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Beyond new public governance¹

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Introduction

I met John Wanna through his colleague Pat Weller of Griffith University. I met Pat at the Public Administration Committee annual conference held at the University of York on 3–5 September 1990. That meeting led to an invitation for me and my family to go to Australia. We went for July and August 1991 and I met John at the (then) Centre for Australian Public Sector Management – now the Centre for Governance and Public Policy. I reciprocated by inviting John Wanna and his partner, Jenni Craik, from Griffith to the University of York for a sabbatical term. We continued to meet regularly after that, mainly because I was a regular visitor to the centre.

In 2003, I emigrated to Australia and became Head of the Department of Politics at The Australian National University (ANU) (2003–07), then Director of the Research School of Social Sciences (2007–08). Between times, I was the temporary Research Coordinator of the Australia and New Zealand School of Government (ANZSOG). In this capacity, I had the task of recruiting a permanent director. The job required a demanding

¹ The origins of this chapter lie in a keynote address to the conference on ‘Democracy and Public Administration’, Institute for Futures Studies, Hölländargatan 13, Stockholm, 14–15 March. Also, I have drawn also on material in Rhodes (2016, 2017a, 2017b).

set of skills. ANU insisted on high intellectual quality. ANZSOG wanted someone who could work with the public service. We appointed John Wanna from Griffith University. I thought he was a 'catch'. I could not think of anybody better suited to bridge the gap.

John and I actively collaborated on several projects. We have published one book, *Comparing Westminster* (Rhodes, Wanna and Weller 2009) and five articles or chapters. The articles included 'The limits to public value, or rescuing responsible government from the platonic guardians' (Rhodes and Wanna 2007). It was the 2008 winner of the Sam Richardson Prize for the best article published in the *Australian Journal of Public Administration* (see also: Rhodes and Wanna 2008, 2009a, 2009b; Rhodes, Wanna and Weller 2008). From 2004 to 2009, we edited a series for UNSW Press, entitled the *ANZSOG Book Program in Government, Politics and Public Administration*. We published 12 books before the publisher withdrew. It was a happy and productive partnership that ended only because I left ANU. He – although I detect Jenni Craik's good taste – bought me a striking glass sculpture as a farewell present. It is in my study to this day. This blizzard of acronyms and academic publications may be relevant but it is a tad dry. It does not tell you anything about John's personality or what he was like to work with.

On my 2000 trip, I stayed in John's lovely Queenslander house in Bardon. Of course, I paid a modest rent, but my real job was to look after the cat, Billy, who was an independent old stray tom. He just wandered into the house one night when John was away, leapt on Jenni's bed, and gave her the shock of her life. Billy forgave her this discourtesy and allowed Wanna and Craik to look after him. With John, I took him to the vet to have an electronic chip inserted. He forgave us too. We bonded. He was there every night when I came home. A good ol' cobber.

The house came not only with a stray cat but also with a shonky old car. I was allowed to drive it, provided I could prise the keys from his daughter's reluctant fingers. The car became a saga. I took my girlfriend to Noosa for the weekend and, driving back, a speed camera clocked me. John got the speeding ticket. He explained to the police that, at the time, the car was on loan to me. The Queensland police, trusting wee souls that they are, thought it was a scam. Because I was back in the UK by now, the police thought John was blaming me to avoid the points on his license. I had to go to a notary public and sign a 'stat dec' (statutory declaration)

that John was not a born liar and that I was driving the car. What was galling was the fact that the car could only have exceeded the speed limit on the Bruce Highway because there was a strong tailwind. Six months later, I was ‘allowed’ to pay the fine, I was not docked any points, and I am sure the Queensland police still did not believe us. Not a word of a lie. I was driving, and John’s reputation was unfairly besmirched.

On occasion, the cultural divide between England and Australia separated us. John has a penchant for loud beach shirts reminiscent of Hawaii. The shirt I disliked the most displayed drunken koalas, holding ‘tinnies’, lounging around under palm trees in the most garish green, yellow and blue colours. John assures me the shirt is by Mambo, and famous. I think it is ghastly, but what does an Englishman who dresses in a black suit with a black shirt know about fashion?

Festschrifts, like weddings, are an excuse for friendly, hopefully amusing, stories, but enough frivolity. In this chapter, my task is to talk about the John’s work on public sector management. He held the Sir John Bunting chair at ANU and his brief was to engage with the public sector. He did so successfully by organising large ANZSOG conferences for public servants, not academics, and initiating the ANU E Press series of monographs. Beyond the necessary scene setting, I do not intend to summarise this work. Both were a great success and the number of downloads reached staggering proportions. I acknowledge his skill and success in working with the public sector but my brief is to talk about his academic work on public management.

I provide a brief history of the shift from traditional public administration to new public management to new public governance. I identify three waves of new public governance – network governance, metagovernance and decentred governance. I discuss John’s work against the backcloth of these trends. This chapter describes the first two waves briefly before focusing on decentred governance. I argue for a bottom-up approach to the study of governance that focuses on local knowledge and uses storytelling as its main method for collecting data. As every approach to the study of governance has its limits, the chapter concludes by discussing the usefulness of local knowledge to central policymakers.

Table 10.1. Public administration, new public management and new public governance compared

Paradigm/Key elements	Theoretical roots	State tradition	Unit of analysis	Key focus	Resource allocation mechanism	Core beliefs
Public administration	Political science and public policy	Unitary/federal	The political-administrative system	Policy advice and implementation	Hierarchy	Public sector ethos
New public management (NPM)	Rational choice theory and management studies	Regulatory	The organisation	Management of organisational resources and performance	Markets	Efficiency, competition and the market
New public governance (NPG)	New institutionalism and network theory	Differentiated	The network	Negotiation of values, meanings and relationships	Networks	Trust and reciprocity

Source: Compiled from Osborne (2010) and Rhodes (1998).

From traditional public administration to new public governance

Table 10.1 summarises the shift from traditional public administration to new public management (NPM) to the latest wave of reform, new public governance (NPG).

Traditional public administration

We turned our backs on traditional public administration; it was seen as the problem, not the solution. Of course, the bureaucracies of yesteryear had their faults and the reformers had a case (see e.g. Osborne and Gaebler 1992; Pollitt 1993; Pusey 1991). Yet, the defining characteristics of traditional public administration are not red tape, cost and inefficiency. Rather, the phrase refers to classic bureaucrats working in a hierarchy of authority and conserving the state tradition. In Table 10.1, their task is to provide policy advice for their political masters and to implement the politician's decision. Politicians, political staffers and even some public servants continue to hold important misconceptions about the past of our public services. They forget that bureaucracy persists because it provides 'consistent, stable administration', 'equity in processes', 'expertise' and 'accountability' (Meier and Hill 2005, 67; see also Goodsell 2004).

New public management (NPM)

The last 40 years have seen three waves of NPM reforms (and for a more detailed account see: Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011, Chapter 1). In Table 10.1, the first wave of NPM was managerialism or hands-on, professional management; explicit standards and measures of performance; managing by results; and value for money. That was only the beginning. In the second wave, governments embraced marketisation or neoliberal beliefs about competition and markets. It introduced ideas about restructuring the incentive structures of public service provision through contracting out, and quasi-markets. The third wave of NPM focuses on service delivery and citizen choice. Nothing has gone away. We have geological strata of reforms. Thus, Hood and Lodge (2007, 59) suggest we have created the 'civil service reform syndrome' in which 'initiatives come and go, overlap and ignore each other, leaving behind residues of varying size and style'. As one senior civil servant said 'the inoculation theory of reform does not work – you are not immune after one bout'. Although the extent of

the reforms varies from country to country, the Westminster countries were among the most enthusiastic. Pollitt and Bouckaert (2011, 9) conclude NPM 'has become a key element in many ... countries. It has internationalised ... In short, it has arrived.'

NPM arrived in Australia too and John Wanna was at the forefront in documenting the changes.² The book he co-authored with Ciaran O'Faircheallaigh and Pat Weller on public sector management in Australia (1992) was the first in the field in Australia. He also contributed books on implementation and project management (Wanna 2007; Butcher, Freyens and Wanna 2010). Both were topics central to NPM. However, his most significant contribution, and the most cited, is his critique of Mark Moore's (1995) notion of 'public value' (see Rhodes and Wanna 2007, 2008 and 2009a; cf. Alford 2008). The idea was that public managers should initiate and reshape public sector enterprises to increase their value to the public (Moore 1995, 52–55). I do not propose to summarise the debate. For my purposes, I need to make two points. First, it was a prominent debate. Second, the scope for initiative and reshaping by non-elected public servants was severely constrained by not only the party political context of management in Westminster systems, but also by the key relationship between ministers and their departmental heads. The corpse of public value lies in the elephants' graveyard of so many reforms of the public service. The big game hunter that put it there is the elected party politician for whom management is an incidental sideshow. The article was prescient.

New public governance (NPG)

In Table 10.1, managing networks is at the heart of NPG. For example, both the Dutch school (Kickert, Klijn and Koppenjan 1997) and the Anglo governance school (Rhodes 1997a) posit a shift from hands-on to hands-off steering by the state. Hands-off steering refers to working with and through networks or webs of organisations to achieve shared policy objectives. It involves continuously negotiating beliefs and exchanging resources within agreed rules of the game (see also: Torfing et al. 2012, 14; Koliba, Meek and Zia 2011, 60).

2 For a full list of John Wanna's publications see Appendix 1. Many of these publications can be downloaded free at: press.anu.edu.au/publications/series/anzsog.

The first point to note is that, whereas NPM inspired a vast array of management reforms, NPG inspired relatively few reforms in Westminster governments. Pollitt and Bouckaert (2011, 212) see joining-up in its various forms as one of the main themes of reform that has ‘grown in prominence internationally since the turn of the century’ (see e.g. Management Advisory Committee [MAC] 2004). So, the neutral, competent servants of the political executive must now master the skills for managing the complex, non-routine issues, policies and relationships in networks: that is, metagoverning, boundary-spanning and collaborative leadership. The task is to manage the mix of bureaucracy, markets and networks (Rhodes 1997b). The public service needs these new skills, although it is a step too far to talk of these new skills requiring ‘a full-blown cultural transformation’ (Goldsmith and Eggers 2004, 178).

I identify three waves of waves of NPG. The first wave of *network governance* originated in the 1990s. The second wave of *metagovernance* came to prominence in the 2000s. As the wave metaphor implies, it did not supplant network governance. Both waves kept on rolling and were joined by the third wave of *decentred governance*. I discuss each in turn.

Network governance

There are several accounts of this trend for Britain, continental Europe and the US, too many to warrant yet another extended summary (see Börzel 1998 and 2011; Klijn 2008; Klijn and Koppenjan 2015, Chapter 2; Rhodes 2017a, Chapter 3). In Britain, there has been a shift from government by a unitary state to governance by and through networks. The boundary between state and civil society changed. Commonly, it is understood as a shift from hierarchies, or the bureaucracies of the welfare state, through the marketisation reforms of the Conservative governments of Thatcher, to the networks and joined-up government of New Labour.³

There is also a large European literature on ‘guidance’, ‘steering’ and ‘indirect coordination’, which predates both the British interest in network governance and the American interest in reinventing government. For example, Kaufmann, Majone and Ostrom’s (1986) edited volume on guidance, steering and control is Germanic in size,

3 See for example: Rhodes (1997a, 2017a); Stoker (2004); and for a review of the literature and citations see Marinetto (2003).

scope and language. It focuses on how a multiplicity of interdependent actors can be coordinated in the long chains of actions typical of complex societies (see also Kooiman 1993; Scharpf 1997). Also, the distinctive and productive ‘Rotterdam School’ focused on network management (Kickert, Klijn and Koppenjan 1997; Klijn and Koppenjan 2015).

For the US, Osborne and Gaebler (1992, 20 and 34) distinguish between policy decisions (steering) and service delivery (rowing), arguing bureaucracy is a bankrupt tool for rowing. In its place, they proposed entrepreneurial government, with its stress on working with the private sector and responsiveness to customers. This transformation of the public sector involves ‘less government’ or less rowing but ‘more governance’ or more steering. In his review of the American literature, Frederickson (1997, 84–85) concludes the word ‘governance is probably the best and most accepted metaphor for describing the patterns of interaction of multiple-organisational systems or networks’ (see also Kettl 1993, 206–207; Salamon 2002). There is also a methods divide between European and American scholars. The latter brought their characteristic quantitative skills to bear on networks and governance. They combined ‘large N’ studies of networks (Meier and O’Toole 2005) with an instrumental or tool view that sought to make the study of networks relevant to public managers (Agranoff 2007). Their European counterparts preferred comparative case studies, although there was a shared focus on network management and the allied subject of collaboration. The interested reader will have no difficulty finding practical advice. Running a network may have its challenges but it is not rocket science (see e.g. Ansell and Gash 2007; Goldsmith and Eggers 2004; Rhodes 2017a, and citations).

This necessarily brief skim through an extensive literature shows that network governance abounds. The topic prospers because it can provide advice to governments on how to manage networks. There is an odd Australian challenge to the network governance narrative that questions whether it is an accurate description (Colebatch 2009; Hughes 2010). Whether the number of networks has grown or whether such networks are new are, frankly, deeply uninteresting questions that miss the point. The central concern is the spread of new ideas about markets and networks and the consequent changes in the role of the state. Torfing et al. (2012, 31–32) deal brusquely and briskly with such sceptics. They argue there have been three ‘irreversible changes’: in the expectations of stakeholders about their involvement in collaborative policymaking, in the shift of public bureaucracies to ‘open organisations ... engaged in joint problem

solving and collaborative service delivery’, and in the belief that network governance is ‘a legitimate alternative to hierarchy and markets’. The new ideas had consequences.⁴

Metagovernance

Metagovernance refers to the role of the state in securing coordination in governance and its use of negotiation, diplomacy and informal modes of steering. As with network governance, metagovernance comes in several varieties (Sørensen and Torfing 2007, 170–180). These approaches address what they see as a weakness in network governance; its emphasis on the hollowing-out of the state. Metagovernance seeks to bring the state back in (see Torfing et al. 2012, Chapters 1 and 7). The meta-role of the state is to regulate the mix of markets, hierarchy, networks and other governing structures: it is not just to manage networks.

However, both network governance and metagovernance share a concern with how the state steers organisations, whether markets or networks, when it no longer directly provides services through state bureaucracies, or rowing. These other organisations undertake much of the work of governing; they implement policies, they provide public services and at times they even regulate themselves. The state governs the organisations that govern civil society; ‘the governance of government and governance’ (Jessop 2000, 23). Moreover, the other organisations characteristically have a degree of autonomy from the state. They are often voluntary or private sector groups or they are governmental agencies or tiers of government separate from the core executive. So, the state cannot govern them solely by the instruments that work in bureaucracies.

Torfing et al. (2012, 156–159 and Chapter 7) suggest the traditional role of the public service is supplemented (not replaced) with that of the ‘meta-governor managing and facilitating interactive governance’. Their task is to ‘balance autonomy of networks with hands-on intervention’. They have various specific ways of carrying out this balancing act. They become ‘meta-governors’, managing the mix of bureaucracy, markets and networks (see also: Koliba, Meek and Zia 2011, xxxii and Chapter 8; and Rhodes 1997b; Rhodes 2017a, Chapter 11).

⁴ For critiques of network governance, see, for example: Bell and Hindmoor (2009); Jessop (2000); Kjær (2004); Pierre and Peters (2000); Peters and Pierre (2009); and Torfing et al. (2012). For a reply, see: Rhodes (2017a).

Tools of the metagovernor

The problem with the neologisms of the social sciences is that they can seem a world away from the experience of practitioners. While there is a wealth of literature on how to manage a network, there is little work on how to be a metagovernor. There are several ways in which the state can steer the other actors involved in governance (see e.g. Jessop 2000, 23–24, and 2003; Koliba, Meek and Zia 2011, xxxii and Chapter 8; Torfing et al. 2012, Chapter 7). The state is not limited to any one of these tools. It can use different tools, and combinations of tools, in different settings at different times.

First, the state can set the rules of the game for other actors and then leave them to do what they will within those rules; they work ‘in the shadow of hierarchy’. So, it can redesign markets, reregulate policy sectors or introduce constitutional change.

It can supplement such hands-on measures with, second, hands-off steering through storytelling. It can organise dialogues, foster meanings, beliefs and identities among the relevant actors, and influence what actors think and do.

Third, the state can steer by the ways in which it distributes resources such as money and authority. It can play a boundary-spanning role, alter the balance between actors in a network, act as a court of appeal when conflict arises, rebalance the mix of governing structures and step in when network governance fails.

Finally, public servants can play a political role. Of course, they cannot play a *party political* role but they can campaign for a policy and form alliances with (say) local politicians. Of course, the state need not adopt a single uniform approach to metagovernance; it can pick and mix.

John Wanna documented equivalent changes in the Australian public sector in his discussions of collaborative governance and putting citizens first. He disseminated these ideas widely in the public service. Both are responses to the problems of NPM. So, collaboration is necessary because policies are delivered by different agencies, across jurisdictions, with third-party providers and with citizens. Policymakers ‘recognise new dependencies’, and collaboration became ‘a widely used policy instrument across the fields of public policy’ that ‘took on the mantle of managing mutual dependencies using diplomacy, dialogue and

deliberation’ (Wanna 2008, 6–7). The drive to put citizens first has its root in the problems that ‘emerged with attempting to treat clients of public programs as “customers”’. Putting citizens first means ‘extending citizens’ participation and engagement directly into policymaking and program administration, and improving responsiveness through greater use of third parties to deliver services’ such as NGOs (non-government organisations) (Podger et al. 2012, 103; see also Lindquist, Vincent and Wanna 2013; Wanna, Butcher and Freyens 2010). With this shift came changing roles for public servants, from bureaucrat to the “in-between” operator, the entrepreneur or diplomat, or the NGO motivator’ (Podger et al. 2012, 110). In short, we are in the heartland of networks and network governance, with the focus on the problems for the practitioner and helping them to manage their dependencies.

Decentred governance

For all their different emphases, the first and second waves of governance have two shared weaknesses relevant to this chapter – essential properties, and instrumental knowledge (and for a more detailed account see Bevir and Rhodes 2010 and Rhodes 2017a).

First, proponents of metagovernance take for granted the characteristics or essential properties of network governance. They agree networks are characterised by trust and diplomacy. They accept that states are becoming increasingly fragmented into networks based on several different stakeholders. They accept the dividing line between the state and civil society is becoming more blurred because the relevant stakeholders are private or voluntary sector organisations. So, Jessop (2000, 24) concedes, ‘the state is no longer the sovereign authority ... [it is] less hierarchical, less centralised, less *dirigiste*’. There is a shared description of the characteristics of network governance (see also Sørensen and Torfing 2007; Torfing et al. 2012).

Second, in the analysis of metagovernance, the state governs the other actors involved in governance. It concedes them the power to self-regulate but keeps the capacity to exert macro control over that self-regulation. In other words, metagovernance heralds the return of the state by reinventing its governing role; it is ‘bringing the state back in (yet again)’ (Jessop 2007, 54). This return to the state opens opportunities for instrumental knowledge or policy advice on the practice of metagovernance. The two

waves share a common concern with instrumental knowledge on network governance; both assume the role of the state is to manage, directly and indirectly, the networks of service delivery. The literature on network management assumes that government departments, state governments, local authorities, markets and networks are fixed structures with essential properties that governments can manipulate by using the right tools. It seeks to improve the ability of the state to manage the mix of hierarchies, markets and networks and of state managers to steer these structures.

A decentred account of governance overcomes these problems by providing a different description of governance. It does not have essentialist features like trust or reciprocity, only ‘family resemblances’ that are constructed, contested and contingent (Wittgenstein 2009, 17–20). It does not describe recurring patterns of action or systematise with typologies; it focuses on the everyday practices of agents whose beliefs and actions are informed by traditions. In a phrase, it shifts away from a top-down focus on the intentions of central elites to a bottom-up analysis of the beliefs and practices of citizens and street-level bureaucrats. It explains shifting patterns of governance by focusing on the actors’ own interpretations of events, not external causes such as a global financial crisis. It explores the diverse ways in which such situated agents change the boundaries of state and civil society by constantly remaking practices as their beliefs change in response to dilemmas. It highlights a more diverse view of state authority and its exercise by recovering the contingent and contestable narratives or stories that people tell. The decentred account of governance is summarised in Table 10.2.

Table 10.2 Decentred analysis

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It represents a shift of <i>topos</i> from institutions to <i>meanings</i> in action. 2. Institutions whether a policy network or a prime ministerial office or a policy do not have essentialist features, only <i>family resemblances</i> that are <i>constructed, contested and contingent</i>. 3. Decentred analysis explains shifting patterns of policy and policymaking by focusing on the actors’ own interpretations of their <i>beliefs and practices</i>, not external causes such as a global financial crisis. 4. The everyday practices arise from agents whose beliefs and actions are informed by <i>traditions</i>. 5. It explores the diverse ways in which <i>situated agents</i> are changing policies by constantly remaking practices as their beliefs change in response to <i>dilemmas</i>. 6. It reveals the <i>contingency</i> and <i>contestability</i> of policy narratives. It highlights both the importance of local knowledge and the diversity of policymaking and its exercise. 7. It provides instrumental knowledge expressed in <i>stories</i>.

Source: Rhodes (2017b).

All patterns of rule arise as the contingent products of diverse actions and political struggles informed by the varied beliefs of situated agents. So, the notion of a monolithic state in control of itself and civil society was always a myth. The myth obscured the reality of diverse state practices that escaped the control of the centre because they arose from the contingent beliefs and actions of diverse actors at the boundary of state and civil society. The state is never monolithic and it always negotiates with others. Policy always arises from interactions within networks of organisations and individuals. Patterns of rule always traverse the public, private and voluntary sectors. The boundaries between state and civil society are always blurred. Transnational and international links and flows always disrupt national borders. In short, state authority is constantly being remade, negotiated and contested in widely different ways in widely varying everyday practices (and for a more detailed account see Bevir and Rhodes 2010, Chapter 5). Awareness of such limits to state action are recognised by its practitioners. A former head of the UK civil service acknowledged:

I have a very strong suspicion that governments are nothing like as important as they think they are, and that the ordinary work of making things and moving things about, of transport, manufacture, farming, mining, is so much more important than what the Government does. (cited in Theakston 2017, Chapter 5)

This conception of decentred governance avoids the shared weaknesses of network governance and metagovernance. There are no essential properties. The state is not reified. Both the first and second waves have an instrumental approach to networks; they are top-down approaches supporting central steering. A decentred view challenges this approach with its bottom-up approach. Local networks are no longer local when run from the centre. The relationship is better described as an exercise in official consultation; at least this phrase does not imply any local discretion or local ownership. The effect is that central management of local networks threatens their autonomy, distinctiveness and effectiveness. This threat arises because any pattern of governance is a product of diverse practices that are themselves composed of multiple individuals acting on all sorts of conflicting beliefs. The bottom-up approach of decentred governance suggests that central intervention will undermine the bottom-up construction of governance, provoking resistance and generating unintended consequences (and see Rhodes 2018 for several examples of decentred analysis in action).

So far, so abstract – on which parallel Planet Earth is this conception of the state useful? First, this decentred view of the state is its own justification because it directs our attention to new topics; to local knowledge and bottom-up accounts of the state. Edification is more than enough.

But, and second, we live in an era where ‘impact’ and ‘relevance’ rule. Decentred analysis is ‘relevant’ because it supplements the views of the elite and the expert with giving voice to the silent. A decentred approach undercuts the idea of network steering as a set of tools by which we can manage governance. If governance is constructed differently, contingently and continuously, we cannot have a toolkit for managing it. However, decentred narratives offer a different approach to policy advice. Instead of revealing policy consequences through insights into a social logic or law-like regularities, they enable policymakers to see things differently. They display new connections in governance and new aspects of governance. In other words, a decentred approach treats policy advice as stories that enable listeners to see governance afresh (Bevir 2011).

Storytelling

To counter the criticism of ‘irrelevance’, the next section harnesses the analysis of storytelling to the decentred analysis of governance and its practices. It offers a different version of instrumental or useful knowledge.

A storytelling approach encourages us to give up management techniques and strategies for learning by telling stories and listening to them. While statistics, models and claims to expertise all have a place in such stories, we should not become too preoccupied with them. On the contrary, we should recognise that they too are narratives about how people have acted or will react given their beliefs and desires. No matter what rigour or expertise we bring to bear, all we can do is tell a story and offer plausible conjecture on what the future might bring.

The starting point is the idea that any organisation ‘always hinges on the creation of shared meaning and shared understandings’. Metaphors exercise a ‘formative impact’ when constructing meanings (Morgan 1993, 11 and 276–280). Stories spell out the shared meaning and shared understandings. Of course, stories come in many versions and often have no clear beginning and no ending. They are provisional and unfolding. In telling the stories, we freeze them so they can appear set in stone, but they unfold constantly.

In a British government department, there is at least one departmental philosophy and it is the storehouse of many stories. It is a form of folk psychology. It provides the everyday theory and shared languages for storytelling. It is the collective memory of the department. Institutional memory lives in the stories people tell one another; 'stories are to the storytelling system what precedent cases are to the judicial system'. Such narratives were like 'precedent cases ... to the judicial system'. They were used to 'formulate recognizable, cogent, defensible and seemingly rational collective accounts that will serve as precedents for individual assumption, decision and action' (Boje 1991, 106).

Civil servants and ministers learn and filter current events through the stories they hear and tell one another. It is an integral part of the everyday practice of civil servants. Stories explain past practice and events and justify recommendations for the future. It is an organised, selective retelling of the past to make sense of the present. Public servants know they tell the minister stories. Stories come in many forms. Some stories are short. They take a single sentence. When you belong to the same organisation, the listener can unpack these stories. They do not need to be recounted in full. The shortest example is 'you know', as in 'you know the story already'. For example, one short story told recruits there 'is a bit of mystique around ministers and they make you feel inferior'. It invokes the idea of hierarchy, the subordinate role of civil servants, and the ceremonial side of being the Queen's minister. Its meaning is clear: 'you are a subordinate'. Gossip is another form of storytelling; personalised with a variable regard for accuracy. Submissions and briefs are stories by another name and recognised to be so by the civil servants who tell them. When the minister resigned, the civil servants asked: 'What is our story?' They wanted to find out what had happened. They talked of 'getting the story straight', 'getting it together', 'we've got the story', 'when you have the narrative' and 'we've reached agreement on some of the main story-lines'. Officials were invited to tell a story. Managers recognise that storytelling provides guides for managerial action (Rhodes 2011, 130–131).

Storytelling is linked to performance. In Rhodes (2011, 289) storytelling had three characteristics: a language game, a performing game and a management game. The language game identified and constructed the storyline, answering the questions of what had happened and why. The performing game told the story to a wider audience, inside and outside the department. Officials tested the facts and rehearsed the storyline in official meetings to see how their colleagues responded. They had to adapt

the story to suit the minister, and both ministers and officials had to judge how the story would play publicly. They then performed that agreed story on a public stage to the media, parliament and the public. Finally, there was the management game, which both implemented any policy changes and, perhaps even more important, let them get on with ‘business as usual’ as quickly as possible. The resulting story had to be reliable, defensible, accurate and consistent with the department’s traditions. Moreover, the analysis of storytelling requires us to understand not only their construction and performance of stories but also their reception; ‘why do some stories capture the imagination when others fail?’ If storytelling is an important metagoverning tool, we need to examine the successes and failures of different types of stories and ways of telling them. We need also systematic ways of collecting and analysing stories.

Collecting stories

Recovering stories can be treated as a technique like a survey; a means for getting data for policymakers. For central elites, the question is how can we collect such data? In a phrase, the answer is ‘policy narratives’. Storytelling is a tool for collecting data about local knowledge to be used by central elites; an addition to the modernist social science toolbox. It is about providing information for policymakers so they can make rational decisions (Van Willigen 2002, 150 and Chapter 10).⁵

There are several ways to collect stories to provide advice to policymakers, including observation, questionnaires and focus groups. Observational field work is the best way of collecting stories but involves deep hanging out (see Rhodes 2017b, Chapter 3). The problem is that such field work is time-consuming. So, deep hanging out is supplemented, even replaced, with hit-and-run ethnography – short repeat visits. An alternative way of collecting stories is to use a questionnaire (see Gabriel 2000, Chapter 6). The questions are reassuringly obvious; for example: ‘if a new member of staff asks you “how do things work around here?” , what do you tell them?’ Focus groups are another effective method for collecting stories. Focus groups involve getting a group of people together to discuss their beliefs and practices. The groups are interactive and group members are encouraged by a facilitator to talk to one another. The researcher does

5 Storytelling, or narratives, as a tool of management is an established part of the business toolkit and there is a burgeoning literature. See, for example: Czarniawska (2004); Gabriel (2000); and Denning (2007). There is even a *Dummies* book (Dietz and Silverman 2013).

not interview the group members but facilitates their discussion. It is important the focus group should be coherent, comprised of people from the same organisation and with shared experiences in that organisation. There has to be a shared history from which they can draw stories. The focus group is shaking the bag of organisational stories to identify its dramas (see Rhodes 2017b, Chapter 5 for an extended discussion).

Such applied ethnography is now the stuff of management consultants (Dietz and Silverman 2014). There are also specialised government units. The aim may not be to collect stories, although they do, but it is always to provide advice for policymakers. However, many parties are involved in, or affected by, public policymaking. They can resist and subvert the aims of central elites. A second reason for collecting stories about governance is to specify the voices of the silent others.

Inscribing: Recover, recount and review

Recovering local stories about governance is not only about providing data for policymakers: it is also about giving voice to those who are seldom heard. The toolkit is the same whether one is collecting stories to advise policymakers or to give voice. The differences lie in whom we ask, for whom we collect the data and how we use those data. The role is not limited to advising policymakers. The researcher has many roles. The research does not privilege any one voice but represents the several voices in public policymaking. Instead of advice to policymakers, the aim can be to recover, recount and review. We recover the stories told to us by politicians, public servants and citizens. We systematise these accounts, telling our version of their stories and recounting them. Storywriter and storyteller review this version jointly to identify errors, divergences and lessons. The aim is a fusion of horizons that covers both agreement and where we agree to disagree.

We derive practical lessons from such lived and shared experiences. In late 2009, Pat Weller and Anne Tiernan brought together 11 former Chiefs of Staff (CoS) of the Australian prime minister. They came together to take part in two closed, roundtable focus group discussions facilitated by Tiernan and Weller. Each session aimed to elicit participants' views on such topics as how different individuals approached the task of working with the prime minister, the key duties and responsibilities that they performed, and the challenges confronting the CoS. Rhodes and Tiernan

conducted interviews with serving CoS. They then analysed both the 230 pages of transcripts and the interviews to identify the lessons for future CoS – see Table 10.3.

Table 10.3. Lessons for Chiefs of Staff

<p>1. Know the boss; supporting and protecting the prime minister Support the position Support the person</p> <p>2. Coping and surviving Run the office Day-to-day management Crisis management</p> <p>3. Policy coordination Set and stick to priorities Control the agenda Get the right people in the room Policy coordination</p> <p>4. Political management: managing dependencies The cabinet and the ministry The party-room The media The public service</p>

Source: Rhodes and Tiernan (2014, 13).

We circulated, discussed and modified drafts with the CoS before agreeing the contents of Table 10.3. We used the analysis as the basis of several workshops for political appointees in Australian state and federal government.

The term ‘local knowledge’ does not refer to only geographical localities. Yanow (2004, s10–s11) sees local knowledge as ‘typically developed within a community of practitioners’ that ‘makes it “local” knowledge – that is, specific to a context and to a group of people acting together in that context at that time’. CoS are specific to a context and share tacit local knowledge about working with the prime minister. It is tacit because they do not have a public voice – they would have to get permission from their prime minister to speak in public. Their work is officially ‘secret’. It is local because it is confined to the networks around the prime minister. The focus groups were the mechanism that gave them voice because they could remain anonymous as individuals yet share their experience in public. In fact, after the research was completed, they waived anonymity.

Truth and lies

Pat Weller reminded me that, as kids, when our parents said we were telling stories they meant we were lying. My account of storytelling is benign; it assumes reasonable people tell the truth. In politics that assumption is naïve. We know that politicians tell whopping great lies. Also, they tell stories for malign purposes: to justify the unjustifiable. So, how do we know when a story is reliable? How do we distinguish between the different stories people tell about the same events? How do we discredit fake news stories?

The search for, and the criteria of, objective knowledge lie at the core of these questions and I do not have the space to develop the argument (see Bevir 1999, Chapter 3; and Rhodes 2017b, 30–33, 50–51 and 100–102). The simple point is that stories must be forensically challenged. As Collini (2012, 62) argues, all inquiry including storytelling ‘is governed by broadly similar canons of accuracy and precision, of rigour in argument and clarity in presentation, of respect for the evidence and openness to criticism’. Facts must be checked. The story must be documented. The argument should be interrogated. We compare stories by putting them on trial and interrogating the quality of the evidence. ‘Truth’ may ‘multifaceted, theoretically loaded, and embedded in historically situated language games and ordinary practice’ (Wagenaar 2016, 134), but we can still strive for ‘plausible conjectures’ (Boudon 1993). In other words, stories are plausible when they rest on good reasons and the reasons are good when they are inferred from relevant evidence.

Conclusions

This chapter discusses three waves of governance: network governance, metagovernance and decentred governance. For each wave, it discusses the implications for practitioners: the tools they can use to steer governance. All three waves coexist today. Frankly, network governance continues to dominate because of its demonstrable relevance to practitioners on managing networks. Metagovernance suggests some important additions to the network governance toolkit. However, there are significant weaknesses with both network governance and metagovernance. This chapter seeks to move beyond NPG by highlighting decentred governance – an edifying third wave. Decentred governance focuses on the diverse ways in which such situated agents change the boundaries of state and

civil society by constantly remaking practices as their beliefs change in response to dilemmas. It highlights a more diverse view of state authority and its exercise. It suggests that tools based on collecting and analysing stories are the best way to steer contingent and contested narratives of governance. It describes how to collect and analyse stories.

Instrumental knowledge is a much-valued goal of social science research today and it lies at the heart of John Wanna's contribution. He plays the role of commentator, identifying and commenting on trends for public servants. He points to possible limits to reforms. He identifies promising lines of inquiry. He engages with theoretical debates that help him carry out his role of bridging the gap between academic and public servant. He is a dancer on the edges of theory, but a player in the game of reform.

Instrumental knowledge is not the heart and soul of decentred analysis. Rather, the approach is valuable in its own right, for its own sake, because it unpacks what is taken for granted by inscribing complex specificity in its context. However, like any approach in the social sciences, it has its limits. I can decentre my decentred account of governance by asking two questions. Is local knowledge useful to central policymakers? What are the barriers to giving voice to the silent?

Local knowledge is seen as 'good' and an essential complement to other forms of knowledge – hence the interest in putting citizens first. It is seen as another way for elite decision-makers to 'improve' policymaking by adapting national decisions to local conditions. Such advice *confronts* politicians and bureaucrats who are scarcely sympathetic to other previously silent voices. They see the stories as 'coming forward with awkward observations' and 'as wishing to preserve "traditional" ways' (Sillitoe 2006, 10). Politicians and bureaucrats criticise stories because the stories fail to conform to their expectations about the causes of problems and their solutions. Stories are dismissed as 'irrelevant or disruptive' (Sillitoe 2006, 14).

Any aphorism such as 'recover, recount and review' courts the danger of oversimplification. My aphorism is no exception because it sets local stories in stone when such knowledge is often elusive and ambiguous. Thus, Vohnsen (2015, 158) argues that 'local knowledge and practice is a tricky phenomenon' because it is 'dispersed and, not possessed equally by all'. It is also shift: 'what one person holds to be of importance in one specific situation is not necessarily what the same person might attribute

importance to in a different situation' (Vohnsen 2015, 158). Moreover, the street-level bureaucrats do not have clear, fixed identities. They 'swap identities all the time'. Thus, 'one minute they are advocating the project like true politicians, while the next moment they are criticising it like detached academic scholars'. They are not local experts confronting a central plan. They know the plan cannot be implemented so 'implementation happens hand-in-hand with street-level planning'. There is 'a second, highly unstable planning phase' locally, which continuously plans and redrafts the policy (Vohnsen 2015, 157–158; see also Vohnsen 2017). Local knowledge is 'shifty' or, more formally, it is contested, contingent and generative (Rhodes 2017b, 173–177). It is not amenable to central collection or direction. Collecting stories to advise policymakers raises the question of whose local knowledge in what context. To recover local knowledge through stories is to inscribe these complex specificities in their ever-varying contexts, but at the cost of being dismissed as irrelevant by central elites.

Proponents of decentred governance can provide advice to policymakers by collecting stories and through the systematic analysis of those stories. However, buyers beware. Today's conventional wisdom may assert that local knowledge should be relevant to policymakers but policymakers define relevance, not citizens. Moreover, local knowledge is not a given. It may be seen as disruptive by governments, but it is legitimate to focus on other people's definition of relevance and on people who hold views contrary to the government of the day. We can choose to be servants of power and help the state win consent, but it is not required. We can choose to contribute to debates that will enhance the capacity of citizens to consider and voice differing perspectives in policy debates. Social scientists, like cobblers, should stick to their lasts and focus on diagnosing ills and criticising policies and policymaking. They should leave problem-solving and policymaking to those elected, *and accountable*, for those tasks. Decentred governance and its stories encapsulating local knowledge offer no easy panacea for decision-makers, but it is an effective analytical tool for unpacking state practices from the bottom up.

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