The Future of Joined-up Public Services

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2020 Public Services Trust
at the RSA

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In December 2008, the Trust launched a major new **Commission on 2020 Public Services**, chaired by Sir Andrew Foster, to recommend the characteristics of a new public services settlement appropriate for the future needs and aspirations of citizens, and the best practical arrangements for its implementation.

For more information on the Trust and its Commission, please visit www.2020pst.org.

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Acknowledgements

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Introduction to this series

The Commission on 2020 Public Services is a major inquiry into how public services should respond to the significant societal challenges of the next decade. The Commission is developing a practical but compelling vision of the priorities for public action to address the emergent challenges facing society in 2020. The Commission has three aims:

1 To broaden the terms of the debate about the future of public services in the UK.
2 To articulate a positive and long-term vision for public services.
3 To build a coalition for change.

This series of essays represents a working partnership between the 2020 Commission and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). As part of our commitment to rigorous, evidence-based research, we jointly commissioned a series of experts to examine the key issues in public services. Two broad themes emerged: one considering future relationships between citizens, state and society; the other exploring the future delivery of public services.

Generous support from the ESRC has allowed the Commission to dig deep into a complex set of issues, and ensure its inquiry represents the best contemporary thinking on public services and society, with a strong evidence base.

Each paper can be read separately, and will also be available as a collected volume in the future. We believe that the research and analysis emerging from this partnership is a rich and significant contribution both to the ongoing national debate on public services and to the Commission's vision for the future. We hope that you enjoy the series, and we invite you to share your own reflections and analysis at www.2020pst.org.

Foreword

Why can't the UK government "be like Marks and Spencer or John Lewis?", Professor Patrick Dunleavy asks in this compelling essay arguing for better integrated public services.

In other words, why aren't public services easily accessible, all in one place, in a location everyone goes to on a regular basis? Why do citizens have to make several phone calls and visits to different government agencies over several days, weeks or even months to solve a problem?

This essay is the result of a major partnership between the ESRC and the 2020 Public Services Trust, in which a range of experts have thought creatively about the present and the future of public services. In it, Professor Dunleavy describes how simple and convenient public services will be for citizens in 2020 if 'digital-era governance' develops as current indications suggest.

The Commission on 2020 Public Services has argued that public services should be organised around individuals and communities. Putting citizens at the heart of public service organisation and in control of decisions that affect them can bring a myriad of benefits, including encouraging them to participate actively in co-producing outcomes from services.

Professor Dunleavy argues that the waste created by fragmented services that do not deliver outcomes is a luxury that, in the current fiscal climate, we can no longer afford. Technology can help simplify citizens' interactions with public services. Professor Dunleavy asserts that we now live in a time of 'digital-era governance', which is characterised by using technology to reintegrate services, design services around people's needs, and enable citizens to access services online. The second wave of this paradigm extends the use of 'social web' technology to enable citizens to greatly expand their real-time interactions with and inputs into public services online.

The picture of the future Professor Dunleavy paints is appealing and seems achievable given the direction of policy in June 2010. But it will take some political will and government will need to create the conditions for citizen involvement in creating joined-up services that meet their needs. It is an aim well worth the effort.

Lauren Cumming
2020 Public Services Trust, June 2010

Introduction

What lessons can we draw from current attempts at integrating public services provision in Britain or elsewhere? What are the main benefits, problems and barriers to this process inside those kinds of service provision that are organised, funded or specifically regulated by government? How else might the UK government ensure the joining-up of services in ways that are helpful to citizens (e.g. through one-stop-shops, individual budgets, etc.)? How could services be integrated in the future? Despite the prevalence of such topics in practitioner discussions for many years now,[1] since at least the White Paper on *Modernising Government* (Cabinet Office, 1999), there is actually only a small research literature that more thoughtfully discusses these issues.[2] Most of these works focus on particular services or particular client groups where problems of 'service delivery disasters' have been most acute, as with children's services (Frost, 2005; Dunleavy et al, 2010).

In this essay I want to look more broadly across all the citizen-facing public services. I also seek to locate the underlying dynamic of changes in the government sector, the fundamental drivers that shape key organisational development in the digital era. Essentially they can be summed up in a rather ugly but nonetheless powerfully descriptive word – disintermediation – which means the stripping out or slimming down or simplification of intermediaries in the process of delivering public services. Disintermediation achieves 'joining-up' by significantly and visibly reducing the complexity of the institutional landscape that citizens confront in trying to access, draw on and improve public services. A great deal of previous 'joining-up' does not qualify as disintermediation because it has been back-office in style and approach. It matters to in-the-know bureaucrats behind the scenes (and it may be quite important for how they do their jobs). But it is not obvious or meaningful to citizens, or to firms or civil society organisations, struggling to manage their connections with a complex web of government agencies.

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1 See especially NAO, 2004; Audit Commission, 2005; Ghash et al, 2008; 6, 1997; 6, stoker et al, 200xx; Richards, 2001.
2 See Pollit, 2003; Bogdanor, 2005; Hood, 2005; Catney, 2009; Davies, 2009.

The paper has three parts. First, I sketch out the nature of this web and why its current complexity creates major problems for citizens. Second, I consider the 'bottom-up' kind of joining-up (and more vaguely 'joined-up thinking') and briefly cover a newer, more holistic approach, 'Total Place', that may develop in importance. Third, I situate the need for greater disintermediation in public services against the macro-trends in the private sector for a transition to online and e-based services, and also against the rather dialectical 'centralising plus decentralising' organisational dynamic of modern information and communication technology (ICT) developments. In the public sector these two key background influences combine with the specific agenda of 'digital-era governance' to make *reintegration, needs-based holism and digitalisation* the key leitmotifs of the next decade and more of public services development.
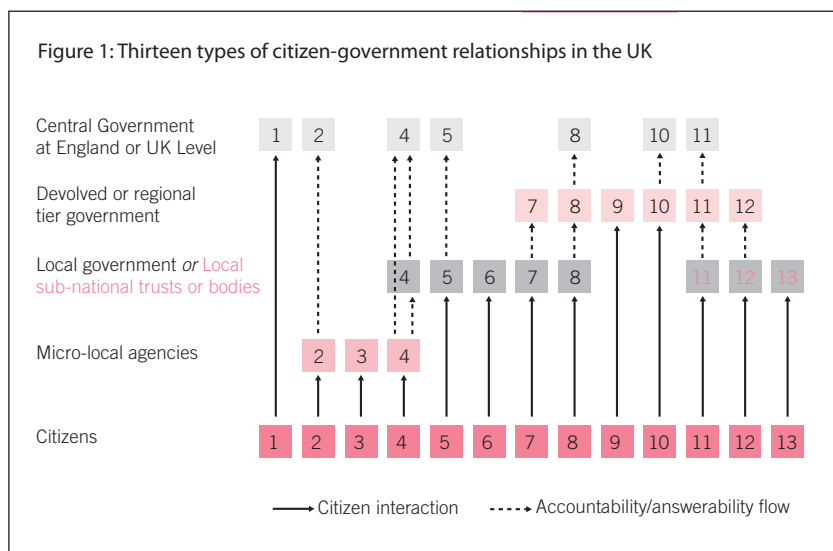
1

'What a complex web we weave' – the diversity of UK public service delivery chains

Over more than a decade, as part of my work with LSE Public Policy Group, I have sat in on a great many focus group sessions with ordinary citizens discussing issues such as how to complain about public services, how to get redress if things go wrong, how to understand government forms and information websites and how to get help if you find them hard going. Almost invariably at some point someone in the group will remark that it is a great shame that UK government cannot be like Marks and Spencer or John Lewis, with their nationally agreed and known policies about returning goods and conveniently located branches in most high streets and major shopping centres. Turning to the group facilitator (or to me if I'm sitting on the sidelines), the people who raise this issue will ask in a detailed and genuinely puzzled way, how it is that the government with all its resources cannot emulate this standard of service and accessibility? Luckily for me the ethos of focus groups is to never give any 'expert' answers but to play back the question for the group itself to solve: 'That's a good question Ed. What do other people think?' The group will normally then divide into two thirds of people who see government fragmentation and complexity as a Machiavellian ploy to deceive and confuse ordinary folk, and a third who see it as an inadvertent by-product of officials wanting their own turf and not caring over-much about issues outside their responsibility or about what their decisions mean for citizens.

Yet why is not government more like Marks and Spencer? Why can it not have an integrated outlet on every High Street or shopping centre in the places where

people want to go anyway? I am still not sure that I know any rational or easily defensible answer to these questions. One common answer is genetic – we created a system of government long ago, with organisational approaches and technologies for processing information that were the best we could do at the time. And now we have invested so heavily in these departments, agencies and local authorities that we cannot bring ourselves to disinvest or reorganise in more radical ways that might now be feasible, given modern ways of accessing, handling, storing and processing information. Another common answer (popular with top civil servants) rebuts the focus group query as naïve. This view points out that government spends 25 per cent of UK final consumption directly on goods and services (that is, leaving out of account its huge role in redistributing resources via transfer payments of various kinds). So the scale of UK government is just vastly greater than the operations of Marks and Spencer or Tesco. These responses both have something going for them. But before concluding that all is well, it seems important also to think critically about how complex and differentiated our government set up actually is. Figure 1 shows my quick sketch of how public service delivery chains are currently organised in the UK.

Figure 1: Thirteen types of citizen-government relationships in the UK

This diagram may look complex, but since we all live and work with it already, it is worth just running quickly through the thirteen different types of delivery chain.

1 *Central government services* are directly supplied by national ministries to citizens or businesses. Key examples are national taxation via Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, the social security system via the Department of Work and Pensions, or on a much smaller scale the passport system of the registration of vehicles and drivers.

2 *Mediated central government services* are funded centrally but directly implemented by micro-local agencies. The key examples are the healthcare provided by primary care trusts and NHS hospital trusts in England.

3 *Autonomous micro-local agency services* seem to be rare in the public sector because funding implies control, but local charities and NGOs operate pervasively in this model.

4 *Services implemented by micro-local agencies in a public service delivery chain* involving both central and local government supervision (less commonly, also involving state or regional governments) are most important in education, with locally managed schools in England.

5 *Local government runs services, but is very closely supervised by central government* and without any substantive local discretion. This category is actually rather rare in the UK. The operations of housing benefits by local governments for the DWP are an important example.

6 *Autonomous local government services*, that are substantively uninfluenced by the centre are also not very common. Local planning and environmental services are the best current examples, but even here planning cases can be appealed upwards.

7 *Local government services supervised by devolved governments* are important in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, whose governments supervise their local government and NHS provision. (This is the counterpart of 5 above).

8 *Local government services supervised by a public service delivery chain involving both UK and devolved or regional governments* are increasing slowly in scope, especially in London government with the key role of the Mayor and GLA and in the northern English regions with the most developed regional institutions.

9 *Autonomous devolved or regional government services* (on the pattern of the United States) are rather rare still, but the evolution of NHS and social care policies for the elderly in the UK's devolved nations is an important example.

10 *Devolved or regional government services supervised or part financed by the UK centre* (or devolved governments respectively) are standard for regional policy in Europe, but only slowly growing in the UK.

11 *Sub-national or local administrations* (usually unelected), delivering public services in a delivery chain involving both state/regional and central/federal governments applies in the UK to some larger-scale NHS services and the remaining regional development agencies in England.

12 *Services delivered by local or sub-national administrations, supervised by state or regional government* applies mainly to some schools and public corporations in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and London.

13 *Autonomously delivered services from local government* have traditionally been rather rare in the UK, but have recently seemed to increase in importance in areas like cultural policy and environmental matters, with some localities going 'beyond the basics' in what they provide for their citizens.

If this set up sounds tricky to hold in your head, bear in mind also that UK central government is split up horizontally into around 14 vertical silos, headed in each case by a department of state in Whitehall with its attendant 'departmental group' of quasi-government agencies, or with smaller-scale departmental counterparts in the devolved administrations. Of course, some of the 13 public service delivery chain patterns above apply either in England or in devolved nations (Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) and regions (i.e. only London at present). And some of the departmental silos are found only in one of the 13 chain patterns above. So we do not have anything like 13 * 14 (= 168) different patterns to deal with. And some of the 13 patterns are fairly thinly populated in the UK in terms of absorbing personnel or public expenditure numbers. But overall I would estimate that there are at least 40 different and substantively important ways of organising the inter-relations across tiers of government in most areas in the UK, each of them with their own distinctive peculiarities, institutional histories and characteristic ways of working.

The costs of this diversity are difficult to estimate. It seems undeniable that the luxuriant proliferation of public service delivery chains entails extra costs for citizens in coping with complexity, as research on citizen redress has clearly demonstrated. Compare the UK with a country like Denmark, where local governments regularly deliver three quarters of all public services by expenditure to their citizens, including social security on behalf of the central government. It seems clear that by this

comparison we are currently buying a set of 'luxury goods' in terms of the ramifying complexity of our arrangements for service provision.

Let me give an alternative for instance. In England alone we currently have 110 different local library services, and 110 different apparatuses for organising the management of library services, and dozens of different small consortia for book procurement, each involving small numbers of libraries. Yet approximately 80 per cent of the stock of public library systems is identical country-wide. If we had this set up organised in a different way, could we radically save costs and improve provision (including the local responsiveness of provision) at the same time? For instance, suppose we had a strongly contested market for providing library services with say six to ten main contractors (some publicly run and some privately run). Then local authorities would have plenty of expert suppliers to choose from, the competition between suppliers would tend to raise standards and cut costs, and the procurement costs of books could be much less. Competitive suppliers might also find much more innovative ways of combining professional staff, part-time staff and local volunteer roles than exist so far. And it is hard to believe that set up in this different way, library managements would have presided unruffled over the catastrophic 33% decline in book lending that has actually occurred in the last decade under the current local public libraries system.

2
Existing developments in joining-up public services

The picture of delivery chains and horizontal siloing above has been evident to ministers, to Parliament and to devolved administrations and local authorities for many years – hence the existence of numerous partnership arrangements between local governments, NHS bodies and other agencies like the police authorities. This apparatus of partnerships has been described elsewhere (Ghash et al, 2008; NAO, 2004; Audit Commission, 2005) and so I will not repeat that analysis here. It is worth noting, however, that in some ways the growth of partnerships has tended to add to institutional complexity in the public sector rather than necessarily to simplify it. For instance, if a local Crime Reduction Partnership embarks on a policy that has adverse consequences for citizens or businesses, the job that they face in getting redress for any harm done to them, and the political mountain they must climb in order to get policies reviewed or changed, may be more considerable than they were before in dealing with distinct, single public authorities. The 'organic' nature of different partnerships, and their variability from one area to another, also add to difficulties in attributing policies organisationally and understanding how they might be changed, not only for citizens but also for public sector decision-makers themselves. Add in the extensive role of contractors in providing social care or cultural or community services, and it is far from clear that a decade of partnering has done much to qualify as 'disintermediating' public services.

None of this is to deny that the push towards thinking about local public services in a more joined-up way has been a very valuable initiative, nor that in principle it may be possible to show that the growth of partnerships has increased the effectiveness with which local public services are delivered. Hard research evidence seems to

be rather lacking in this area, but there is a fairly broad practitioner consensus in favour of fostering greater joining-up. Given the lack of other evidence, this should certainly count in the scales in favour of partnerships having positive consequences.

A discussion of joining-up services by Professor Nick Frost (2005) provides a very helpful jumping off point for my rather different analysis below. He notes that in the highly stressed area of children's services, the push for more joining-up between local authority social services, NHS staff, the police, local schools and other bodies reflected very well-known problems, including:

"• information not being shared between agencies and concerns not being passed on. As a result children may slip through the net or receive services only when problems become severe

• a child may receive assessments from different agencies which duplicate rather than complement each other

• several professionals may be in contact with a child over time but no single person provides continuity or co-ordinates services

• several agencies spend some money on the child rather than one agency spending an appropriate amount on a co-ordinated package of support

• services may disagree about whether the child falls into their categories and may try to pass on difficult cases to other organisations

• professionals and services may be based in different locations rather than co-located

• co-location can make services more accessible to service-users and improve inter-professional relationships and ways of working

• services are planned and commissioned to focus on one particular objective – such as childcare, truancy, or family abuse. Planning services in the round can enable a better response to support the child and be better value for money. Joint commissioning can enable the creation of services that deliver multiple dividends such as Children's Centres and extended schools."

(Frost, 2005, p. 17-18).

Figure 3 below shows a modified version of a sequence that Frost argued marked the main 'stages' in the development of 'joined-up thinking'. In general I am broadly sceptical of stages models in most public management contexts, because

they often disguise the fact that two or more intermediate 'stages' can often be telescoped together or missed out entirely if a radical decision is taken to do so. For instance, stage 7 in Figure 3 below involves mergers or integrations across services, implying that these will perhaps be seen as a last resort. Yet in fact UK governments have often acted to mandate the pooling of services, and historically have more commonly backed mergers over more incremental partnerships. Equally at key junctures, a range of pathways may open up for decision-makers, between which they must make choices, often involving dilemmas. In Figure 3, for instance, I suggest that at stage 6 there are in fact three possible pathways. Nonetheless, a stages model is still useful in emphasising that new organisational practices like joining-up most characteristically will evolve incrementally at local level, rather than suddenly jumping from one level to another. So it is worth running through the modified sequence in Figure 3 here, while bearing in mind the caveats above.

Figure 3: Possible stages in the development of joined-up services

Stage 1 – free-standing services			
Stage 2 – agency co-operation			
Stage 3 – active inter-agency collaboration			
Stage 4 – basic cross-agency co-ordination achieved			
Stage 5 – equal co-ordination or partnerships			
Stage 6 Difficult next-stage, or 'something more', developments	**Stage 6a** 'lead-agency' coordination or some re-partition of roles.	**Stage 6b** Pooled budget partnerships.	**Stage 6c** Joined-up top or intermediate leadership.
Stage 7 – Mergers, take-overs or integration			

Source: This sequence draws on but is different from work by Nick Frost (2005, pp. 13-16).[3]

3 Frost (2005, pp.13-16) distinguished five levels of joining-up, as follows:
   • No joining-up - uncoordinated, free-standing services
   • Level 1 - Co-operation – services work together toward consistent goals and complementary services, while maintaining their independence
   • Level 2 - Collaboration – services plan together and address issues of overlap, duplication and gaps in service provision towards common outcomes
   • Level 3 - Co-ordination – services work together in a planned and systematic manner towards shared and agreed goals
   • Level 4 - Merger/integration – different services
   I have used his labels and some key concepts but my characterisation of the stages with the same labels is rather different from his.

Stage 1 – Free-standing services

Here provision of services is planned separately by each organisation or service-stream involved, within highly siloed professional or organisational compartments, each with their own organisational and professional culture, separate employment conditions for staff, and different legal requirements and capabilities, plus their own systems of central government targets and regulation apparatus, and distinct funding. All connections to other services in relation to areas or individual cases are treated as 'foreign affairs' by each organisation and so handled only via occasional 'diplomatic' contacts, usually at senior levels. Organisations are often indifferent to individual cases that 'fall between the cracks' of provision and no 'lead agency' allocations occur. Agencies may also 'compete' with each for 'turf', or compete to avoid handling 'no-win' problems or difficult cases. Similar processes may also occur between government agencies and third sector or NGO bodies over (valued) services. Especially where provision depends on voluntary-sector or NGOs provision, 'boutique bureaucracy' problems can occur with many small social providers each catering for a restrictive client group and hence many gaps between their provision. Multiple agencies cycle episodically and frequently through contact with 'difficult' clients' cases.

Stage 2 – Agency co-operation

The key difference here is that organisations or service-streams now recognise that their activities are complementary and acknowledge a need to fit them together in order for the coverage for clients or communities to be improved. Hence they meet regularly (and at a range of levels); know more about each others' plans, goals and programmes; and try to achieve more consistency in their provision (e.g. to synchronise timings so as to act on the same priorities at the same times or in the same areas). But progress is limited because organisations or service-streams do not significantly modify their own strong cultures, and they retain full budgetary and planning independence. Organisations may still use co-operation as a mask to 'bureau-shape' their activities by rebuffing 'difficult' clients so as to 'export' them to other bodies, or by competitively renouncing 'lead agency' status.

Stage 3 – Active inter-agency collaboration

Organisations or service-streams now formulate joined-up plans, that at least cross-refer to each other. And crucially, they make some efforts to collect information on how (joint) outcomes are being achieved. The planning stage at least systematically

seeks to identify areas of overlap and duplication in what the different service-streams do, to chart unaddressed issues or gaps in service provision, and to consider services from a customer/client/citizen perspective. Yet subsequent follow-up can be limited.

Stage 4 – Basic cross-agency co-ordination achieved

The organisations or service-streams involved agree some common or over-arching goals, which follow through from plans into implementation and even into detailed working on cases or areas. They work together in a planned and systematic way towards realising shared objectives. For example, information sharing or information-pooling begins, ICT systems start to routinely communicate, and 'front-line' staff know each others' processes and methods of working well.

Stage 5 – Co-ordination or partnerships

What changes here is that services work together in a planned and systematic manner towards shared goals that are agreed consensually. Joint committees meet regularly at senior levels and managers emphasise the need for effective joint working inside each organisation or service stream involved. Intermediate managers and front-line staff understand each others' patterns of working and organisational imperatives and make effective adjustments to foster good relations and better service delivery to clients or areas.

Stage 6 – Difficult next-stage, or 'something more', developments

Achieving further progress in deepening the joining-up of provision across departments, agencies or separate service streams is often at its most tricky here. There are at least three different main pathways that might be taken. Usually only one of these alternatives tends to be seriously explored in a given situation, often responding to the personalities of particularly dynamic or forceful local leaders.

Stage 6a – 'Lead-agency' coordination or some re-partition of roles

In different areas, one of the services is recognised by all the participating agencies as being in a better position to coordinate or plan overall provision than the others. Accordingly the 'designated lead agency' attracts more resources or power in its sphere of influence to define issues and responses, and here other agencies become more supportive or reactive in turn, downgrading their own planning and strategy effort accordingly.

Stage 6b – Pooled budgets partnerships

A budget is allocated by objective or program to a set of agencies or several service-streams, with a clear decision-maker and performance measurement. Here agencies or service-streams can only draw down a budget in response to their fulfilling agreed-upon roles against a single, effectively integrated plan of provision that is independently monitored.

Stage 6c – Joined-up top or intermediate leadership

Separate organisations or service-streams (with distinct organisational and professional cultures, employment conditions, and often funding sources) still exist. But the same individuals are appointed to head two organisations at the same area level. Alternatively, joint managers are appointed to head the most joined-up provision across two organisations. Either step takes equal co-ordination a stage further.

From one or another of these pathways it may actually be rather easier to move on to a final stage of integrating previously separated services into a single organisation.
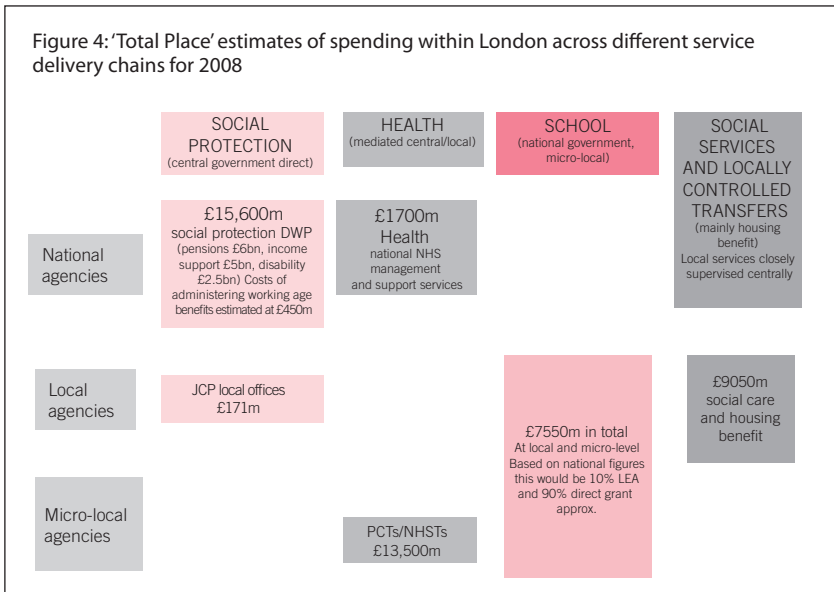
Stage 7 – Mergers, take-overs or integration

Different organisations or services are brought together to become one organisation. Budgets are fully pooled, the provision of ICT and networks are merged, staff can in principle move freely across internal sectors, and common goals and plans are defined. Over the short-term work-tasks and staff are reassigned so as to produce the most inclusive and cost-effective service attainable. Over a longer term employment conditions and skills/expertise requirements tend to be pooled, usually with a transition phase and with some ring-fenced period for existing staff to apply for new positions. As staff mix together more, and efforts at integrating organisational cultures are made, so previously separate professional and organisational cultures are broken down, stirred together and remoulded in a new and more joined-up form. Cultural change is generally greater with mergers than where one powerful organisation makes 'acquisitions' of smaller services.

Mergers tend to be 'last resort' solutions in the local level or the 'organic' development of joining-up partly because of the substantial costs and time lags involved in making mergers and acquisitions work well. At central government level, there is good evidence that frequent reorganisations have had substantial costs

(White and Dunleavy, 2010). Nonetheless, the tradition of top-down government from Whitehall means that this stage can also be directly legislated, even where the existing local-level underpinnings for mergers are not very strong.

Until 2009 the evolution of joining-up in the public services field at the practical level and in the practitioner literature has been focused on local-level developments, primarily originating with the local level top managements of one or more service streams. In this sense the process has been bottom-up and often focused on specific problems or client groups, albeit with a great deal of support, encouragement and facilitation by central government in England and devolved governments in their countries. However, it is worth noting that a much more top-down or holistic approach began to develop in some Total Place pilot areas from 2009. This approach essentially starts with trying to trace the public expenditure that flows down from the central government to distinct city or locality areas. Following the money and then correlating the finance received with the tasks actually being undertaken by local governments, NHS bodies, police authorities, quasi-government agencies and central government departments and executive agencies in each wide-local area – such as the whole of Cumbria or across London as a whole – gives a new perspective. In a sense Total Place asks decision-makers to raise their eyes from

Figure 4: 'Total Place' estimates of spending within London across different service delivery chains for 2008

	SOCIAL PROTECTION (central government direct)	HEALTH (mediated central/local)	SCHOOL (national government, micro-local)	SOCIAL SERVICES AND LOCALLY CONTROLLED TRANSFERS (mainly housing benefit) Local services closely supervised centrally
National agencies	£15,600m social protection DWP (pensions £6bn, income support £5bn, disability £2.5bn) Costs of administering working age benefits estimated at £450m	£1700m Health national NHS management and support services		
Local agencies	JCP local offices £171m		£7550m in total At local and micro-level Based on national figures this would be 10% LEA and 90% direct grant approx.	£9050m social care and housing benefit
Micro-local agencies		PCTs/NHSTs £13,500m		

the particular tree that they look after and to pay attention to wood as a whole. Now the tasks involved here are not easy ones, given the appallingly low level of development of UK public expenditure-tracking systems. Comprehensively breaking down program amounts across areas even at the government region level is hard to do, and following through in detail on who gets what, to do what, is a major piece of research. Most of the answers produced so far have been rather broad brush. For instance, Figure 4 shows a schematic representation of the Total Place outcomes found for London.

Two key outcomes seem to have followed from Total Place to date. First, categorising all the different types of public spending collated within city or locality boundaries tends to stress the surprisingly large amounts of spending amounts involved per area, and per citizen within each area. It raises issues about whether spending £n,000 millions per area (or £z,000 per head of population per year) should not really provide a more effectively integrated set of public services than are already in place. It invites us to think if we were starting with a blank slate, what could be done with the same amount of resources. Now, of course such 'What if?' questions can be easily dismissed as artificial and not constructive. We are where we are, and we perhaps cannot lightly envisage the transaction costs of moving to somewhere radically different. Nonetheless, such questions can be a spur to innovation and to more innovative thinking, outside the boxes of our current set up.

Second, the experience of taking part in Total Place appears to have convinced most of those participating in studies that there is a substantial overlap or duplication of existing services, variously estimated by participants informally at 25 to 35 per cent overlap in one or more local service streams doing the same things. Given the macro-scale of overall city or sub-region spending that Total Place also shows up, it becomes all the more urgent to think through critically how this level of overlap might be reduced by reducing the number of organisations involved, or by joining-up or more effectively integrating services. This initiative is still at an early stage, and it confronts numerous likely barriers. But it does represent an important and different stimulus for change. The coming squeeze on public spending anticipated to 2015 may also give this kind of initiative the much stronger impetus it needs to carry forward into really significant changes.

3
Digital-era governance and joining-up services

There is a third and very important stimulus for joining-up public services, which stems essentially from the huge variety of rationalisation processes in modern advanced industrial societies produced by digital information streams and the development of the internet and the world-wide web. The ability to hold and access the world's information in digital form may have looked like a utopian dream on the part of Google ten years ago, but it is now clearly an objective (or alternatively a dreaded situation, depending on your point of view) that will in some form be reached in the next decade. By 2020 then public services in the UK must be much better adapted to the advent of a digital-era than they are now.

The source of this imperative is not in any form of technological determinism. There is no impersonal 'logic' of technology that says that a particular group of organisations cannot go on running their processes within a fixed technology, while the world around them changes radically – as the Amish have successfully done in the USA. But what is socially, economically and culturally feasible for a small religious sect in a rural setting, is not going to be feasible for the public services of a modern economy and nation state. The UK is a small unit struggling to make its way in a global economy where better-endowed and innovative competitors create continuous pressures for rapid change in knowledge, innovation in business and new horizons in cultural development. The processes that will force the British state to modernise (perhaps often against the dragging resistance of its leading officials and employees across the picture) are not technological but social and economic. In a digital world we cannot afford to consume resources in doing things wastefully or less effectively or less cheaply in the public sector than it is

possible to do similar or analogous tasks in the private sector economy and in civil society.[4]

It follows from this argument, and the denial of any technological determinism, that the UK government must always behave as a very critical and expert customer in the market for IT services. The well-known history of IT disasters in the UK public sector shows that in the past this critical distance has not been achieved. In a comparison of seven leading countries we found that the UK has by far and away the highest scrap-rate for IT projects, far greater than in the USA, Canada, Australia, Netherlands, Japan and New Zealand (Dunleavy et al, 2008, Ch.3). It is crystal clear that these problems have followed from the highly uncompetitive UK market in government IT, which undoubtedly has the highest concentration rate of any of these countries. I should stress that every hopeful prospect for improving government through better online services depends on the UK government sorting out its industrial policy in this area and achieving more competitive markets and more diverse suppliers and strategies than have been used hitherto. The Conservative-Liberal Democrat government elected in May 2010 has made an encouraging start here (Fishenden, 2010).

Equally, despite the constant refrains to the contrary from IT industry lobbies and consultants, it is important to stress that simply implementing bits and pieces of digital-era technologies on their own and divorced from equally necessary organisational and service-design changes is highly unlikely to yield positive results, or indeed to be sustainable. While this approach was feasible in the initial automation of government sector business processes from the 1960s to the mid 1990s, in the last fifteen years the development of the internet means that much more far-reaching changes in organisational arrangements and policy design need to be made in order to create large-scale advances in efficiency and public services development.

One of the complicating factors here has been a widespread difficulty in understanding what the salient impacts of modern ICT changes have been in the private sector, let alone their implications for government. A powerful case has recently been made by Luis Garicano, John van Reenan and others (Bloom et al, 2009) that in fact modern ICT changes have had rather complex, indeed dialectical (that is, partially contradictory), implications for organisational arrangements in

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4 There is a rather general literature addressing some of the issues here, see: Fountain, 2001 and 2007; Brewer et al, 2006; Hood and Margetts, 2007; Mayer-Schönberger et al, 2007.

business. First, *networking effects* are centralising. The ability to collect information from more and more data points and to systematise it and analyse it in real-time in ever more sophisticated ways has tended to mean that in modern businesses increased spans of control are possible. Higher tier decision-makers can now keep tabs on more subordinates, be periodically involved in more decisions, insist on being consulted in real-time, and intervene more speedily when key performance indicators go off-trend. The consequences of such changes have been a widely noted thinning out of middle management in modern corporations, a substantial de-layering that has lead to flatter, wider hierarchies.

Yet in exactly the same period, and in an equally strong way, a second trend in ICT developments has been for modern databases to be strongly *decentralising*. Modern workers can now access far more information immediately than their predecessors, whether in services or manufacturing industries. This means that grassroots workers can now handle far more problems themselves, without appealing to superiors. The information they need on adjustments, complications, routines, special case procedures, and so on can increasingly be made available to them at the point of manufacturing or the point of service, so that they can decide issues and ways forward without having to appeal to superiors. Equally lower-tier managers can now handle a wider range of issues without asking for guidance from higher tier offices. Thus the same staff can now handle multiple problems and issues, so long as they have extended ICTs supporting them. This effect tends to strongly shift the locus of decision-making down the organisational hierarchy.
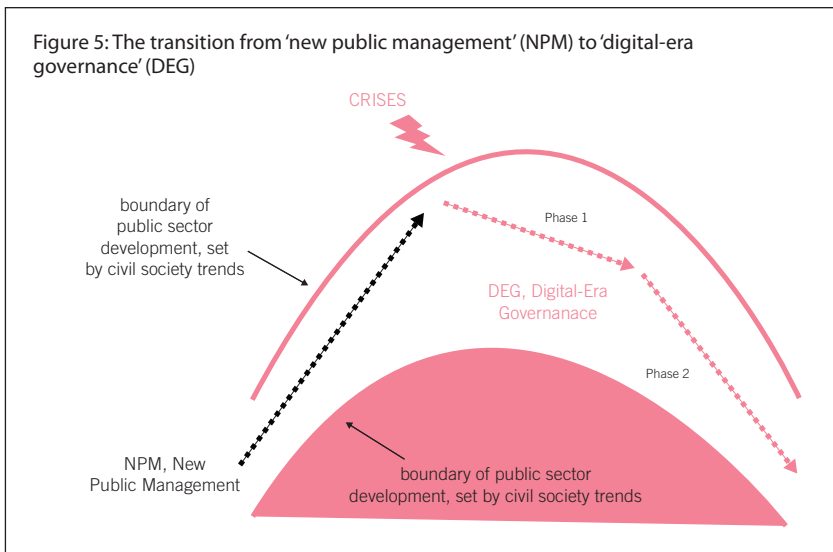
How do these macro-level trends apply then inside public services? A style or approach commonly labeled as 'new public management' (NPM) almost completely dominated UK public services development from 1985 to 2005. Along with colleagues I have previously argued that the three key components of NPM are dying on their feet (Dunleavy et al, 2006, and 2008, Chs. 4 and 9; Dunleavy, 2007). These macro-themes have each had some good effects in their day, but they have been over-developed in the UK, creating crises in many dimensions. Hence they are now intellectually dead-ends in terms of offering guidance for future changes.

The three fading themes are:

- *Disaggregation*, which fundamentally involves splitting up large bureaucracies via agencification, micro-local agencies (such as locally managed schools), more quasi-government agencies, and purchaser-provider separation.

- *Competition*, which moves away from bureaucratic monopoly providers and introduces alternative suppliers via mandatory competition, outsourcing, strategic review, quasi-markets, deinstitutionalisation, asset sales, consumer-tagged financing, and deregulation. And finally

- *Incentivisation*, which strengthens or puts in place economic or pecuniary motivations for actors or organisations to make 'the best' use of resources via privatisation, PFI schemes and Public Private Partnerships, performance-related pay, user charging, public sector dividends, and 'light touch' regulation (as in banking before the 2009 financial crisis).

Figure 5 shows that one fundamental reason why these older approaches first yielded diminishing returns and later lead to acute crises and reversals of policy was that they ceased to fit well with the macro-trends in business and the wider society towards digital era processes.

Figure 5: The transition from 'new public management' (NPM) to 'digital-era governance' (DEG)

Instead I have argued (with colleagues) that a radically new paradigm of public sector development has emerged, one which focuses on three very different themes and ones that are in many ways orthogonal to those of NPM (Dunleavy et al, 2006 and 2008). In particular the first wave of digital-era governance (DEG$_1$) focused essentially on:

- *Reintegration*, which reverses the fragmentation of NPM by joining-up and trying to de-silo processes, by partnership working, by 're-governmentalising' issues that must inherently be handled by the state, by creating new central government processes to do things once instead of many times, by squeezing process costs, by using shared services to drive out NPM's duplicate organisational hierarchies, and by trying to achieve radical simplification of services organisation and policies.

- *Needs-based Holism* is a thoroughgoing attempt to create client-focused structures for departments and agencies, to implement end-to-end redesign of services from a client perspective, to put in place one-stop processes (whether windows, or e-windows, or fully integrated one-stop shops), and to create agile (not fragile) government structures that can respond in real-time to problems, instead of catching up with them only after long lags. And finally:

- *Digitalisation* covers the thoroughgoing adaptation of the public sector to completely embrace and imbed electronic delivery at the heart of the government business model, wherever possible - for instance by adopting centralised online procurement, or new forms of automation focused on 'zero touch technologies that do not require human intervention. Digitalisation also is a key stimulus behind radical disintermediation, the effort to strip out layers of redundant or non-value-adding processes and bureaucracies from service delivery. As in private services, this will partly involve making (able) citizens do more, developing isocratic administration (or 'do-it-yourself' government), and a transition to full open-book governance instead of previously very limited or partial 'freedom of information' regimes.

As Figure 5 also shows schematically, the first phase of digital-era governance (DEG_1) has quickly moved even further away from its anti-NPM beginnings. A new phase (DEG_2) has developed in response to the steepening changes in societal trajectories made possible by so-called 'Web 2.0' developments towards social networking, 'cloud computing' and very rich forms of media-handling. Instead of the text-based systems that predominated in Web 1.0, and that still completely dominate all forms of UK government online provision, the DEG_2 phase adds a new impetus towards the use of more advanced and real-time digital technologies, 'rich' media and social networking approaches. It also stresses the co-production of public services with citizens' active involvement embedded in many different forms. The key problem here is that this active involvement is much better evoked at local level, and is hard to reconcile with the UK government's highly centralised strategy

(Dunleavy et al, 2007) and the general under-development of online services at regional and local levels, compared with central government agencies (Dunleavy, et al, 2009).[5]

In case this all seems too abstract or vague, in Figures 6 and 7 I have summarised first some very clear-cut examples of DEG processes already in being in UK government as at June 2010 and second some developments that seem likely in the next decade. The organising frame of both Figures is similar, with the vertical columns distinguishing between broadly centralising and decentralising changes (as spelt out above), and the horizontal rows grouping together developments under the reintegration, needs-based holism and digitalisation themes.

Figure 6: Already apparent public service trends and changes matching 'digital-era governance' predictions

DEG Themes	NETWORK EFFECTS – CENTRALISING	DATABASE EFFECTS – DECENTRALISING
Reintegration	• www.direct.gov.uk – an effort to create a one-stop online supersite • Regulatory integration in the Care Quality Commission (across NHS and social care); or between the Bank of England and Financial Service Agency (over banking regulation) • The children's database planned by Labour ministers (which may not now happen)	• Myriad Partnerships • 'Total Place', the effort to at least map how much public spending flows via what delivery chain into each city or sub-region, and if possible to deploy resources more effectively • Single 'point of service' schemes, such as that run by Kent County Council • Sharing chief executives or core services
Needs-based holism	• Benefits pooling and co triggering (e.g by pensioner Services in DWP) • 'Tell Us Once' – an effort to stop duplicating government's demands on citizens for the same basic information about them	• Personal care budgets • Core packages integration, e.g. further joining-up in children's protection • 'Personalised services' provision in state schools and the NHS
Digitalisation	• Shift to transacting with government online. In 2009-10 HMRC received 74% of income tax self-assessment forms online. Meanwhile in 2008 only 1% of DWP's customer contacts took place online • Integrated NHS patient care records, useable across the UK • Immigration databases	• The planned development of the NHS Choices website • The continued development of risk--based administration across many 'regulatory' public services

5 Aspects of the problems of lagging development in local online services are covered by OECD, 2007; Timonen et al, 2003; Torres et al, 2006; and Verboest et al, 2007.

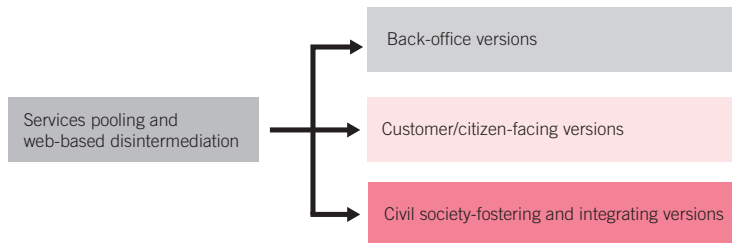Figure 7: Probable 2020 developments in public services delivery systems

DEG Themes	NETWORK EFFECTS – CENTRALISING	DATABASE EFFECTS – DECENTRALISING
Reintegration	• 'Government cloud' set up for all government IT, so that only the very largest IT-using departments (HMRC and DWP) plus MOD (which has separate IT needs from civil government) run their own self-contained IT in central government • Cabinet of 12-15 members only, with no more than 50 UK ministers in all, and more fluid directorate structures replacing some departments • Unitary ombudsman/ redress system regionally, with a national collegium of ombudsmen handling overall issues	• Shifts to a unitary local service provider, covering council services, health, police • One-Stop Window or One-Stop Shop provision covering all government services at all levels, online and locally
Needs-based holism	• Single citizen account with government, integrated to PAYE and direct debits, and probably all run via the banking system (and not via employers as at present for PAYE) • Pooled service alternatives with central departments and local authorities choosing to contract with 6-10 competing alternative providers (some public and some private, possibly with some co-operatives also)	• Extended personal care budgets • 'Treatment circles' for all frail, elderly, disabled and long-term ill people. Circles integrate family, friends, NGOs, state carers and professionals
Digitalisation	• Online transactions at 95% for tax, and 80% for DWP • 'Intelligent' systems services assist citizens and businesses to be fully compliant with tax and regulatory requirements • NHS and social care safety systems help prevent service delivery disasters • Central government focuses on being an 'intelligent centre' using high quality analytics to best influence local provision	• Universal customer feedback online • Real-time, citizen activated public responses and redress systems to warn of and prevent 'service delivery disasters' from occurring

In Figure 6 there is an impressive battery of innovative changes. As I write (in June 2010) it seems likely that the new coalition government's initial impetus to delay or

halt older Labour plans for ICT developments in the public sector will produce a bit of hiatus in some of these schemes. But delaying government ICT and reorganisation developments is rarely sustainable in the long-run. Standing still may artificially squeeze up government productivity levels for a couple of years of acute fiscal stress. But longer-run and more sustainable progress requires innovation, indeed constant, serial innovation – which in modern conditions means more DEG_2-type changes, compared to the still NPM-influenced DEG_1 changes of the previous Blair and Brown governments. So not all the elements in Figure 6 may continue without changing direction – nor is it essential for the digital-era governance thesis that they do so. Yet the vast majority of these changes seem likely to stay in place and to be irreversible.

Turning to Figure 7 this is a frankly speculative effort at thinking through what might be different in the UK public sector by 2020 if the digital-era governance thesis about the direction and accelerating pace of changes is right. Like all futurology it requires the usual strong health warnings about the past poor record of the social sciences (and indeed everyone else) in getting new developments into correct focus. Nonetheless the main directions of travel seem likely to be sustained – in particular towards a UK or England government that serves primarily as an 'intelligent centre' for the public sector as a whole, influencing delivery primarily through excellent information rather than seeking to compel adherence to targets or to micro-manage delivery from afar. The centre should also have slimmed down into fewer fixed departments and with more fluid directorate structures merging, such as those used in EU governance or now inside the Scottish Executive. All public services that can do will also have moved decisively online, so that the organisation of some major departments like HMRC or DWP will have 'become their website' and will relate to all their customers predominantly via digital means.

Figure 8: Forms of joining-up

Services pooling and web-based disintermediation → Back-office versions

Customer/citizen-facing versions

Civil society-fostering and integrating versions

At the grassroots level, public service delivery should be radically pooled into far fewer and more unified (rather than just joined-up) delivery organisations, creating a radically simpler institutional landscape for citizens, businesses and civil society bodies to negotiate. Figure 8 suggests that in addition to the back-office modes of integration that have predominated up to now, the locus of joining-up is likely to shift towards first customer-focused radical disintermediation – essentially taking out more of the intermediate layers of public services delivery chains detailed in Figure 1 above. A second wave of new-style 'joining-up' is likely to blur some of the public sector – civil society boundaries, a theme prominent in the Conservatives 2010 election campaign under the 'big society' label (see also Blond, 2010). Although at a macro-level this idea may seem weak or non-credible, at a micro-level there is a considerable potential in forms of integration that try to re-wire or re-connect civil society systems with government involvement and participation. For instance, one could envisage that the frail elderly, and mentally or physically handicapped people with severe care problems, could be cared for more effectively with networks that bring together family members, professionals in health and social care services and other providers (such as NGOs) in real-time digitally connected networks, with flexibly assignable budgets and strategies, and many more different kinds of resources than any one caring organisation currently disposes of. Or we could connect prisoners in jails back to their families, past employers, lawyers and health professionals via closely regulated forms of digital communication. The central aim here would be to bring down the UK's currently very high recidivism rate (around 64 per cent) to the levels achievable in some other countries (maybe as low as 50 per cent) by ending the over-isolation of prisoners from all their social networks. Currently, sending someone to jail is a hugely disruptive step which typically pushes them further towards dependence upon criminal activities to survive when they are released from prison. The trick here would be to contingently re-connect prisoners with their lives, so that they could more easily resume family life and gainful employment on their release.

Conclusions

The agenda for joining-up public services from now to 2020 is a large one. Essentially it seems doubtful if the UK as a country can any longer afford to fund and sustain an overly complex architecture of services provision that was already tangled in the early 1980s and was made far worse by the whole new public management episode from 1985 to 2005. A great deal of experience has been rather slowly and painfully acquired by local agencies, local managers, professional staffs and grassroots workers in the last ten years in working in partnerships and developing 'joined-up thinking' about how to provide citizens with better and more effective public services. These innovations provide an extensive seed-bed of learning and new forms of understanding that break out of previous heavily siloed approaches.

Yet the future will in all probability require far more extensive and more radically thought-through changes, in particular focusing squarely on achieving in the public sector some of the positive 'disintermediation' experiences of digital-era changes in the private sector – and incidentally also avoiding any recurrence of the many negative 'big IT' experiences in the 1985-2005 period. The digital-era governance argument predicts that the direction of travel will be towards more reintegration, more needs-based holism and co-production with citizens and civil society, and towards radically digitalised modes of citizen-government contacting and ways of organising internal government sector processes. So far the digital wave has only lapped against some of the roughest edges of public services. It has a great deal of momentum still to run in helping to simplify the landscape of public services in which citizens and businesses operate, and in which government officials and politicians themselves try to understand and positively shape societal development.

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