

How to bust silos in the public service

Apolitical Workshop

1 September, 2022

Michael Crawford Urban

Obstacles

Governance	People	Data
Vertical responsibility Public servants' responsibilities and accountabilities tend to be organized on the basis of narrow vertical silos.	Insufficient resources Attempts at horizontality require intangible prerequisites like trust- and team-building but often underestimate the time and resources required to put these prerequisites into place.	Privacy concerns Real or perceived concerns around privacy, and restrictive data-use requirements, often block the data-sharing necessary for horizontal solutions.
Individual incentives Professional incentive structures often under-recognize, fail to reward, or otherwise poorly align with, working horizontally.	21st century skills Governments can have difficulty retaining workers and managers with the flexibility, creativity, and ability to communicate and collaborate within and between teams, that working horizontally requires.	Technological constraints Incompatible data standards/formats and legacy systems that are not interoperable make it difficult to collaborate across institutional boundaries.
	Champions needed Horizontality requires champions able to clear away institutional obstacles but too often leaders are incentivized to focus on the reasons why a solution won't work.	

Tools

Governance

- **Designating a lead department** as specifically responsible for leading a horizontal initiative.
- The **“once only” principle** forbids governments from asking citizens and businesses for the same information more than once.
- Creating a **legislative requirement to “steward” the larger public service system.**
- **Integrating departments/programs focused on overlapping areas.**
- Temporary **mission-based teams** that are designed to match the dimensions of discrete problems.
- Government-wide auditable **public service agreements**, agreed between Ministers on behalf of departments and Premiers/Prime Ministers, which cover planned means of delivery and funding.
- **Super caseworkers** are provided with additional training, responsibility and the authority to engage multiple programs across departmental boundaries, while also enjoying reduced caseloads.
- Creating **functional expert units**, with expertise in areas like behavioural science or design thinking, and deploying this expertise on a project or problem basis.

People

- **Valuing collaborative skills** as a core competency when recruiting staff and when conducting professional development and performance assessments.
- **Integrating stakeholders’ and partners’ perspectives** into public servants’ performance assessments.
- Formally **recognizing and supporting professional communities** within the public service.
- Enabling public servants with in-demand skillsets to act as **free agents** and move laterally and flexibly within the government on a time-limited project basis, while maintaining the security of a home base.
- **Side hustles** involve public servants contributing to projects in which they are interested but not associated with through their actual position.

Data

- User-friendly **data sharing platforms**, built on secure technology and common data standards, allow the easy manipulation and cross-referencing of data from across government, while adhering to robust privacy policies.
- **Common data standards, policies and protocols** that provide a technological platform for government wide-interoperability.
- The establishment of **delivery units** that provide centralized tracking of key performance indicators.

The Case Studies

Obstacles & Case Studies



Governance

CASE STUDY:



Estonia *The "Only Once" Principle*

OBSTACLES ADDRESSED:



Vertical responsibility



Technological constraints



Privacy concerns



People

CASE STUDY:



UK *Professional Specialisms*

OBSTACLES ADDRESSED:



Vertical responsibility



Individual incentives



Insufficient resources



Data

CASE STUDY:



New Zealand *The Data Exchange*

OBSTACLES ADDRESSED:



Technological constraints



Privacy concerns

Key Lessons

- If we cannot get rid of vertical accountability, it needs to be **consciously balanced with horizontal counterweights**.
- In Estonia, the “once only” principle created a **network of horizontal incentives for collaboration** because it made everyone’s job impossible to do without this collaboration.
- In the UK, professional specialisms created a **horizontal network of human connections and perspectives** that helped government retain staff and act more coherently across the whole-of-government.
- In New Zealand, the DX created a **horizontal communication network** that enabled the delivery of better results by making better use of data the government already possessed.

Practical Takeaway

- Attempts at horizontality require intangible prerequisites like trust- and team-building (i.e., human networks).
- We often underestimate what's required to put these prerequisites into place.
- To successfully counter the negative by-products of verticality, we need to recognize the importance of the work required to build and nurture horizontal networks and make the space needed for the sustained commitment required to do so successfully.

Want to learn more?

The *Abandoning Silos* report at:

<https://munkschool.utoronto.ca/mowatcentre/abandoning-silos/>

The *Abandoning Silos: Key Takeaways* blog post at:

<https://munkschool.utoronto.ca/mowatcentre/abandoning-silos-key-takeaways/>

The *Horizontal collaboration toolkit* blog post at:

<https://munkschool.utoronto.ca/mowatcentre/the-horizontal-collaboration-toolkit/>

The *Apolitical* article at:

<https://apolitical.co/solution-articles/en/public-servants-can-collaborate-horizontally>

The *Policy Options* article at:

<https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/february-2019/tools-for-horizontal-collaboration-in-government/>

Thank you!

LinkedIn: Michael Crawford Urban

Academia.edu: Michael C Urban

Twitter: @michaelcurban

Email: urban.michael@gmail.com