Government 2:0

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In this response to the three questions posed regarding the future of Government 2:0, I look at them in the context of contemporary modern culture as a culture of change. The questions are, looking 20yrs into the future:

- "How will Government 2.0 change the culture and practice of Australia's public servants and governments?"
- 'What does Government 2.0 mean for Australia's governance?'
- "What will Australia's Government 2.0 future look like?"

Change occurs in one of two ways, either randomly and outside of our control, or purposefully as a result of planning. In particular I look at how Gov 2:0 technology has the potential to facilitate immense change within the world and its governance, but an effective plan will require a different problem solving approach to achieve desired outcomes. Finally I consider the cultural characteristics of a Government and public service that might successfully use digital technology and how this will differ from contemporary understanding of both leadership and governance.

Any consideration of the future falls into one of two models. The first is 'prediction', the second is working towards a 'desired future'. In between there is something that might be described as 'wishful thinking'. The first is to analyse the past and trends over time, and predict where these trends may eventuate. At its simplest this process is typical for betting on the horses or other sporting events. It is commonly used for all kinds of other situations, from gender of babies to the price of oil. It is though notoriously inaccurate, especially when the time line gets longer, and the situation or context becomes more complex. Thus it is reasonably easy to predict the time that the bus will come tomorrow, but all kinds of changes might occur between now and in a year's time that would affect accuracy. Improved data gathering and synthesising have made weather predictions quite accurate for a 24hour period, but are still notoriously inaccurate for three month timelines.

Wishful thinking is to have a vague idea of what might be desirable in the future, but with no active plan to achieve it, such as stating 'I just want everybody to be happy'. It is through a process of Abstract Rational Thinking that it is possible to set out a vision and articulate a plan to achieve the vision. Abstract Rational

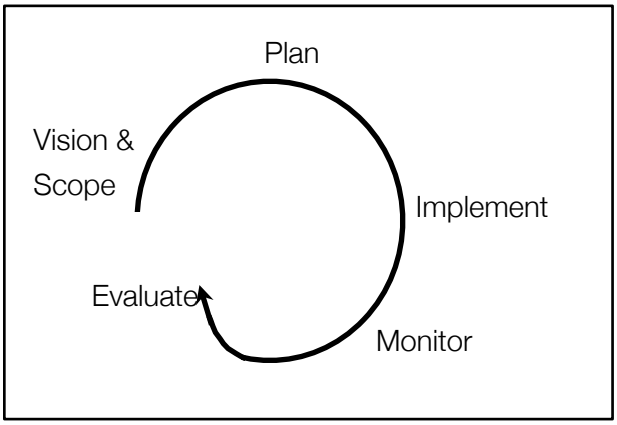

Fig 1: The Virtuous Cycle of planned change.

Thinking is the basis for entrepreneurialism, action research and design as a process. A common methodology is to consider the current situation, construct a vision for the future as a desired state, plan to achieve the desired state and then monitor, evaluate and learn from the activities carried out to achieve the vision. (Fig 1)

The Vision

Goals, visions or objectives come in all forms. Some can be quite pragmatic, set with a high degree of confidence that they will be achieved. The process to achieve them is good practical project management skills. There are other times though when it is necessary to have a vision that is aspirational; something that will be a 'bit of a stretch' to achieve. At the time of winning the competition, nobody really knew how the Sydney Opera House could be built. However the winning drawings articulated a sufficiently inspiring vision that was both aspirational and within the bounds of believability. Critical elements of a successful aspirational vision are that there is sufficient desire to attempt to achieve it, that it is something of a stretch, that it is sufficiently desirable as to warrant the stretch and somehow sets out a program that whilst sketchy, seems believable. What makes it highly desirable is the knowledge that it will require creativity, dedication and perseverance to attain. In 1957 (the time of the Opera House competition) and a few years later, 1961 when JF Kennedy declared that he wanted to see an American land on the moon, such technical aspirations were sufficient to galvanise nations. We are now in a different age, an age that demands more than technological achievements to be aspirational. In fact, rather than the challenge being to solve a technical problem, we have in digital technology the power to enable change as dramatic as the invention of the wheel or gunpowder. For this change to be positive there has to be a vision that is equal to the potential.

A recent letter writer to the Guardian Weekly (March 2010) expressed a vision for the future that many of its readers (educated, technically proficient, inquisitive) would probably be happy enough to adopt. "There's general agreement on the destination: a planet where all sentient beings can grow, work, play, create, eat, shit and sleep in perpetuity and safety". The writer then stated that the big problem is that we don't know how to get there. As we live in an age where if you don't have a plan - you plan to fail, this is not a good situation.

Scoping the Context

The planning cycle described earlier requires both setting a vision, and scoping the current situation from which to build an actionable plan. Three essential characteristics of today that need to be considered when planning the future could be 1) the neutral nature of technology. 2) today's complex environment 3) the contemporary culture of governance and development.

There is immense potential of digital technology, the basis of a concept such as Gov 2.0 to help achieve the desired goal. However all technology is neutral. A wheel can be used for an ambulance or a tank. A truck can be used to transport food to the market, or soldiers into battle. The challenge is to use the technology to achieve the desired goal or vision.

The Gov 2:0 documentation makes a number of references to how the new technology will alter the way in which Government will work. In particular it refers to increased collaboration in decision making processes. Examples are

> "Government 2.0 involves direct citizen engagement in conversations about government services and public policy through open access to public sector information and new Internet based technologies. It also encapsulates a way of working that is underpinned by collaboration, openness and engagement.
>
> and
>
> ……the citizen at the centre in a more open and collaborative relationship with government. It also means a shift in how we work, with an increased emphasis on transparency and collaboration"

Whilst enabling wide scale dialogue and deliberation is a significant attribute of the technology, the technology is neither a pre-requisite for collaborative decision making nor a guarantee that it will occur. The statements do not necessarily make engagement and collaborative decision making happen, and as such are no more than wishful thinking. For the potential of the technology to be realised it requires a different perception and understanding of development.

At the centre of this difference in perception of development lies the idea of complexity, and an understanding of why collaboration might be useful in government processes. In their article Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning (1978) Rittell and Webber observed that problems in outputs (products) are essentially 'tame' and solvable, whilst many of the problems confronting us today (pollution, domestic violence, angry police, disengaged teenagers, climate change) are 'wicked'. "Wicked" means that there is no one answer, no eureka moment when a solution to the problem can be deemed 'mission accomplished' for these exist within the sphere of human interactions in the world as a complex system. They are not in themselves achievable products, (however complicated it might be like flying to the moon) but the outcomes of numerous actions that affect each other. In this respect, the desired vision viz: "….. a planet where all sentient beings can grow, work etc." is an outcome, not an output. There will be no grand opening or TV moment when success can be broadcast globally. One of the greatest difficulties in achieving desired outcomes is that they cannot be obtained using the same processes required to achieve desirable outputs. This is because the nature of the task lies in the interactions that occur between people, not in the qualities of a product itself.

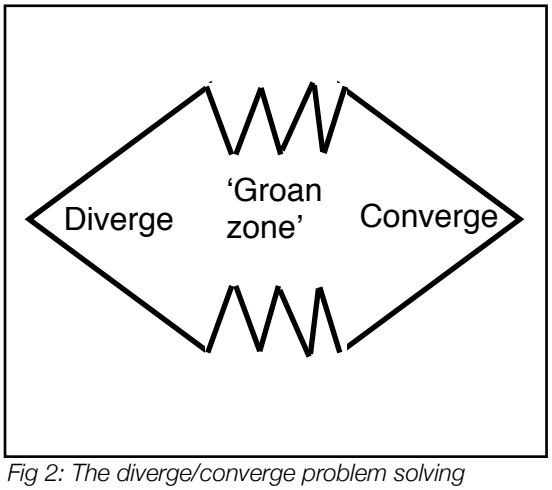

Fig 2: The diverge/converge problem solving concept, in which it is the process of listening to others and making compromises that builds social capital between individuals.

Rittel and Webber themselves identify that building capacity within a complex system can be achieved through the practice of collaboration in the creation

of tangible products and services. This correlates with such concepts as social capital (Vinson and Services. 1999; Putnam 2000) and the opportunities for self learning that occur through praxis (Schön 1995). The psychologist Sam Kaner (1996) maintains that both individual transformation and the development of social capital occurs through the process of having meaningful engagement with others in the decision making process (Kaner 1996) (Fig 2). In other words, it is the process of collaboration and the relationships developed in creating complicated projects that provides personal challenge and growth.

However the act of planning requires making a decision that results in a tangible, measurable and achievable product such as a plan or a policy.

The Plan

Plans can be articulated in many ways. They can be data sheets, drawings, gantt charts or models. One model to describe the relationship between outputs (those products and services that we can do and which are directly measurable) to outcomes is program logic (Orr 1999). One of the best known is the LogFrame (Fig 3), which describes four components of development. The first are actions that lead to outputs. This is the process of creating things (tangible things like cars and brochures and policy documents). At a higher level are strategies which provide both the thinking and enabling processes that will lead to a desired outcome.

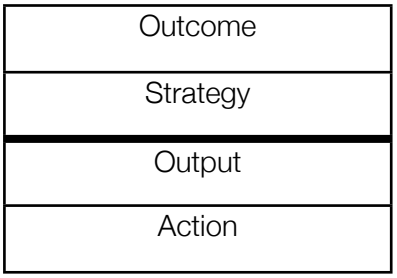

Fig 3 The LogFrame. An Internationally used program logic tool to describe the linkages between the components of purposeful endeavour

To maximize the strategic possibilities of Government 2:0 technologies it will require different actions and outputs by the technical specialists and Government. As there is historically no cultural reason to collaborate on the scale that the technology offers, it will require new actions and outputs to maximise the potential of the technology. If business is carried on as usual it will at best limit the potential of the technology, or worse be used to actively work against achieving the vision. An analogy is that it will be like the red flag act of 1865 that required a man with a red flag to walk in front of all horseless carriages (cars) to warn others of its approach. This effectively limited the capacity of the car to 5kph. So too, the limitations to the potential of the technology are social and cultural, not technical.

One of the questions posed is “How will Government 2.0 change the culture and practice of Australia’s public servants and governments?” However as technology is neutral and can be used for any purpose, a more appropriate question might be “How might the culture and practice of Australia’s public servants and governments change to make best use of the new technology?” This re-framed question puts the control back to the idea of purposeful development and a desire to achieve a stated vision.

The kind of cultural change required of the technical specialists to maximise the capacity of the technology behind Gov 2:0 is to shift from creating products and services, to creating inclusive processes that purposefully and meaningfully engage others to collaboratively create the products and services that society wants. Whilst not stated in the Gov 2.0 literature, the benefit of more collaborating in the decisions that affect them is because it provides opportunities for meaning and learning, which in turn strengthens the system as a whole. In other words, the planned outputs (the part which public servants, the technical specialists of Government, have control of) needs to change. Specifically it will be to create opportunities (forums, processes) for those that will be affected by a decision, to be part of making the decision. The technology itself can not do it. The new technology enables more people to be engaged in the development process, but only if those with the power to do so allow it to

	Program Logic
Super goal/vision	All salient beings etc…….
Outcome	Engaged population with high levels of social capital
Strategy	Maximise use of Gov. 2:0 digital technology for collaboration
Output	Inclusive decision making processes.
Action	Technical professionals approach their work differently

Fig 4 Program Logic of a plan to make strategic use of Gov. 2:0 technology to achieve a desired outcome.

happen (fig 4). Thus to answer the second question 'What does Government 2.0 mean for Australia's governance?' it could be little, or if the potential of the technology is to be realised, profound.

All decisions are made within a particular social and cultural context, and of significant importance will be the role of the governance environment in which projects and programs are developed. This requires the most radical change to contemporary development culture and practice (Block 2008). Sam Kaner has identified three key players in any decision within contemporary liberal democratic society. There is the authorising body, the collaborators and the wider community. We all play these roles at different times and at different situations. We might collaborate with our work colleagues, be the authorising body for our children and are part of the wider community for our Local Authority. For structured inclusive decision making to be successful there has to be a greater understanding of the characteristics of each of these roles and the changes required from existing practice.

For public servants (technical specialists within Government), it is probably not hard to conceptualise that for effective decision making by the collaborators, it is necessary for the authorising body to 'hold the space' - that is; not issue instructions, not put forward a

favoured direction; not over rule the complex negotiations required to achieve an acceptable decision with all stakeholders. Conceptually this requires a significant change in what we expect from an effective elected representative. It is a change from someone that favours one sector of society over the interests of another sector, to enabling those with the responsibility and interest in the decision to effectively collaborate with each other. The authorising body still holds the power, but uses it in a different way.

For those that are the collaborators (who will increasingly be both across Government agencies and external to Government), it means both having the skill to put their own views forward effectively, but to also have the capacity to listen and understand others. Collaboration is far more than the exchange of information, but the process of negotiation and compromise that results in a sustainable decision. It is this process that builds social capital that will achieve the desired high level goal. Whilst Gov 2:0 has the technical capacity to enable this, it will require new software such as 'The Virtual Centre' (Butcher 2010) to maximise the technologies' capacity. The most significant change required of this group will be to engage with those that will be affected by the decision for their views of the problem rather than their views on a proposed solution. For when we are part of the broader community, effective engagement that will build social capital means having the opportunity to input into the decision making process before a decision is made, not to just have the capacity to comment on a proposal.

Risks

Any plan has risks associated with its implementation. A significant risk is that it requires people to change their current practice. Within the terminology designed by Peter Sandman on Risk Communication this would seem to be a case of Precaution Advocacy (The risks to not changing are high, but the level of outrage is low). His suggestions for why this might be the case are varied, but the evidence from the developing world is that there are many reasons why people don't change current practice, (Pretty, Guijt et al. 1995) least of all when there seems no immediate personal gain. Furthermore, the psychologists have also demonstrated that it is not possible to change those with power, only your own practice.

Fig 5 : It was the cholera and plague epidemics that effected all classes that drove modern public health improvements. These developments also changed what we see as 'normal'.

However, we know from historical evidence that the contemporary city is considerably different to those of the past; (Fig 5) concepts of normal have changed over the years and nobody nowadays would see it as acceptable to have a city in which large scale open defecation is the norm. We also know that it is a combination of events that trigger widespread change. It took the Great Fire of Baltimore in 1904 to instigate building codes in that city, and the plague in Sydney to force the construction of a

water borne sewerage system. Such events are often a catalyst, but they depend on the thinking to have already occurred and tentative steps to have already been made.

Whilst there are many reasons for individual project managers and owners to not change practice, common ones include self interest, fear of the unknown and perceptions that the city and its components should remain as they are. Another significant risk is that those that don't have a high capacity in abstract rational thinking will be expected to perform in ways in which they are unable to achieve success.

Risk Management

Perceived self interest in continuing current practice is a common reason not to change. Why people decide to change practice is complex and beyond the scope of this paper. However a common reason not to change is fear, and a common fear of every technical specialist (whatever the field, be it natural resource management, planning or finance or ethics) is that poor decisions will be made when there is greater input into the deliberative process. The expressed fear is that non-specialists will either not have the technical capacity to make a good decision, or the process will be 'hi-jacked' by a power group with a different agenda to the technical specialist. With regard to the former the evidence is that given sufficiently good information on which to base a decision, the reality is that people make as good a decision as any other group (Carson 2010). What is critical is to provide good quality information for people to make decisions in a supportive environment. Concerning the latter, there is an emerging practical body of knowledge to allow multiple views to be expressed whilst providing a 'level playing field' for people to be heard and decisions made. In this new reality, it is the work of the psychologists that provide the theoretical underpinnings to action.

Psychologists have developed a large body of knowledge around how individuals wield power to have their values imposed on others. The methods used include organisational rank, financial power, elected power, linguistic, artistic, technical, professional expertise and even power through being a victim and power through rescuing others by advocacy. Group facilitation is an emerging skill set that brings to the system skills and processes designed to provide the space in which ideas and world views can be expressed, and conversations held, around common hopes, dreams, issues and concerns. These techniques can be used to enable groups of people to engage with each other on any issue of governance.

Fig 6. 1300 people developing the Perth structural plan

Catalysts for individual project managers to change might include: becoming more aware of the many risks to their projects and programs through poor community/stakeholder engagement processes; encouragement from the authorising environment in

which they operate to practise engagement techniques, becoming aware of the processes that can be used to develop projects, including the learning opportunities provided in developing these newly emerging products.

Implementation

Examples of collaborative action learning processes that have worked at the 'big picture'end, include the America Speaks process (AmericaSpeaks 2010) and study circles. The America Speaks process enabled 5000 people in New York generate the brief for the rebuilding of the World Trade Centre . The same process was used for 1300 people to create the 2005 Perth structural plan (Fig 6). Another is the use of study circles in Scandinavia to develop policies. However far smaller processes can be used for more local issues, and do not always require highly technical processes to reflect the required cultural change. A group of residents in an outback country town with an interest in improving sporting facilities was taken through a Participatory Action Research process that enabled them to consider and compare all the existing facilities, the users, their fitness for purpose and rate of use (Fig 7). This process provided the program logic to develop a funding proposal to upgrade the touch-footie ground. Having opportunities to participate in small 'non-controversial' projects allows people to practise participating on an everyday basis. In all these cases the critical elements were: the authorising body 'holding the space' for others to make the decision, and having a SMART (specific, measurable, agreed, realistic, time-bound) output or product that was suitable and appropriate for the collaborators to both use the information that they have in the decision to be made.

Fig 7 A group of residents use a Participatory Action Research process to collaborate on developing a plan for improved sporting facilities in their town.

Evaluation

This leads to the final question, which is; "What will Australia's Government 2.0 future look like?" Whilst it is difficult to measure cultural change, it is a lot easier to measure the processes and procedures that will indicate that cultural change is happening, and the behaviours of those involved in designing and developing collaborative processes.

Thus whilst we know that over the last 500 years' products and services have developed incrementally through the efforts of those technical and professional specialists with high capacities in abstract rational thinking, it is possible to imagine the growth of sophisticated

tools and techniques that allow those that will be affected by a decision to be part of the decision making process.

These are the criteria on which to base the evaluation of engagement activities. As mentioned earlier, a risk to the plan is that perceptions of the city and its components remain as they are. There is nothing to stipulate that a successful and dynamic city should comprise of the products and services that exist today. Successful engagement and collaborative events will result in a city (humanly affected landscape) that is different to what it is now, because the city is merely a reflection of the society that created it. If engagement is measured against how well it enables the existing development paradigm, the potential is for engagement to be manipulative or tokenistic. Success will always be relative, with reflection, learning and observation providing the driver for the next attempt (Fig 8).

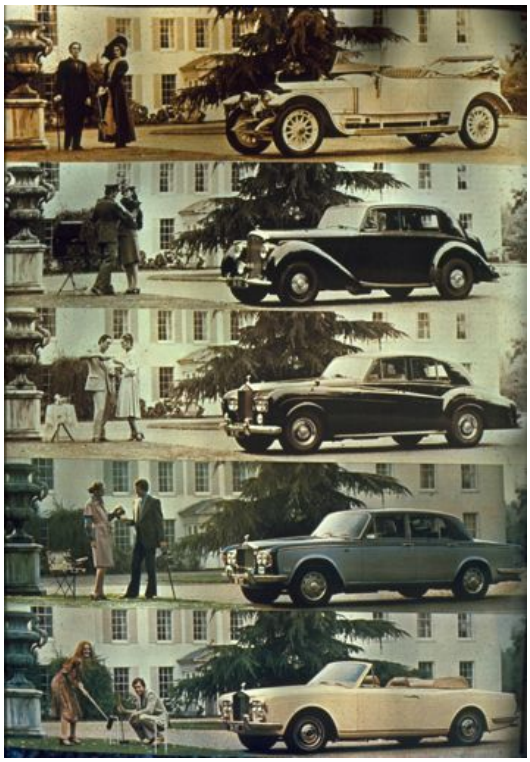

Fig 8. Because inclusive decision making processes are a product, just like a car, it is possible to become better at doing it. However, it is necessary to want to do it in the first place to start.

Thus evaluation of collaborative decision making processes needs to be around such questions as:

How well did the Authorising Body 'hold the space'? In other words, not be involved in the decision itself. How well were lobbyists directed to participate in the engagement process? How much support was given to the collaborative process?

How well did the collaborators work with each other? Did they listen to each other?

How well did the collaborators actively engage and incorporate the issues and concerns of the 'broader community' into the final decision?

How well did the technical specialists prepare documentation so that those without that technical knowledge were able to understand the issues at hand, and make an informed decision?

Over time we will develop better processes and procedures, of which Gov 2:0 technology offers considerable potential. However it will require cultural

Carl Sagen writes :

> "We have built a society dependent on science and technology, but are structuring our educational system so that almost no one understands science and technology. This is a recipe for disaster".

Fig 9. Collaborative decision making processes will provide the opportunity for many to develop capacity in abstract rational thinking, but only if those with power act differently to current practice.

change for the tool to achieve its potential.

Thus a crude and early attempt at an inclusive approach was the Peoples Forum held in 2007 by Kevin Rudd. Using another analogy with the development of the car, this event was unfortunately as sophisticated as a Horseless Carriage of 1870 compared to a Toyota Corolla of today. A key element was the lack of understanding by the then Prime Minister of his role in such a forum if it was to be successful. The role of the authorising body of a participatory process with multiple decision makers is to 'hold the space' for others to make an informed decision. This is in contrast to adding in what they think are desirable outputs (products), or allow lobbyists to have more influence than others in final documentation.

Conclusion

The technology and thinking behind the Government 2:0 initiative is powerful, and will allow many geographically dispersed people the opportunity to collaborate on deciding on the solutions to their mutual problems. It is though only a technology. For the potential of the technology to be realised will require a different approach to governance and public service structures than that which currently exist. In terms of governance it means having those with representative power to 'hold the space' in which others can actively collaborate. For the technical specialists it will mean changing from solution providers to providing clear documentation on which others can make informed decisions. It will also require the development of a new technical skill, namely designing and implementing appropriate processes for collaborative decision making to occur. These processes are emerging, of which Government 2:0 is just a tool in a suite of change processes. Of critical importance is the required shift in the decision making culture to maximise the potential of Gov. 2:0 thinking.

The Engagement and Partnerships Team in DSE has developed the Effective Engagement Kit and a suite of training products designed to help program and project managers effectively design engagement activities, including how to use the new technologies for maximum effect.

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