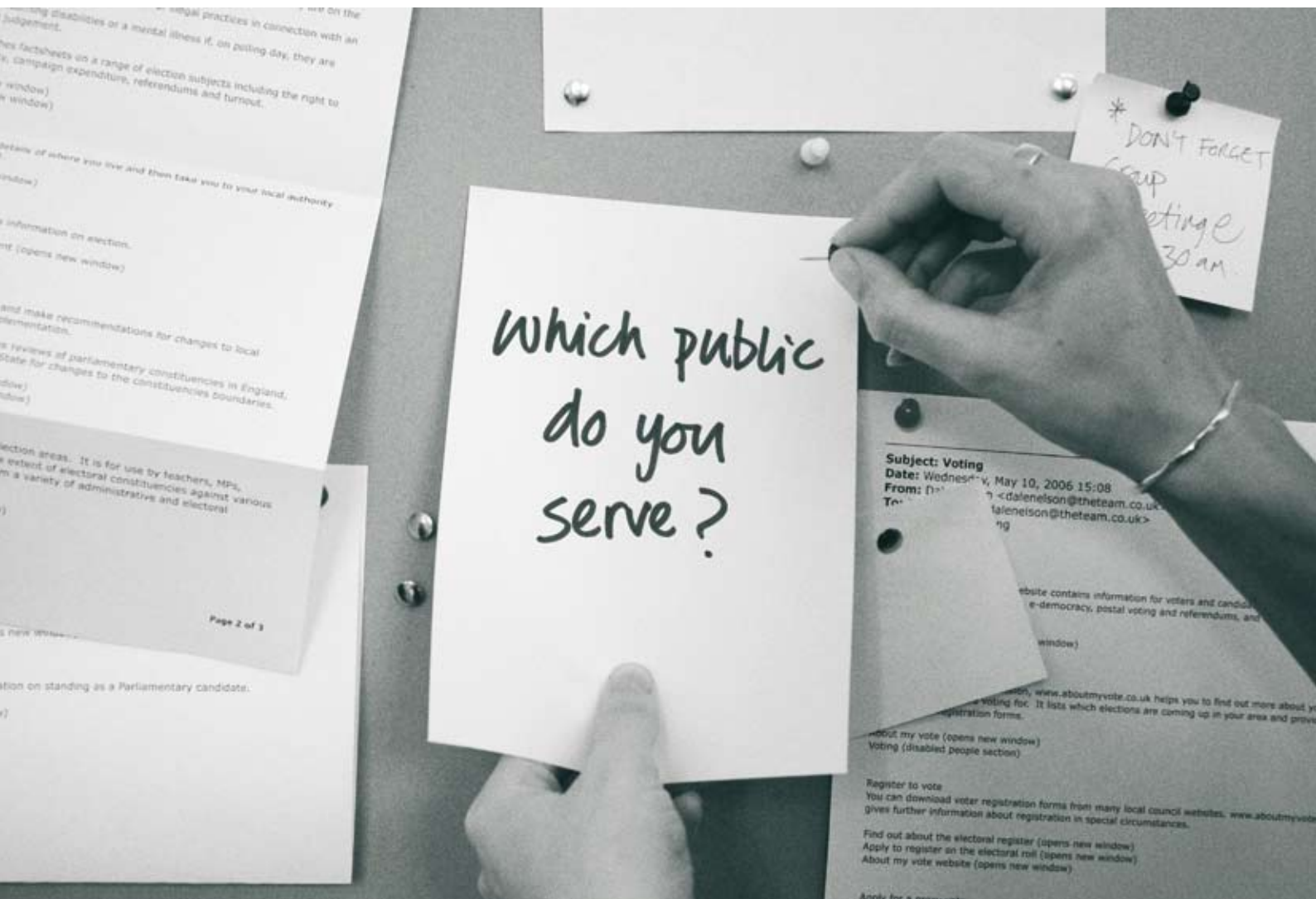


# How Politics Works: Understanding the New Realities of the Political Process in Public Management



Francesca Gains and Gerry Stoker for The Work Foundation – April 2008



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The concept of public value is attractive and captures an important truth about the purpose of public service programmes: citizens accept and support public administration and services because they add value to their lives as citizens and more generally to society as a whole. Mark Moore<sup>1</sup>, the originator of the concept, argues that the ability of a public organisation to achieve public value is determined by a combination of its operational capacity and its effectiveness in achieving legitimacy and support through its authorizing environment. So, on the one hand, managers pursuing public value should be concerned about achieving the right structure, finances, staffing and information management in their organisations and systems since these are all key ingredients in ensuring their operational capacity. But we think, like Mark Moore, that it is equally important for managers to devote time and attention to understanding the political environment in which they are operating as that will have a major impact on their achievement of public value.

The original formulation of public value in Mark Moore's work contained a rather underdeveloped idea of the role of politics in public management. Moore does suggest that politics needs to be embraced more fully in public management. But the impact of this insight is lessened by the unclear idea of politics that surrounds the public value literature. The concept of politics embedded in Moore's work and in subsequent articulations of public value<sup>2</sup> leaves us with an under-developed conception of politics and therefore an unclear understanding of what the challenges involved in embracing politics might be. The key problem lies in the tendency for writing from a management tradition to view politics as either an irritating obstacle that has to be by-passed in some way or alternatively as a rather grand statesman-like activity in which the public interest is discerned through discourse combined with effective leadership. The former view is too coarsely cynical and the latter edges towards naivety. This argument is elaborated in the first section of the paper.

The second section of our paper develops the case for recognising the role of politics in public management by highlighting how, over the last two decades, the practices of management and politics in the UK at least, have become more intertwined rather than less so. Despite the influence of New Public Management thinking that tried, in many respects, to push politics out of management, the two have become more awkwardly and complicatedly combined. This section identifies how the coming together of management and politics creates a confusion of roles, practices and responsibilities.

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Moore, *Creating Public Value*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995

<sup>2</sup> See on this point Rod Rhodes and John Wanna, 'Bringing the Politics Back In' in John Benington and Mark Moore (Eds.), *In Search of Public Value: Beyond Private Choice*. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave-Macmillan

The third section explores how, in response to concerns about a lack of trust in politics, reform plans and developments in public administration have tried to deny the role of politics and place faith in the role of independent, well-intentioned experts. We show how in the practice and discourse about partnership working and in the preference for free-standing agencies, commissions and committees governments have been attempting to respond to new challenges by putting politics to one-side and handing power over to organisations whose legitimacy and accountability appears to rest on nothing more than their expertise.

Section four makes our argument for bringing politics back in. But our understanding of the positive role of politics does not fall into the trap of offering naïve or utopian hopes of what politics can achieve. We want managers to have a realistic understanding of politics and recognise its pitfalls and difficulties. The crucial challenge is to develop a critical rather than a cynical appraisal of the way politics plays into the achievement of public value and what this means for politicians, managers and stakeholders.

‘What to do’ is the focus of attention in the final section of the paper. The growing intensity of the relationship between public management and politics today demands a better articulation of the representative/participative divide in democratic politics. It also requires that managers and politicians develop an understanding of the art of metagovernance. It obliges us to have a more open expression of the rules of engagement when a complex mix of politicians, bureaucrats, stakeholders and citizens all insist on the right to contribute to defining what public value is or is not. Above all it requires a greater reflexivity from all players in the political game of determining public value.

Moore's conception of politics is mixed. On the one hand he is a realist and takes to heart the idea that politics is an inescapable part of the world of public managers. What managers achieve and the success of their organisations can not usually be measured in a straightforward way by reference to profit or rate of return. The goals and ambitions of public organisations are often more general and less susceptible to one universally accepted measure. Therefore the debate over success is itself a political one in which different voices make their pitch and a judgement is reached about what is and is not an acceptable performance or set of outcomes. The political environment can be seen as a threat or as something that needs to be managed. Political mandates can be fickle, unclear and uncertain and a manager needs to be careful not to end up on the wrong side of a political backlash against what they have done or propose to do. So when management specialists talk about politics it is often in terms of something to be wary of or something that you should try and work your way around. The smart manager is the one who can out-fox the foxes and keep the politicians off their tail so that they can get on and do their job. The even smarter manager is the one who has the politicians eating out of his or her hand.

This line of thought leads Moore on to a depiction of the manager as a leader of the political process. Yet adopting this viewpoint entails advocating a politics of high idealism and benign intent. Managers are there to encourage 'the capacity of the political process to establish' and 'articulate collective aspiration' as the most 'appropriate guide to public action'<sup>3</sup>. The overall impression of Moore's book is that politics, in practice, is often grubby, short-sighted and not much to be admired but managers have to live with it and in the hands of managers it can become a tool for identifying societal goals.

But as Rhodes and Wanna argue there is a certain naivety embedded in the conception of politics offered by Moore and accounts of politics in the management literature more generally.

*The growing public value literature assumes a somewhat naive 'common-weal' view of politics and governance. The roads to public value are apparently only paved with good intentions. Actors such as governments, public organisations and interest groups are assumed to want to do good things. They are viewed through a prism whereby they seek to assist and please citizens, to be motivated by notions of creating public value and improving the public good<sup>4</sup>.*

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<sup>3</sup> Moore, *Creating Public Value*, p36

<sup>4</sup> Rhodes and Wanna, 'Bringing the Politics Back In'

Crucially, public management is as much about control as it is about achieving customer satisfaction. It is about ensuring the rules are obeyed, rationing scarce resources and regulating citizen behaviour. Moreover, outcomes in the political process are not always 'win-win' situations, as Moore tends to suggest, but rather reflect power imbalances and political conflict.

We accept the need for a realistic understanding of politics in public management but argue that achieving public value requires a more positive approach to and engagement with politics by managers. We think that politics delivers something to public value that no amount of operational capacity, performance measures and target proficiency can deliver. Politics, as noted above, determines public value but not just in the form of an authorising environment, it can provide the dynamic for discovering public value and enhancing the prospects for achieving public value. Understanding and engaging with politics enhances the potential for creativity and innovation in public services.

The underlying philosophy of public managers (whether politicians or officials) should be to create public value. The issue that needs to be addressed is whether the public intervention which they are directing is achieving positive social and economic outcomes. Providing services is no longer a sufficient justification for state intervention funded by citizens – whether those services are provided directly or commissioned. The question that has to be answered is does the service advance valued social or economic outcomes? Does it deliver public value? And that judgement itself can only be made in the context of political debate and deliberation. To know whether public value is delivered requires a political engagement and an exchange between the relevant stakeholders and government officials at all stages in the policy process.

The concept of public value developed by Mark Moore during the 1990s clearly resonates with public managers and political commissioners in many countries<sup>5</sup>. The public value framework reflects a desire to move on from a sterile debate between dichotomous views of public bureaucracy as either passive and responsive, as in a hierarchical commissioning environment, or self interested, and therefore in need of quasi market disciplines to ensure efficient delivery. In short, when it emerged the concept of public value enabled managers to think and speak again about the public purposes of their organisations and aided recognition of the distinctiveness of managing in the public domain.

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<sup>5</sup> Sir Gus O'Donnell, '90 Years on – Influence and Capability at the Heart of Government', Whitehall Conference speech, 25 January, 2007 accessed from [http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/about\\_the\\_cabinet\\_office/speeches.aspx](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/about_the_cabinet_office/speeches.aspx) (6 November 2007)

The problem we have with Mark Moore's argument is not its advocacy of politics as a means to pursue public value but in its conceptualisation of the nature of politics and its practice. We need to enter into our understanding of politics with a more grounded understanding of the dynamic of power and conflict that drives it. More than that, we argue that the original idea of 'public value' was conceived in an American context in what we argue was a less troubled and challenging public service arena. The concept has developed a long way over the last decade, via work in the UK and elsewhere. Our case is that the public value challenge has been made more complex by developments in the set of relationships between politicians, managers and citizens. The next section of this paper examines these key developments and argues that public value processes will require in the future a more subtle and varied repertoire of political dynamics.

## Developments in the political context in which public value operates

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We argue that changes in our systems of governance have led to a greater intertwining of the worlds of politics and management in the last two decades and that as a result recognising the politics of public value is becoming a more significant concern for managers. New Public Management aimed to confine the role of politics to determining initial input into the system of management and to judging performance. Politicians' tasks were to set the targets; managers aimed to deliver the services and then were judged accordingly. Yet with the public value paradigm, politics becomes the process that breathes life into the whole system. This conception of politics is, however, broader than party politics; it refers to the dynamic of how collective decisions are made. Public value puts politics at centre stage and as such, we think it recognises a key feature of the way the world of modern public management has developed.

However we hold the view that the public value debate needs to better acknowledge the contemporary governance context within which public goods are conceived, commissioned, delivered and experienced. We argue that the ability of public managers to anchor, or broker, a conversation between citizens and politicians in order to ensure efficient, appropriate and innovatory public service provision is taking place in a more complicated delivery environment. We identify the four main developments below: pluralism of policy advice, overlapping accountabilities, greater pressure to deliver and complex patterns of vertical integration in governance.

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### **Increasing pluralism of policy advice and initiative**

Debates around the creation of public value have sensitised public managers to the complexities of capturing 'voice' in public services and highlighted the necessity for public managers to facilitate better and more frequent citizen access to the policy making and authorising environment. However, relying too heavily on the public manager to fulfil this role in the dynamic does not acknowledge that in the current authorising environment, policy advice comes from a variety of sources. In comparison to the relationship that existed between politicians and civil servants ten or fifteen years ago, there is now a more complex set of sources that politicians can draw upon for advice when forming policy<sup>6</sup>. Policy advice no longer necessarily originates from the bureaucracy that the politician sits at the head of and may come from special advisors inside the system, think tanks and other external sources.

In part, this pluralism reflects a deliberate attempt during the Thatcher era to separate political from operational decisions by creating arms length agencies. Although executive agencies remained part of the civil service answerable to ministers, the creation of separate delivery

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<sup>6</sup> Sir Andrew Turnbull's valedictory lecture, 27 July 2005, accessed <http://politics.guardian.co.uk/whitehall/story/0,9061,1537060,00.html> 6 November 2007; C D Foster, 2001, 'The Civil Service Under Stress: The Fall in Civil Service Power and Authority', *Public Administration*, 79, (3). Pp725 – 749

structures created tension in the policy environment, with competing sources of policy advice becoming available and a loss of input on managerial matters at the policy core<sup>7</sup>. Outside the formal remit of direct ministerial control, thousands of non departmental public bodies, public corporations and other quangos operate at the national, devolved, regional and local government levels providing advice, delivering services and running tribunals<sup>8</sup>. Non departmental public bodies (NDPBs) have been created often with the specific intention of removing decision making from the political arena, bodies like the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Foods Standards Agency (FSA). Some of these bodies hold public meetings and publish annual reports, many do not and yet the accountability relationship with ministers is distant. Whilst quangos have long been a feature of the political environment and on paper the number of NDPBs has fallen, the distributed nature of governance involving arms length bodies has increased, with just over a one third of government expenditure administered through executive NDPBs<sup>9</sup>.

The increasing diversity in the sources of policy advice partly reflects a desire to draw in to the core advice from beyond public servants. Just as large numbers of civil and public servants are operating in bureaucracies at arms length to ministers, there has been a growth of the sources of advice from non civil servants. Although Royal Commissions have long been a feature of government, New Labour have increased the usage of a variety of task forces to draw in outside advice into government thinking<sup>10</sup>. Ministers frequently look to independent think tanks and policy research units for a range of options. Special advisers have been a feature in Whitehall since the early 1970s. Their numbers have grown steadily and currently stand at 81. Although this is a relatively small number compared to the numbers of politically appointed advisers in other countries, or the over 3,000 members of the senior civil service, their impact has been noticeable<sup>11</sup>. Most Whitehall insiders know that winning Ministers over requires working through and with their special advisers<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> F Gains, 2003. 'Executive Agencies in Government: The Impact of Bureaucratic Networks on Policy Outcomes' *Journal of Public Policy*, 23 1 p 55 – 79; Gains, F. 2003 'Surveying the Landscape of Modernisation: Executive Agencies under New Labour', *Public Policy and Administration* 18 (2) p. 4-20

<sup>8</sup> Public Administration Committee, HC 367, Mapping the Quango State, 5<sup>th</sup> Report, 2000 – 2001

<sup>9</sup> Flinders, M. 2004. 'Distributed Public Governance in Britain', *Public Administration*, 82 (4), pp 883 – 909

<sup>10</sup> Foster, 2001, 'The Civil Service Under Stress: The Fall in Civil Service Power and Authority', *Public Administration*, 79, (3). Pp725 – 749

<sup>11</sup> Sir Richard Wilson, 2003. 'Portrait of a Profession Revisited', *Public Administration*, 81 (2) pp365 – 378; Public Administration Committee, 2001. HC 463 Third Report, special Advisers: Boon or Bane: The Government Response to the Committee's Fourth Report of Session 2000-01, Stationary Office London; Committee for Standards in Public Life, 2003. Cm 5775 Defining the Boundaries Within the Executive: Ministers, Special Advisers and the Permanent Civil Service, 9<sup>th</sup> Report, Stationary Office London

<sup>12</sup> Sir Andrew Turnbull's valedictory lecture, 27 July 2005, accessed <http://politics.guardian.co.uk/whitehall/story/0,9061,1537060,00.html> 6 November 2007

In local government there has been a similar change in the governance landscape. Where once chief officers in a locality advised the appropriate committee chair, drawing on a professionalised knowledge base and with a monopoly of provision in the field, currently local government officers will work to a small group of decision makers in a cabinet, are answerable to non executive councillors scrutinising service provision both internally and externally, and must broker with a range of partnership agencies in the public, private and not for profit sectors<sup>13</sup>. The professional knowledge base of local government professionals is eroded and replaced by management skills in negotiating, commissioning and brokering<sup>14</sup>.

The consequence of this pluralism in the sources of policy advice for managers in the public sector is three fold. First, managers may not be the source of policy advice. Second, managers may even be competing with other sources of policy advice for politicians' attention. And thirdly, as a consequence managers may not always own the policies they are being exercised to see through to effective implementation.

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**The challenge  
of multiple  
accountabilities**

In the classic Weberian idea of bureaucracy, public servants are situated in a hierarchy of decreasing spans of control headed at the apex by an elected politician. This pyramid ensures oversight of the activities of public servants at all stages in the process of delivering public services and a mechanism for responsiveness to the electorate through the political mandate. In this model the citizen is sovereign, with the political principal directing the activities of bureaucratic agents and accountability mediated through the electoral mandate of the political principal. This is the normative model which underpins the UK's parliamentary democracy and is reflected in the departmental structures of Whitehall and the conventions for ministerial responsibility to parliament<sup>15</sup>.

The public value approach suggests that public managers need not be so passive; that they can supplement and enhance the link between citizen and delivery within a context of continued accountability to the political principal and awareness of the wider authorising environment. Here the broad thrust of public value discussions focuses on how to marry the tensions of more direct and participative democratic engagement alongside the representative mandate which underpins the Westminster model. We highlight, however, that the debate must acknowledge that the accountability frameworks within which public service delivery is nested are growing

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<sup>13</sup> Stoker, G, Gains, F, John P, Greasley, S and Rao, N. 2007 *The New Council Constitutions* [www.elgnce.org.uk](http://www.elgnce.org.uk) and DCLG London

<sup>14</sup> SOLACE, 2005, '*Leadership United: Managing in a Political Environment*', London

<sup>15</sup> Public Administration Committee, 2007. HC122 Third Report, Politics and Administration: Ministers and Civil Servants, Stationary Office London

ever more complicated and operating in a fragmented system where political principles are more distant from decision making and the point of delivery.

Operating under a policy and resources framework, contract or legal mandate, huge rafts of delivery are undertaken by arms length agencies and not for profit organisations, whilst the policy formation responsibilities of departments and ministers are separated from these delivery agencies and independent bodies. When the Next Steps agencies were established, for example, there were attempts at formally clarifying spheres of responsibility by separating accountability for policy making from accountability for operations by allowing the Next Steps agency chief executives to respond directly to parliamentary questions. However, this led to concerns of an 'accountability' gap as parliamentarians were unable to scrutinise agency staff directly. Politicians were accused of scapegoating agency staff for mistakes whilst simultaneously interfering in the day to day running of agencies<sup>16</sup>. On coming to office New Labour were keen to reassert ministerial responsibility for executive agencies and yet the constitutional picture looks increasingly fragmented as a result of devolution, the pluralisation of policy advice, privatisation and contractorisation<sup>17</sup>. The difficulty of separating policy from operations continues to cause confusion, for example, between the authority of NICE and the Secretary of State for Health over issues of postcode lotteries and drug purchasing policies in the health arena.

Although the Weberian model for accountability is stylised it still informs the Westminster model espoused by most UK Ministers and their senior civil servants and is unchallenged even by the quite extensive constitutional developments seen so far in the New Labour era<sup>18</sup>. Indeed, New Labour has sought to maintain and strengthen aspects of this hierarchical accountability. Yet although notionally Ministers still remain directly accountable to parliament, this relationship is less clear cut because managers have their own, overlapping accountabilities. Some even argue that it is no longer clear what politicians are accountable for except their personal behaviour<sup>19</sup>. The dynamic of the relationship between politicians and managers has changed.

Managers have professional, financial, managerial and legalistic accountabilities of their own to think about. We highlight the impact of increased information, media scrutiny, and of a performance management system driven by targets below. Although overall it is undoubtedly

<sup>16</sup> Lewis, D. 1997. *Hidden Agendas*. England: Hamish Hamilton Ltd; Public Administration Committee, 2005. HC 853, Second Special Report, Ministerial Accountability and Parliamentary Questions, Stationary Office London

<sup>17</sup> Gains, F. 2003 'Surveying the Landscape of Modernisation: Executive Agencies under New Labour', *Public Policy and Administration* 18 (2) p 4 – 20; Flinders, M. 2002, 'Governance in Whitehall', *Public Administration*, 80 (1), pp 51 – 75.

<sup>18</sup> Richards, D and Smith, M J. 2004 'Interpreting The World Of Political Elites: *Public Administration* Vol.82 (4)

<sup>19</sup> Woodhouse, D. 2004. Ministerial Responsibility: the tale of two resignations, *Public Administration*, 82 (1)

the case that the provision of information via technological advances and audit and performance management systems has vastly improved, scrutiny of decision making remains weak at national and local level<sup>20</sup>. The lines of accountability remain blurred and now perhaps more uncertain and confusing to citizens than in the past.

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### The speed and intensity of delivery pressure

The same technological advances which have improved access to information and increased the accountability of public services can also place intense pressure on public managers to manage demand and expectations. As Tony Blair (then Prime Minister) stated in a speech on civil service reform: 'Consumer expectations of Government services as well as others are rising remorselessly. People no longer take what is given them and are grateful. They want services that are responsive to their needs and wishes'<sup>21</sup>.

Public managers and politicians are operating in a delivery environment where there is increasing public pressure not only to get delivery right but rapid media scrutiny when problems arise. The growing importance of media scrutiny was noted by one Whitehall insider in the mid 1990s, before the growth of 24 hour news media coverage and the diversification of media outlets over the last few years had intensified that pressure<sup>22</sup>. With the rise of 24 hour media news, the rapid exchange of information facilitated by the internet and the emergence of social networking sites, the policy process has rapidly become open to exposure and the pace of public management has increased<sup>23</sup>. This pressure was described recently by the Permanent Secretary at the Home Office Sir David Normington; 'you're trying to put things right and every day there is a new angle being put to you, seeing yourself in the headline day after day, a sense of the issue running away with you, not being able to get ahead of it. I think all these things actually put a lot of pressure on the politicians and civil servants'<sup>24</sup>. These intense delivery pressures have the potential to increase tension and conflict between politicians and public managers and may lead to the conflict itself becoming the story.

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### The vertical integration of decision-making

The complex governance picture depicted above describes a sideways 'hollowing out' as a result of the creation of new policy networks involving different advisers, partners and providers

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<sup>20</sup> Gains, F. 2006 *New Council Constitutions: A Summary of the ELG Research Findings*, DCLG, London, 16 pp; HC 853, Second Special Report, Ministerial Accountability and Parliamentary Questions, Stationary Office Lond

<sup>21</sup> Tony Blair, Speech at the Civil Service Reform, Delivery and Values event, 24 February 2004, accessed from [http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/about\\_the\\_cabinet\\_office/speeches.aspx](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/about_the_cabinet_office/speeches.aspx) 6 November 2007; Sir Gus O'Donnell, '90 Years on – Influence and Capability at the Heart of Government', Whitehall Conference speech, 25 January, 2007 accessed from [http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/about\\_the\\_cabinet\\_office/speeches.aspx](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/about_the_cabinet_office/speeches.aspx) 6 November 2007

<sup>22</sup> Foster, 2001, 'The Civil Service Under Stress: The Fall in Civil Service Power and Authority', *Public Administration*, 79, (3). Pp725 – 749

<sup>23</sup> Sir Richard Wilson, 2003. 'Portrait of a Profession Revisited', *Public Administration*, 81 (2) pp365 – 378

<sup>24</sup> Sir David Normington, 2007. Taken from a transcript of 'Shape Up Sir Humphrey, BBC Radio 4 broadcast 5 March

challenging and complicating the roles played by politicians and public managers. Policy making is also made along vertical lines reflecting both the dominance of national decision-making and the growing influence of globalisation through supra-national bodies such as the European Union and other international organisations<sup>25</sup>. Lower-level politicians and managers, both nationally and at the regional and local level, must look beyond their own organisations as they are all coming under increasing pressure to negotiate the external vertical constraints to decision-making. National politicians are subject to European directives, which in turn have led to policy frameworks for delivery at the local level. Local decision makers, both elected politicians and officials, are held to tightly constructed national performance frameworks which offer limited opportunities to deviate from central targets. As Sir Andrew Turnbull has noted, these performance frameworks push public managers 'out of their comfort zones' to work with others up and down a delivery chain<sup>26</sup>.

So when considering the context within which public managers need to engage with politicians and citizens in order to create public value and engage with their authorising environment a picture of considerable complexity emerges. The implications of these developments can be summarised as:

### ***Competition for ideas***

Multiple sources of policy advice has resulted in competition for policy ideas and managers may find themselves in the situation of being responsible for policy ideas they do not 'own' or are not unfamiliar with.

### ***Confusion about roles***

As accountability frameworks extend beyond the conventions of ministerial responsibility, and with the creation of special purpose bodies designed to remove decision making from political interference, public managers find themselves more frequently being held to account publicly. Yet ultimately ministers are still politically accountable and have the power to step in when difficulties arise. This confusion over roles can lead to conflict, especially at times where both politicians and public managers need to have a shared understanding about their roles and to demonstrate public confidence in one another.

### ***Increasing pace of public management***

The intensity of pace of public management, the result of rising expectations, technological advances and media scrutiny can mean that any confusion about roles become politically

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<sup>25</sup> Rhodes, R.A.W. (2000) 'New Labour's Civil Service: Summing up joining up', *Political Quarterly*, 71 (2) 151-71.

<sup>26</sup> Sir Andrew Turnbull's valedictory lecture, 27 July 2005, accessed <http://politics.guardian.co.uk/whitehall/story/0,9061,1537060,00.html> 6 November 2007

salient and can feed into a loss of public confidence about the stewardship of both manager and politician.

### ***Inter-dependence***

The dominance of globalised markets, population flows, ideas and technology, the growth in supra-national authorities like the EU, as well as a performance management frameworks and targets means that there are an increasing number of vertical constraints on decision making. This has also led to more vertical interdependency, in addition to horizontal interdependency via wider policy and delivery networks.

## The strange denial of politics in public management

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We argue that in response to these developments public managers should embrace politics more effectively. However, current reform trajectories in the UK tend to push in other directions, by focusing on the development of technocratic capacity rather than political dynamics. This is based on the view that politics has failed. People no longer trust politicians or politics and so the best hope for reform lies in by-passing politics. Faced with the complexity of modern governance there is always the temptation to look for technical fixes rather than embrace politics in the round. This denial of the role of politics is evident in the rise of partnership arrangements and in the enhanced role given to expert bodies and commissions.

Partnership is assumed to work best in situations where the heat of politics is taken out of the situation. Skelcher and colleagues<sup>27</sup> in their study of partnerships in the UK identify three common discourses about partnership that shape and limit the way these processes are understood by those engaged in them. Only one puts politics centre stage in a discourse of participatory democracy that takes a utopian view of politics. This discourse demands the direct engagement of many citizens in decision-making and puts a strong faith in the ability of deliberation to bring about social co-operation rather than to encourage conflict. The two dominant discourses have no place for politics.

The first views partnership as an extension of the realm of management. It places great value on managerial autonomy and increased discretion for managers from the processes of politics. According to this view, partnerships are the arenas where the real priorities of an area can be addressed in a long-term and stable manner without the disruption of short-term politics considerations. All that is required from leading politicians and citizens is their explicit endorsement of the long-term strategic objectives of the partnership, agency arrangements or governing framework in order to legitimise the practices of the managers. Citizens, too, may be called upon to move beyond an implicit to an explicit level of endorsement of this management-controlled form of governance through thin and weak forms of public consultation that involve them endorsing the strategic plans of the partnership or agency.

A second common discourse also tries to deny politics by creating governance arrangements that provide a buffered zone for decision-making that is free or independent of politics. There are a number of variations in this line of argument. One is to emphasize the importance of elite exchanges between partners away from the gaze of the public so that negotiation and compromise can be facilitated. This image of good governance practice is long-standing and is reflected in many of mechanisms used to reach agreement in governing arrangements. Again,

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<sup>27</sup> Chris Skelcher, Navdeep Mathur and Mike Smith 'The Public Governance of Collaborative Spaces: Discourse, Design and Democracy' *Public Administration*, Vol 83, no.3, 2005, pp573-596

the argument is that if the heat of politics is removed then sensible long-term decisions can be negotiated.

A similar line of argument is used to justify an increased role for independent commissions and bodies. Governments in recent years have taken the lead in a seemingly concerted process of 'taking the politics out of politics'. Politicians, it seems, no longer trust themselves – offloading many of their previous responsibilities to a bewildering range of independent and, above all, non-political, authorities and agencies. One justifying argument involves defining issues as matters of technical or expert concern rather than ideological or value-driven conflicts; when so defined the issues can therefore be left to the technocrats to decide. This would appear to be the rationale used to justify handing over decision making power in the NHS to a care quality commission, leaving house building to a new homes and communities agency and giving power over major planning issues to an independent planning commission. There is a further interesting variation of this governing practice in which the system creates a deliberately insulated form of agency that delivers a credible commitment that decisions are going to be made in the long term public interest. The most well known example is that of delegating control over the money supply and interest rates to an independent decision-making body to insulate it from short-term political interests.

Although the Bank of England Monetary Policy Committee is often cited as an example of successful de-politicisation (but the experiences of Northern Rock in 2007/8 indicate grounds to challenge such comforting assumptions), in general these mechanisms for the denial of politics are not healthy. Such bodies are, of course, not accountable to the public in anything like as clear and direct a fashion as elected officials. There are few decisions which can be so effectively ring-fenced from debate and contestation. We need to embrace politics rather than technocratic arms' length governance without government – a form of decision-making without full democratic accountability.

## The case for embracing politics

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We would favour an approach to reform that offers a realist but positive view of the world of politics. An essential feature of the changing patterns of governance analysed above is that governing takes place through multiple agencies, relations and practices. Decision-making power is dispersed across a range of new sites for action. Politics is to be found in the dynamic of the relationships between managers, politicians, citizens, lobby groups, think tanks, special advisors and the media.

Politics here is understood as the processes of collective decision-making that help us manage conflicts and create conditions for co-operation. These processes are therefore central to the search for public value that takes place in an array of locations beyond the formal exchanges between party politicians. Politics is valued as a mechanism for social co-ordination for at least three reasons. First, it enables people to co-operate and make choices on the basis of something beyond the individualism of the market. It treats people and encourages them to treat others with recognition of the full roundness of their human qualities and experience. Second, political decision-making is flexible so it can deal with uncertainty, ambiguity and unexpected change. Politics is an essential coping mechanism in an uncertain and unpredictable world. Finally, politics can move beyond a distribution of benefits – a rationing function also offered by markets – to establish a process of social production in which interests are brought together to achieve common purposes. Politics can influence the basis for co-operation by changing people's preferences and creating an environment in which partnership is possible.

The starting point for our understanding of politics comes from one of the best known and respected books on the subject. Bernard Crick in his *In Defense of Politics* comments:

*Politics ...can be simply defined as the activity by which different interests within a given unit of rule are reconciled by giving them a share of power in proportion to their importance to the welfare of the whole community<sup>28</sup>.*

This definition offers a realist base for understanding politics in that it does not seek to deny that issues of power drive politics as much as utopian understandings of democracy. Politics is about getting interests to come together and take account of each other. These interests may be reconciled, but not bound by a new, jointly discovered consensus. The preferences associated with interests are malleable; shaped as they are by norms and values and the context of what is achievable. This definition also places power at the centre of politics, a share in the collective decision is granted according to the interest's importance to social welfare. Those that control

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<sup>28</sup> Bernard Crick, *In Defence of Politics* (Fifth Edition) (London: Continuum , 2000)

key resources are likely to have increased decision-making clout and whilst the basic principle of democracy – granting each affected by a decision a say in that decision – is formally met, it does so in the context of a real world understanding of power. Accommodation is achieved in a variety of ways: sometimes by mutual understanding driven by deliberation but often through hard bargaining, vague specification of outcomes, the use of rituals and symbols and the exercise of hegemonic influence. Politics is driven not by mutual admiration but rather by the necessity of pursuing a common purpose in an inter-connected world where one cannot choose one's neighbours.

Our realist understanding of politics should extend to recognising that for most people politics is not their first choice of activity. In theory, democracy is built on providing opportunities for citizens to get involved and engaged in a whole range of institutions and decisions from the neighbourhood to the global level. However, it is important to recognise that there are trade-offs to be made between time spent at politics and the joys of private life. Moreover, advocates of engagement tend to over-prescribe particular forms of engagement and to misjudge the extent and nature of the engagement that most people require. We should be cautious about our expectations about the extent and depth of engagement that people want.

Finally, when politicians, managers and citizens engage in politics it is important to acknowledge the limitations of their cognitive capacities. Politics is about muddling through more than rational planning. The image of the master of politics as a chess-playing strategist is a common but misleading one. Few professional politicians have the good fortune to allow them to live up to this image throughout their careers. What goes for the professionals applies equally to citizens, who regularly approach the world of politics and collective decision-making with a bizarre mixture of naivety and cynicism.

This is the realist understanding of politics in which public value has to be pursued. It is a heady mix of democratic sentiment, power and interests conducted in the context of a world that is difficult to understand and predict. Yet public value demands that managers operate in this arena and is premised on the idea that we need to design institutions, structure processes and develop support systems to make it easier for the public to engage in political processes.

We therefore need ways of getting people more directly involved in policy making and implementation without at the same time expecting them to give up their lives and become professional politicians<sup>29</sup>. There are two insights hidden away in this formula. First, it is vital

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<sup>29</sup> The arguments presented here are taken from and developed further in Gerry Stoker *Why Politics Matters* Basingstoke, Macmillan Palgrave, 2006

to recognise the variety of issues that people think are important. An important issue to one person can mean nothing to another. This is so because politics rests on a fundamental truth about human beings. Because we and only we can live our different lives we all see the world through the lens of that experience. Most of us probably carry around in our heads a set of (usually unarticulated) understandings of what range and type of issues matter to us; they will be different to those held by others. We need a politics that allows citizens to have a say over what is important to them, not what professional politicians, lobbyists, journalists or scientists tell them is important. The second is that having a say does not mean, for most people, having a veto or being the final judge. As amateurs, citizens are cautious about claiming decision taking responsibility. 'Having a say', generally means wanting to influence, but not having to decide. The institutional implication is that we need to revive representative politics as much as we need develop new participative forms of engagement. If we are to generate public value then we need to expand the repertoire of political opportunities available to citizens but at the same time ensure that politicians and managers recognise their crucial role in shaping and defining the political process.

The pursuit of public value in the context of today's politics requires us to rethink the representative/participative divide in democratic politics. They are not competing poles of political engagement but rather two sides of the same practice of democratic politics. We need, however, to encourage a critical re-assessment of both representation and participation. Yet the pursuit of public value also demands a more subtle engagement in politics by managers and politicians. They need to develop the skills of metagovernance. Lastly, the new politics calls for a greater reflexivity from all players in the political game of determining public value, so that they can more clearly understand their position and that of others. Since the range and variety of players in the policy process is wider, we need more explicit and stronger articulations of the rules of engagement in our political system. We will examine each of these propositions further below<sup>30</sup>.

**A rebalancing of representative and participative democratic forms** Knee jerk reactions to the complexity of modern governance lead some to insist that new forms of involvement, participation or engagement should be offered to the public (and we argue in support of a variety of platforms for more direct citizen participation below). However, as the discussion about leadership in the previous section suggests, for us, the starting point is to revalorise the role of elected representatives<sup>31</sup>. Representation provides the lynchpin to effective democratic practice and therefore to the pursuit of public value. As David Plotke argues:

*(T)he opposite of representation is not participation. The opposite of representation is exclusion. And the opposite of participation is abstention. Rather than opposing participation to representation, we should try to improve representative practices and forms to make them more open, effective, and fair. Representation is not an unfortunate compromise between an ideal of direct democracy and messy modern realities. Representation is crucial in constituting democratic practices<sup>32</sup>.*

Representation is the practice of making present that which is literally absent and as such it is an activity that involves an active exchange between citizen and representative<sup>33</sup>. As David Plotke suggests, the divide between representative and participative democracy is not as great as some suggest. If representation is going to be meaningful and powerful – to do its democratic job – it requires a sustained connection between the representative and those that

<sup>30</sup> Many of the arguments in this section are developed further in Stoker, *Why Politics Matters*

<sup>31</sup> See the case made by Jane Roberts in, *Representing the future. The report of the Councillors Commission* December 2007, Department for Communities and Local Government

<sup>32</sup> David Plotke, 'Representation is Democracy' *Constellations*, 4:1, 1997, pp19-34

<sup>33</sup> Hannah Fenichel Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972) is a classic study. For a very interesting review of where the debate is at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century see Dario Castiglione and Mark Warren, 'Rethinking Representation: Seven Theoretical Issues' Prepared for delivery at the Midwest Political Science Association Annual Conference, Chicago, IL, April 6-10, 2005 (available at [www.huss.ex.ac.uk/politics/research/readingroom/](http://www.huss.ex.ac.uk/politics/research/readingroom/))

are to be represented. The pursuit of public value demands an active commitment to the style of representation. The challenge of doing that is, however, greater than ever in the political world we described earlier in the paper.

According to David Plotke, to deliver a system of effective representation requires 'expanding participation in representative forms; enhancing communication between representatives and constituents; increasing effective participation by previously excluded or underrepresented groups; and increasing sites and modes of representation'<sup>34</sup>. On these grounds, making politics work requires a constant exchange between the representatives and represented, although Plotke's argument also hints at a more complex and difficult challenge when he refers to increasing the sites and modes of representation. We need to move beyond a conveyor belt conception of the way that representation works. This model rests on trying to ensure that the way the representative is elected guarantees they will be held to account for giving voice to the expressed preferences of their constituents. In reality, the relationship is more complex than that<sup>35</sup>. Elected representatives can and do select parts of their constituency and choose to give prominence to their needs and concerns. They may highlight some aspects of their constituents' lives over others. Moreover, they seek to shift the preference structures in their constituencies and persuade them that they are right to focus on some issues and not others. In short, representation is not a process of holding a mirror up to a constituency and faithfully reflecting back the image; it is a more creative process than this, and one that is shaped by power.

To see representation in this way means that all claims to be representative are 'partial and contestable'<sup>36</sup>. This is not to deny the value of elected representatives. They can make a strong claim to democratic legitimacy (indeed, we would argue the strongest claim) by virtue of being directly elected in a system of mass voting. However, this process does not recognise the legitimacy of others' claims to represent people's interests, from 'private' actors, voluntary associations, community groups, ethnic minorities and other groups that find alternative ways of representing a constituency of citizens. Constituencies are not necessarily given or permanent. They are all constructed and may indeed be short-lived. To be represented in the modern world citizens, with their complex identities and interests, need to be represented through a range of elected and non-elected means. Modern governance demands a subtle appreciation of the complexity of the practices of representation.

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<sup>34</sup> Plotke, 'Representation is Democracy'

<sup>35</sup> The discussion below draws on Michael Saward 'Governance and the Transformation of Political Representation' in Janet. Newman(ed) *Remaking Governance*, Policy Press, 2005

<sup>36</sup> Saward, p182

Beyond a recalibration of what constitutes representation we need to have more opportunities for direct engagement. We need a variety of ways that people can engage in politics directly. An excellent pamphlet by Graham Smith<sup>37</sup> for the Power Inquiry suggests a way forward in terms of more participative forms of engagement. Smith highlights innovative forms of public engagement from across the world and offers the following categorisation for these schemes: consultative, deliberative, co-governance, direct and e-democracy schemes. The range of options for engaging people is considerable (see Table 1). The goal should be to take examples of effective practice from several countries and test them further.

**Table 1: New Forms of Engagement**

Form	Description	Illustrative Case	Web Resource
<b>Consultative innovations</b>	Informs decision makers of citizens' views through a combination of methods to explore public opinion.	Public debate on the future of GM technology in the UK in 2002	<a href="http://www.genewatch.org/sub-531175">http://www.genewatch.org/sub-531175</a>
<b>Deliberative methods</b>	Enabling a cross-section of citizens to have the time and opportunity to reflect on an issue by gathering opinion and information in order to come to a judgment about an issue or concern.	The British Columbia Citizens' Assembly in Canada was established in 2004. Over eleven months 160 people were given the task of reviewing the province's electoral system.	<a href="http://www.citizensassembly.bc.ca">http://www.citizensassembly.bc.ca</a>
<b>Co-governance mechanisms</b>	Arrangements aim to give citizens significant influence during the process of decision making, particularly when it comes to issues of distribution of public spending and implementation practice.	Participatory budgeting started its existence as a form of engagement in Porto Alegre, Brazil in the late 1980s but by 2004 it is estimated that over 250 cities or municipalities practiced some version of it	<a href="http://www.pgualc.org">http://www.pgualc.org</a>
<b>Direct democracy</b>	Referendums called by citizens that come in two broad forms. Popular initiatives allow the recall of decision made by elected representatives. Citizens' initiatives – allow citizens to set the agenda and put an issue up for public decision	Quite widely practised in Switzerland and the United States	<a href="http://www.iandrinstitute.org/">http://www.iandrinstitute.org/</a>
<b>E-Democracy</b>	The use of information and communication technology to give citizens new opportunities to engage.	MN-POLITICS is run by a non-partisan, independent organization established in 1994 that aims to enable internet-based dialogue and debate between citizens and groups in Minnesota.	<a href="http://www.e-democracy.org">http://www.e-democracy.org</a>

<sup>37</sup> Graham Smith, *Democratic Innovations* (London: Power Inquiry, 2005)

However, some advocates of engagement are prone to over estimating the extent and intensity of political engagement that most people desire or are even comfortable with. John Hibbing and Elizabeth Theiss-Moore summarise a range of findings and conclude that 'people's dislike of politics runs deep and is unlikely to be eliminated if only they would get involved with other people in political procedures'<sup>38</sup>. They identify a number of potential cognitive stumbling blocks on the path to greater engagement. People often have a very naïve understanding of the way that politics works, struggle to see the world through the eyes of others, and are fearful that somehow they are going to be tricked or duped by the political process. But more engagement in a complex associational democracy is not necessarily the answer. Hibbing and Theiss-Moore produce a range of evidence to show that associational activity is not always a good training ground for politics. When people do meet in associations and groups they often put a lot of pressure on members to stick to a limited range of topics and matters where regular, unassuming citizens can feel at home and unchallenged for fear of stimulating too much controversy or opening discussion about troubling issues. This observation plainly applies to associations dealing with leisure, sports or hobbies but also applies to many more overtly political organisations where issues of ideology or policy are debated less frequently than more practical issues of fund-raising. For proof of this you need only ask members of a political party you know about how much time is spent discussing politics compared to time spent discussing fund-raising and various administrative matters. People in all such exchanges, in parties and outside them, are learning to get along with one another. In one sense they may be gaining social capital, although it is important to emphasise that this is not necessarily being transferred into political capital, which is an ability to deal with the challenges and conflicts of political discussions and choices. People in associations and groups tend to confine their interactions to a limited set of topics and more practical issues, in part as a means of coping with the unknown views of group members and the uncertainty created by conflict and division. Most prefer to stick to the uncontroversial and gravitate towards groups that are populated by like-minded people.

So if many people are not inclined to engage in politics as members of everyday groups and associations, what about the more ordered and ruled environments favoured by deliberative theorists? Will people feel moved to discuss politics then? The answer is yes, and many studies of experiments in deliberation indicate that one of the most noticeable impacts is on the sense of political efficacy reported by participants<sup>39</sup>. More generally it is argued that political

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<sup>38</sup> John Hibbing and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse, *Stealth Democracy*, Cambridge: CUP, 2002

<sup>39</sup> See Graham Smith, *Democratic Innovations* (London: Power Inquiry, 2005)

engagement at the community level makes people feel better about their political effectiveness, more knowledgeable about their local community and gives them a clearer understanding of how local officialdom could or should respond to them<sup>40</sup>.

But here again Hibbing and Theiss-Moore offer a number of important counter-arguments. First, deliberative groups can become dominated by one particular voice, so that instead of encouraging group reflection they may encourage a sort of 'group-think' whereby people abandon their ordinary standards of judgement and go along with a line of argument that may be ill-judged and out of step with any evidence presented. Just think of the mixed record of juries in deciding matters in criminal or civil justice cases, or the way that groups of elected politicians can think themselves into a position that appears absurd and nonsensical to many external observers. The point is that deliberation can produce bad decisions as well as good decisions.

Deliberation is also much more difficult when the issues under consideration are controversial or challenging, an observation made by many advocates of the method<sup>41</sup>. Participation can leave people feeling humiliated and brow-beaten. People may be required to open up in a way that they do not feel comfortable with. Many people do not react well when faced by opposing views. They find it very challenging, preferring instead to believe that most people agree with them. When faced by opposing views they can clam up and go silent. Hibbing and Theiss-Moore conclude that deliberation 'in real-world settings tends to disempower the timid, quiet, and uneducated relative to the loquacious, extroverted and well schooled'<sup>42</sup>.

The debate presented here about the limits of engagement should lead those who advocate it to pause and think. Examining the cognitive maps that are commonplace in our societies about how we approach and undertake collective exchange shows that participation in collective debate and endeavour is a form of activity that many approach with a set of limiting coping devices, a degree of caution and in some cases, where the context is uncertain, with trepidation. What has been argued does not, nor was it intended to, provide some sort of killer blow to the idea of engagement, but it does aim to curb the tendencies of those who are over-ambitious or overly optimistic about the prospects for engaging the vast bulk of people in politics.

In short, we need an active strategy for re-engaging people in politics that is built on realistic premises and normative concerns about the range, quality and equality of the engagement. The guidelines we should follow are helpfully set out in a publication backed by the American

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<sup>40</sup> See Stephen Macedo & Others, *Democracy at Risk*, Washington: Brookings, 2005, p120

<sup>41</sup> Archon Fung and Erik Olin Wright, *Deepening Democracy*, London: Verso, 2003

<sup>42</sup> Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, *Stealth Democracy*, p 203

Political Science Association<sup>43</sup>. The report starts by noting that the overall quantity of engagement is an issue. To a degree, the legitimacy of the political system rests on the quality of, and opportunity for public participation, at least in some elements of the political process. Moreover, given the complexity of modern governance, citizens' input is often not only required in the initial phase of policy making but also in their implementation. Environmental change, sustaining healthier lifestyles and improving education are all areas that require an input from government but also from the citizen if positive change is going to be achieved. The quality of engagement is also a relevant issue. Political engagement does not always have to be intensive or deliberative but it should not be uninformed and divisive either. We need to think hard about how to design our systems to incorporate an element of competition and challenge, whilst at the same time allowing scope for participation that binds people together and supports the overall legitimacy and health of the political system. Finally, issues of equality are important. We should be concerned if the evidence points to obstacles blocking particular groups from engagement: the poor; the less well educated; racial and ethnic minorities; young people or women.

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### The practice of metagovernance

Managers and politicians must concern themselves with the metagovernance of the complex range of relationships that constitute the intertwined world of politics in today's system of governing if public value is to be realised. The concept of metagovernance refers to the way that leading players in governance, including elected politicians and managers, establish the ground rules and the context in which politics takes place. Metagovernance can involve the active manipulation of networks by selecting participants and steering them to a particular conclusion. Politicians and managers can become adept at this kind of activity, although if pushed too far there is evidence that this can be counter-productive as other network members sense and resent the fact that they are being manipulated<sup>44</sup>. Yet there are others forms of metagovernance that are more 'hands-off'. Framing captures a broad range of activities. It includes facilitative legislation or policy guidance to give networks a general sense of direction but leaves its constituent organisations free to define their own paths and mechanisms for achieving these goals. It also covers incentive based measures that encourage organisations to co-operate in a particular way. Crucially, the politicians and managers in both cases are acting in a 'hands-off' way by guiding but not dictating the process. Metagovernance can also involve storytelling, as Eva Sorensen explains:

*Through storytelling, it is possible to shape images of rational behavior through the construction of interests, images of friend-enemy relations, and visions of the past and possible futures for individuals and groups and for society at large. Hence, storytelling*

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<sup>43</sup> Macedo & Others , *Democracy at Risk* et al, pp8-10

<sup>44</sup> See Skelcher et al 'The Public Governance of collaborative Spaces: Discourse, Design and Democracy'

*represents a forceful hands-off means of influencing the formation of political strategies among a multiplicity of self-governing actors without interfering directly in their strategy formulation<sup>45</sup>.*

The essence of the insight here is that networks and communities of interest can be influenced and encouraged to view and understand their world in certain ways, and through that activity they can be managed. However, in order to effectively manage in this way Sorensen argues that managers, but more specifically politicians, need to learn new leadership skills. The skills of metagovernance are not the skills of traditional politics and administration yet they are vital to the achievement of a politics that can deliver public value.

The concept of leadership that is suited to metagovernance can be clarified by developing James Svava's depiction of the emergence of a type of elected urban political leader who is 'a facilitator who promotes positive interaction and a high level of communication among officials in city government and with the public and who also provides guidance in goal setting and policy making'<sup>46</sup>. We suggest that to be effective in the modern policy context, with competing government bodies and agencies and a more critical and demanding citizenry fuelled by a more challenging media, means that a different style of political leadership is a prerequisite at all levels of government.

Facilitative leadership constitutes a different way of exercising power and influence. In this model the previous, more formal understanding of power as the exercise of detailed influence or control over decision making gives way to a more informal understanding that power is about giving direction and mobilizing the resources necessary to ensure that the vision is fulfilled. In a complex, fragmented world, the paradigmatic form of power is that which enables certain interests to blend their capacities to achieve common purposes. The capacity to blend together resources and put together a vision that can be shared across a community or network are seen by many as the key ingredients of effective leadership at the beginning of the twenty first century.

To mobilise the use of the concept of facilitative leadership we suggest four features of political leadership that could be empirically tested: partnership skills, accessibility, low partisanship, and

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<sup>45</sup> Eva Sorensen, Metagovernance: the changing role of politicians in processes of democratic governance , *The American Review of Public Administration*, Vol.36 , No 1, 2006, p 101

<sup>46</sup> James Svava. 2003. Effective Mayoral Leadership in Council-Manager Cities: Reassessing the Facilitative Model. *National Civic Review* 92 : 157-172, p157

decision-making capacities<sup>47</sup>. A facilitative leader would be able to partner with public officials and other politicians in their own organisation but also work effectively with other public agencies as well as private, voluntary and community sectors. The leader would be relatively visible to citizens and be able to engage with them and offer an accessible form of politics. They would be outward-looking and not tied to narrow partisan party politics, although they may be elected on a party ticket. Finally, they would be able to offer a streamlined focus for decision-making in order to provide momentum in a complex world.

Our initial research suggests that some leaders at the local level – especially urban mayors – appear able to offer this style of leadership<sup>48</sup>. There is less evidence that such a leadership style can be found at the national level, although at times individual ministers appear to have the capacity to display such leadership. Paradoxically, we think it is the assumed powerlessness of many local leaders that makes it easier for them to develop a facilitative leadership style. The assumption of being in control – reinforced by parliamentary traditions of accountability and the pressures emanating from a 24 hour media – make this style of leadership more problematic and difficult to develop at a national level.

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**Greater  
reflexivity and  
clearer  
rules of  
engagement**

The arguments presented here call for an acknowledgement of the complicated governance environment in which public services are now delivered, for a realistic but positive approach to politics when creating public value, and for the advancement of what we call facilitative leadership. All of these factors have implications for the roles of both politicians and public managers. The political realities we outlined earlier in this paper and the extension of political engagement and metagovernance we called for above, imply that in the pursuit of public value a more nuanced and reflexive understanding of accountability and legitimacy is necessary. The old club rules of the Whitehall model are no longer either reflective of reality or sufficient to guide appropriate action in a modern context<sup>49</sup>.

Given that the roles of politicians and public managers are blurred and in some instances are even virtually interchangeable, there is a need for greater transparency about these relationships and how these are made accountable through political, financial, informational and legal frameworks. Without robust and defensible accountability arrangements which are understood by those involved as well as the public, policy problems can escalate and

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<sup>47</sup> S. Greasley and G. Stoker (forthcoming) 'Mayors and Urban Governance: Developing a Facilitative Leadership Style?' *Public Administration Review*, 2008

<sup>48</sup> See Francesca Gains, Stephen Greasley, Peter John, Gerry Stoker (2007) *Does leadership matter A summary of evidence on the role and impact of political leadership in English local government* Department for Communities and Local Government: London

<sup>49</sup> Wilson G and Barker A, 2003. 'Bureaucrats and Politicians in Britain' *Governance* 16 (3); Moran, M. 2003. *The British Regulatory State*, Oxford University Press, Oxford

confidence in managers' and politicians' ability to deliver public value can ebb away<sup>50</sup>. We welcome the wider debate stimulated by the Government's 'Governance of Britain' Green Paper and argue that a radical debate is required not merely to retune the citizen to old rules of governance, as the Green Paper sometimes implies, but rather to codify and clarify the new ways we are going to have to govern ourselves in the twentieth first century. Without such a debate and clarification public value will be a lot harder to pursue.

Regardless of the formal constitutional, legal or managerial rules established to support the accountability and legitimacy of public decision making and management, it is critical for those involved to retain reflexivity both about how to act and the boundaries for authoritative action. The legitimacy which flows from elected authority means that politicians predominantly claim executive authority. Public managers need to remember this ultimate political reality and develop their political antennae. Likewise, politicians need to acknowledge the ability of public managers to engage directly with others in policy development and delivery. No one blueprint will serve as a template for the actions of, and interactions between, the many stakeholders involved in modern governance. Only by explicitly acknowledging both the political complexity and the potential influence of a wide range of political processes can politicians and public managers effectively support the creation of public value.

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<sup>50</sup> Gains, F. 2004. 'Hardware, Software or Network Connection? Theorising Crisis Catalyst in UK Next Steps Agencies', *Public Administration* 82 (3) p 547 - 566

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