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*Desk power: Insights into bureaucrats' autonomy*

**Title of the paper**

*Bureaucrats behaving badly - using administrative traditions to legitimise adherence to old ways*

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**Abstract**

This paper examines how bureaucrats use their discretion to respond to the inevitable tensions between implementing new ways of working and bureaucratic traditions. I suggest that a significant barrier to change is that they do so by co-opting established traditions to legitimise adherence to old ways of working. Drawing on documents and interviews with elite policy actors I use the Logics of Critical Explanation framework to analyse the policy world through three explanatory 'logics' which focus on the ontological assumptions, norms and narratives that sustain the policy practices complicit in the repeated failure to address inequity in remote Indigenous Australia.

**Keywords:** Indigenous, policy, new governance, engagement, problematisation, interpretive methods

**Introduction**

Australian government efforts aimed at improving Indigenous wellbeing, particularly in remote Australia, continue to fall short (see for example PM&C, 2016, pp. 5-6). While the failure of Indigenous policies to lead to improved outcomes has been much studied, the focus is largely in structural issues especially those which relate to funding, the complexity of arrangements and diffuse accountabilities (Bolger, 1987a, 1987b; Dillon & Westbury, 2008; Hunt, 2007; Sullivan, 2011; Watson, 2011). There has been little focus on the need to "challenge to the dominant Anglophone patterns of bureaucratic behavior" (Smith, 2013, pp. 227, 229). This lack of focus on the mechanics of Indigenous policy development and implementation has been deemed "surprising" (Moran, 2007, p. 13).

There has, however, been considerable practitioner research interest in resistance to change within the public sector (Marsh, Richards, & Smith, 2001, p. 245). There is general support for the claim that resistance to change has resulted in a strong tendency towards 'business as usual' where reforms are "pumped along the sclerotic arteries of the same old bureaucracy but with the vigour of new acronyms" (Sullivan, 2011, p. 110). A common consequence of resistance to change is to "pretend to reform by changing what policies or organizations *look like* rather than what they actually *do*" (Andrews, Pritchett, & Woolcock, 2013, p. 2). Rather than embracing change, the tendency has been to allow managerialism to "strangle local entrepreneurialism in the interest of central control" (Evans, 2009, p. 2).

In this paper, I use the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery (NPARSD) as my case study. At the heart of the NPARSD was a commitment to change the way governments engage and do business with remote Indigenous communities (Coordinator General for Remote Indigenous Services, 2011). This was to be achieved through new approaches to service delivery including a place based approach, improved stakeholder engagement, and policy learning through normative as well as summative evaluations. The aim was to see 29 remote communities enjoying "the same standard of services as non-Indigenous communities of similar size, location and need" (COAG, 2009, p. clause 16(a)).

More specifically, the focus in this paper is on efforts to implement what I term "local contextualized solutions" under the NPARSD. By this I mean solutions which take into account the local context within which the policy is to be implemented and modify the response accordingly. This captures the "bottom-up" nature of most place based approaches which is the cornerstone of community development efforts. The value of these approaches is

well recognized. For example, the importance of context, history, tradition, and culture in defining problems and in ensuring the "fit" of solutions is generally recognized (Andrews et al., 2013; Grindle, 2013, p. 399; Pritchett, 2013; Pritchett, Woolcock, & Andrews, 2013; World Bank & Webb, 2008). As well, the need to design policies to take into account local context (rather than top-down imposed solutions) is widely recognized in international development (see for example Andrews et al. (2013); Breslin (2004)), as well as more generally (Behrendt, 2007; May, 1981; Mc Laverty, 2011). As noted above, a focus on place was at the heart of the NPARSD.

However, after four years of concerted whole of government effort implementing the NPARSD, the consensus was that, apart from delivering increased investment to the 29 communities, and improving inter- and intra-governmental relations, other gains were nebulous (PM&C, 2014). Australian governments recognise that policy actors are struggling to adjust to more devolved ways of working. A recent report suggests that, despite the requirements to work differently, "there is little evidence to date that program managers, primarily based in Canberra, are changing the operational parameters of their programs" (p331). Drawing on observations by Evans (2010, p. 148), this paper looks at how program managers can actively use their discretion to shape practice towards enabling flexibility on the ground, or Street Level Bureaucracy.

Lipsky's seminal work on Street-level Bureaucrats (SLB) serves as a starting point for this analysis (Lipsky, 2010). Firstly, Lipsky recognised that policies can be ambiguous – and that this was one of the conditions required for SLB to come into play. However, he suggested that the interpretation of policies is due to the actions of SLB, not the interpretations and actions of management. This paper seeks to explore the ways managers, not just SLB,

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interpret policies and exercise discretion to influence implementation. Secondly, Lipsky assumes that SLB are being directed by a uniform and unified "management", committed to the policy objective. This kind of reasoning sits behind research which seeks to identify ways that managers are the drivers for channelling SLB in more productive ways (see for example Riccucci, Meyers, Lurie, & Han, 2004). This paper explores the possibility of a management which has varied views and is more committed to managerial approaches than the mooted reform.

There are two reasons why I seek to identify why SLB and managers use their discretion in ways inconsistent with policy intention. In the classic tradition of the "state-agent" narrative (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2012, p. S18), in the short term, it will still be important to find ways to limit the exercise of that discretion. However, in the longer term, I suggest that understanding what underpins resistance to change will assist in devising ways to improve the exercise of discretion at all levels of implementation and clear the way to embed the new ways of working required.

In the following I firstly outline the case study and how localised responses were reflected in relevant policy documents. I further examine how the way implementation was driven by "management" constrained the activity of SLB in ways that led to outcomes that were not consistent with policy objectives. I then examine the framework used in the analysis and present the empirical findings on how the implementation of a place-based approach played out under the NPARSD. I then look at how managers actively worked to steer front line staff away from the new ways of working through the imposition of template based planning and what this means for future reform efforts.

**The case study**

As noted above, the NPARSD required new ways of working. The policy endorsed localised approaches with a "single government interface in each community" and Local Implementation Plans developed "in partnership" with each community to improve services and infrastructure (Coordinator General for Remote Indigenous Services, 2011, pp. iii-v). Localised responses were further enshrined in so-called service delivery principles - articulated both in the sustainability service delivery principle "considering flexibility in program design to meet local needs" (C13 (b)(ii)) and the engagement principle which required recognition of "local circumstances" (C9(c)). In addition, governments were asked, in each location, to identify service delivery priorities and develop plans that were "between community groups and governments, and non-governmental and private sector organisations where relevant" to address these priorities (21(d)). Further, the integration principle recognised that "a centrally agreed strategic focus should not inhibit service delivery responses that are sensitive to local contexts" (C12(e)).

A key deliverable of the NPARSD was a Local Implementation Plan (LIP). LIPs were publicly available documents including "priorities … including targets, actions and associated milestones and timelines, with publicly available joint annual reports on progress" (COAG, 2009, p. 21(d)(i); 21(k)) and provided the mechanism to operationalize coordination and subsequent monitoring and reporting (COAG, 2009, pp. 17(f) and 25-30; 21(a)). Partnership approaches are often operationalized through joint planning exercises, which provide a means of managing the relationship in terms which are familiar to policy agents. In their discussion of welfare reform strategies, Henman and Fenger (2006, p. 265) refer to a

"political rationality" of partnerships which they claim has overshadowed the "market imagery" of NPM. They also refer to the "valorisation of the local" as a "mix of neo-liberal and consumerist rationalities" where "the local becomes the place that is more flexible, more responsive and therefore, more capable of providing individualized services" (265).

LIPs were to be developed by Regional Operations Centres (ROCs) working "across government with local Indigenous people and other stakeholders to develop … [them] and ensure that they are implemented in a timely and accountable way" (21(c)). In so doing they were required to "work with selected communities … to agree on service delivery priorities between community groups and governments, and non-governmental and private sector organisations where relevant, consistent with the COAG targets" (21(d)). However, the increasing focus on the LIPs as drivers for the initiative was problematic. As noted in the evaluation:

> *There is a tension between the LIP's dual functions as a tool for service delivery coordination and community engagement. Over time, stakeholders have reported that the model has become inwardly focused on government service provision and coordination issues, with increasingly limited involvement of the community in discussions about the progress of the LIP, ongoing planning and priority-setting* (PM&C, 2014, p. 25).

Further, despite the ROCs having a high level of autonomy on paper, a template for LIPs was developed centrally and, in all places except Western Australia, the gaps were faithfully filled in. How this influenced the implementation of a place based approach is explored below.

Further, LIPs were specified to be "developed for each location arising from the baseline mapping and in consultation with local community members and other parties" (COAG, 2009, p. 12(d)). The "baseline mapping" (clause 17(b)) was a significant enterprise, involving collecting baseline information on existing services, service gaps and government investments (clause 17(b)), gaps in priority infrastructure (clauses 17(i), 19(e)(i)) and "existing community networks and decision making processes" (clause 19(e)(ii)). This massive effort was also to develop "an evidence base to facilitate measuring of performance" (clause 19(e)(iii)). The decisions on what should be included in the baseline mapping data were made exclusively within government, with community input explicitly ruled out at the inter-governmental workshop held to agree on inclusions in the baseline mapping (personal communication).

The policy required a strong reliance on the baseline mapping to identify service gaps and so priorities for the LIPs. This was reinforced by one participant:

> *the baseline reports – those are very long and detailed, but the reason … [they were] like that is that, the way the [NPARSD] was written, it was almost as if people were going to get those reports and that was going to tell them exactly what to do* (INT13)

Thus by mandating baseline mapping as the basis for local planning, the NPARSD legitimised policy actors who were inclined to keep the focus on the programs and services deemed to be important to government, but not necessarily the community, and mitigated against SLB using their discretion to deliver localized solutions.

My analysis draws on 19 in depth semi-structured interviews with elite policy actors involved in the development and implementation of the NPARSD. All but two of these interviews were face-to-face and ranged in time from 40 to 90 minutes, with the majority around 60 minutes. Interviews focused on senior managers as they constitute the "most influential community of practice in the public service" as the way they go about their work shapes the culture and values of the public service through their words, deeds and ideas (Bourgon, 2008, p. 402). Participants were selected through a "snowballing" technique until sufficient coverage to ensure key characteristics, such as level of government, role, location and experience was obtained (see Table 1). It was not possible to locate each of the participants within a State or Territory as most moved at least once during the term of the NPARSD, however, all jurisdictions involved in the NPARSD were covered. To maintain the anonymity of participants, they are identified by codes in what follows.

**Table 1: Breakdown on characteristics of participants (n=19).**

| Characteristic | | # | | # | | # | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Level of government | State/NT | 3 | Federal | 11 | Both | 5 | | |
| Role | Policy monitoring | 7 | Policy implementation | 4 | Implementation | 6 | All three | 2 |
| Location | Major centre | 11 | Community | 6 | Both | 2 | | |
| Engagement | Directly involved | 8 | Some involvement | 6 | Not directly involved | 5 | | |
| Experience outside public service (PS) | Worked only in PS | 11 | Worked outside as well | 8 | | | | |
| Years in Indigenous Affairs (IA) | Less than 10 | 10 | 10-20 | 3 | More than 20 | 6 | | |
| Gender | Male | 13 | Female | 6 | | | | |
| Currently employed? | In PS - IA | 9 | In PS – not IA | 3 | Not in PS | 7 | | |

Note: One refusal; Three no response to request; One unable to set up a time;

**The framework**

In my analysis, I draw on Lipsky's ideas that it is important to understand the "patterned ways" that factors shape the implementation of policies (Brodkin 2012, 943) as well as the growing body of management literature that suggests that discretion is exercised within the constraints of an "organisational context that shapes the possibilities for its use" (Brodkin 2012, 946).

To highlight the mediating role of the practice of public administration, I draw on the Logics of Critical Explanation (LCE) conceptual framework (Glynos & Howarth, 2007). The LCE framework analyses policy regimes through three inter-related explanatory "logics" – social logics, political logics and fantasmatic logics. Glynos and Howarth define the logic of something to be 'those aspects which make it tick' (2007, 135); or more specifically, 'the purposes, rules and ontological presuppositions that render a practice or regime possible, intelligible, and vulnerable' (Glynos, Howarth, Norval, Speed 2009, 11). These three logics tell us about the 'norms, roles and narratives, as well as ontological presuppositions that, together, render practices possible, intelligible and vulnerable to contestation' (Glynos, Klimecki, & Willmott, 2015, p. 395). Further, Glynos and Howarth suggest the three logics correspond to three dimensions to social reality – social, political, and ideological/ethical – which they suggest are the basis for 'practices or regimes of practices' (2007, p. 15).

Social logics, or "the way we do things around here", are the established bureaucratic traditions and norms that are challenged by new governance approaches. Political logics underpin the way that these norms being created, contested or defended, or transformed. Identifying political logics is important as their rationale is seldom examined, with the result

that more wide-ranging alternatives not often not explored. Finally, fantasmatic logics are the discourses which sustain both policy worlds and policy action by reconciling inherent contradictions and incompleteness in ways that allow policy entrepreneurs to feel "comfortable". One way of thinking of this is that these discourses deal with the cognitive dissonance experienced by policy entrepreneurs in the complex and often contradictory intercultural field of Indigenous affairs.

The LCE framework sheds light on the bureaucratic field that the policy was implemented within. The underlying premise is that social worlds are radically contingent – in other words that, in theory, they could have been different and so can be differently constituted, despite the fact that they are seemingly stable and fixed. Thus policy actors are operating within a system of meaningful practices, but there are gaps that become more apparent at certain times, including when adaptation to new ways of working is required. LCE provides a systematic way to analyse why and how policy actors react during those moments, and how acting differently can be facilitated, or how maintaining the previous practices can be preferenced.  In that sense it explicates both the existing social structure around new governance approaches, as well as how policy actors have understood and engaged with conflicts between established and new ways of working.

The times when the "gaps" become more apparent than others are termed 'dislocations' within LCE. The conditions outlined by Lipsky for SLB to come into play are essentially dislocations caused by mismatch between policy and practice; and insufficient resources (in a broad) sense. In other words, tensions are caused in trying to make new logics work within an incompatible set of social logics, and in attempting to manage limited resources in new ways, requiring new logics and ways of working.

**Legitimising lack of engagement with contextualised local solutions**

Empirical analysis identified a number of factors which provided legitimation for policy actors inclined to resist engagement with local solutions. Firstly, the policy development process was a factor. Developing the policy without reference to the local community set the tone for subsequent engagement and reinforced the pre-eminence of government knowledge over local knowledge:

> *I think there were failures in consultation. There was no consultation with Aboriginal people in the development of the agreement and I think as it progressed, even with the best will in the world, they weren't fully factored in.* (INT11)

> *Well, people started talking, stakeholders were getting together. A lot of people, it all become incredibly complex because the irony was, there was so many stakeholders. And as I say, the bit that was missing was the local stakeholders.* (INT06)

As noted above, there were also a number of ways that prescriptions in the policy documents mitigated against contextualized local solutions. Firstly, mandating baseline mapping as the basis for local planning, the NPARSD legitimised policy actors who were inclined to keep the focus on the programs and services deemed to be important to government, but not necessarily the community:

> *Just because it's important to us, doesn't make it important to them.* (INT07)

*I mean housing is a great example – everyone [at the community level] wanted us to build 4 or 5 bedroom houses but Canberra wanted to reduce the price per house …* (INT05)

As well, the strong focus on outputs in the NPARSD itself reinforced the pre-existing tendency to a ticking the boxes mentality:

*Actually at a very senior level. I think to be fair, what happened was people just started thinking that's the RSD, I'll do what the National Partnership says, make sure we do everything in the national partnership and then we'll judge success on that. Which is kind of, if that's all you're going to do I think it's kind of pointless to be honest, that sort of box ticking.* (INT13)

Further, there was no definition of what was expected of policy actors in working in a place based way. Amongst participants there were two conceptions of what that might mean – coordinating programs and services more effectively within a prescribed location (consistent with the social logic of coordination) against tailoring programs and services to better meet the needs of a place. This lack of clarity in what was meant by 'place based' work, against the more clearly defined and foregrounded reporting and monitoring did not assist in developing the capability for contextualized local solutions:

*So the worker who facilitates that has to have those skills. If the only skill they've got is that they've got to get a CDEP contract or whatever it is signed or they've got to get a program on the ground, if that's their skill, then they will make sure that they get that done, but that's not a development skill. … You know, so if you're saying at the*

*end of each week, you've got to tell us how many ditches you've got on that ground, it's very hard to do community development, to do that capacity building in that environment.* (INT16)

It also potentially led to a focus on delivering LIPs rather than on the process of developing them.

A shift from program based approaches to a focus on place is in conflict with strongly held bureaucratic norms. One participant felt that the highly structured governance arrangements were in part to assist with overcoming that inertia:

*It recognised that you weren't going to change the way that things are normally done by simply asking people who were doing things at the moment to do it a bit differently. You needed some capacity within government to come together in a different way because you were doing something that was a bit counter-cultural by saying "Hey we've got to give priority to the location rather than giving priority to your remote formulas for determining who gets what, when and how" but throwing people around the table at multiple levels was probably not the best investment to advance that ...* (INT18)

Another participant recognised the challenges of managing the tension between the social logic of Ministerial responsiveness and localised solutions:

*It's delivering local solutions to local priorities but also taking into consideration more national priorities and requirements. So you can be working on delivering on local issues but you also have to keep in mind those national frameworks and targets that you have to try and meet. Making them meet. But usually they do.* (INT02)

A further participant recognized the difficulties in committing to frame reflection and simultaneously delivering:

*Hard core things, things you could see, generally were done. Governments tend to be really good at doing things like building a house, but it's the things like social engagement, social change, leadership development – they're the things governments really founder with and for instance governance capacity, leadership development – governments didn't really do that very well.* (INT04)

Applying the LCE framework allows us to see the social logics that were prominent in the tensions that played out in implementation of the NPARSD. These logics, summarised in Table 2, also help us to understand how these prescriptions in the policy documents were not helpful in managing the tensions between existing and emerging norms.

**Table 2 – Points of tension for implementing 'local contextualised solutions'**

| | **Conflicting social logic** | **Manifestation** | **Political logic** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Committing to frame reflection | Action orientation | Deliverables<br><br>Responsiveness to Minister | Accountability |
| Attaching value to different knowledges and lived experience | Command and Control | Preferencing expert over local knowledge | Capacity deficit |
| Willing to adapt approaches in response to lessons from local level | Risk aversion | Consulting with pre-determined outcomes | Accountability |
| | Action orientation | Deliverables | Evidence |

These tensions played out in the way that the flexibility afforded to ROC managers was overlaid, and in many cases, overridden, by the provision of centrally developed templates for

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the LIPs. This allowed managers to steer implementation away from local flexibility back to centralised control.

**Template driven planning**

As noted above, despite the ROCs having a high level of autonomy on paper, a template for LIPs was developed centrally. In my interviews there was reasonable acceptance by participants of the value of the template, such as the comment:

> *I think it was good – you've got to have something … generally it was pretty neat, pretty clean.* (INT15)

In fact, there was criticism that there wasn't more direction central offices as to what was expected from the regional offices, with this lack of central direction cited as one of the reasons the NPARSD didn't deliver on expectations:

> *I was really a bit taken aback that different places were developing their plans differently around Australia and there wasn't really a best practice to follow.* (INT02)

There was also strong recognition that while the template might have been intended just as a guide it was taken much more literally:

> *People weren't given, or I suppose didn't feel like they were given permission to think outside of the template. They were so well trained to answer the question that was asked rather than to be more creative.* (INT14)

A number of reasons were put forward for this, mostly around compliance. While many commented on how no-one is punished for following the rules, one participant also noted that you would be more likely to get the plan approved if you followed the template. However, some participants reflected on the implications for local solutions in having a template:

*I think it drove the bureaucracy down a particular avenue that almost isolated, it did isolate, community input... People weren't given, or I suppose didn't feel like they were given, permission to think outside the template.* (INT14)

*[the] more structured the template, the less structured the responses can be, and the expectation of a structured template leads you to other things, in terms of the way you communicate and engage with a community.* (INT17).

*You know my experience with it is quite good re engagement – everyone was willing to get involved, talk to community, listen to community views, the trouble is that it then becomes a one size fits all engagement model.* (INT15)

This appears to be reflected in the surprising consistency between the LIPs:

*It worked against a place based approach ... each community is different. Yet the implementation plans don't reflect that. It's as simple as that. And you know, you've got a community of 200 or 2000, and you'll find there's some similarities about each of them and yet you'd have to say that there should be more difference because of the*

*nature of disparities and disadvantage and demographics and location and all those things.* (INT09)

*When they really start to look and feel exactly the same, you kind of think, "Did this really come from the community – did they really all want the same things in the same order?" And so, I think, okay, being a good bureaucrat we'll follow the template but it's frustrating to know that you're expected to follow and stick to that.* (INT10)

Understanding the tensions between established and emerging social logics helps to see why this might have occurred. Having a template legitimized favouring existing social norms over the new. Thus the tension between command and control and localized solutions was pushed towards centralization:

*I think the LIPs were victims to not having the infrastructure and cultural maps done, but got caught up in the quest to do something quickly. We weren't given time to engage in a meaningful way. And so they did have this LIP and they became lists of things that government was willing to do, including the things that state governments were willing to do but with no big effort.* (INT11)

Further, combined with the social logic of action orientation, policy actors felt driven to include large numbers of actions in the LIPs:

*The template almost set up an unspoken performance measure – that the more actions you had the better. Because the bureaucracy saw it as an opportunity to list every thing that they were doing, to be able to justify their effort. The template kind of*

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*imposed that mentality of listing absolutely everything, regardless of whether they*

*were special or different or unique. It raised that RSD made important how things*

*were done, instead of thinking first how things were done. So I think it drove the*

*officers to implement certain behaviours that didn't work in the environment in the*

*community and to develop those plans – which were called <u>local</u> implementation*

*plans – that were inaccessible to the vast majority of communities that I had anything*

*to do with.* (INT14)

Thus, when pushed for time, it is easier to roll out a one-size-fits-all option, with small local variation, than to comprehensively customise to local circumstances. Including actions that are not already government priorities also takes time – not least to secure agency support and funding.

In these ways, the action of mandating the use of a template mediated what was possible in the development of localised solutions. It allowed SLB to fall back on established ways of working rather than exercising flexibility at the local level where it was required. There was no requirement within the policy documents to plan according to a template. Its inclusion was entirely due to managers exercising their discretion in specifying implementation practices for SLB on the ground.

**Conclusion**

In the introduction I noted that classic interpretations of SLB suggest that interpretation of policies sits at street level, rather than with managers, and that there is a unified "management" committed to delivering the policy objective. In contrast, this paper explored

the idea that when looking at policies directed towards introducing new ways of working, managers also interpret policies, and that this interpretation is not necessarily unified or directed towards the policy objective. In particular, it explored the idea that rather than embracing change, managerialism can lead to implementation practices which reinforce centralised control, rather than allowing the local entrepreneurism that is at the heart of SLB. In other words, I explored that "active role that some managers may have in the construction of street level discretion" (Evans, 2010, p. 148).

To do this I looked at a case study of a recent initiative in remote Indigenous Australia aimed, in part, at introducing a place based approach. I noted that, rather than presenting a uniform understanding of what this entails, senior policy actors had quite different understandings of what a place based approach might entail. One group, rooted in managerialism, felt that it would involve coordinating programs within a geographic location. The other, rooted in community development, felt that it would involve tailoring programs to better fit the needs of a place. Along with a number of requirements within the policy documents, this contributed to conditions which pushed implementation away from local flexibility towards centralised control.

Using the LCE framework, I examined the ways that the new place based way of working was in conflict with established traditions, or social logics. I then looked at the way that "management" influenced implementation practices by providing a template, thus pushing local SLB towards centralised control rather than the flexibility that was required for an effective place based solution.

As (Brodkin, 2012, p. 947) suggests, to foster conditions for SLB to occur, an "enabling" approach is needed. This requires a "deep and complex understanding of organizational behaviour" which then allows identification of the capacity building and other investments governments need to make to "facilitate quality and responsiveness in policy delivery" (947). The analysis in this paper contributes to a better understanding of "how organisational conditions affect what [policy actors] do, and as significantly, what the broader consequences of their practices might be" (2012, 948).

In my interviews I asked participants to identify one thing that they would like to change if they had a "magic wand". As it was a magic wand, that one thing could be unrealistic, so that they could nominate issues that they saw as important but did not necessarily think would change. The participants were all senior policy actors, and as such had thought about the issues they saw as standing in the way of reform. The issues that they identified provide insights into how organizational conditions affect the implementation of reform. In this paper I concentrate on those wishes that were ostensibly about changing administrative practices. Firstly, a number of participants wished for more effort to be put into developing a better understanding of key terms and of what is required:

> *I think it's a whole range of things that have to be done that weren't, well that were*
>
> *perhaps underestimated. And I think there wasn't always - and I think it's also*
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> *terminology and understanding. So what I think about engagement, is it the same way*
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> *as the federal minister or the state minister might think about engagement? Possibly*
>
> *not or possibly? And even within the bureaucracy? So you'd really need to have sat*
>
> *down and said very clearly, "This is the way you're gonna work."* (INT16)

On the surface this appears to be about social logics, however a number of participants recognised that the underlying political logic also needs to change. In particular, these wishes recognise the need for policy documents to be fully supportive of the proposed new governance reforms, rather than inadvertently authorising actors to exercise their discretion by not engaging fully with the reforms. This need for clarity around what is asked of policy actors that has been identified in most recent evaluations (see for example KPMG, 2007; Morgan Disney & Associates, 2006a, 2006b, 2007; PM&C, 2014; SGS Economics and Planning, 2007). It is interesting, particularly in light of the quite different understandings of terms like "place based" that were revealed in my interviews, that the need to define key terms – in functional not abstract terms – is something that is still not sufficiently recognized as important.

Policy actors however, recognized the need for better developed policy frameworks that support emerging logics and do not unwittingly authorize a lack of engagement with reform:

> *I think it's a whole range of things that have to be done that weren't, well that were perhaps underestimated. And I think there wasn't always - and I think it's also terminology and understanding. So what I think about engagement, is it the same way as the federal minister or the state minister might think about engagement? Possibly not or possibly? And even within the bureaucracy? So you'd really need to have sat down and said very clearly, "This is the way you're gonna work." (INT16)*

> *I mean maybe it is a breakdown in how we equipped people. This is the capability of government officials whether we basically underinvested in ensuring that they had a*

*deep understanding of what the logic was and what they couldn't, could do in terms of operationalising the thing at the ground level and at the ROC level* (INT18)

In echoes of Lea's "policy totems" (Lea, 2008), this recognises that there is an inordinate amount of faith in 'getting the policy framework right' without attention to ensuring that the framework is able to translate smoothly and unambiguously into implementation:

*To be fair, there is generally a high level approach to policy, but that sort of high level thing should never be relied upon –you've got to give yourself the time…* (INT13)

Paradoxically, without investing in building a shared understanding, the capacity of policy actors to use their discretion in interpreting the policy logic can result in a lack of engagement with the reforms that the policy is seeking to embed:

*… because otherwise what you are going to do is repeat – it's happened a few times now where we've done place based things and we haven't done that detailed work, we don't involve the communities. Unless we invest that time … it is painful but there is no point rushing to do something that isn't going to work, because we've done that so many times. That's the thing that governments – you'd actually think it would already know what to do but it doesn't! If you really did know what to do you would have done it already.* (INT13)

A further wish was the need for longer term approaches:

> *Look, I would say timeframes. I would say timeframes and I would say if I wanted to get my magic wand out, it needs to be bigger than party politics. So, it needs to be bigger than somebody wanting to hang either their party's hat on or their own hat on as a minister. That it needs to be much longer term stuff.* (INT07)

In wishing for longer timeframes or a longer term focus, all three participants who nominated this as their wish noted that it would require taking what they termed "politics" out of the mix:

> *Um I think it would have to be unfortunately our political process which means um our governments change regularly and each government wants to think it can be the one to make the difference, because that means short term expectations about things will change over a very long period of time. And that really, really puts complex policy areas under great pressure. A different political approach would just make the world of difference. I don't even know what that is but one that was able to sustain longer term approaches.* (INT08)

While participants identified this with "politics", in fact what they were talking about was overcoming the politic logic of upward accountability. Participants identified how accountability to Ministers reinforces the social logic of action orientation to the detriment of local flexibility:

> *I think one of those things is that you just don't keep changing your mind about what strategies and processes you are going to put in place – you need to stick to your plans and allow time for things to work.* (INT10)

These two "wishes" about definition of terms and a longer term focus support the premise that creating an enabling environment is critical, but not in the usual sense. Even though they are ostensibly about structural issues, a focus on the logics underpinning administrative practice points to an important aspect of the enabling environment which is generally overlooked. This is, the need to identify and document the political logics which underpin strong existing social logics that can undermine reform.

Creating an enabling environment is then about creating and nurturing political logics that serve to support (or are consistent with) contextualised local solutions, rather than legitimising the old ways of working. In particular, as identified above, nurturing a new political logic which values local knowledge to supplant that of capacity deficit will be critical. Further, as is increasingly being identified in the literature, new logics of accountability will need to be developed (see for example Bellefontain, 2011, p. 1; B. Hunter, 2007, p. 185; B. H. Hunter, 2009, p. 56; Stewart, 2009).

The analysis in this paper suggests that without effort being applied to nurturing logics supportive of reform, the way that managers use their discretion to shape implementation practices will continue to push towards the more familiar managerial methods than contextualized localized solutions.

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