are grafted onto existing policies has been a public sector that is increasingly fragmented and confusing (Aucoin 1995; Peters and Savioe, 1996; Peters 1998; Rhodes 1998; Davis and Rhodes 2000) and a social sector that is divided and lacks cohesion (Bradshaw, 2000; Funnell 2001). From an Australian perspective, de Carvalho (1998:107) argued that neither the market nor bureaucratic modes of coordination ‘... provided a lasting improvement in the social and economic welfare of nations. They created as many problems as they solved’. Indeed, for many, this complex mix of often competing policies has resulted in the social fabric of many countries becoming frayed at the edges.

‘Mending the social fabric’ has become a high priority for many governments and increasingly, the ideals of the community – in which interpersonal networks act to bring together the fragmented infrastructure of the broader public sector - are being presented as a legitimate alternative or augment to the more traditional models of social coordination (Blair, 1999; Adams and Hess 2001; Rhodes 1996). Thus as Davis and Rhodes (2000:95) note, ‘networks put these fragmented bits back together’.

For government, while all departments necessarily have a role to play in the building of relationships within and across government, the task of coordinating cross-sector policies and programs into a coherent ‘whole-of-government’ position has generally fallen to their central agencies, treasury, prime minister and cabinet, and public service management - predominantly because of their position at the hub of decision-making around key areas such as policy, finance, administration and legislation (Painter, 1987; Head, 1996; Bridgman and Davis, 1998). These agencies respectively have control over funding, policy processes and management of people and organizational structures, giving them substantial capacity to influence by exercise of direct authority as well as indirect influence (O’Grady, 1985).

In view of the growing calls for cross-sector coordination, seamless and more innovative service delivery modes, the central agencies of many governments, including the Queensland State Government, introduced a number of network based initiatives aimed at ‘joining-up’ and maximizing the service outcomes of a range of dispersed and disparate programs and projects. The Government Service Delivery Project (GSD) was one such attempt by a Queensland central agency to apply a network model of coordination of government services. The GSD project used as its basis the establishment of relationships to foster existing and emergent cross-department activities to achieve enhanced service outcomes. Despite the growing reliance on network forms to deal with multiplex social issues and a growing interdependence between agencies, there remains a limited understanding about how they actually operate and how networks can best be managed to maximize outcomes and ensure sustainability. Moreover, the role of government and, in particular central agencies, in these networks remains unclear (Milward and Provan, 2000). The issues relating to the effective management of networks and appropriate governance structures is explored in a case study of a networked model of 'whole-of-government' coordination, the GSD Project. This paper proceeds by identifying antecedents to the growth of network coordination, examines the benefits and costs of networks and analyses the emerging role of government in network management and governance.

Convergent Issues and Increased Need for coordination

During the 1980s and 1990s a number of issues converged which made the diverse and fragmented sector no longer tenable and *network* coordination an increasingly necessary objective. First among these was the financial limits placed on government and public services (Crawford, 1996; Bekker and Zouridis, 1999). Other factors include changing community expectations (Davis and Keating, 2000) and continuing advances in information and communication technology which are seen as a way of integrating the tasks of a range of

government providers in a more cost efficient and timely manner (Crawford, 1996; Bellamy and Taylor, 1998; Bekker and Zouridis, 1999).

Most importantly, there was a growing realization that many modern social issues have developed into meta-problems that cannot be resolved by the traditional single agency or 'silo' approach (Waddock, 1991; Rhodes, 1998; Pearson, 1999; Mitchell and Shortell, 2000) or through the complexity of the market (de Carvahlo, 1998). These types of broad, complex problems defy precise definition, cut across policy and service areas and have no simple solutions (Chisholm, 1996; Lowndes and Skelcher, 1998) and if left unattended, result in a high cost to the achievement of a civil society (Social Exclusion Unit, 1998).

Gradually, a broad consensus grew within the political, business and community arenas that multiple, non-compatible systems detracted from productivity, efficiency and effectiveness. As Aucoin (1995:245) commented on the Canadian situation:

As the government responds to domestic pressures for quality public services, it will need to improve the integration of its service delivery systems. Individual citizens, client groups and businesses increasingly are demanding services that do not subject them to the inconveniences and costs of fragmented government.

This fundamental concern with the inability of government agencies as they are currently structured and operated to deal with 'wicked' or intractable' social issues has been identified by government leaders including, among others, Clinton in the United States, Schroeder in Germany and was clearly articulated in the Blair Government's 'new deal' approach. This view holds that the '...biggest challenges facing Government do not easily fit into traditional

(government) structures. They require a wide range of departments and agencies to work together' (Performance Innovation Unit, 2000).

As a result the focus of government in many jurisdictions, including Australia began to shift away from an emphasis on sustaining costly and increasingly ineffective proprietary systems exemplified in a single agency structure to establishing linkages within and across departments and the myriad of community agencies to realize public policy intentions (Rhodes, 1998; Mitchell and Shortell, 2000). Lowndes and Skelcher (1998:315) describe the shift from departmental 'silos' to shared arrangements:

And so the apparently tidy hierarchy of the public bureaucracy is reshaped to establish lateral, diagonal and vertical relationships with other bodies operating at different tiers and in associated policy fields.

Alliances and partnerships and other forms of cross-institutional and interorganizational relations are widely seen as an integrating strategy to coordinate organizational fragmentation and environmental complexity (Lowndes and Skelcher, 1998; Mitchell and Shortell, 2000). Moreover, as Podger (1994) asserts, such mechanisms allow for more cooperative agendas to transpire between organizations as distinct from individualist approaches of more recent times. The variegated composition, ideologies and expectations of these interorganizational arrangements suggest a similar diversity in their form and structure.

Networks: Coordinating Complexity and Attaining Collaborative Advantage

While interorganizational arrangements take many forms (Mandell, 1999) ranging from partnerships to mergers (Gottfredson and White, 1981; Kanter, 1994; Limerick, Cunnington and Crowther, 1998; Mitchell and Shortell, 2000; Mol, 2001) they are often referred to

metaphorically as 'networked organizations' (Miles and Snow, 1986), and 'interfirm' or 'organizational' networks' (Uzzi, 1996). However, as Lowndes and Skelcher (1998) argue, on their own such 'interfirm' arrangements or structures do not constitute a network. Rather, networks are formed out of the ongoing and relatively stable patterns of relations that are established between organizations or departments involved in an interorganizational arrangement. Since networks can be highly fluid constructs they are dependent on the ongoing social relations established between members to create the shared values, trust and mutuality necessary for collective action. This form of interfirm or interdepartmental coordination is referred to as 'network governance', and contrasts with the bureaucratic structures within firms and formal contractual relations between them (Nohria, 1992; Rhodes, 1998). That is, network governance in the form of social relations provides the glue to bind an array of independent yet interdependent agencies into a collective force. Ansell (2000:304) refers to this as a process of '... flexible, nonhierarchical coordination and cooperation'.

In bringing together the most relevant stakeholders, networks offer a more adaptive, cohesive and complete response to issues - one that pools widely dispersed resources and includes the full array of service providers and interest groups in decision making processes not just preferred stakeholder groups or government departments (Waddock, 1991). In this way, networks allow actors from a range of sectors to form and reform into action networks to respond to existing and emergent issues. Kooiman (1993: 4) highlights the underpinning basis of such shifting formations:

These interactions are ... based on the recognition of (inter) dependencies. No single actor, public or private, has all knowledge and information required to solve complex, dynamic and diversified problems; no actor has sufficient overview to make the application of needed instruments effective; no single

actor has sufficient action potential to dominate unilaterally in a particular governing model.

Networks therefore acknowledge that no one person or agency has primacy of decision making and direction setting and that leadership can come from a number of sources within the network (Chisholm, 1996). Moreover, it is the unique interaction of people - including those located at differing levels of government and from other sectors - and their resources that gives networks their collaborative advantage (Huxham, 1996; Lasker, Weiss and Miller, 2001). Thus, while providing immediate benefits of enhanced service provision, networks by tapping into diversity and pushing through previously contentious issues can also move in new and perhaps originally unintended innovative directions. As Gerlach and Palmer (1981: 364) note, a network '... escalates efforts and generates forward motion through the rivalries and competitions among its segments and leaders.' Thus networks can have powerful spillover effects, often triggering further innovation and setting off new chain reactions of new interventions. This 'organic' ability to adjust to others and re-organize themselves into adaptive patterns and structures are further strengths of networks in that they contribute to growth, resilience and sustainability (Eisenhardt and Galunic, 2000).

Networks - a double-edged sword

These positive attributes of networks - polycentric, self-organizing and mutually adjusting (Gerlach and Palmer, 1981; Witte et al, 2000) while enabling access to greater resources both material and conceptual and adding to the creative problem solving ability of networks, also have obverse aspects that can present problems for network management and governance. First, networks are comprised of diverse, independent units, with their own values and core objectives. This autonomy of network members presents as a threat to the stability of the network, as it is argued (Borys and Jemison, 1989) there is no common hierarchy to hold the

organizations together. Instead networks rely on each partner to direct their efforts toward a common purpose. When this purpose is ill defined or ambiguous, or when differing views cannot be accommodated, the network can become ineffective or disintegrate (Taylor and Hoggett, 1994; Huxham, 2000). As Borys and Jemison (1989: 237) argue 'collaboration among sovereign organizations means that different purposes must be reconciled and molded into a common purpose'. Further, because network direction is set by members, networks may move tangentially away from original intentions and therefore can not be assured of achieving their original purposes (Rhodes, 1996). In this way, network fluidity may work against achieving specified objectives and resist managing according to tightly defined operational requirements.

The swiftness with which networks can act and their ability to engender creativity and improvisation coupled with their location, often on the periphery of traditional structures and processes, means that networks can be predisposed to secretive or at least 'unaccountable' or unauthorized actions (Machado and Burns, 1998; Rhodes, 1996). Taylor and Hoggett (1994: 137) highlight the dangers inherent in a lack of transparency or accountability:

Networks are essentially *private* or opaque rather than public and transparent. They are largely invisible and not open to public scrutiny, secret and unaccountable. Depending upon the values and norms, which govern the operation of such networks, their lack of public visibility has often provided the basis for corruption.

That is, since networks take on the characteristics of self-governing entities they can determine their own rules and conditions of membership and frequently consider themselves to be accountable only to their peers and their clients. Uncontested by outside groups and traditional accountability measures and therefore not subject to public sanctions, networks can become a 'law unto themselves'. And while much of the activities of networks are limited to the 'means justifying the end' rather than outright corruption

some network process can cross the boundaries to illegal or at least unethical behavior.

Such a situation is evidenced, for example, in the allocation of contracts to members of the network 'inner circle' or their associates.

Finally, the diversity, density, and complexity of network relationships while useful in ensuring multiple linkages can result in bottlenecks and information overload that present problems for communication. As the Blair Government noted: 'Cross-cutting work involves complex relationships and lines of communication which means they can be risky, or at least difficult to manage' (Performance and Innovation Unit, 2000).

Network organizations thus are not a panacea for the problems of modern society or its governments (Taylor and Hoggett, 1994; Rhodes, 1998; Huxham, 2000, Witte et al, 2000).

They present a host of 'inherent complications' (Powell, 1990: 305) that require careful design, governance and management to realize their multifarious benefits.

Network governance and management - new roles for government

While networks appear to avoid the problems inherent in hierarchy and market models by bringing together a range of different stakeholders to resolve complex problems in the delivery of services, there are many formation, implementation and ongoing structural issues that need to be resolved. An important facet of establishing and maintaining appropriate network arrangements to provide effective coordinated service delivery for governments is the issue of network governance.

Network governance refers to the establishment and maintenance of relationships that bind organizations together and enable them to achieve collective goals. An important aspect of governance becomes the orchestrating of diverse instruments into harmony, while still respecting autonomy and fostering innovation and creativity. Kickert (1997: 735) describes

this process as 'directed influencing'. Such a task is achieved by replacing the 'iron hand of the hierarchy' with the 'velvet glove of diplomacy'. In this way, governance is less about 'rowing' and more about 'steering' (Osborne and Gaebler, 1993) and, when appropriate, sharing the helm. For government this represents a shift from being at the center of power and locating them as equal players (albeit with special functions) within the coordination function. However, despite this 'equal player status' as Klijn and Koopenjan (2001) point out, the special functions of governments and their access to resources not readily available to other network members puts them in the powerful position of being able to direct network actions, favour some networks over others through funding regimes or 'unhook' networks from funding sources. This is particularly true for central agencies since they are located at the hub of decision-making and resource allocation (O'Grady, 1985).

Nevertheless, since government networks are conducted within a largely legal/political environment (Agranoff and Lindsay, 1983; Agranoff, 1990; Klijn and Koopenjan, 2000) with strong needs for transparency, accountability and effectiveness; they still require some degree of control over network structures, activities and, especially, outcomes. Therefore, increasingly governments are developing strategies that move beyond a reliance on the broad governance processes of network constitution and composition to include an influence over structural arrangements, direction setting, processes and outcomes (Klijn, Koopenjan and Termeer, 1995; Klijn and Koopenjan, 2000); Mitchell and Shortell, 2000).

Thus an important, emerging role of government and of central agencies in a networked model becomes that of managing the external relational and internal implementation aspects of network operation (Mitchell and Shortell, 2000). The fulfillment of this network management role will require government to expand their current 'tool kit' at both the macro and micro management levels. At the macro level the focus is on 'preparing the ground' for

network activity including getting the correct mindset or values in place within and across government, providing legitimacy for network action, and ensuring systems and procedures are able to respond (Performance and Innovation Unit, 2000).

By attending to these macro level tasks, government and particularly central agencies will be able to better facilitate shared visions, clarify mutual expectations, and establish appropriate communication mechanisms. Adopting this 'leadership' role and through the championing of initiatives, government will be better able to model (and monitor) appropriate accountability, ethical and organizational practices.. In this way as Cohen and Rogers (1992) suggest a possible role for the state is to 'orchestrate the diversity of particularism into an equitable system of provision, referee its conflicts, tap its commitment and render the secret accountable'.

Micro level skills are more enigmatic requiring the ability to participate as an equal network member while still guiding and facilitating direction and outcomes (Rhodes 1996). This dual network 'maintenance' function comes from the need to build and invest in relationships to foster cohesion and mutuality while at the same time looking to consolidate and action the network agenda (Klinj and Koopenjan, 2000). The emphasis, at this level for government, lies in negotiated management that is achieving mutually satisfying goals through a process of dialogue, arbitration and exchange not in the imposition of solutions or objectives onto other network members (Rhodes, 1998; Davis and Rhodes, 2000). Achieving the necessary balance between guidance and control in network management would seem to be a skillful enterprise and requires government agencies, particularly those central agencies that are generally responsible for the implementation of whole-of-government networked structures, to carefully consider the mix of roles necessary for the management of networks. It also requires a significant shift in their power base to enable other players (outside of their domain and even

government) to lead the way. Understandably for central agencies, for so long had been at the fulcrum of direction setting within the state, this new role will not sit easy. Following Rhodes (1998) this paper suggests that this unease is centered on the relative autonomy of networks and the fact that they resist steering.

This section showed how service fragmentation coupled with increasingly stringent government budgets, increasing complexity of social problems and changing community expectations and values, and a heightened need to deal with intractable or wicked issues, led to the use of networks as a preferred model of coordination. However, while useful, networks are not a panacea for solving all the 'problems' of government and if not managed appropriately or become subject to other factors, can limit or constrain outcomes or perceived benefits. Further, as the following case study suggests, central agencies remain apprehensive about these networks and their distant 'hold' over them. Thus when networks are perceived to 'get out of control' or other forces come into play that render them problematic they are likely to be dismantled and replaced with more secure coordination models (Lowndes and Skelcher 1998; Klinj and Koopenjan, 2000).

METHODOLOGY

The research design follows a case study format designed to establish those factors that impacted on a particular government network. In this way, the barriers and enabling factors for effective network implementation and governance may be identified. Using a case study methodology allowed the ability to ascertain causal linkages between the different elements of the case (Yin, 1980). A case study of an existing network provided an opportunity to determine the critical aspects of network operation and structure. The case study is based on data from preliminary unstructured interviews of key participants in the project, survey and focus group data and related documentation, and provides an example of a cross-government reform effort in the Queensland public sector.

Interviews were undertaken with ten key participants of the GSD project over a three-month period during the later half of 2000. For these key respondents each interview lasted one hour and followed a similar unstructured process in which respondents were asked to reflect generally on their understanding of the GSD project, their involvement in the project and critical aspects of the project's governance structure and management. Additional information was obtained from survey data completed by members of Regional Managers Forums as well as a series of three focus groups of public sector managers and policy advisors conducted throughout the state during the same timeframe. Through a series of individual and group report back sessions, participants were given the opportunity to correct, amend and confirm information and insights gleaned from interviews. Such a process enabled a range of perspectives across government to be captured and, when coupled with multiple data gathering mechanisms and especially the report back process, afforded enhanced verification and validity of the insights gleaned (Patton, 1987).

FINDINGS

Government Service Delivery Project - A network governance coordination model

Similar to other jurisdictions, ongoing public service reforms in Queensland were argued to have resulted in a public service that was professional, accountable and relatively efficient (Roach, 1999; Government Service Delivery Project, 2000a). By the end of the 1990s however, it was apparent that traditional reform models with their emphasis on structural changes and internal quality mechanisms had reached their capacity for achieving improvement and that further efficiencies in government required strategic integration at whole-of-government, agency and regional levels. Indeed, a consistent theme emerging from government consultations and reports at the time centered on the problems of fragmentation and duplication of services and the need for government to become better coordinated - particularly in terms of providing services at the community level (Pearson, 1999). This point

was most graphically made by a delegation to the Bundamba Community Cabinet (an initiative of the Beattie Labor Government to better engage with the community) that identified problems relating to: 'Multiple agencies, both government and non-government, that are poorly coordinated, disparate and not in synchronization'. The traditional top-down implementation ethos of government that relies on 'head office program direction-setting to the detriment of a place focus' was also identified as problematic (cited in GSD, 2000a).

In acknowledgment of these concerns the government had established a policy agenda with a cross agency focus and was exploring a number of alternative modes for delivery of more 'joined-up' or seamless service delivery at all levels of government (Head, 1999; GSD, 2000c). Some of these initiatives included 'shop front' services, electronic service delivery, community renewal as well as establishing a set of broad government priorities that emphasized cooperative action between departments (Head, 1999). Alongside of this cooperative aspects were built into Chief Executive Officer's performance agreements (Department of Premier and Cabinet, internal document - Chief Executive Officer Performance Agreement, 2000/2001).

It was in such a climate, that the Government Service Delivery Project (GSD) was established in 1998. Sponsored by the Office of Public Service Commissioner (OPSC) a former central agency that was reconstituted in 2000 as the Office of Public Service, Equity and Merit, and endorsed by the Chief Executive Officers' Forum the project was an attempt at a 'new way' of doing business within government (GSD, 1999:1). For many it was seen a bold and timely departure from traditional service provision mechanisms. Indeed, much of its concept and form were based on learnings derived from participation in the Experiential Leadership Development Program (ELDP) a leadership-training program conducted within the OPSC for senior public sector managers. As its promotional leaflet claims:

ELDP builds an individual's capacity to effectively lead others in a changing environment. Throughout the program people apply their new knowledge and skills to create a shared vision, build effective organisational cultures and strong cross-agency networks.

On the influence of ELDP one respondent noted that: 'The EDLP process provided an important motivational force. That is, there was a critical mass of people (public servants) supporting the concept from within the public sector'.

More specifically the values and behaviors espoused by these graduates were consistent with the goals of the GSD Project. Thus, the emphasis of ELDP on team-based learning and relationship building provided a new way of thinking and a forum for discussions on attaining a 'new' public service. Another interviewee commented that the program highlighted 'the value of working together' and provided an impetus to change the way that public services are provided.

ELDP therefore contributed to the mood for a more cooperative and collaborative model of reform - one that sat well with the network governance model. The strong emphasis on relationships as the glue to bond departments together is shown below:

Believed it was the way of the future. There were enough examples of success in bringing players together. By doing so it would overcome the natural logic of politics (silo approach). Focus was to be on sharing credit and the burden of failure.

Thus the shared principles and values of many graduates of the ELDP Program coupled with the need to bring a range of stakeholders located at differing levels within the public service

system proved to be the catalyst to a reform model that essentially sought to join-up the public service and, in doing so, to enhance the service provision to the community.

Building and linking networks through relationships

The GSD Project acknowledged that there were a number of initiatives already occurring within the Queensland government aimed at 'joined up' services. It therefore looked to augment and build on the existing networks established around these initiatives by creating an overlay of horizontal and vertical networks to increase government's ability to implement its priorities through more integrated service delivery (GSD, 2000d). As one respondent noted:

It was considered that the network model, by focusing on the public service as a 'whole' rather than as a collection of independent parts or 'silos', would lead to greater 'synergies' between departments and as a consequence better outcomes for the public.

Thus the GSD Project, with its core set of values and an array of interlinking networks, formed a 'governance' network that overlaid existing and emergent policy and service networks. In this way the array of government services could begin to be 'joined -up' into a more cohesive, coordinated and comprehensive system of service delivery.

In a departure from previous reform strategies, the GSD project centered much of its early focus on engaging with the public service sector in order to inform and validate the direction of the project and to secure wide ranging support. In its broadest terms, engagement is a process of 'working collaboratively with and through groups of people affiliated by common interests' to achieve mutually satisfying outcomes (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1997). It is generally believed that engagement leads to not only clearer and more relevant intervention directions but also a stronger commitment. For the GSD Team, this

'engagement process' consisted of a series of workshops, meeting and discussions in Brisbane and regional centers and involved senior executive officers, middle managers and policy development staff and regional managers. The strategies and initiatives that were subsequently developed by GSD therefore grew out of this broad engagement process, rather than being inventions developed and imposed by the team. As a consequence of the engagement approach to implementing the GSD project, there was claimed to be broad ownership and support for the GSD and its initiatives across the public service (GSD, 2000b, 2000c). The following comment encapsulates the view of a number of respondents, indicating that the project's outcomes were the:

Result of extensive consultation with Regional Managers' Forums, Regional Workshops, and Policy Officer Workshops. Feedback from these was used in developing the final Innovation and Service Improvement Framework. This was more than consultation - it was true engagement. Ideas were sought and included in the Framework. This process involved around 2,500 people.

Pivotal to the success of the GSD Project then was the establishment of a community of key people as well as a series of cluster groups or 'horizontal networks' across specific areas of interest to begin to link up services. These, essentially structural and relational aspects of the Project, were augmented by activities such as the development of a framework to guide coordinative and collaborative effort across government and the establishment of a series of case studies on networked action to provide ongoing insight into the benefits and blockages for this type of initiative. In this way the intent was to provide some beginning linking mechanisms across sectors, information to guide the project as well as build a base of support to champion the project.

Early successes forecast demise

At a time of growing dissatisfaction by public servants with the current mechanisms for delivering public services, the GSD offered public servants some hope for change by providing mechanisms that fostered inclusiveness, innovation in service delivery, and unification of the public service.

From early on the GSD Project was met with enthusiasm and commitment. It was widely perceived as a 'real opportunity' for the public service to make a contribution to the improved well-being of Queenslanders through greater integration of services at both policy and service levels. By actively seeking out and engaging with the public service and demonstrating the advantages and potential of integrated government the GSD Project provided a vehicle for new ideas and services to be discussed and trailed. As one respondent commented: 'People were all going in the one direction - working as one public service'.

The GSD process, by tapping into and linking various networks was able to identify common themes and values, which helped to unite a previously distinct ethos. A respondent viewed the success of the GSD Project, as 'one of the few times that there has been a strong alignment between regional and head office issues'.

There was also strong support for the development of systems and processes that broke down barriers between departments and facilitated joined-up government. The adoption of a 'network' model was also perceived as 'a more inclusive process' that allowed for levels of the public sector to be part of the solution. The project's communication and marketing strengths were also acknowledged with the GSD project being awarded Australian Marketing Institute Award (State) Leadership in Marketing Excellence Marketing Award for 2000.

Thus the GSD Project was successful at building a common vision for a different way of providing government services. It used this joint vision and associated relationships to provide a link between existing and emergent networks and, in doing so, began to shift the coordination focus outward.

Despite these early successes, however, the GSD Project was effectively dismantled in mid 2000 after less than two years operation, with aspects of its operation later amalgamated into the Access Queensland Program, an offshoot of the GSD Project that sought to use technology to deliver seamless transaction, information and referral services to the public. Ironically, although not surprisingly as the literature indicates (Taylor and Hoggett, 1994; Limerick, Cunnington and Crowther, 1998; Witte et al, 2000), it was the successful aspects of the GSD, particularly those pushed the boundaries of traditional coordination modes, that made it vulnerable to changing forces within government and contributed toward its later difficulty in achieving ongoing sustainability.

The findings of the case study determine that a number of factors were pivotal to the vulnerability and ultimate dismantling of the GSD project. These factors include a lack of formal authorization for the project, the loss of a high-level project champion, a perceived overemphasis on process rather than outcomes, a perceived lack of outcomes, and the proposed elevation of the role of regional managers.

Balancing network practice with political and operational realities

Although the GSD Project and its ideals had been endorsed by the Queensland Government it nevertheless failed to receive direct funding. Initially this was not perceived by the GSD Implementation Team as a major issue. Indeed, it was used as a strategy to build 'ownership' or 'buy-in' from Chief Executive Officers by requesting that each department contribute funds

to an operating account. In a show of support for the project most CEOs made financial or 'in-kind' contributions.

However, the failure of the GSD project to secure funding from Treasury, perhaps the most powerful central agency of state, was seen by a number of external respondents as a strong indicator that the project did not have the 'high level' support necessary to prevail. Indeed, the allocation of significant funds to the related Access Queensland project was seen as confirmation of a change in direction by government. This view was encapsulated by the following: 'Most people thought that when GSD did not receive funds from budget that it did not have the support of government. Despite all the rhetoric, real, genuine support equals funds. Access Queensland received \$4.5M, GSD - none. Clearly that was the way that government wanted to go'.

In retrospect, a number of GSD Project Implementation Team members agreed that this was a significant point for the ongoing operation of the project as it highlighted the lack of formal sponsorship or authorization for the project: This view was succinctly put as follows: The project lacked higher-level political sponsorship. There was plenty of good will - but no safety net. It was not a political priority and that was reflected in the lack of funding.

Consequently the GSD Project had to rely on the ongoing support of the broader public sector to meet its aims. This support was to be achieved through two distinct implementation strategies. The first centered on the use of the Commissioner of the Public Service as a high level 'champion' of the project to peers at higher levels of government such as the Steering Committee members and the Chief Executive Officers. This person reflected on the role:

As Chair of the Steering Committee I demonstrated senior championing of what was being done. (I) Worked with smaller groups of CEOs and gave examples of concepts and projects that were consistent with GSD. Publicized real working examples of success rather than just ideas and possibilities – and emphasized the benefits of addressing issues this way.

As Noble (1999: 26) notes the presence of a powerful champion helps to generate resources and support and provides 'overall direction' to project initiatives. Clearly this was a successful strategy, as it was widely agreed that the 'table of equals' was well informed and committed to the project and that the 'champion's influence emanated throughout the public service fostering both hope and the mobilization of resources toward 'pockets of collaboration'. However, with the transfer of the key champion the benefits of this role ceased and made the project vulnerable to changes within the machinery of government. This was exacerbated by the lack of formal authorization allocated to the project. There was also a strong opinion held by some respondents that the GSD Project lacked a higher level sponsor - one that linked it more directly to the power base or authorizing processes of government. With this higher level of support and more formal authorization it may have been more difficult to 'pull the project'. More specifically it was stated that:

The project was bureaucratically driven. Therefore there was no flack when it was disbanded.

The loss of the high-level project champion was a critical blow since it disrupted the operation of the network, limited access to higher levels and effectively unhooked the project from the authority chain. With neither a champion nor sponsor, the project lost its 'authorization' and became vulnerable to changing forces within the machinery of government. In short, the project, while retaining strong links horizontally across the public sector, became unhooked from the vertical axis of influence and authority. Without this

linkage element the full effects of 'network capital' could not be attained (Hampshire and Healy, 2000).

Another factor creating difficulties for the continued operation of the GSD network was the excessive emphasis on process at the expense of 'bigger picture' issues and objectives. On reflection some GSD Team members identified the overemphasis on process and an absence of tangible outcomes as contributing to a loss of support for the project. This view was highlighted in the following comment:

The project was looking to the long term. We were not expecting to see hard, tangible outcomes in the short term. In retrospect I don't believe the sector can or will wear this. They need to see something in twelve months and something significant in two years.

These problems were compounded by a countervailing emphasis on other 'lower' sections of the public service and the strong emphasis that emerged as part of the Communication and Marketing Strategy. This Communication and Marketing Strategy was employed to ensure that other levels within the public service remained informed of the project and committed to its activities. As noted earlier this 'engagement process' was highly successful, securing support for the project and providing input into initiatives such as the Innovation and Service Improvement Framework. In pursuing this marketing and communication strategy, through the 'engagement process' the Regional Managers' Forums (RMF) were identified as a model for broader whole-of-government coordination (GSD, 1999). The RMF became the focus of much of the Project Team's efforts and this diverted attention away from staying in touch with other levels within the public service. Moreover, the subsequent submissions to increase the leverage of RMFs by way of an independent funding source and increased access to decision

making processes was also identified as contributing toward a loss of support. These proposals moved the role of the RMF beyond their authorized and established functions of information and exchange, resource sharing and peak regional consultative role (Resource Document for Regional Managers' Forums 1994). As one respondent commented 'these proposals were perceived as a threat because the 'centre' did not value decentralization'. Such a view is consistent with Peters and Savoie (1996 :283) who state: 'In a world of government that is more concerned with the empowerment of the lower echelons of the public service and of their clients, central agencies appear to be anachronisms'. Thus the GSD, with its attempt to involve horizontal decentralized players in policy development challenged the vertical axis of government and this resulted in structural tension. Matheson (2000) suggests there is a structural tension between the two axes of government - the vertical that operates on central control and the horizontal that tends to emphasize the involvement of decentralized players in policy development and service delivery. As Hoggett (1991, cited in Lawrence, 1999:4) expands, decentralization 'sounds fine in theory but in practice it would crucially weaken the ability of the center to direct and influence policy'.

Perhaps most importantly those involved in the GSD project failed to replace the high level champion when the original high level champion was removed. In staying focused on the 'ground' or the 'troops', an important top-down driving force in the support of a high level champion may have been ignored. Without the ongoing focus of the 'champion' to provide the impetus for continued support and legitimacy as well as the mobilization of resources at lower levels of operation, a level of doubt and cynicism began to emerge at the field. Additionally, without a project champion active in key decision-making venues, the project vertical linkage and authority was severely limited.

In this way, the continued survival and maintenance of the GSD project came under threat from the lack of resource control, becoming unhooked from the hierarchical control of the high level champion and the technical coherence of processes being undermined by the overly processual nature of transactions within the network. Finally, a perceived lack of tangible outcomes also contributed to the failure of the project.

While perhaps the GSD Project could have withstood any of these factors singly it was their combination, coupled with a strong centripetal 'pull to the center' due to a forthcoming election and the need for government to present as a coherent force that contributed to its loss of status as a reform initiative and subsequent dismantling. It was commented:

The machinery of government was looking to bring things into the center while at the same time GSD was apparently going in the opposite direction.

Thus confronted by an impending election and the need for coherency and control, and inexperienced and unsure of the network role and management principles, government reverted to 'old routines' (Klinj and Koopenjan, 2000: 154).

CONCLUSIONS

Networks have become a pervasive feature of public administration in Queensland. They are a useful adjunct to the traditional forms of social coordination because they extend beyond the limited hierarchical and contractual relations of other coordination models to link up all relevant actors. In so doing they are able to access a wider array of resources, bring together independent entities, engender more creative and coherent solutions, and move in new and innovative directions. However, by pushing out or extending the decision making ability to 'external players' networks both challenge the 'status quo' and necessitate the adoption of new, and perhaps, uncomfortable roles for central agencies. Moreover, when network activities tip balance of power from the vertical axis to the horizontal, relational axis, there is

often a return to a more 'centralized' coordination models that are more easily controlled (Lowndes and Skelcher, 1998).

This was almost certainly the situation for the Government Service Delivery Project. The project secured the interest and commitment of public servants looking to move the public sector in a new direction. In doing so the GSD made inroads toward developing an overall framework to guide and sustain 'joined-up' government initiatives. By establishing relationships with existing and emerging networks within and external to the public sector it began to link previously dispersed and disparate operations into a coherent 'whole'. However, when the GSD looked to adjust or share some of the decision-making processes from the centre to the network members, the project itself became 'adrift' from its support base and was subsequently dismantled.

While ultimately, the GSD project was a case study of the dismantling of a cross-sectoral and agency network there are valuable lessons to be learnt in relation to the operation of cross government service delivery networks, coordination of activities through networked arrangements and governance issues in networks. Specifically these lessons centre on managing the vertical – linking - aspects of network building as well as the horizontal – bonding and bridging elements, and giving equal emphasis to tasks and outcomes as well as relational processes.

In conclusion, the case study demonstrates that while networks represent a useful mechanism to coordinate services through collective action within and across government, their inherent push to the periphery will be inevitably be met by an equal if not greater push to the centre.

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