

FOR THE GOVERNORS OF TOMORROW: A "DEMOCRACY AUDIT" OF THE POLICY PROCESS

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Abstract

Work by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) on "governance" has provided criteria by which an assessment can be made of the democratic quality of any instance of policy development. I begin by briefly introducing this framework, and then apply it to a recent New Zealand policy initiative – the development by the Ministry of Social Development of the Agenda for Children. I selected this initiative on the basis that it stood out immediately as likely to answer comparatively fully to the criteria for democratic policy making as defined by the OECD. I review the policy process undertaken, the website presentation and links, the official documentation around consultation and reporting, and the minutes of the ministerial advisory group established for the initiative. Close analysis indeed confirms a commendable allegiance to the principles of contemporary democratic governance, and the main purpose of the article is to explicate how this allegiance can be realised in practice. At the same time, areas where the consultation and presentation around the policy fall short, as well as where the OECD framework itself may be suspect, are noted.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last 10 years or so, the term "governance" has expanded its domain of reference from business circles to organisations within the public sector, and, increasingly, has come to substitute for "government" and "public administration" as a way of referring to the activities of the state as a whole. This migration of the term was no doubt influenced by the "reinventing government" movement of the early 1990s, which, among other things, saw a place for introducing business models in order to improve the efficiency and rationality of government (Spicer 2004:357–359).

Subsequently, the term was picked up and endorsed – albeit with a twist in signification – by the OECD. The proceedings of an OECD conference held in Germany in March

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2000 and attended by a number of distinguished international scholars from a range of fields offer two main explanations for the suitability of "governance" in governmental circles. (The tendencies these explanations point to would appear to depart from the "teleocratic" or overtly purposive and depoliticising aspirations that Spicer attributes to the promoters of reinventing government.) Firstly, governance is said to symbolise recognition of an increasing demand on the part of the (implicitly national) public to be involved in and consulted on the pressing issues of policy.

Recently, there has been a growing recognition that the ability or power of collective institutions to chart a particular course depends to an increasing degree on the active involvement of the governed. Looking to the future, there are signs that the governed of yesterday could become the governors of tomorrow. This does not mean that every citizen or worker would become a politician or manager. Instead, tomorrow's dynamic societies, less governable by the old methods of command and obedience, may set and achieve both individual and broad social goals by enhancing decision-making capacities generally. (Michalski et al. 2001:7)

Secondly, the term is said to reflect the reduced ability of national governments to control the affairs within their jurisdiction. "The growing interdependence of territorial states is itself producing a complex global federation, in which regional alliances are subsidiary instances. In this global transformation of the state, government becomes governance" (Albrow 2001:158).

The trends posited by these alternative explanations appear to be in direct conflict. Unless the globalising trend – assuming it continues – can be led to incorporate the democratic participation of a trans-national citizenry, the tendency towards "active involvement of the governed" can only regress, not advance. On the assumption, however, that the question of how this tension will be resolved is still open, I will be mainly concerned in what follows with the currency of the first explanation: specifically, to investigate whether there is evidence of a clear shift from *control* towards *governance* in the New Zealand policy-making environment. Conveniently, a companion publication from the OECD allows the devising of a simple framework for testing the democratic accountability of a policy instance. I will begin by describing this framework, and then assess a particular policy instance – the development of the Agenda for Children – in the light of this framework.

THE FRAMEWORK

Citizens as Partners: Information, Consultation and Public Participation in Policy-making, is addressed to the goal of "strengthening effective, efficient, transparent and accountable government structures" (OECD 2001:14). It defines three fundamental criteria for this strengthening or enhancing of government structures, or "governance" as I am using the term:

- Information is complete, objective, reliable, relevant, easy to find and to understand.
- Consultation has clear goals and rules defining the limits of the exercise and government's obligation to account for its use of citizens' input.
- Participation provides sufficient time and flexibility to allow for the emergence of new ideas and proposals by citizens, as well as mechanisms for their integration into government policy-making processes. (OECD 2001:11)

However, the report's qualification of consultation is problematic: "It is based on the prior definition by government of the issue on which citizens' views are being sought ... Governments define the issues for consultation, set the questions and manage the process, while citizens are invited to contribute their views and opinions" (OECD 2001:12). I would argue that this limitation undercuts the democratic principles supposedly being advanced. More specifically, it shows a lack of appreciation of the extent to which prior definitions and questions, as well as management of the policy process, shape, limit and short circuit the debate about, and development of, policy. They determine who can, or will, be consulted, and whether that consultation will continue or be truncated. These activities are not as objective and transparent as governments, and the OECD, seem to think.

I have elaborated on this point in previous research (e.g. Wallace 1997, 1998, 2000, 2003). The upshot is that public policy documents (and, indeed, other forms of presentation) can turn out to be perfunctory or, at best, *educative* rather than genuinely consultative. This criticism will inform the following discussion.

THE POLICY EXAMPLE

I will now analyse, according to my interpretation of the OECD criteria outlined above, a policy initiative which, though still ongoing, has been through its main consultation stages and which seemed a good candidate for meeting the criteria. This is the policy work progressed within the Ministry of Social Development and referred to as the Agenda for Children. Further, since web presentation is clearly a significant aspect of what the OECD is calling for in respect of improving democratic governance (I will discuss this further below), it seemed a valuable addition to the study to be able to focus on the quality of web-based dissemination. I therefore looked at the government portal www.beehive.govt.nz in the months following its inception in 2002. Among the initiatives listed during this period, the Agenda for Children stood out for its provision of electronic links that could be made to relevant information, contacts and documents.

Criterion 1: Complete and Accessible Information

Putting aside the question of whether information can ever be entirely complete or objective, there is no doubt that the documents produced during the main flush of policy development for the Agenda for Children were accessible and relatively readable. These documents are light years away from the densely worded policy texts of the past. What has been termed "at a glance" reading, where readers can easily and quickly navigate themselves through a text, is fostered at every point. The following reader-friendly features are apparent:

- sub-headings
- questions (in headings in particular)
- bullet points and enumeration where possible
- signposting (in-text references to the structure and content of the document)
- direct second-person address to the reader
- logical and hierarchical ordering of material
- brevity (documents are noticeably brief – perhaps too brief)
- use of magazine features such as side-bars to avoid cluttering the main text with explanatory material many readers will know
- consigning of more extensive supporting material to appendices instead of cluttering up the main text. In the official report (Ministry of Social Development 2002), the following useful categories are covered by appendices:

The process: how we went about developing the Agenda for Children

Consultation findings: what you said [these are not the only references to consultative feedback]

Other government work on issues you identified

Examples of the whole child approach in action

Information about children (demographic material etc.)

Further information on research gaps relating to children.

These reader-friendly features are something that policymakers today are keenly aware of: "The importance of design for the document to be engaging was noted" (meeting of Child Policy Reference Group, 22 February 2002).

A further aspect of this first criterion involves new information and communication technologies (ICTs). "(T)he challenges of the emerging information society oblige governments to adopt new information and communication technologies (ICTs) and prepare for greater and faster interactions with citizens" (OECD 2001:11). The tools currently available to governments include websites and portals, online discussion groups and interactive games.

This interaction with citizens was aided from the outset by the website provided for the Agenda for Children initiative. The home page² for the initiative provides access to the reports, the discussion papers and submissions that informed them, and the analyses of submissions, as well as the initial seminar papers and the minutes of the Child Policy Reference Group (an advisory group discussed in detail below). Children and young people were also invited to contribute to an interactive website (www.globalnet.org.nz).

Further extension of the possibilities opened up by digital networking was also mooted in the post-consultation report, namely to “Develop a website to share resources with government agencies, local authorities and community organisations on the benefits of and issues surrounding children’s participation in decision-making. This could include a database of relevant contacts in organisations” (Ministry of Social Development 2002:21).

It is pertinent to note in this connection that online discussion groups do not always live up to the promises that networking enthusiasts have made for these and other virtual communication forums. While the opportunity for open dialogue is clearly provided by the new technology, participants’ disciplinary and occupational commitments often lead to a segmentation of discussion rather than the cross-fertilisation hoped for (6 2001:101, Wallace 2001).

Perri 6 (2001:105) takes the matter of technological access an important stage further:

Freedom of information should extend to public availability for all the models, simulations, problem-structuring tools, geographical information systems and content analytic agents that policymakers themselves use... For the aim, in a democratic society, of the cultivation of judgement in governance should not be the empowering of a political elite, but the strengthening of the competence, maturity and self-governing capabilities of the citizenry.

Such freedom of access to policy development tools goes well beyond the information-sharing practices apparent in these or any other New Zealand policy documents, past or present.

“Complete” and “objective” information should, in my view, include a full contextualisation of the policy in question – its origins, its antecedents, its purposes and its underpinning assumptions. However, most references to the origin of the Agenda for Children policy development are limited to the most recent renewal of interest in the question of children’s welfare. So, reference is made to a Seminar

2 Now available in slightly abbreviated form at <http://www.msd.govt.nz/work-areas/children-and-young-people/agenda-for-children/index.html>

on Children's Policy in July 2000 and the subsequent establishment of a Child Policy Reference Group to "provide advice on the development of the Agenda for Children". The home page provides links to both the Seminar and the Reference Group.

This is consistent with traditional practice in policy formation: namely a tendency not to contextualise beyond the explicit initiative in question. In answer to the Agenda for Children discussion paper heading "What has happened so far?", the text states: "The Agenda for Children initiative was launched at the Seminar on Children's Policy, held at Parliament in July 2000" (Ministry of Social Development 2001a:8). One must read the documents very closely to find any reference to a precursor policy initiative, *Strengthening Families*, a project of the previous government. There was reference (PDF format) on the Seminar page to the *Strengthening Families Outcomes Report*, which seems to have been available to those at the seminar. And there was a reference in the discussion paper to issues of agency coordination (itself a relevant but traditionally neglected aspect of policy work): "the Government is addressing some of the coordination issues through initiatives such as the 'Strengthening Families' inter-agency case collaboration" (Ministry of Social Development 2001a:15).

Nevertheless, despite the relative invisibility of the broader picture, considerable background material is made easily available by going to the Seminar link, where the full texts of the papers given at the seminar can be accessed. This availability represents a significant advance on typical past practice.

There are also numerous references to UNCROC (the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which New Zealand ratified in 1993 and was thereafter obliged to report progress on every five years) and which must have been part of the rationale for pursuing policy development in this area. (This is one issue that bears upon the globalising dimension of "governance" that I referred to in the introduction.) Interestingly, however, this aspect of the origins is not apparent in the foreword of either the discussion paper or the report, where the policy focus is presented as if springing fully formed from the brow of government.

In addition, part of the historical contextualisation, only briefly mentioned in the public documents (perhaps understandably), relates specifically to the *inadequacies* in New Zealand children's policy identified by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. Nowhere in the specific public consultative documents are readers made aware of the issue in the kind of detail to be found in one of the contributing papers to the seminar:

Most of the recommendations made by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child in response to New Zealand's initial report on the implementation of UNCROC were about these sorts of issues [ways of creating a policy environment conducive to children's interests]. The Committee was concerned that New Zealand's approach to children's rights appears to be fragmented and there is no national policy for children. The Committee also raised concerns about data collection and the development of indicators (including registration of complaints from children), the number of different age definitions for childhood, lack of coordination between different government departments dealing with issues affecting children, and the priority given to children in budget allocations. (Office of the Commissioner for Children and Ministry of Youth Affairs 2002:3–4)

The Children's Policy Reference Group had discussed this. "Not useful to use requirements under UNCROC as main rationale for action better to develop a whole new way of looking at children which automatically promotes their rights" (meeting of 20 July; punctuation missing in original).

On at least two occasions the Agenda for Children post-consultation report avoids engaging with issues that, justifiably or not, were (and remain) the sites of heated debate. One of these is the debate over whether non-family caregivers can provide the kind of bonding held to be required for full development of the child. The report makes no acknowledgement of the dispute, and in fact effectively dismisses it by explicitly representing parents and caregivers as interchangeable: "Children need to have a close attachment to parents/caregivers who provide them with love in a nurturing relationship where they are valued and respected" (Ministry of Social Development 2002:16).

Similarly: "Children are more likely to achieve good academic and social results with teachers who focus on individual achievement rather than competition" (Ministry of Social Development 2002:17). Here a claim is made without acknowledging counter claims periodically voiced in the news media; namely, that competition in the classroom benefits learning, particularly for boys.

In my view, a document fully sensitive to providing a comprehensive context and addressing all potential readers would have acknowledged these contested issues.

Criterion 2: Clear Goals and Rules for Consultation

It is notable, given my earlier comments on the question of who gets to define the limits and conditions of consultation, that the "public consultation phase" for the Agenda for Children initiative did not particularly provide for the public to shape the agenda, or to determine the parameters of investigation. "At this point, the Government wants to *test*

its thinking on the Agenda's content and gather the ideas and views of two key groups" (Ministry of Social Development 2001a:8, emphasis added); "This part of the discussion document presents our ideas to date" (Ministry of Social Development 2001a:10). Significantly, the discussion paper was structured around already-formulated goals rather than, say, options, though admittedly the presentation of the goals is admirably open-ended (discussed further below).

The opportunity for non-policy people (albeit "community experts") to influence the agenda, however, was considerable. The mechanism for doing this was the previously mentioned Children's Policy Reference Group (CPRG).

The notion of the reference group is a relatively recent innovation and therefore might benefit from some contextualising comment. It can be usefully related to discussion in many countries about ways of "cross-cutting" policy issues – i.e. those that require coordination across departments – and fostering the co-determination of policy and practice (Sabel 2001). The aim of such cross-cutting work, according to Sabel (2001:130), is to "transcend the structural limits without actually transforming the structures". Sabel goes on to refer to a *UK Performance and Innovation Unit Report* of February 2000. One strategy given there is "improving policy formulation and implementation to take better account of cross-cutting problems and issues, by giving more emphasis to the interests and views of those outside Central Government who use and deliver services" (Sabel 2001:130–131).

According to the Terms of Reference statement on the Agenda for Children website, "The primary objective of the Children's Policy Reference Group is to provide the Ministry of Social Development and the Ministry of Youth Affairs with advice on a broad range of policy issues affecting all children and young people, including the Agenda for Children work programme." In line with Sabel's point about enlisting the views of people outside central government, the CPRG initially comprised nine non-government members and a similar number of officials from the then Ministry of Social Policy and the Ministry of Youth Affairs. It is significant for the issues informing this article that, at its first meeting, the group dedicated itself to considerable openness on the question of confidentiality of the discussions, as shown in the following excerpt.

The following decisions were made:

- Process of sharing CPRG information should be as open as possible
- Members will discuss CPRG business with their colleagues, networks, media etc. at their own discretion
- Meeting agenda and summary of meeting discussion and action points will be posted on MSP website
- If CPRG member requests that an item of discussion or a meeting paper should remain confidential, this will be respected by the rest of the Group. (notes of first meeting, Friday 13 October 2000)

I will turn now to the details of the public consultation. Discussion materials were provided separately to both adults and children – an *Agenda for Children Discussion Paper* and a Children’s Discussion Pack. According to the website, “over 7,500 children and hundreds of adults shared their views and ideas as part of the Agenda for Children consultation.”

More specifically, the website informs readers that the Ministry of Social Development distributed the children’s discussion pack to:

... interested individuals, schools, early childhood education centres and other organisations that work with children. We also convened 51 groups of children and young people from diverse settings including schools, youth groups, Child, Youth and Family residences, IHC and CCS and held professionally facilitated consultation sessions with them. Government Ministers Steve Maharey, Laila Harre and Tariana Turia facilitated sessions at schools throughout the country.

The discussion paper for adults was “distributed to a wide range of organisations, parents and other individuals interested in children’s issues.”

Submissions were analysed rather than merely summarised or collated and, again, audience-specific reports were produced – a separate summary report and “a child-friendly summary of the submissions” entitled “What you told us”. Subsequently, an action-oriented report, *New Zealand’s Agenda for Children: Making Life Better for Children* (Ministry of Social Development 2002), was released, along with a separate summary of the report.

This is an impressive amount of dissemination. And in terms of maximising the possibility of *dialogue* (a vital aspect of consultation), a number of factors, some overlapping with points made elsewhere in this paper, can be mentioned with respect to the main mechanism of facilitating dialogue, the discussion paper (Ministry of Social Development 2001a).

First, there is the very use of the term “discussion paper”. Over the previous decade or more it had been possible to notice a morphing of this term, first to “discussion document” and then to “consultative document”. And with each linguistic mutation, there was evidence that the “consultation” had less to do with genuine discussion and more to do with simply observing a requirement, or even with other functions altogether, such as *informing* or *educating*. (Wallace 2000 and 2003 provide further discussion of such evidence.) So the return of “discussion paper” as the preferred term can be seen (at least in this case) as indicative of a restoration of openness and willingness to engage in dialogue.

Secondly, there is a strong sense that a policy of full disclosure has been applied. The text makes very explicit at the outset the purpose of the policy development, the process to be followed, and even the possible outcomes envisaged. Further, the contextualisation provided is much fuller than in other instances I have studied. Although, as discussed earlier, it is grounded very much in the present (current conditions of disadvantage for children), it does not completely ignore the wider UNCROC situation, either in respect of the framework for policy it establishes, or in respect of New Zealand's lack of compliance to date (although, as I mentioned earlier, this is mildly expressed). In addition, there is reference to the demographic context and to the impinging factors of global and technological change.

Thirdly, there are, wherever possible, links to websites and organisations where the reader might most easily obtain documents for further reference. Of equal importance in this respect, the text announces the formation of an interactive website (www.globalnet.org.nz) through which readers could participate in the consultation. Additionally, or alternatively, participants could use the response form included in the document.

Fourthly, although the elicitation function of the text is organised around goals, rather than open-ended questions – which would give the readers/citizens more control over defining the parameters of the issue – the document writers ameliorate this by (a) admitting at the outset that responses are to be directed at the thinking they have done so far and (b) formulating goals that are general enough and contextualised enough to allow a broad horizon for response.

Each goal is organised around, firstly, informing the reader as to general aims, current situation and possible further priorities for action. Secondly, each goal allows readers to:

- respond positively or negatively to the goal
- suggest additions or changes
- comment on the acceptability of the further priorities
- suggest other priorities.

The relative generosity of this format is most apparent when contrasting it with a similar policy initiative from three or four years previously, the attempt to develop a Code of Family and Social Responsibility. The code discussion booklet was organised not around goals but often highly specific *expectations* for conduct together with selective and highly focused questions (Wallace 2000).

In contrast with the discussion paper for adults, the document specifically for children (Ministry of Social Development 2001b) is rather more obviously limited. To begin

with, it is not addressed directly to children, but rather to those (adults) who will be conducting the consultation on their behalf. And its authors must have assumed that those adults would be separately informed of the context because none is given. The opening paragraph reads:

The Government is developing an Agenda for Children. Consultation with children and young people is an important part of this process and we would appreciate your help with this. This booklet provides information about the Agenda for Children and describes how you might involve children and young people. (p.2)

And in answer to the heading "What is the Agenda for Children?", the booklet merely says:

The Agenda for Children is about making New Zealand a great place for children and young people under the age of 18 years. It will include a five-year plan of what the Government needs to do to help achieve this vision. It will identify broad goals and some short- and long-term policy and research priorities. (p.2)

Admittedly, there is an additional separate one-sheet response form that children can write directly on and that is addressed directly to them. But this in itself is problematic in that the space provided is very limited (despite suggestions to "use the back if you want more space") and not all the questions provided in the booklet's response-recording pages are provided on the sheet, including what are perhaps the more evocative ones: "What are your hopes and dreams for the future?" followed by "What do you need now that would help to make those things happen?"

Furthermore, the booklet was made available to people associated with children – people who can be expected to have some knowledge and understanding of children, but not necessarily to have skills in consultation and in facilitating responses. There is no reference in the booklet to the possibility of enlisting expert facilitation services, despite the fact that this had been suggested at a CPRG meeting ("Scene-setting, humour, and lively delivery are vital expert facilitation needed", meeting of 9 February 2001, punctuation missing in original). There is simply a list of consultation methods that these adult representatives might use. This is particularly significant given that the consultation/inquiry about children's lives might have raised delicate issues. The booklet acknowledges this possibility without being particularly helpful:

The consultation questions may raise sensitive issues for a child or young person. If a child or young person is upset, you may need to talk with the child individually or find someone the child feels safe talking with about their concerns. In individual or group consultations, you may need to provide children and young people with information about avenues of support available to them, and how to access that support. (p.4)

These representatives are instructed to "record the views and ideas of the children and young people you consult with", although this can include examples of "work" the children and young people might have done. There is no sense that the presence of adult recorders might be problematic for the integrity of the consultation, and an irony in the fact that children are supposedly being treated and considered as citizens but have no real autonomy as to whether and how they participate in the process. This is only partly explicable by the legal/ethical requirement to gain parent/caregiver consent to the consultation.

Criterion 3: Allowance for the Integration of Citizens' Ideas and Proposals into Government Policy Making

Officials were clearly conscious of the particular relevance of participation in this context: "It was agreed that there might be some risk of slippage at the consultation stage. It is important that the CPRG models a good process of engagement, and participation with the community, particularly with children and young people" (notes of CPRG meeting 13 October 2000).

The consultation extended over a three-month period and involved the establishment of a wide range of consultation sessions, some facilitated by government ministers. Although not unprecedented, this activity represents a considerable advance on established practice – in which consultation publicity might be limited to routine announcements in public notices columns, or response periods might be too short for interested citizens to request additional information or to engage in a thorough process of public mobilisation and discussion.

Similarly, despite the methodological problems mentioned earlier, a serious effort was made to analyse the responses so that adequate account could be taken of them in the subsequent policy-design phase. The official report is encouraging in the extent of its reference to the consultation. Each section of Part 3, entitled "Taking the Agenda for Children forward", addresses one of the "key action areas", or goals, under the following headings:

- what is happening already
- what the Agenda for Children will add
- possible future developments and directions.

In other words, there is a clear effort to explicate concerns and begin to operationalise ideas emerging from the consultation. For example, the section on addressing violence in children's lives, after listing a number of existing programmes, states:

The Agenda for Children consultation feedback from children frequently highlighted bullying as a negative aspect of their lives ... These results are strongly supported by research, which confirms that bullying is a serious issue affecting the lives of children and young people in New Zealand today.

A commitment is then given to explore “ways to improve the coordination between specific anti-bullying initiatives ... and violence prevention strategies”, followed by reference to the possibility of developing resources that draw together research and knowledge on bullying (pp.25–26). Subsequently, a report (*Developing a More Positive School Culture to Address Bullying and Improve School Relationships*) has been produced and, together with related background material, is now also available on the Agenda for Children website, maintaining an ongoing record of the project. (Advice on applying the “whole child approach” is other new work that has been added.)

CONCLUSION

The documents draw particular attention to the fact that an open, consultative process was intended from the outset, as if to admit that this is not what normally happens. In clearly going a long way towards accomplishing such openness, the process offers itself as a model for all policy development. The danger, as Mark Bevir has recently warned, lies in the difficulty of distinguishing between genuine democratic governance and the recent emergence of what he calls “system governance”.

What are we to make of the ubiquitous rise of system governance? Does it mean that local, state, regional, and international regimes are all busily establishing radical democracy? Alternatively, have these regimes adopted the letters of radical democracy while missing its spirit? (Bevir 2006:426)

His account of system governance – “a shift from hierarchies and markets to networks and partnerships ... from intervention and control to steering and coordination ... the incorporation of nonstate actors into the policy process” – which, he argues, “has arisen as an elite project based on expert assertions that it is an efficient and effective mode of governing” (Bevir 2006:426), suggests there may be less distance between the OECD prescriptions and those of the reinventing government movement than I supposed, and tends to confirm my reservations about the OECD view of consultation.

How, then, can the model offered in the Agenda for Childhood case be reinforced and extended, particularly when considered in relation to an increasingly pluralistic society? Chantal Mouffe (2002) (see also Wallace 1998:67) is adamant that this can only happen through the establishment of agreements about procedures to be followed in constituting what she calls a “democratic subject” capable of “vibrant agonistic debate about the shape and future of the common life” (Mouffe 2002:93), and not through consensus on particular matters of substance. Following Wittgenstein, she states (2002:96):

Procedures only exist as complex ensembles of practices. Those practices constitute specific forms of individuality and identity that makes possible the allegiance to the procedures. It is because they are inscribed in shared forms of life and agreements in judgements that procedures can be accepted and followed. They cannot be seen as rules that are created on the basis of principles and then applied to specific cases.

The last sentence in particular recalls Lasswell's essay on democratic character ("Shared power includes the freedom to challenge the lawfulness of applying general rules to specific cases" (1951:476)). And despite its references to "rules" and "principles", a not too dissimilar understanding is apparent in the introduction to *Governance in the 21st Century*, with which I started:

Establishing the complementarity between future dynamism and new forms of governance entails two major, interdependent shifts in how decisions are made and implemented throughout society. The first, more macro-level dimension involves replacing predetermined and rigid organisational schema with much more spontaneous, fluid and task-based approaches. The second, more micro-level dimension concerns the need to overcome the hierarchical relationships, habits and traditions that have been so ingrained in how people behave and think.

Both of these changes will call for major advances in the practical skills and rules used in daily life by organisations and individuals, whether operating alone or in concert, locally or globally, in a government, workplace or household context. Thus, the common challenge for policymakers, in public and private sectors, is to ensure that people will have the capacity to exercise their liberty and to manage the constraints that come with the adoption of a common set of basic principles or values. (Michalski et al. 2001: 23–23)

These developments in policy making and response to diversity can be usefully linked to "capacity building" as a key focus of government policy in recent years, with its emphasis on fostering an "innovation culture" (Office of the Prime Minister 2002:6). Further progress involves government turning capacity building on *itself*. Improving "governance capacities" will include "efforts to upgrade the primary ingredients – the skills, infrastructure, frameworks, values and goals – that determine individual and institutional capacity to make and implement the decisions that govern the future" (Michalski et. al 2001:23). The Agenda for Children project has been a commendable start.

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