The 21st Century Public Service Workforce:
Eight Lessons from the Literature

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"We need to think of ourselves as municipal entrepreneurs"

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The Twenty-First Century Public Servant – Eight Lessons from the Literature

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Here we summarise eight lessons from the academic and policy literature on public service change and how change is impacting on people working in these services.

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About the Research

Public services are going through major changes in response to a range of issues such as cuts to budgets, increased localisation, greater demands for service user voice and control, increased public expectations and a mixed economy of welfare provision. This 21st Century Public Servant project builds on the findings of the 2011 University of Birmingham Policy Commission into the 'Future of Local Public Services' which identified the need to pay attention to the changing roles undertaken by public servants and the associated support and development needs.

The project is a partnership arrangement between the University of Birmingham and Birmingham City Council and aims to establish a knowledge portal to support other public servants and public service organisations. It is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council.

Research questions

- What is the range of different roles of the twenty-first century public servant?
- What are the competencies and skills that public servants require to achieve these roles?
- What are the support and training requirements of these roles?
- How might central and local government better support and promote public service careers?

Work plan

- Rapid evidence appraisal, through desk-based research October-December 2013:
- Exploratory research, through interviews January-June 2014:
- Disseminating findings, through project blog, portal and events May-September 2014:

Follow the Twenty-First Century Public Servant blog at **http://21stcenturypublicservant.wordpress.com/** and contribute to the debate on **Twitter #21Cps**

About the Literature

There are many different challenges that are encountered when undertaking a piece of work like this. First there is some debate about who public servants actually are. For a long time these individuals have largely been thought to reside in the public sector but with increasingly mixed economies of welfare we find that many who have public service roles work for for-profit or not-for-profit organisations outside of the public sector. This is a hot topic of debate within the literature and one which has not been reconciled in the 'real world'. We have been inclusive in our search of the literature and where pieces have talked about people working in public services (even outside the public sector) we have included these perspectives.

Many different academic disciplines have an interest in public service reform and part of the challenge in bringing together lessons on this topic is that we have had to reconcile different disciplinary perspectives that do not always speak to each other well. We have also included grey literature in this search to provide a more up-to-date perspective but this also brings with it other challenges. The grey literature often has descriptions – and frequently prescriptions – of what should happen based on particular beliefs of the way the world is. The academic literature we find is more often circumspect about what should happen, diagnosing a problem but not pointing to much in terms of solutions beyond the macro level. The academic literature also typically lags behind everyday changes as quality research takes time to catch up with the events of the day.

Bringing these different literatures and perspectives together was never going to be easy, and given the nature of the evidence base was never going to be a systematic review of the evidence or a last word on this topic. As such, we have tried to write this as an accessible piece that signposts some of the main areas which are highlighted in the literature. We hope that this will generate debate and be further developed over the process of the research. If you have not already seen our blog then do take a look and you can tell us what you think the main lessons are and join the debate - **http://21stcenturypublicservant.wordpress.com/** and on **Twitter #21cps** .

Lesson 1: Future public services will require a different set of workforce roles than in the past

There is an emergent consensus in the academic and policy literature that public services of the future will require more relational approaches. The concepts of networking and governance have been dominant in the public management literature for many years, as the limitations of hierarchy and market-based approaches became evident [1, 2]. Denhardt and Denhardt [3] argue that the role of government has moved beyond rowing and steering to 'negotiating and brokering interest among citizens and community groups, creating shared values'. These changes place crucial emphasis on the relationships that are built within public service networks and with citizens. A 2012 report by the IPPR argued, 'Recognising the importance of human relationships could revolutionise the role of the state'[4]. Similar arguments have been made in reports by Demos[e.g. 5], NESTA (**http://www.nesta.org.uk/project/people-powered-health**), Participle (http://relationalwelfare.com/) and the RSA's 2020 Public Services programme (http://www.rsa2020publicservices.org.uk/). This literature, and the discussion here, primarily focuses on England, although similar debates are being held in other advanced welfare states, for example Australia[6].

It is not always clear in this literature whether this relational turn results from socio-economic, demographic and technological change, or whether the policy community is catching up on the extant reality that relationships matter. Certainly, there are a series of secular trends which are increasing the significance of public service interventions that focus on long-term relationships between the people who use and provide public services. These include the growth in chronic health conditions and long-term unemployment, and the declining levels of trust between citizens and agents of the state[7]. However, in some of this literature there appears to be a harking back to a lost era of the community social worker, the district nurse, the hospital matron and family doctor, that allegedly thrived before new public management destroyed relationships in the name of efficiency.

A University of Birmingham Policy Commission into the Future of Local Public Services[8] identified four new roles which will be performed by the public servants of the future:

- **Storyteller** - the ability to author and communicate stories of how new worlds of local public services might be envisioned in the absence of existing blueprints, drawing on experience and evidence from a range of sources. The ability to fashion and communicate options for the future, however tentative and experimental, will be crucial in engaging service users, citizens and staff.
- **Resource-weaver** – the ability to make creative use of existing resources regardless of their intended/original use; weaving together miscellaneous and disparate materials to generate something new and useful for service users and citizens.

- **System-architect** – someone who is able to describe and compile coherent local systems of public support from the myriad of public, private, third sector and other resources. This is a role that combines prescription with compilation and it is an ongoing task as system resources are likely to vary over time and space.
- **Navigator** – a role specifically focused on guiding citizens and service users around the range of possibilities that might be available in a system of local public services. This is the kind of role that some area-based regeneration workers and neighbourhood co-ordinators and managers have developed in the past on a 'patch' basis.

The Commission envisaged that these roles were to be undertaken alongside some existing, but relatively new, roles: commissioner, broker and reticulist (or networker), and four-longstanding roles (regulator, protector, adjudicator and expert).

A metaphor for understanding these changing roles is offered by the Work Foundation[9]: "All employees should be motivated and incentivised to view their service from the 'outside in', or from the perspective of the service user or citizen. The aim must be to create a reflective frame of reference where public servants have both the capacity for constructive criticism and the capability to devise creative solutions to the problems that they confront.'

Lesson 2: Citizens are changing too

A key factor in changing roles for public servants is that citizens are changing too. It has been widely noted that citizens are less deferential than in the past and increasingly have higher expectations of what public services should offer. There has been a growth of what Griffiths et al call 'assertive citizens', who want to have a say about the services they receive [7]. This partly reflects greater affluence and education levels. It is also about demographic changes such as the increased incidence of long-term health conditions about which citizens have time to develop a level of expertise.

In response to these changes some authors have written of the rise of a more consumerist public, more demanding and impatient, more insistent on the need for choice and redress in public services, less tolerant of the need for services to be rationed. Whilst 'consumer' is a term with a range of meanings, one interpretation is that it is an individualistic and passive perspective, in which people expect to interact with public services through the same customer paradigm that operates in the commercial sector. This can be contrasted with more co-productive approaches that recognise and harness citizen expertise and appetite for involvement so that they are a key part of service improvement.

Co-production is widely argued to be a central plank of future public services. A range of services can show evidence of improved outcomes through working co-productively, including user-led mental health services, nurse family partnerships, prisoner councils, patient care plans, and apps that facilitate neighbourhood planning more detail see [10]. These examples highlight the potential for co-production to be individual, group or collective[11]. Normatively it is argued that co-production is beneficial for citizens: it creates 'more involved, responsible users' [12] who are more aware of the limits of services and the pressures facing staff [13].

The workforce implications of co-production are diverse. It has been suggested that effective co-production requires a re-thinking of the roles and relationship between citizens, communities, elected representatives, practitioners and policy makers. Dialogue is a starting point for building consensus and incentivising citizens to get involved. Durose et al emphasise the importance of, 'Incentivising citizens and front-line professionals in a way which is relevant to their values and experiences, for example providing opportunities for peer-to-peer learning'[10]. Staff need to be prepared to accept and harness the expertise of the service user, because of their health and care experience or their knowledge of the local community [14]. For example, initiatives such as personal health budgets are premised on an assumption that the doctor doesn't always 'know best' when people are living with chronic conditions on a daily basis[15].

Many of the evaluations of co-production initiatives have emphasised the distinctive role that professionals are expected to play. In one, the staff member is described as

having 'an eclectic role…It exhibits elements of individual coordination, personal advocacy, family support, community development and direct funding [16]. In another, it is 'part good neighbour, part facilitator, part advocate, part support worker' [14]. There are challenges for staff in responding to these new roles. One author called for, 'a new type of public service professional: the co-production development officer' [17]. Conversely, others strongly emphasise the need to '[r]esist temptation to create yet another category of potential professionals' to make co-production happen [18]. At a minimum there is a need for staff training to support co-productive approaches. The New Economics Foundation has worked with local authorities to set up a co-production forum, training manual and training modules to help frontline staff develop some of the techniques[19]. A Local Authorities Research Council Initiative (LARCI) study on co-production[20] called for a need to match up senior/executive staff (who may have an 'academic' interest in concepts like co-production), with the middle managers who feel the pressure of targets, and front-line staff who may not have the time or head-space to engage with new research.

Lesson 3: Generic skills will be as important as technical skills for future public servants

For the public servant working in this relational, co-productive state, it is widely argued that they will need a set of skills which are different from those of the past. Davidson[21] writes about 'twenty-first century literacies'. These include: interpersonal skills (facilitation, empathy, political skills); synthesising skills (sorting evidence, analysis, making judgements, offering critique and being creative); organising skills for group work, collaboration and peer review; communication skills, making better use of new media and multi-media resources[8]. The editors of the IPPR collection on The Relational State suggest that it will involve a skill set which is different to that of the 'delivery state', including: 'the ability to empathise, communicate, listen and mobilise coalitions of citizens and professionals to achieve social goals' [4]. For example, Mulgan's contribution to this collection suggests that clinicians should 'make healthcare more like education, deliberately aiming to raise the skills of the public through, for instance, courses or e-tutorials' to support people with diabetes and dementia [22].

New communication technologies are responding to and reinforcing public expectations of transparency and accountability from public services. The immediacy and intimacy of new forms of social media demand that public services depart from the formal and prolonged responses to feedback that prevailed in the past [23]. The screening of council meetings online and the willingness of some public service staff to blog and tweet in real time about their work and ideas is setting new standards for what counts as effective communication. A key skill in this digital environment is the ability to make effective use of these new interfaces, telling clear narratives to a range of different audiences.

Much of the high profile debate about these skills has been undertaken within health and social care, but they are becoming live debates in a wide range of professions. For example in a report on regeneration professionals, Adamson and Lang[24] argued, that there are two broad skill sets required:

'Connective skills: The practices, attitudes, values and relationships that enable practitioners to work collaboratively, to merge organizational objectives and to recognise the shared responsibility for successful delivery. These areas of activity are often seen as personal attributes and whilst it is true that these person-orientated skills come easier to some people than others we also believe that people can be trained to be competent in these areas of increasingly important professional activities.

Delivery skills: The skills required to translate vision to successful completion of projects by combining and unifying the contributions of a wide range of agencies and actors' [24].

Many of these skills fall under a heading of 'soft skills', indeed a survey of public service employers by Hay found that employers valued 'soft skills' such as communication as highly as technical skills when recruiting new staff[25]. However, there is also a greater emphasis on what might be termed 'hard' skills around contracting and decommissioning. What is distinctive about these skills, perhaps, is not the distinction between 'hard' and 'soft' but between the techno-professional and the generic cross-sectoral.

These changing needs demand new types of integrated skills training. However higher education and other training and development and support continues to offer highly specialised and professional pathways that lead to particular professional qualifications[8]. Post-qualification training remains focused on particular sectors. Those which look cross-sectorally tend to be leadership programmes. There is a tendency to assume that public service careers are linear and specialised and therefore predictable.

Lesson 4: Ethics and values are changing as the boundaries of public service shift

Negotiating the challenges of more relational and person-centred practices in public service requires attention to identity and ethos as well as skills. Professional roles such as social work, nursing and medicine entrench a set of skills, but also a set of values and sense of identity. The public service ethos has been a common reference point in discussions about public service reform for many years. Ethos captures the sense of an intrinsic motivation to service the public, distinct from extrinsic motivations such as material reward or fear of sanctions [26] . Intrinsic motivations are particularly important in public services since users often cannot impose extrinsic sanctions like exit on poor quality providers [26, 27]. However Perry and Wise (1990) have argued that there will also be rational and affective aspects to ethos. Rational motivations are those that advance an individual's self-interest, such as the self-esteem that comes from working in the public interest. Affective motivations are about an individual's emotional response to an organisation, including altruism and empathy.

Better understanding the bundle of incentives that motivate people to serve the public is part of the workforce challenge for 21st Century public services. What is often ambiguous in definitions of the public service ethos is whether it is a description of public servants' behaviour or an aspiration. As the PASC report points out, '[I]t is not clear whether [the public service ethos] is seen as an existing attribute of public services that deserves celebration, or as a desirable attribute of reformed public services that is a goal for achievement (or a mixture of both)' [28]. The report concluded that the public service ethos was 'a benchmark, against which public service workers and institutions should continuously strive to measure themselves.' However translating this benchmark into a guide to behaviour may be difficult. The problem of adapting lists of attributes into actions has led some to describe the concept of ethos as 'nebulous' [29 in, 30].

In the 'new public management' era, there was a shift away from talking about a public sector ethos towards a public service ethos, which suggested a new 'synthesis' between the traditional ethos and private sector models of customer service [31, 32]. The customer orientation transfers the ethical considerations of public service from process to end product [31]. '[E]thical considerations are now couched in terms of optimum outcome for customers rather than the motives of the actors engaged in service provision' [30]. This responsiveness to customers suggests an agnosticism about whether services are located within the public or private sector. When the Public Administration Select Committee held an inquiry into the public service ethos several years ago, it stimulated a lively debate about whether such an ethos could survive the move of services to the private sector [see, 33]. Private companies indicated that it was 'arrogant' to suggest that they could not embody a public service ethos [28]. Sustaining that ethos outside the public sector has been a challenge for some outsourced bodies however, Hebson et al present data from public service workers outsourced in public private partnerships (PPPs), arguing 'the cost cutting and work intensification associated with PPPs present a significant threat to the long-term survival of the traditional public service ethos' [30]. The level of cost-cutting currently facing many public services may mean that this work intensification, and consequent erosion of ethos, will be felt within the public sector, as well as at arm's length. An apparently more benign form of outsourcing, the spinning out of not-for-profit mutuals and social enterprises, is now becoming common in some areas. There is a perception that such entities can focus on their core function of enhanced outcomes for individuals and communities, without losing their public ethos. However the evidence base around these enterprises remains underdeveloped [34].

In recent years, there has been a growth in academic literature focusing on value and values, rather than ethos. Sometimes value(s) may refer to the broader public or social value created by public services [9]. Mark Moore's [35] work on public value has been very influential within public management, providing a way to consider the distinctive contribution of public services outside of a commercial calculus. More recently, social value has come to be of interest, with methodologies such as Social Return on Investment being an increasingly popular way to evaluate interventions. The Social Value Act 2012 places a duty on public bodies to consider social value ahead of the procurement of goods and services.

As well as being public or social in their orientation, values may be oriented towards the organisation or towards the individual. An interest in organisational values coheres with a greater interest in culture as a key determinant of organisational success or dysfunction [36]. According to a report from PPMA and the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 'Values are important - almost without exception, public sector leaders have established or are establishing core organisational values as a means of underpinning culture and changes in employee behaviour' [37].

Individual values have come to the fore through initiatives such as values-based recruitment. Recruitment to values has drawn increased focus, for example NHS Employers held an event earlier this year to explore values-based recruitment [38]. They utilised case studies to demonstrate mechanisms by which employees could assess the values of the interviewee. This mirrors the approach being encouraged by Health Education England for universities in their recruitment of undergraduate nurses.

Lesson 5: Emotional labour will be a key element of future public service work

In responding to the 'recruitment for values' movement discussed above, Cole-King and Gilbert[39] have pointed out that compassion is not only a value, it is also a skill. Thus recruitment needs to focus on the extent to which people have a set of competencies which will enable them to behave with compassion in high-stress environments and to cope with the emotional labour that care entails[40, 41].

Emotional labour is defined as, 'the expression of one's capacity to manage personal emotions, sense others' emotions, and to respond appropriately, based on one's job'[41]. In its response to the Francis Report into events at Mid-Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust, the government explicitly evoked the concept of 'The Emotional Labour of Care', writing: 'Working in health and care is inherently emotionally demanding. To support staff to act consistently with openness and compassion, teams need to be given time and space to reflect on the challenging emotional impact of health and care work'[42].

This increased awareness of the need for resilient responses to emotional labour constitutes a new dimension of public service practice. However there are challenges here for traditional notions of professionalism and distance. Relational services could be interpreted as those in which 'authentic' connections are made between people using and providing services, whereas the literature on emotional labour places an emphasis on performance and the suppression of feelings. For Mastracci et al, emotional labour requires that workers 'suppress their private feelings, in order to show "desirable" work-related emotion'[41]. The emotional labour literature envisages a careful preservation of professional boundaries as part of self-care[40].

Potential tensions between relating/emoting and maintaining distance can be seen in the debate around personal assistants within social care. Personal assistants may have the opportunity to build intimacy, with time spent with an employer in a home setting contributing to emotional closeness. Glendinning et al drew on focus group discussions with personal assistants to observe that, 'Personal assistants also appreciated the emotional quality of the relationship which they developed with an employer over time'[43]. However Leece highlights the difficulties which personal assistants may experience in establishing boundaries and appropriate working practices: '...the direct employment relationships were designed by employers primarily to serve their own interests, and the friendly, family-type arrangements they created resulted in obligations that made it difficult for workers to exit the arrangement, despite the many shortcomings of their position'[44].

Such themes are gaining more attention in the public management literature, in the so-called 'turn to affect'. The affective realm is that which is concerned with emotion and until recently has been a neglected element of public management and governance literatures[45]. Wagenaar and Cook suggest that, 'emotion is not only...an inevitable accompaniment of action, but...a necessary element of perception'[46]. A focus on 'relationality' helps to surface the psychosocial connections between politics and emotions, recognising that feelings and anxieties frame people's judgements of value and investments in ideas and institutions[47]. This developing area of the literature calls for different approaches to research, ones that focus on the micro-level of practice rather than simply looking at organisations and institutions. It has developed in reaction to those areas of the literature that tend to paint public service workers as passive actors, devoid of agency.

Studies of emotion have started to better understand the ways in which professionals view everyday practice and the kinds of issues that would be well worth attending to in the context of reform As Janet Newman[48] illustrates, where individuals span boundaries they are more likely to draw on emotional work. If the future of public service roles is to involve greater boundary traversing then this is likely to become of even greater importance to public servants. Taken together, what this work ultimately suggests is emotion is an integral part of the everyday practice of all public service professionals and not just necessarily that who work in the sphere of care.

Lesson 6: Perma-austerity is catalysing and inhibiting the emergence of new roles

The cuts that the Coalition government are currently making to public spending are unprecedented and have both short and long-term implications for public services[49]. The sustained nature of the cuts – which has been termed 'perma-austerity' – are unprecedented in the modern welfare state. In many places these are leading to massive restructuring and rethinking of public services, but such a process also inevitably leads to individuals feeling protectionist over their particular component of public services. Some areas of the literature are quite negative about public servants in this context, stereotyping them as self-interested and seeking to protect their own domain, although there does not seem to be strong evidence to demonstrate that this is necessarily the case. In some places there are concerns that any cuts will led to deskilling of professionals as training budgets are cut and the scope of public services diminish. There may be resistance to taking on more generic and relational roles, prompted not by knee-jerk protectionism but by a fear that the future is a race-to-the-bottom flexible labour market. Some of the wariness about personalisation in social care, for example, has come from a suspicion that it is an attempt to 'deprofessionalise' social work[50].

Over the past few years health services have witnessed a series of reorganisations and the dismantling of Primary Care Trusts and their shift to Clinical Commissioning Groups. For some areas this reorganisation has been welcomed; the frame of austerity and the need to deliver efficiencies has proved to be a useful way to stimulate service improvement activity, where able and eager individuals have been able to take on roles. However in other areas institutional memory has been lost and any ground that may have been made in recent years has been surrendered as individuals have taken on new roles and got to grips with the complexity of health service delivery. In their study of health service reorganisations and sensemaking, Anna Coleman and colleagues[51] found that the more frequently reorganisations occur, the more likely it is that local areas become resistant to change and any alterations are made within the confines of former schemes. What this study shows is that institutions (formal and informal) play an important role in shaping responses to changes and in those areas where great change has happened actors find ways to resist further significant alterations. This may preclude the emergence of new roles in response to the need to cut budgets.

In research into local government responses to austerity, Lowndes and McCaughie[52] conclude that 'ideational continuity seems to dominate within local government… witness in salami slicing tactics (less of the same) rather than bold new visions… local government currently sees a surprising lack of new ideas'[pg. 543]. However, they do conclude that this does not mean that nothing creative is happening and there is a particular emergence of work of institutional bricoleurs. What they mean by this are those individuals who bring together or recombine resources in particular ways to bring about opportunities. These are very much the sorts of skills involved in the resource-weaver role alluded

to in Lesson 1 and seem to be important in times of financial constraint. Many of those in this study spoke of finding ways to keep their head above the water and to try and mitigate the effect of any cuts, suggesting people were not on the whole being catalysed into new ways of acting. However, the research did find some examples of expanded organisational repertoires where learning had been borrowed from other contexts (e.g. private firms).

Like any of the lessons set out here it is difficult to make definitive conclusions about what is happening; practice will vary around the country and some of the implications may not be felt for some time yet. The context of austerity rather perversely may both catalyse new roles to emerge as organisations have to fundamentally re-think the design and delivery of services, but also inhibit new roles from emerging as insufficient funding stops development.

Lesson 7: Hero-leaders aren't the answer

When leadership is discussed in the media it is most frequently focused on particular individuals and much of the leadership literature more generally has focused on individual heroes[53]. However, in recent years a literature has emerged that focuses more on distributed or dispersed leadership. This perspective suggests a need for a new kind of public sector leader to respond to the changing context, in which leadership beyond boundaries and beyond spans of authority will become more important[54]. There is recognition that the most pressing issues for society are complex and span the remits of many different agencies – now universally referred to as 'wicked' issues. These wicked issues can't be solved by one public sector agency alone and require collaboration between public sector organisations, the private sector, voluntary organisations, communities and individuals. This has raised the question for leadership theorists and practitioners about whether the traditional concept of a leader is still fit for purpose or whether there is a need for a new way to think about the role of a leader and the skills that will be needed.

There are several terms to describe this new type of leadership, including collaborative, collective, contested, distributed and dispersed leadership. Two frameworks in particular have found resonance with local government and helped to frame thinking about different leadership approaches. First, Heifitz's adaptive leadership model, which he defines as 'mobilising people to tackle tough problems' [55] and, second, Mark Moore's concept of public value[35], which enables a leader to look beyond immediate pressures to focus on what the public most value and what will add value to the public sphere. Both these approaches call for new sets of leadership skills.

More recently there has been a call for a new breed of leaders from Wilson's 'Anti hero project'[56] which builds on Heifetz's model[55] where effective leaders avoid being the hero who has to find a solution for every problem. The Anti hero report suggests that the workforce recognise the need for new leadership approaches. In response to a survey, respondents identified the top five leadership characteristics that are currently overvalued as control, charisma, power, financial skills and expertise – all very traditional concepts of leadership – whereas the five key undervalued skills were collaboration, humility, listening, empathy and integrity. It is clear that for leaders to be able to operate in a diverse, collaborative environment, these 'undervalued' skills will be the ones that will produce results. Similarly, recent work by the Public Sector People Managers' Association (PPMA), concludes that:

> From our interviews [with chief executives and HR directors in a range of local service organisations] it is clear that there is widespread belief that public services can only be more responsive to the needs of service users if employees on the front line are trusted to innovate and empowered to act with more autonomy. This requires a fundamental culture change away from traditional command and control models of leadership to one in which leadership is distributed across organisations [37].

In order to achieve this, leaders clearly need to be confident (and humble) enough to 'let go' and enable this distribution of power to front line workers.

SOLACE, who represent local authority chief executives, have been developing a framework for the skills that future council chief executives will need. They have described these as 'contextual' skills:

- Leading place and space: acting as the advocate, hub, facilitator and supporter of all aspects of the development of their community. This means more than just managing and contributing to partnership working – it requires creating local identity, community cohesion, balancing priorities and creating 'whole system' approaches.
- Leading during complexity and ambiguity: working without a blueprint, going beyond the management of change and towards new levels of innovation.
- Leading entrepreneurial organisations: entrepreneurial skills to invent new delivery methods, seek investment opportunities, create and operate organisations that empower staff and have a 'can do' culture.
- Leading through trust: creating a motivational environment where others will have enough trust to follow them, even when the way ahead is not clear[57].

There is a clear picture emerging of the type of leader and the skills set that is needed now, and in future, to tackle society's wicked issues. What is not yet clear is whether existing development and recruitment processes will enable these types of leaders to emerge.

Credit - Matti Mattila on flickr

Lesson 8: Lots of professions are coming to these conclusions, but are tackling the issue separately

A striking feature of the policy literature is that lots of different professions are coming to the same conclusions, but that there is little dialogue between service sectors about how to share lessons and encourage staff to work across boundaries.

In social care for example, the 2010 Dartington review into the future of adult social care, combined an emphasis on traditional social work roles (managing risk, gate-keeping funds) with a call for a greater focus on maximising well-being, helping people realise their assets and signposting to other services. The expansion of personalisation and person-budgets, has led to a call for social workers to be enablers and brokers[58]. Commentators on children's social work practice have also highlighted the essentially interpretive and relational nature of this work, which runs counter to the trends to provide technological fixes[45].

The need for a different type of leader is also finding support within social work. A recent report by Leading Social concluded that there are big skills gaps in the leadership of the UK's social sector, and that 'We need more leaders with much greater self-awareness who are committed to their own development throughout their leadership journeys.' The report advocates for a shared leadership approach where it 'becomes the norm for an established leader to mentor, coach or advise someone new, and the norm for aspiring leaders to have a mentor, coach or adviser and to share back their understanding of new ideas and the social and technological developments they have grown up with'[59].

In health, the Kings Fund[60] has argued that the growth in numbers of people with multi-morbidities that span mental and physical health creates new workforce challenges:

'Current staff...need to develop the skills to act as a 'partner' and 'facilitator', rather than an 'authority' and this will require significant cultural change.' As whole person approaches come to be seen as vital, new metaphors are needed, 'To use a sporting analogy, medicine can no longer be a racquet sport between generalist and specialist – batting the patient backwards and forwards, it needs to be a team game, generalists and specialists working together with the patient'[60].

In housing, Circle Anglia have written of a blurring of the boundaries between housing management and community development, 'Now [the housing officer's] role is to act as enablers, guardians of quality. Residents wanted a more active presence in neighbourhoods. The role of a neighbourhood officer is to be a link to signpost issues in a community, to ensure there are working partnerships with other organisations in the area, and if there aren't, then to set up that multi-agency approach' [61].

In planning, a collaboration between several key planning organisations has set out the skills of future planners as being the ability to: negotiate; be independent; mediate; communicate; collaborate; understand people in their communities; be able to think in scenarios. Among the future roles of the planner is that of "provocateur"...There is an important role to be played by a "trouble making" planner, questioning people's assumptions and offering alternative contexts and perspectives...Such "provocation", through constructive challenging and questioning, can be important in addressing the public value deficit we highlighted by actively engaging with perceptions of local and public value, and the connections between them'[62].

According to an article in Regeneration and Renewal, the journal for the regeneration professional, 'it's about enabling those individuals to look beyond their specific job role. It's about creating a place-dedicated public servant, rather than a public health worker, a police employee or a local authority worker, who can actually get involved in leading the regeneration of the local community' [63].

Human resource professionals working in public services are being supported by PPMA to consider the strategic workforce challenges facing the whole sector[64]. These focus on planning and mapping the needs of the future workforce. They are partnering with the Local Government Association (LGA) and SOLACE on this so as to broaden the interest and impact of the work.

Given that the same challenges and debates are occurring across the professions, there is a case for more interprofessional training and development. The PPMA/LGA/SOLACE partnership represents a good start here. However it is not likely that any partnership will have the credibility to encompass all the professional voices. Nor is it clear whether professionals are prepared to concede that there is a generic skill set which is as important as their professional skills.

Next Steps

The issue of cross-sectoral training, along with other issues raised by the eight lessons, are those on which the project team are seeking input in the interview phase of the 21st Century public servant project.

The 40 project interviews will span people working in public services in the public, private and third sectors as well as regional and national leads on workforce policy and strategy.

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