

Joined up government

**A review of national and
international experiences**

working paper no. 1

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The Victorian Government has vested the State Services Authority with functions designed to foster the development of an efficient, integrated and responsive public sector which is highly ethical, accountable and professional in the ways it delivers services to the Victorian community.

The key functions of the Authority are to:

- identify opportunities to improve the delivery and integration of government services and report on service delivery outcomes and standards;
- promote high standards of integrity and conduct in the public sector;
- strengthen the professionalism and adaptability of the public sector; and
- promote high standards of governance, accountability and performance for public entities.

The Authority seeks to achieve its charter by working closely and collaboratively with public sector departments and agencies.

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1 introduction

Better collaboration and integration across government is a priority for governments in Australia and overseas. Traditionally, governments have been organised with vertical structures, aligned to delivery of particular services such as hospitals or schools. These provide efficiency, clear lines of accountability and concentration of specialist knowledge. However vertical structures are not well equipped to deal with many contemporary public policy issues which require cross portfolio action such as climate change and social disadvantage.

This paper has been prepared as background research for a project the Authority is undertaking on joined up government. The paper looks at the academic literature and relevant government reports dealing with joined up government. The meanings, context and benefits of joined up government are discussed and the experiences of the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and Finland are reviewed. Specific Victorian examples of joined up activity have not been the subject of this paper and are therefore not included.

2 defining joined up government

Joined up government recognises that many complex public policy issues are cross cutting in nature and do not fit neatly into departmental boundaries or portfolios. Improving collaboration and integration to address cross cutting issues has been a priority for governments in Australia and overseas over the last decade and has generated a range of reforms.

There is no universally accepted definition of joined up government and a range of terms, such as horizontal, holistic or integrated government and whole of government, have been used to refer to similar efforts. The Management Advisory Committee (MAC), a forum of secretaries and agency heads of the Australian Government, provided the following definition for the Australian Public Service in 2004 (MAC, 2004, p.4):

Whole of government denotes public service agencies working across portfolio boundaries to achieve a shared goal and an integrated government response to particular issues. Approaches can be formal and informal. They can focus on policy development, program management and service delivery.

Joined up government is generally focused on improving outcomes. Initiatives tend to target a particular client group or geographic area. The scope and application of joined up government is wide and can mean initiatives across different government boundaries and for different government responsibilities. Broadly, joined up government can be across:

- Portfolios or departments within a tier of government
- Different tiers of government (federal, state and local)
- Government and other sectors (private, not for sector, voluntary) or the community. (6, 2004; Di Maio, 2004; Office of Government Commerce, 2006)

It can also encompass a range of government activities:

- Whole of government strategic objectives
- Policy development
- Program management
- Regulation
- Shared service delivery and 'one stop shops' for access to multiple services.

Joined up government approaches are designed to complement rather than replace vertical structures (Christensen & Lægreid, 2006a; Vincent, 1999). Joining up can be costly, time consuming and a long term view may be required to obtain positive outcomes – not all government problems require this investment (Farland, 2004; Wanna, 2005). While issues such as security, regional development, road safety and events like the Commonwealth Games can benefit from or require a joined up approach, more routine or straightforward issues or areas of service delivery can be handled effectively by one department. In each case, the costs and risks of joining up or not joining up need to be considered (MAC, 2004).

3 the origins of joined up government

New Labour gave prominence to joined up government through its modernisation of public administration in the United Kingdom (Christensen & Lægreid, 2006b). The Blair Government introduced the concept as a way to develop a more integrated approach to ‘wicked’ issues facing the public sector (Christensen & Lægreid, 2006b; Mulgan, 2005; UK Government, 1999). Joining up has recently been a high priority for governments for two reasons: (1) trends in public administration; and (2) increasing need for integrated responses to address complex problems faced by society (Mulgan, 2005; Pollitt, 2003; Wanna, 2005).

3.1 public administration trends

Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, a number of governments began importing private sector practices and a market orientation to modernise public services. Known as the new public management, these changes had an impact on public sector management systems, structures and processes. New public management has encouraged governments to be more focused on performance against targets and to be more efficient at delivering services (Mulgan, 2005).

As a result, vertical accountabilities within agencies and between agencies and ministers have been clarified and strengthened. This has improved the efficiency and transparency of government operations but has increased the challenge of collaboration and integration across government, particularly when government tries to improve results for complex issues like intractable social problems (Christensen & Lægreid, 2006b).

Under new public management, agencies are focused on delivering outputs, with incentives aligned with outputs for individual departments. Outputs shared across agencies are more difficult to deal with and can be given a lower priority. Further, as collaboration is a process rather than an output, it is more difficult to specify and fund this as a target.

With improved transparency and efficiency, the focus of public sector management reform has turned more recently to improving the effectiveness of the public sector, by managing for outcomes for the public. This has emphasised the tension of collaborating across organisational boundaries and prompted governments to consider ways to encourage joined up working (Christensen & Lægreid, 2006a; Richards & Kavanagh, 2000). Rather than undertake structural change to improve horizontal working, governments have sought other ways to overcome the challenges of vertical structures of government (Harringvirta & Kekkunan, 2005).

3.2 complex problems and citizen expectations

Governments are recognising that issues such as water use, global warming, security, terrorism, family breakdown and drug abuse cannot be addressed by one department or portfolio alone (Pollitt, 2003). Part of the complexity of addressing these issues is their interconnectedness; researchers have accumulated evidence to show that issues such as crime, for example, are influenced by family, social and economic factors (Mulgan, 2005). There is also mounting evidence suggesting that earlier intervention is more effective than providing a ‘cure’ and that a lack of collaboration on issues like child development and safety can be dangerous and compromise service delivery (Mulgan, 2005; Walker, 2006).

Joining up across portfolios and working with external sources of expertise provides government with input from a variety of perspectives and improves the flow of ideas around these complex problems (Kettl, 1998; Pollitt, 2003). At a whole of government level, taking a joined up approach to policy development can also assist governments to develop priorities and make trade-offs across portfolios.

Evolving consumer expectations are also placing greater demands on government to become more customer focused (Bartos, 2005a; Mulgan, 2005). Citizens now expect governments to provide a coordinated, accessible and integrated experience – services that meet the needs of citizens, rather than reflecting departmental structures and boundaries. This has pushed governments to consider service delivery around client groups or integrated portals rather than around existing agencies or service types.

3.3 the benefits of joining up

The ultimate benefit of joined up government approaches is improved outcomes for the public. But there are other benefits for government and citizens:

- taking a view that is wider than one department or portfolio and contributing to cross-cutting initiatives
- improving delivery through one stop shops, for more accessible and simple access to government services
- promoting innovation, by bringing together people from different organisations and backgrounds;
- improving cost effectiveness, through identification of cross over and realising economies of scale. (National Audit Office, 2001)

4 enabling joined up government

In practice, achieving joined up government can be difficult. It depends on having organisational cultures, skills, capabilities, and management systems and structures that support collaborative and integrated ways of working. Across all joined up government efforts, there are a number of critical factors for success:

- working towards shared goals that are clearly defined and mutually agreed
- measuring and evaluating progress towards the goals
- having sufficient and appropriate resources available
- having strong leadership, directing the team and initiative towards the goal
- working well together with a sense of shared responsibility. (Ling, 2002; National Audit Office, 2001; Parker & O’Leary, 2006)

The structures, processes and approaches used in joined up government initiatives need to be specifically tailored. This includes the nature of the relationships between partners, the characteristics of the activity involved and the size and complexity of the undertaking. Ling (2002) groups the range of joined up working practices into four dimensions: types of organisation, accountabilities and incentives, ways of delivering services and ways of working across organisations (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 Dimensions of joined up working

New ways of working across organisations	New types of organisation	New accountabilities and incentives	New ways of delivering services
<i>Joined by:</i> Shared leadership Pooled budgets Merged structures Joint teams	<i>Joined by:</i> Culture and values Information Training	<i>Joined by:</i> Shared outcome targets Performance measures Regulation	<i>Joined by:</i> Joint consultation/involvement Shared client focus Shared customer interface

Source: Ling (2002)

4.1 new ways of working across organisations

Joined up government often requires new ways of working across organisations. This includes:

- articulated and shared goals and outcomes for the project, with realistic expectations about what can be achieved in the short to medium term;
- high level commitment from all parties involved;
- agreed structures, processes and roles;
- sufficient investment of time and resources to develop the structures and models (Curtis, 2006; Pollitt, 2003; Office of Government Commerce, 2006).

Making this work in practice is difficult and has hampered joining up efforts (Chesterman, 2002). The importance of partnerships is widely recognised, but pushing a partnership approach from the centre of government overlooks the power imbalance between organisations and the complexities of problems that are being tackled (Diamond, 2006). Partnerships rely on conditions of trust and understanding, which need to develop between parties and cannot be imposed by policy makers. Both policy makers and researchers agree that the word ‘partnership’ has been overused and underspecified and that the capacity of organisations for collaborative work needs to be developed further (Diamond, 2006; Laffin & Liddle, 2006).

4.2 new types of organisation

Successful partnerships require organisations with the culture and capacity for joining up. Traditionally, public service organisations have used vertical hierarchies around areas of specialist expertise to deliver public services, with a strong focus on achieving organisational goals and priorities. In contrast, joining up requires an internal culture that values collaborative and integrative ways of working and has the capacity for trusting other organisations (Hunt, 2005; Ling, 2002).

Organisations need a culture where adaptability, discretion and a focus on results are valued (Ling, 2002) and joined up working is embedded in the professional culture (Burgess, 2006). Briggs (2005) has described the preferred culture to support whole of government working as:

- flexible, persistent, adaptable and open to innovation and creativity
- team focused with the ability to think and act across agency boundaries, to tolerate mistakes and manage risks
- capacity for building strategic alliances, collaboration and trust and to negotiate to achieve joint outcomes
- expression of diverse views is encouraged and different cultures and their strengths appreciated
- capacity to balance the tension between short and long term goals.

Cultural change depends on leadership from ministers and senior bureaucrats (Success Works, 2002; Richards & Kavanagh, 2000). Leaders need to be ‘committed to a team approach to problem solving, responsive to “outside” views and driving a performance culture that sets high store on innovative solutions unconstrained by traditional structures or approaches’ (MAC, 2004, p.47).

To deliver joined up government, managers and staff need a broader skill set than traditional rational skills (Allen, 2006). Managers need to be willing to take risks, to tolerate ambiguity and act as mediators – they need to be experts in building trust (Jackson & Stainsby, 2000). Staff also need relevant skills, including being able to:

- communicate faster, earlier and with a wider audience
- manage complex relationships, with skills in mediation and negotiation and personal characteristics of patience and creativity
- understand the broader context, lead without control and make careful judgements about when to intervene. (Allen, 2006; Pollitt, 2003)

4.3 new accountabilities and incentives

With a focus on outcomes for particular communities or client groups, joined up government brings added complexities to accountability and incentive mechanisms. The traditional alignment of decision making, accountability and performance management with vertical structures can inhibit shared outcomes and responsibilities between organisations (Bartos, 2005b; Lenihan & Valeri, 2003). This can be particularly difficult when joining up with communities, private organisations and the not for profit sector (Allen, 2006).

Organisations need shared accountability and transparency about responsibilities. Government systems such as the budget process need to support this. To a degree, the use of an output and outcomes framework for government budgeting has made it easier to join up across portfolios (Kettl, 1998). However collaborative approaches which do not fit neatly into outputs also need to be funded to achieve integrated government (Ling, 1999; Ling, 2002).

Performance management and incentives also need to support joined up government. Currently, incentives for achieving organisational aims can be stronger than the rewards for horizontal achievements. With a strong focus on performance management, departments can be tempted to ignore issues that require shared responsibility (Mulgan, 2005). Joined up government needs shared performance indicators and these need to be aligned with incentives and reporting systems (Bakvis & Juillet, 2004; Pollitt, 2003).

The tension between the centre of government and departments and agencies needs to be managed (Christensen & Lægreid, 2006; Mulgan, 2005). With a greater capacity for planning and establishing cross-government initiatives, the centre can become more powerful in joined up government. At the same time, departments and staff need the authority and autonomy to make decisions, particularly for initiatives targeting local communities (Parker & O'Leary, 2006; Smith, 2005). Devolving management responsibility so that staff 'on the ground' have greater capacity to make decisions is one area currently being pursued in the Australian Public Service to support whole of government efforts (Burgess, 2006).

4.4 new ways of delivering services

More responsive and integrated services for citizens can be a major benefit of joining up. This can be about joining up to deliver more customer focused services such as through one-stop shops. It can also be about getting more input from communities about service delivery issues, so that local services are all driven by the local priorities. (Ling, 2002).

With advances in technology, citizens expect governments to provide more customer focused services (Richards, 2001). Call centre technology and internet technology allow governments to design systems that link separate services around life episodes or particular client needs. This presents a number of challenges to government: presenting the information in customer friendly language and style, managing the technology change, developing systems that allow two-way traffic (information provision and undertaking transactions) and establishing governance mechanisms for one stop shops (CITEC, 2006; Richards, 2001; Skovitne, 2006).

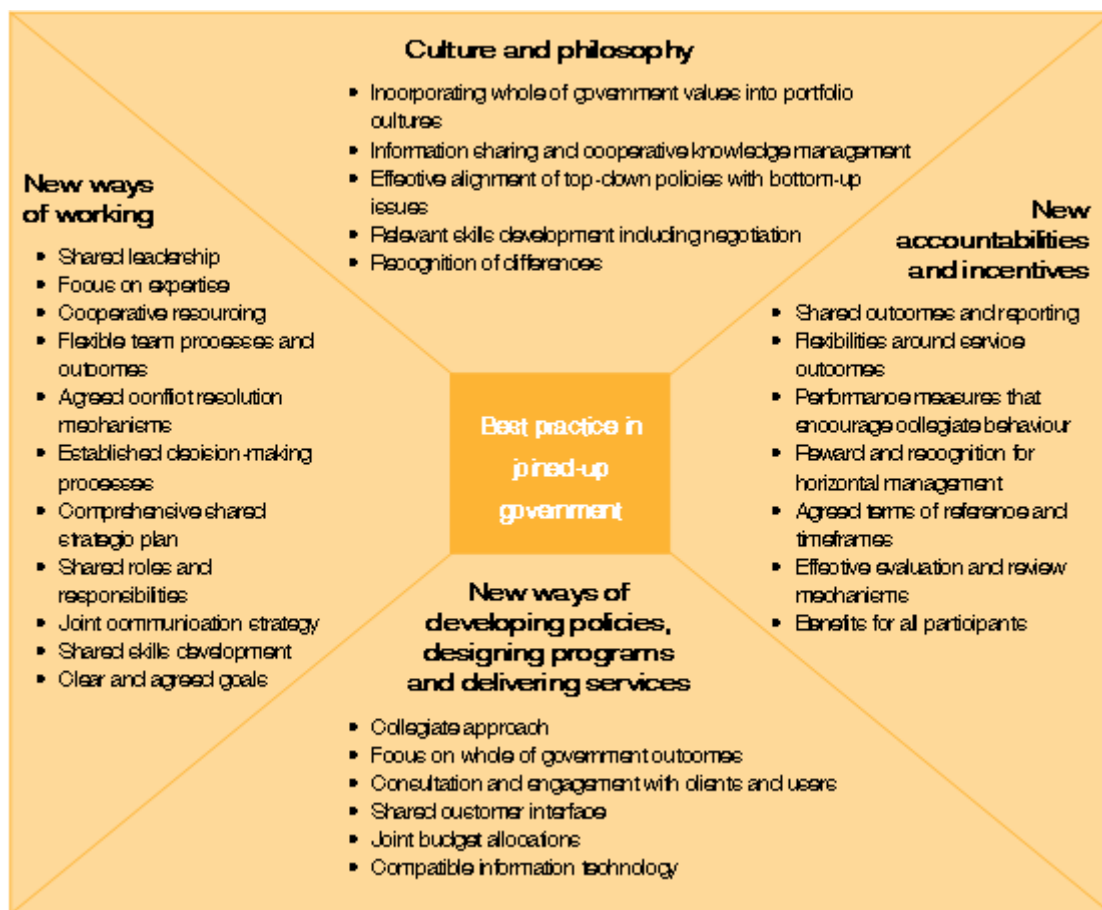
Governments have worked at developing stronger local networks, including community groups and members, to identify local priorities and integrate service delivery. Success has depended on strong leadership, having the skills for engagement, investing the time and allowing local flexibility in funding and resourcing (Blacher, 2006; McGregor, 2003). Government at the national or state level also needs to relinquish control and support local innovation and flexibility to achieve better service delivery at the local level, which has proved difficult to date (Geddes, 2006; Smith, 2005).

For complex problems, citizen engagement can be a critical component of managing the issue (Curtain, 2006). This needs to be done well or it risks community frustration, disengagement and disempowerment (Lasater, 2006; Maguire & Truscott, 2006). Consultations need to be representative of the community or target group, and this can be difficult for poor and marginalised groups who do not have an organised voice or the capacity to contribute (Allen, 2006; Maguire & Truscott, 2006). Government needs to develop more accessible and less formal ways of consulting to ensure new consultations do not just recruit the same community members that are already connected (Allen, 2006; Skidmore, Bound & Lownsborough, 2006).

4.5 better practice

For each dimension of joined up working, there are a number of practices and approaches that can be used to facilitate new ways of working. The Office of Government Commerce (2005) and the Management Advisory Committee (2004) have identified a range of better practices to implement joined up government projects, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2 Better practice in joined up government



Source: adapted from Management Advisory Committee (2004)

5 national and international experiences

5.1 Australia

At the national level, joined up government has received significant attention over the last five years and continues to be a priority for the Australian Public Service. Since 2002, the Australian Government has announced new whole of government priorities, changed cabinet processes to strengthen its strategic leadership role and undertaking a strategic project exploring joined up government through the Management Advisory Committee (Halligan, 2004; Management Advisory Committee, 2004).

National examples of whole of government approaches to working across the boundaries of government include the cross-government response to the Bali bombings and Council of Australian Governments activities, such as the whole of government indigenous trials or the Australian Better Health Initiative.

State governments have recognised the importance of joined up government, although activities have varied between jurisdictions. Examples of state government joined up initiatives include:

- Establishment of 'one-stop shops' for interacting with government (including accessing information, obtaining services and making payments). Examples include Canberra Connect in the Australian Capital Territory and Service Tasmania, both of which provide community access to government services through shopfronts, a call centre and the internet (CITEC, 2006; Skovitne, 2006).
- Establishment of social policy units in Departments of Premier and Cabinet, including the Social Policy Unit in Western Australia and the Social Inclusion Unit in South Australia. These units are responsible for coordinating, leading and monitoring initiatives around social issues across government, in recognition that a partnership approach is required to address social issues.
- Development of guidelines for working across boundaries in government, including the Guidelines for collaboration and integrated services - Working together in NSW public sector, produced by the Premier's Department in New South Wales and Seamless government: Improving outcomes for Queenslanders, now ... and in the future, published by the Office of Public Service Merit and Equity.
- Whole of government priorities and policies. Examples include the directional statement of the Queensland Government and Tasmania's 20 year statement, Tasmania Together.
- Initiatives to develop integrated and coordinated responses to particular issues. The Regional Coordination Program in New South Wales is one such example, where the Strategic Projects Division of the Premier's Department has managed an initiative to achieve sustainable social, economic and environmental benefits for regional and metropolitan communities.

5.2 United Kingdom

The Blair Government introduced the concept of joined up government in 1997 to improve the government's response to 'wicked' problems, including intractable social issues such as drug use and social exclusion. The 1999 White Paper, *Modernising Government*, called for the public sector to work in partnership across organisational boundaries, to provide more integrated and seamless service delivery. Subsequent action plans from the Cabinet Office set out a range of initiatives to support joined up working.

Rather than focus on one area of reform, the Government has experimented with a number of options to pursue joined up working, resulting in a wide range of changes which were mutually reinforcing (Mulgan, 2005). These include:

- taking a cross-cutting approach to policy making. Mechanisms to achieve this have included Policy Action Teams (set up by the Social Exclusion Unit within the Cabinet Office), cross cutting reviews of spending and the establishment of cross-cutting units, which cover issues such as social exclusion, rough sleepers and neighbourhood renewal, where multiple departments are involved and the policy issues have been difficult to solve.
- managing joined up working through seminars, reports (such as the National Audit Office report, 'Joining up to improve public services'), networks such as the New Local Government Network and the role and implementation of the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit in the Cabinet Office.
- activities to join up implementation of policies, through tools such as training and support in project management and implementation, the establishment of the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit, consolidation of local structures, coordination of purchasing through the Office of Government Commerce and the integration of services through portals such as UK Online. (Government Social Research Unit, 2006)

At the national level, a number of reviews have indicated that progress has been achieved, and that horizontal approaches are now accepted as essential for government (National Audit Office, 2001; Mulgan, 2005). Initial emphasis was on achieving more joined up working at senior levels of the public service and in recent years that focus has been on embedding joined up government in implementation and service delivery at the front line in organisations. Given that there has historically been more experimentation and success with joining up at the local government level, these efforts have been focusing the central government.

5.3 Canada

Under the term 'horizontal management', joined up government has been promoted in the Canadian public service since the mid-1990s. Key drivers of joined up government have been cross-cutting issues such as climate change and Aboriginal Issues, globalisation and citizen demands for more integrated service delivery (Bakvis & Juillet, 2004; Fitzpatrick, 2000).

In the early 1990s, the Canadian public service underwent major reforms, including significant reorganisation and cost reductions. Following this, the federal government moved its focus to policy capacity and development and, to support this, horizontal management (Bakvis & Juillet, 2004). Attention has predominantly focused on joining up between different levels of government and across federal government departments (Ling, 2002).

In the following years, a number of reports were produced (such as studies by the Auditor-General around accountability and management for horizontal integration), whole of government reviews of cross-cutting issues such as policy planning were conducted and a number of reforms were implemented (Ling, 2002; Lindquist, 2004; Bakvis & Juillet, 2004). Changes were made to areas such as performance management, with horizontal coordination added to the requirements for deputy ministers.

As in the United Kingdom, horizontal coordination has been heavily promoted by the centre of government, to the extent that provincial governments and the community can feel that they are not genuine partners in the process and in initiatives (Lindquist, 2004). At the same time, reviews of horizontal management in Canada have been critical of the role of the Privy Council Office and the Treasury Board Secretariat, arguing that they have failed to provide clear and coherent leadership for initiatives and that, despite the range of horizontal activities, they have not established clear guidelines for when to use and how to implement and monitor horizontal management of issues (Bakvis & Juillet, 2004; Office of the Auditor General of Canada, 2005).

Despite these challenges, the government and public service continues to recognise that horizontal coordination is a major issue facing government. In recent years, the Speech from the Throne has continued to reflect issues that depend on a horizontal approach, such as climate change and public security. In 2006, Canada also finalised the implementation of Service Canada, streamlining government service delivery and providing a 'one-stop' personalised access point for government services (Privy Council Office, 2006).

5.4 Finland

Falling levels of citizen trust and a highly sectoral way of managing government has led to major reforms to government and the public sector in Finland over the last two decades (Harringvirta & Kekkonen, 2004). Improving the way government worked horizontally has been a major focus of this reform. Leaders of the reforms decided that the issue could be addressed by altering the working methods of government and that formal changes in authority or power between organisations were not required.

Introduced in 2003, the government now sets out its agenda in the Government Programme. This Programme focuses on horizontal activity of the government and identifies four priority areas, including the Employment, Entrepreneurship, Information Society and Civil Participation Policy Programmes. Each Programme is detailed in the Government Strategic Document, which focuses on horizontal policies and identifies targets, measures and concrete acts required to meet the targets for each area. The targets and measures outlined are consistent with financial pre-requisites, set out in the government budget documents.

Under the reforms, each Programme has a Coordinating Group of Ministers (including Ministers of all relevant portfolios) and a Coordinating Minister, who is responsible for the Government Programme and their own portfolio. The Programme is managed by a Programme Director, who doesn't have any formal power but runs a network of representatives from the participating portfolios. The Programme Director has little direct funding, but appropriations for programme purposes are earmarked in the budget using a matrix technique. Success of the new processes relies heavily on political will for consensus and strong support from the Prime Minister and is thus dependent on the political culture.

To facilitate evaluation, the Government Strategy Document provides targets that are concrete, quantifiable, relevant and sufficient for each area, with a focus on outcomes rather than outputs as the findings are used mainly for political rather than managerial purposes. Each area is evaluated prior to the development of policies for the next Government Strategy Document, which in turn is discussed and prepared prior to discussions around the budget. From 2006 onwards, all ministries and agencies are required to enter their performance information onto a Finland state internet reporting system, further improving the transparency of public administration (Autero, 2006).

These changes have been implemented over the last three years. Early evaluation of the reforms suggests that it has assisted government to become more strategic and results focused. It has also improved transparency and horizontal thinking across government (Harringvirta & Kekkonen, 2005).

6 conclusion

Governments need to achieve joined up government to address many of the complex problems facing modern public administrations. There has been a wide range of implementing joined up government around the world. Experiences indicate that governments need to change on four key dimensions:

- looking inward and developing new skills and cultures;
- looking sideways and forming partnerships;
- looking upwards and finding appropriate accountability and performance management systems; and
- looking outwards and finding ways to work with citizens.

The tension between reassertion of the centre of government and decision making, innovation and flexibility at the local level is a common theme across the dimensions of joined up government. While political and bureaucratic leadership and support is important to set priorities and to establish a collaborative culture, cooperation and integration on the ground may be more important than joined up government imposed from the top down (Christensen & Laegried, 2006b).

Other areas of emerging focus in achieving joined up government include trends towards networked governance (Considine & Lewis, 2003; Keast & Brown, 2002), increasing flexibility around funding and performance management systems (Rubin & Kelly, 2005) and exploring ways to engage with communities in ways that are representative and meaningful (Allen, 2006; Skidmore, Bound & Lownsborough, 2006).

Finally, joined up government is often applied to the most difficult problems which, by their nature, have a range of stakeholders with different values and conflicting suggestions. This needs realistic expectations, sufficient time and resources and flexibility to develop and implement tailored governance structures and consultation

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