



How Governments Address Complex Policy Challenges and Manage Whole-of-Government Issues

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For a panel on 'Integrated Governance and Public Administration:
What lessons can be learned from international experiences?'

**INA-DSRGM Conference on *Integrated Governance:
International Experiences and Challenges for Portugal*
Lisbon, Portugal, 15-16 October 2015**

Pressures Towards Integrated Governance

Integrated governance a goal since the early 1990s, but...

- more complex challenges seem to be arriving
 - increased awareness of different facets problems
 - greater humility about limitations of interventions
 - citizens are more demanding, seeking new service models
 - governments motivated by efficiency and effectiveness
 - digital technology creating new possibilities on many fronts
- Today's presentation will not delve into specific examples of whole-of-government or horizontal initiatives – there is never a shortage of those, and they are unique!

Complex policy
challenges



Horizontal
Initiatives



Whole-of-Government
Initiatives (WoG)

The flow of today's presentation

1. Complex Challenges and Whole-of-Govt Responses

- *A surfeit of complex and wicked policy challenges*
- *Are complex, horizontal challenges a new phenomenon?*
- *The coordination toolkit for WoG & horizontal initiatives*

2. Essential Strategic Perspectives to Review

- *Strategic postures for complex, horizontal challenges*
- *Acknowledging strategic realities of modern governance*
- *Collaborative, coercive or crisis situations?*
- *Skills and capacities for boundary-spanning & horizontal initiatives*

3. Alternative Perspectives to Consider

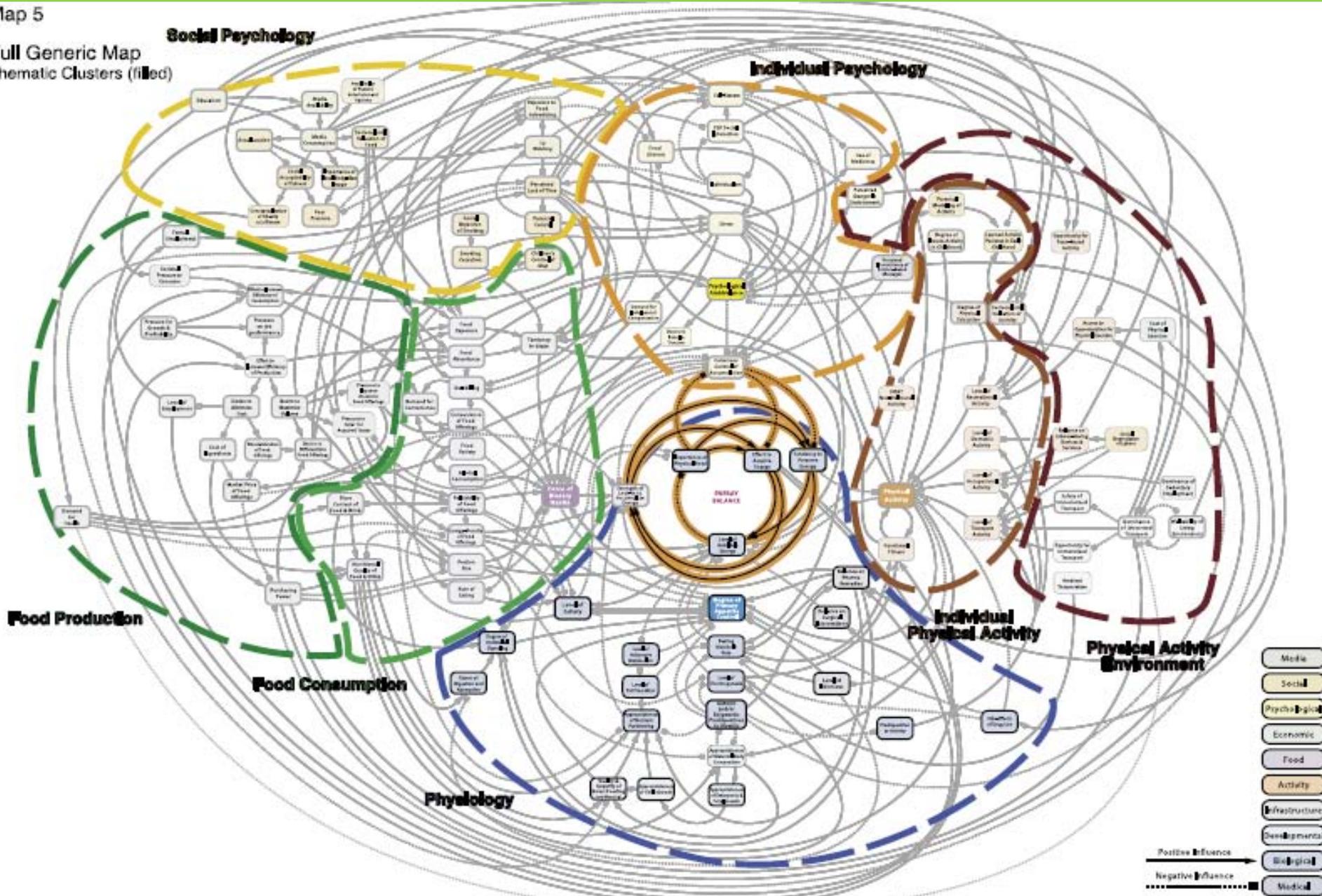
- *Engagement: sizing up and responding to complex challenges*
- *Visualization: capturing complexity, diverse views, and progress*
- *How does 'integrated governance' link with complex challenges, 'whole-of-government' initiatives, and horizontal management?*

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Complex Challenges and Whole-of-Govt Responses

Map 5

Full Generic Map
Thematic Clusters (filled)



A Surfeit of Complex and Regular Problems

- It has become commonplace to label complex problems as ‘wicked problems’, bundles of issues and features difficult to comprehend ‘no-stopping’ features.
- But are all complex problems the same? What might be the differences among them? Comprehensibility, scale, problem definitions by citizens, experts, politicians, etc.
- Often such challenges are difficult to separate from the horizontal initiatives themselves, some being whole-of-government approaches (e.g. Canadian/Australian lists).
- The important question is: what if there is no shortage of regular and complex policy challenges? What does it mean to have a surfeit of challenges?

Diversity of Horizontal-WoG Approaches

Examples from Canada

- The Trends Project (PRI)
- Team Canada
- Urban Aboriginal Strategy (Saskatchewan)
- Science and Technology MOU on Sustainable Development
- Implementation of the Oceans Act
- Search & Rescue - Swissair 111 Disaster
- Voluntary Sector Task Force
- Federal Regional Councils
- The Leadership Network
- St. Lawrence Action Plan

Examples from Australia

- Greenhouse Australia
- Australians Working Together
- Council of Australian Governments Indigenous Trials
- Goodna Service Integration Project
- iConsult (ICTs & community over-consulting)
- National Illicit Drugs Strategy
- Response to the Bali Bombings
- Sustainable Regions Program
- The Sydney 2000 Olympic Games

Management Advisory Committee. 2004. *Connecting Government: Whole of Government Responses to Australia's Priority Challenges* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.

Hopkins, M., Couture, C. and Moore, E. 2001. *Moving From the Heroic to the Everyday: Lessons Learned from Leading Horizontal Projects*. Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Management Development Roundtable on the Management of Horizontal Initiatives.



Are complex, horizontal challenges new?

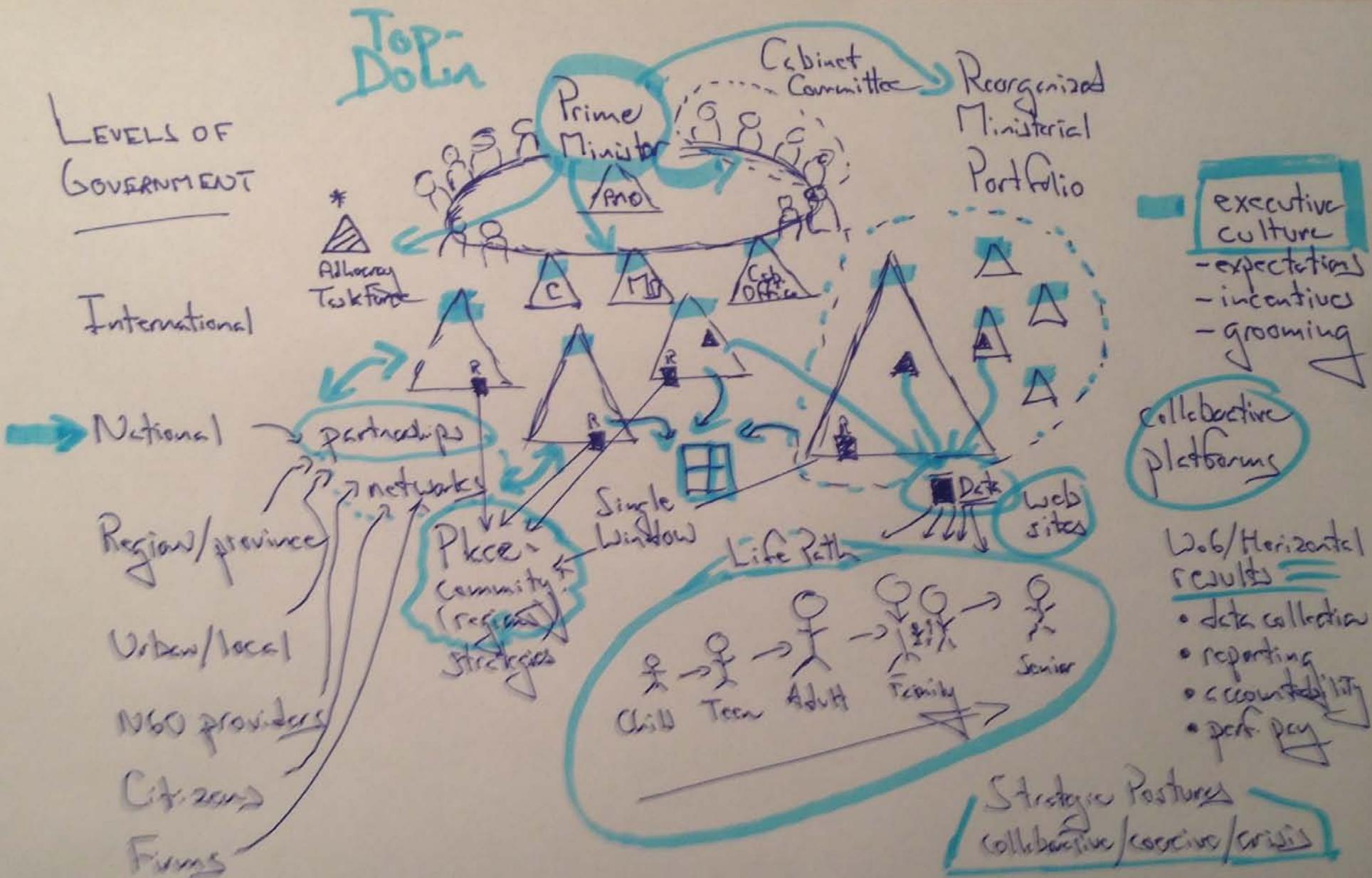
- Addressing complex challenges requires coordinating and aligning many policy instruments and programs.
- Such problems do not fall neatly in the domain of any given program of government, or even a department.
- Typically addressing real complex problems requires instruments, information, and insights from across the government and involve many departments/agencies.
- In turn, many challenges involve working across levels of government, presenting additional coordination issues.
- Increasingly government involve firms, NGOs, citizens
- Bakvis & Juillet (2004) warn that managing in a whole-of-government way is “pulling against gravity”
- More so with ‘distributed governance’ (MLG and MSG)

Tools for Whole-of-Government Initiatives

- Governments edicts to focus on specific challenges
- Ministerial portfolios, cabinet committee structure, and department mandates (including 'lead status')
- Working across boundaries with adhocracies, incentives, central funding of initiatives, corporate culture
- Supportive central agency administrative frameworks
- Creating focal points: client focus, place, networks, etc.
- Building new web interfaces, channels, and platforms
- Collecting, tracking and using data to monitor & control

→ *But no substitute for political leadership
...or a government priority...or a crisis.*

Diverse Tools for Horizontal/WoG Initiatives



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Essential Strategic Perspectives to Review

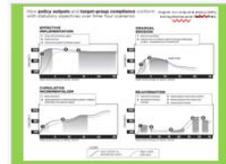
Strategic postures for complex challenges

1. Comprehensive policy interventions: what used to be called rational-comprehensive-synoptic interventions or massive planning interventions, requiring tremendous front-end knowledge, good theory, great political will.
2. Incrementalism: relies on multiple governments, agencies and others moving forward in their own ways – relies on mutual adjustment, proximate learning, and lowers the cost of failures but can lead to policy drift.
3. Synoptic incrementalism: with articulated goals, relies on *emergence* and *experimentation* with multiple actors in a distributed governance context (Bourgon, *New Synthesis in PA*, 2011).

For all postures: how to ensure ‘policy durability’ and ‘shift-points’ as well as ‘flexibility’ and ‘learning’? For different examples and perspectives, see the chapters in Lindquist, Vincent & Wanna, *Delivering Policy Reform* (2011).

The strategic realities of modern governance

- The number of complex challenges and horizontal issues will outstrip the central capabilities of governments to coordinate sustain momentum of WoG initiatives.
- Additional issues emerge, unexpected crises occur, and groups can influence public opinion – all competing for political attention and resources.
- This leads to different implementation trajectories →
- If making progress on big challenges requires top-down political support, many initiatives may be precarious or at risk; *but if they rely more on administrative coordination or technological solutions, more likely to be sustained.*
- From a macro perspective, requires distributed approach to assigning responsibility for WoG/horizontal initiatives.

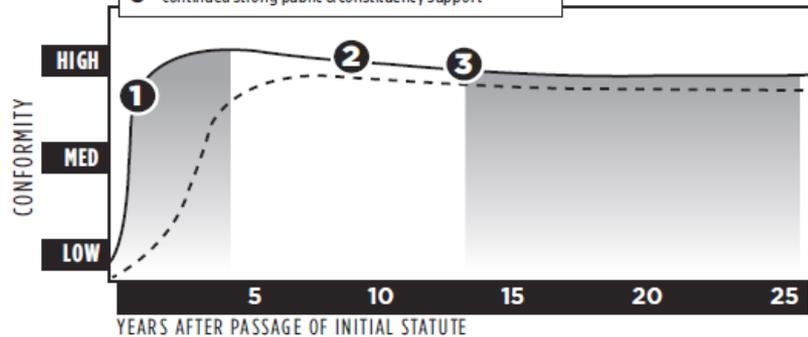


How **policy outputs** and **target-group compliance** conform with statutory objectives over time: four scenarios

Diagram 3 in Lindquist & Wanna (2015);
levering Mazmanian & Sabatier (1983).

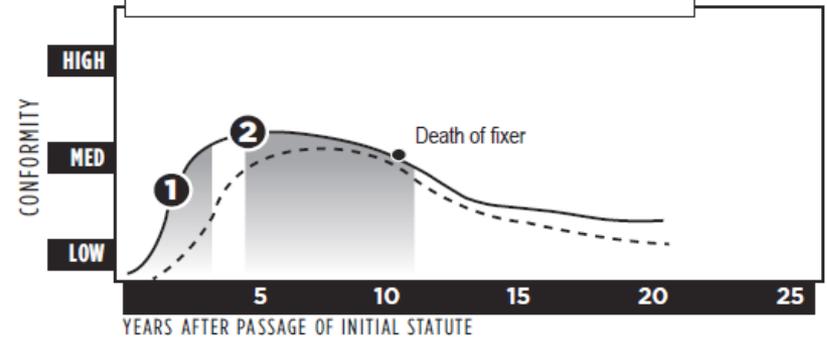
EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION

- 1 Strong staff & constituency support
- 2 Original staff leave
- 3 Continued strong public & constituency support



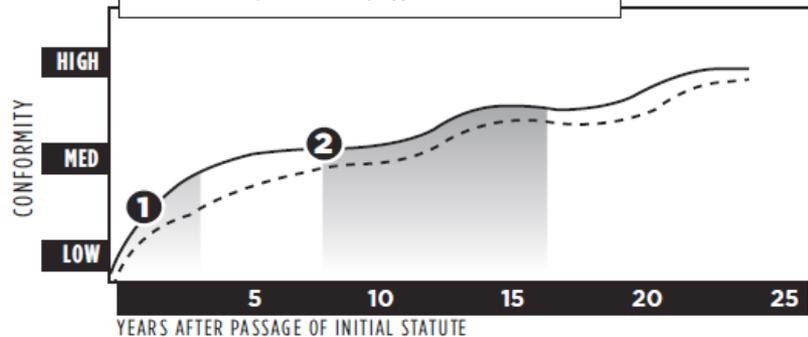
GRADUAL EROSION

- 1 Initial start-up problems
- 2 Gradual erosion of constituency support & consequent nibbling away at statute – exacerbated by loss of committed staff



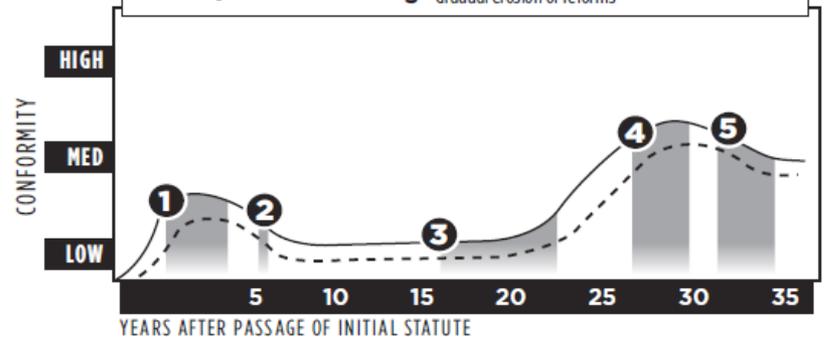
CUMULATIVE INCREMENTALISM

- 1 Modest initial effort
- 2 Gradual improvement in monitoring statutory provisions, compliance administration, and constituency support



REJUVENATION

- 1 Initial burst of enthusiasm
- 2 Undermining of statute by sovereigns
- 3 Gradual change in socioeconomic conditions
- 4 Reforms produced by new statute & staff
- 5 Gradual erosion of reforms



LEGEND



Collaborative, Coercive or Crisis Situations?

- Most of the literature on whole-of-government and horizontal initiatives casts them as **collaborative** efforts:
 - Many phases: dialogue, problem-definition, trust-building, analysis, framework-creation vs agreement, implementation, monitoring, assessment, and accountability.
 - Such collaboration is remarkable for ratio of upstream to downstream activity (50-50): imagine what auditors think!
- But whole-of-government initiatives can be very strong top-down and **coercive**, driven by government priorities and relying on political and administrative coordination.
- The elixir of **crises**: clear need, strong coordination, and cooperation with mutual adjustment & alignment: *why can't this be bottled-up and built into govt. repertoires?*

Skills & Capacities for Horizontal Leadership

Whether horizontal initiatives are fully ‘whole-of-government’ or not, several skills for executives and managers are needed:

- Collaborative leadership and **fostering engagement** with partners and others whether in collaborative, coercive, or crisis situations.
- Building the right **adhocracy/boundary-spanning capacity**, and adroitly leading these usually temporary/thin capabilities.
- **Balancing** commitment and fidelity to horizontal partners while meeting the minimum threshold needs of ‘home’ organizations.
- **Embracing turnover** among staff and partners, as well as political succession (which can present opportunities, not just frustration).
- **Creating coherence** (sense making) in an emergent way.
- For executives and ‘the centre’: instincts about **timely support**.
- **Downstream tracking**, performance management, accountability.

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Alternative Perspectives to Consider

Engagement and Complex Challenges

- Engagement as a **leadership skill** and **organizational strategy** deserves a closer look because it can have many distinct components...
 - engaging other departments and agencies
 - engaging citizens and other clients
 - collaborating with service delivery partners
 - collaborating with other governments
- The right balance will vary according to the challenge at hand, the horizontal initiative under consideration, and how much co-production is involved.
- Much depends on how top-down and directive the initiative is vs. collaborative and emergent. Resources?

Visualization and Complex Challenges

Are we sufficiently investing in visualization techniques to:

- fully capture and share complexity,
- invite and acknowledge diverse views of experts and stakeholders,
- develop macro perspectives and micro contributions, and
- track and measure progress?



Diagram from Grove Consultants International web site. For more on the visualization movement, see Lindquist, E. 2015. "Visualization Meets Policy Making: Visual Traditions, Policy Complexity, Strategic Investments."

Concluding Remarks:

Integrated Governance in Perspective

- How does the plethora of diverse complex policy challenges, horizontal initiatives and leadership, and whole-of-government approaches relate to the concept of '**integrated governance**'?
- Has connotation of a specific 'solution' – a set of practices & services which have been 'integrated'.
- Stepping back: it can be seen at the macro level as a worthy general aspiration and posture, but gets realized in diverse ways within and across levels of government, always evolving due to new needs, demands, political priorities & new technologies.

Further Reading

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Thank You! Questions?

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CONNECTING
GOVERNMENT

Whole of Government Responses
to Australia's Priority Challenges

MANAGEMENT
ADVISORY
COMMITTEE

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Some Propositions to Consider

1. Public servants, and the larger institutions of which they are a part, have considerable experience working across boundaries.
2. Demands for horizontal governance and collaboration will continue to multiply.
3. Horizontal initiatives outweigh the capacity of departments and 'the centre' of government to manage.
4. Vertical structures, incentives, and accountabilities will persist.
5. Too many "heavy" coordinating mechanisms may complicate or crush promising horizontal initiatives.
6. Every horizontal initiative will have unique leadership and management challenges -- there must be multiple ways to secure advice and support.
7. Good horizontal management may simply be good management, but leaders must understand unique horizontal challenges.
8. Timely executive support of horizontal initiatives is crucial for success.
9. System support for horizontal initiatives should be cast as investments.
10. Political posturing and policy conflict across governments will continue.