

**Presenter(s):** GRACE, Marty

# **Governments & Communities in Partnership**

From Theory to Practice

*Conference hosted by*  
**Centre for Public Policy**  
**University of Melbourne 3010**  
**Australia**

**Phone 61 3 8344 9480**  
**Fax 61 3 9349 4442**

<http://www.public-policy.unimelb.edu.au/conference06/>

---

# **Refereed Conference Paper**

---

This paper is part of a collection of papers that were presented and discussed at the Centre for Public Policy *Governments and Communities in Partnership* conference (September, 2006). The paper has been independently reviewed by an expert. This review process conformed with the Department of Education, Science and Training (Australia) guidelines for refereed research publications.

For information about this conference – or to access other papers from this event, please visit the conference website:

<http://www.public-policy.unimelb.edu.au/conference06/>

# **Whole of government approaches and joined up services: a challenge to neo-liberalism?**

Dr Marty Grace

School of Social Sciences, Victoria University

Refereed paper presented to the  
Governments & Communities in Partnership: from theory to practice conference  
25-27 September 2006, Melbourne

In his background paper for the Governments and Communities in Partnership conference, Mark Considine (2005) suggests that international change towards whole of government approaches, partnerships and joining up could be termed 'network governance'. He characterises this change as both a challenge to traditional bureaucratic thinking, and a deepening of democracy.

My focus in this paper is on this notion of democratisation. I will take an analytical and critical look at the extent to which joining up promotes democracy and challenges the neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism that have become internationally dominant in recent years. I will link theory and practice by discussing YP<sup>4</sup>, a trial of joined up services for homeless jobseekers in Victoria, Australia.

Identifying conceptual tools for this analysis presents some challenges. Esping-Anderson (1990) described three types of welfare state regime – liberal, conservative and social democratic. This typology is comfortably familiar. However criticism of this typology draws attention to its limitations, particularly that it oversimplifies, presenting ideal types of welfare regime. Observed welfare regimes, especially with the advent of third way politics, tend to mix and match different ideas rather than falling neatly into one of the types. The typology is nevertheless acknowledged as a useful conceptual and analytical framework (Goodin et al 1999; Bessant et al 2006) and this is how I will use it rather than in any definitive way. I will use a modified version of Esping-Anderson's typology to reflect on political ideas and their links with whole of government and joining up approaches.

In these times of globalisation, political ideas are passed around the world and shared internationally in an unprecedented way. Of course, political ideas and their critique have been shared internationally for a very long time, but the international rise of neo-liberalism in the 1990s alerted us to the way that political ideas can achieve rapid dominance internationally, given the advent of sophisticated electronic communication, relatively convenient international travel and frequent contact

between world leaders, politicians and senior bureaucrats from around the world. Examples of this globalisation of political ideas range from the broad notion of the primacy of the market to specific notions such as ‘welfare dependency’ and ‘mutual obligation’.

At this stage I would just like to clarify my terminology, particularly the use of the term ‘neo-liberalism’. As Mishra (1999:7) states:

... [G]lobalization is not simply a market-driven economic phenomenon. It is also – and very much – a political and ideological phenomenon. ... Thus globalization must also be understood as the transnational ideology of neoliberalism which seeks to establish its ascendancy worldwide.

This neoliberalism is a particularly conservative version of liberalism with strong values of individualism, acceptance of inequality, competitive capitalism and small government. As Peter Leonard (1997:113) states: ‘... [T]he old ideas which ruled the modern welfare state – universality, full employment, increasing equality – are claimed to be a hindrance to survival.’ Although some people, particularly advocates of the British Third Way see politics as increasingly non-ideological, I find that using a typology of political paradigms is useful for understanding what is happening and its implications. I will use a modified version of Mullaly’s (1997:102-3) typology.

|                  | Social Democracy   | Liberalism  | Neo-Conservatism   |
|------------------|--|---|--|
| Social beliefs   | Freedom<br>Collectivism<br>Equality<br><i>Derivative values</i><br>Humanitarianism<br>Democratic participation | Freedom<br>Individualism<br>Inequality<br>(all of the above modified by humanitarianism and pragmatism) | Freedom (or liberty)<br>Individualism<br>Inequality          |
| Economic beliefs | Government intervention<br>Public control of economy<br>Equitable  | Mixed economy or welfare capitalism   | Laissez-faire<br>Competitive capitalism<br>Private ownership |

|                   |  |                                       |   |
|-------------------|--|---------------------------------------|---|
|                   | distribution of income and opportunities   |                                       |   |
| Political beliefs | Participatory democracy<br>Capitalism can be transformed by social democracy<br>The state has a positive role to play in society | Representative democracy<br>Pluralism | Elite rule<br>Dominance of economic system<br>Law, order and stability<br>Paternalism |

We can see that the neo-liberalism discussed in the globalization literature has many of the social, economic and political beliefs of conservatism.

Third Way politics in Britain has been an attempt to modify neo-liberalism, bringing more emphasis on equality and a greater role for the state in social services than the previous Thatcher government. My focus today is on another possible challenge to neo-liberalism: the emergence of international interest in ‘whole of government’ approaches: in joining up government activities, bureaucratic systems, and government-funded services. In Australia we have governments of different political affiliation at federal, state and local levels keenly interested in whole of government approaches, joined up services, cooperation, integration, collaboration, participation, more democratic, and less managerialist approaches to both governance and service delivery. On the surface, these ideas and commitments would seem to be more democratic than conservative.

My central question is whether this interest in joining up amounts to a significant change in political beliefs, or is mere cosmetics. Returning to Mullaly’s (1997) typology of political paradigms and how they play out in welfare state regimes, we can see that the fundamental difference from which much else flows is the difference in views about who is responsible for social problems.

|                         |   |  |  |
|-------------------------|---|--|--|
|                         | Social Democracy  | Liberalism   | Neo-Conservatism                                     |
| View of social problems | Caused by various social conflicts inherent in a capitalist society | Caused by social disorganization, which is inherent in | Caused by individual weakness, deviance, or heredity |

|                                |   |  |   |
|--------------------------------|---|--|---|
|                                | Acknowledge personal agency   | a capitalist system  |   |
| View of social welfare         | Welfare capitalism can be used as a stepping stone toward socialism<br>Ideal welfare system is a structural model (goal is to promote egalitarianism) | Used to modify negative effects of capitalism<br>Goal is to provide a social minimum<br>Ideal welfare model is an institutional system | Hostile toward a well-developed welfare state<br>Goal is to relieve destitution<br>Ideal welfare model is a residual system |
| Nature of social work practice | Provide practical, humanitarian care to casualties of capitalism<br>Work for transformational change at personal, cultural and structural levels      | Personal reform<br>Limited social reform   | Coerce people to look after themselves<br>Social control<br>Poor Law treatment<br>Emphasize investigations to prevent abuse |

Under neo-liberalism we have had classic victim-blaming, with disadvantaged people held responsible for their own plight, and expected to change their lives with minimal assistance from governments. When governments show an interest in joining up, and whole of government approaches, are they shifting their beliefs about who is responsible for social problems? By saying that it is the responsibility of governments to establish structures and institutions that relate to people's real-life needs, are they admitting that governments and systems are at least partly responsible for social problems? If so, what does this mean for us and how we respond to this political interest in joining up?

I am involved in a trial called YP<sup>4</sup>. I will introduce the project, how it came to be, and its political significance. I present some thoughts on whether political interest in trials like YP<sup>4</sup> signals a change in neo-liberal victim-blaming. My role with YP<sup>4</sup> is that I am the principal investigator for the outcome evaluation.

I want to start with a story. This is the story of a young man who I will call Steve, not his real name of course. I don't know Steve personally, but he has given the YP<sup>4</sup> team his permission to use his story in articles and presentations.

Last year looked good for 22 year old Steve: He had a good flat in a good area and he had started an apprenticeship in the building industry. But he could not manage his rent on apprenticeship wages, he fell behind and was evicted. While he was homeless, he could not continue with his job. Steve has since found himself a place in a boarding house in North Melbourne for which he pays \$120 a week. It is neither cheap nor appropriate. He is keen to find a new home in the area. And ideally, he would like to go back to his apprenticeship. Such a job would likely put around \$200 a week in his pocket which, Steve figures, won't be enough to get decent accommodation anywhere near North Melbourne. Steve is now tossing up whether to hold out for a better-paying job – a risky move given his low education – or move somewhere cheaper which is further away from his friends and his job opportunities. With services as they are, Steve cannot really expect to get help for his housing, training and employment needs at the same time or from the same place.

Here in Victoria, there is a network of organisations that work with people experiencing homelessness. Some of them were so concerned about their lack of success with people like Steve that they set themselves to analyse why, and to design a better response. They searched the literature and consulted about why services were ineffective, and what might improve outcomes.

They found that existing services were fragmented and linear (Campbell et al 2003). The fragmentation was because of government funding arrangements. We have become very familiar with the criticism that government funding is like a series of silos called health, welfare, education, housing and employment, with funding put in at the top of the silos, and services coming out the bottom. The services flow from the silos and are determined by programs and funding arrangements rather than by the real-life circumstances of real people. The sides of the silos are rigid, with no interchange between health, education, welfare, housing and employment. The services that come out the bottom are fragmented, and it is up to front-line workers, or service users themselves, to try to find their way through the rules of each service, trying to bend the rules and massage people's stories in a desperate attempt to get assistance for people in urgent need. But instead of demonstrating need we have to demonstrate eligibility for particular programs.

The organisations, Hanover Welfare Services (which is also the auspice), Melbourne Citymission, the Brotherhood of St Laurence and Loddon Mallee Housing Services, decided on a project that would go beyond case management and service

coordination to challenge the silos (Horn 2004). They obtained political support and funding for YP<sup>4</sup>, a trial of joined up services for homeless jobseekers aged 18 to 35. The name 'YP<sup>4</sup>' means young people to the power of four, reflecting the empowerment orientation of the agencies involved, and spelled out as the four Ps – purpose (a job); place (a home); personal support (which is offered); and proof (research). YP<sup>4</sup> is designed as a randomised controlled trial with eligible participants randomly assigned to one of two groups. One group (S Group) receives services in the standard way and the other (J Group) receives their services in a joined up way. In the absence of good benchmark data, the evaluation of the trial will rest heavily on comparison of outcomes for the two groups – those receiving joined up services, and those receiving standard services.

YP<sup>4</sup> has inspired a remarkable level of organisational and political commitment and cooperation:

- Four large non-government organisations with political clout
- Five government departments across state and federal jurisdictions
- Three peak bodies involved in YP<sup>4</sup> governance
- A federal interdepartmental committee to coordinate a whole of government contribution / response to YP<sup>4</sup>
- Three universities involved in evaluation

There has been much enthusiasm and excitement, but some criticism as well. It may seem to some that YP<sup>4</sup> is nothing new – just a fancy new packaging of service coordination and client-centred case management that highly skilled workers have been practising for years. If case management means frontline workers exhausting themselves trying to coordinate and integrate services that remain intrinsically fragmented, we have not solved the problem, just shifted its impact. The difference with YP<sup>4</sup> is that, rather than putting a lot of effort into managing, responding to and covering up fragmentation there is a commitment to exposing and challenging problems with the service system. Much of the work that went into YP<sup>4</sup> was negotiations to gain agreement and commitment to joining up, not just at service



delivery or case management level, but at system, political and governance levels as well. The research that is an integral part of the YP<sup>4</sup> trial will answer questions about outcomes for service users, and it will also answer important questions about what happens when we challenge the silos.

The key elements of the YP<sup>4</sup> intervention that we call joined up services are:

1. Resourced case management
2. Access to a flexible pool of resources
3. Timely, individualised assistance
4. Negotiated pathways to employment
5. Immediate access to training, employment assistance and work opportunities
6. Assistance to resolve housing crisis
7. Sustainable housing and a living wage

These are the key elements from the perspective of case managers and J Group participants. There is a huge amount of behind-the-scenes work that attempts to join up services at systems, governance and political levels. It is this negotiated systems-level joining up that makes YP<sup>4</sup> different from other client-centred case management initiatives.

The outcome evaluation that I am responsible for will look specifically at the question:

*By joining up services and programs, does YP<sup>4</sup> assist participants to progress along a pathway that will achieve more sustainable employment and housing outcomes than would current interventions and if so, do those outcomes persist over time?*

The specific aims of the outcome evaluation are:

1. To investigate the outcomes for young people participating in the YP<sup>4</sup> trial;
2. To feed back information on impacts of the trial to the sponsor organisations;

3. To assist sponsor organisations to understand and articulate the policy and service delivery implications of the findings; and
4. To work with sponsor organisations to publicise the project findings and their implications.

My own research philosophy is critical: I undertake research with the explicit intention of contributing to change that will make life better for disadvantaged groups (Fook 2002).

The research is longitudinal over a five-year period, and this provides the opportunity for it to be iterative, as findings can be fed back into the research design and changes can be made to the following phases of the research.

The focus of the outcome evaluation is based on the YP<sup>4</sup> objectives.

They are:

1. To enhance participants' employability and reliance on income from work
2. To improve the housing situation of trial participants (in terms of appropriateness, accessibility, affordability, and security/stability)
3. To improve participants' health and wellbeing
4. To better integrate trial participants into their communities
5. To join up housing, employment and personal support services for trial participants

The major data collection activities are interviews conducted at 0, 12, 24, 36 and 48 months; and the collection of data from existing administrative data sets (n=414).

These are to be supplemented by quarterly collection of data from service providers (relating to J group participants only; n=220) for two years; and focus groups. We also plan to conduct some in-depth interviews.

The trial partners have negotiated with government bodies to obtain data, with the consent of the participants. This will hopefully enable us to trace the participants' outcomes in relation to the objectives of the YP<sup>4</sup> intervention.

Now that I have told you a little about YP<sup>4</sup> and my role as the Principal Investigator of the outcome evaluation, I want to move on now to a discussion of its political significance.

As an old social worker I could easily understand the interest in joined up services when that interest came from people working in service delivery – the social workers, youth and welfare workers who work personally with homeless people. The front-line workers experience daily the frustration of working with people with urgent needs and trying desperately to fit them into the guidelines of funded services, then trying to get priority for them over other people with desperate needs.

I can understand the managers' interest. They seek funding for the services. They manage service delivery, and they monitor the work that is done with service users. It is easy to understand why these people are interested in a trial of joining up services. They see joining up as a potential way of meeting service users' needs much more effectively than by fragmented services.

What came as a surprise to me was the level of political interest in YP<sup>4</sup>. This paper is a reflection on that level of interest and what it means.

Over the past decades, political trends and ideas have become more global than ever before. The contemporary global environment includes interchange between governments of different countries regarding the nature of social problems and appropriate roles for government in planning, funding, and delivering services. The 1990s saw the international rise of neo-liberal ideas about social problems and social service delivery, particularly in places like the US, UK, Canada and Australia. These neo-liberal ideas included a reduced role for governments in relation to social

services, a dominant view that social problems were the result of individual dysfunction, and funding for clinical and therapeutic services rather than prevention and community development. These changes have had profound impacts on service delivery and outcomes. Workers in front-line service delivery, social service management, research and policy work have experienced these impacts and have been active in their critique.

Strict managerialist governance resulted in funds flowing inflexibly from government to service delivery sites (the silo effect), with front-line workers frustrated by trying to fit real people and their unruly situations into tightly bureaucratically and administratively defined social programs.

My central question for this paper is whether the interest we see today in joined up services, joined up governance, and joined up approaches at a political level represents a challenge or a shift from dominant neo-liberal ideas.

If the recent interest in joining up represents a challenge to neo-liberalism, it would appear to be at the level of the view of social problems. Typically, neo-liberal approaches see individuals as responsible for their own problems, with social services provided to give them opportunities for self-improvement and to overcome their problems. If joining up is at service delivery level only, it can be implemented as case management and service coordination within a neo-liberal framework, simply trying to increase service quality and increase the chances that people can achieve the personal reform required by this ideology. This kind of change is typical of limited social reform within liberalism. It can look like useful change, but is not transformational, in that it does nothing to change the social conditions that caused people's problems in the first place. Of course it does not do this, because it locates responsibility for people's problems with individuals, not with the system.

When we hear politicians talking about joining up at government, funding and systems levels, there is clearly the potential to move beyond the service-delivery level. However, the early experiences with YP<sup>4</sup> show that there is commitment to joining up at political and service delivery levels, but resistance at systems levels. These levels are the rigid sides of the silos, kept intact for many years to stop things from spilling out and becoming chaotic. This is the world of the bureaucracy, where rules, routines and procedures have kept people safe. It is not surprising that this area resists joining up. While individuals may understand and see the reasons for joining up, systems have been designed, developed and fine-tuned on the silo premise. Asking for change at this level is very disruptive.

The eventual success or failure of initiatives such as YP<sup>4</sup> lies in their ability not just to join up services and improve outcomes for a handful of service users, but to challenge the silos. The success or failure hangs in the balance, and it is the performance of the bureaucracy that will tip the balance one way or the other. If bureaucrats do not see the change as worth the disruption it will not succeed in the long term. Politicians will become disillusioned and move on to the next internationally popular idea. However, if front-line services, bureaucracies and politicians together can succeed in joining up services, it will reinforce a commitment to planning government expenditure in a way that responds to people's real-life situations, not some victim-blaming stereotype of service users. Will this challenge neo-liberalism?

Success at joining up services would reinforce a shift that is present but tentative and embryonic within the current political commitment to joined up services. This shift, at the level of the view of social problems, is a change towards seeing responsibility for social problems as shared, with governments taking some responsibility rather than placing it all on the person experiencing the social problem. This is a shift from a neo-conservative to a more liberal view of social problems. It falls short of a social

democratic view that would emphasise egalitarianism, and would see Steve as entitled to a guaranteed minimum income, as well as appropriate services.

This shift could be seen by some as insufficient and therefore not worthwhile. However, within a critical framework, I would argue that if a change challenges an oppression it is worthy of our support. This change towards governments taking more responsibility for social problems goes part way to challenging the oppression of victim-blaming. I would see it as a step towards a service system that would offer people adequate assistance when they experience difficulties. Rather than a model of minimal sustenance to prevent total destitution, this system would take the attitude that many people in difficulties require high support for a short time in order to get back on their feet. If assistance is truly adequate and appropriate, far fewer people would require life-long assistance. This is clearly a different view from neo-liberalism.

If practitioners want the international interest in joined up services to challenge neo-liberalism and deepen democracy, then there are things we can do to make the most of this opportunity. We can:

1. Understand the political significance of this interest as a challenge to dominant, victim-blaming approaches to social problems;
2. If we work in the bureaucracy, we can accept network governance, whole of government approaches and joined up services as a challenge to traditional bureaucratic thinking (Considine 2006) and decide to be part of the solution rather than part of the problem; and we can
3. Resist drift in conservative directions, including suggestions that it is nothing more than client-centred case management.

Does the current political interest in joining up services, systems and governance amount to a deepening of democracy and a challenge to neo-liberalism? This analysis leads me to answer 'maybe' to this question. Certainly the willingness of governments of different political persuasions to value joined up governance and

joined up services indicates a willingness to take a little more responsibility for social problems and solving them rather than placing full responsibility on to those experiencing the impacts. Perhaps it indicates a loosening of the hegemony of neo-liberalism, and the creation of, or at least the spaces for, some different, more democratic ways of perceiving social problems and assisting people like Steve.

## References

- Bessant, Judith, et al 2006, *Talking policy : how social policy is made*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, NSW.
- Campbell, Susan, Horn, Michael & Nicholson, Tony 2003, *A new approach to assisting young homeless job seekers*, Hanover Welfare Services, South Melbourne. Available <http://www.hanover.org.au/> Accessed 2-2-06.
- Considine, Mark 2005, 'Partnerships and collaborative advantage: some reflections on new forms of network governance', background paper for the Governments & Communities in Partnership: from theory to practice conference, Centre for Public Policy, University of Melbourne.
- Esping-Anderson, Gosta 1990, *The three worlds of welfare capitalism*, Polity Press, Cambridge, UK.
- Goodin, Robert, Headley, Bruce, Muffels, Ruud, and Dirven, Henk-Jan 1999, *The real worlds of welfare capitalism*, Cambridge University Press, New York.
- Fook, Jan 2002, *Social work: critical theory and practice*, Sage, London.
- Horn, Michael 2004, *A new approach to assisting young homeless job seekers: Trial proposal*, Hanover Welfare Services, South Melbourne. Available <http://www.hanover.org.au/> Accessed 2-2-06.
- Leonard, Peter 1997, *Postmodern welfare : reconstructing an emancipatory project*, Sage, London.
- Mishra, Ramesh 1999, *Globalisation and the welfare state*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham.
- Mullaly, B 1997, *Structural social work: ideology, theory, and practice*, 2nd edn, Oxford University Press, Toronto.