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New Public Passion

Reflections from New Zealand on Public Service Reform

Effective public services are critical to sustaining and improving quality of life for communities around the world. A trusted, responsive and dynamic civil service underpins the ability of a state to deliver on the needs and wants of its citizens. The Sustainable Development Goals articulate the core development needs of countries, but cannot be achieved without effective civil services.

The challenge is that change is accelerating and complexity abounds, even as demands increase; many civil services are confronting tighter financial constraints and low levels of morale. In such complex networks, decision-making is fragmented but interdependent, leading to unpredictability and rapid change as “patterns arise out of a vast array of interactions and seemingly out of nowhere”.

The good news is that, in this complex, interconnected and rapidly changing world, the quality of civil service in a country is still largely under the control of citizens and their leaders. However, a significant increase in adaptability is required of public services, especially in an operating environment without resource flexibility and enthusiastic appetite for change. The Sustainable Development Goals cannot be achieved without overcoming this challenge.

New Public Passion (NPP) incorporates intrinsic and extrinsic motivation as well as organizational dynamism.

Public service reform is being pursued, with mixed results worldwide, to respond to this changing environment. Drawing on the experience of reform in New Zealand and engagement with reform endeavours in other countries, this paper seeks to differentiate the universal and the contextually unique in public service reform and to articulate New Public Passion and other approaches that strengthen the chances of successful reform.

New Public Passion

The Idea: Intrinsic Motivation Really Matters

New Public Passion (NPP) incorporates intrinsic and extrinsic motivation as well as organizational dynamism. That intrinsic motivation matters – that people will try harder if they feel they are doing the right thing, be more engaged if they find their work interesting and be more passionate in pursuit of their values – should not be controversial. Intrinsic motivation is not unique to the public service; it is a focus for social thinkers and business gurus. ‘Public service’ itself reflects the call to intrinsic values of service to the community. However, the importance of intrinsic motivation is underestimated or ignored in civil service reform all over the world.

Extrinsic motivation – the promise of rewards and the threat of punishment through compliance and accountability – is essential, but by itself cannot drive performance in a fast-changing, complex world. While some argue that intrinsic motivation cannot be systematized and thus is not reliable, it remains important for civil service performance and is essential to the ability to adapt at pace to rapid change. This dynamism is necessary for the new civil service required in a complex and fast-changing world. To work on reform without thinking explicitly about harnessing the intrinsic motivation of civil servants undermines the likelihood of sustainable change.

NPP is not a brand-new idea, but it is a timely drawing together of important thinking linking motivation and performance in a public service context. In addition to practical experience, the idea is based on well-established theory and private sector thinking about responding to the changing global marketplace.

The NPP idea draws on and seeks to build the lessons from Public Service Motivation (PSM) into the heart of public management models. James Perry defines PSM as “an individual’s predisposition to respond to motives grounded primarily or uniquely in public institutions”. Perry’s measurement methodology has laid the foundation for empirical analysis of the importance of PSM.

Most public management toolkits that we rely on today were not designed for managing complexity and rapid change. Public administration and new public management principles are necessary, but insufficient. New Public Governance attempts to bridge that gap, but will do so only if it harnesses intrinsic motivation and builds NPP. NPP seeks to rebalance the use of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation in New Public Governance to improve civil service delivery. The central message is that intrinsic motivation really matters.

Through a primary focus on accountability and managerialism, our public management systems rely too much on extrinsic motivation. High levels of intrinsic motivation are the natural advantage of public services, but this needs to be explicitly encouraged and stewarded. A NPP approach will harness intrinsic motivation to enable dynamic and adaptive civil servants to respond more effectively in environments with constrained resources, low morale, increasing change and complexity. This is a critical lever for maintaining performance, especially during periods of change. Reform is ultimately not sustainable without understanding and designing around the motivation of public servants, on whose sustained performance is dependent on their engagement and motivation.

The Benefits: Generating Trust, Supporting Responsiveness and Enabling Dynamism

Harnessing intrinsic motivation can help to generate trust, support responsiveness and is critical to building and sustaining dynamism. *Trust* is foundational. It is very difficult to have a civil service that is responsive and dynamic if there is a deficit of trust. In environments with low levels of trust, a vicious circle of helplessness, apathy and self-interest can eventuate. Harnessing intrinsic motivation is one of the few ways to break out of this vicious cycle. *Responsiveness* is vital and accountability is the chief engine of responsiveness. Wherever practical, accountability should be clearly defined and rigorously accounted for. However, in times of financial constraint and low morale, tapping into intrinsic motivation more effectively may be the only way to deliver more for less for a period of time and create the momentum to get over a change 'hump'. *Dynamism* is critical for responding to complex and rapidly changing environments and effectively harnessing intrinsic motivation is essential for enabling dynamism. Trust, responsiveness and dynamism arising from NPP translate into significant support that officials championing reform can build upon.

Sustainable Reform

Intrinsic motivation is critically important, but is only one aspect of sustainable reform. The presence of a Reform Moment and the need for sharply focused reforms are also key components. Key lessons from reform in New Zealand and other jurisdictions around the world are summarized in Figure 1.

Diagnosis

The entanglement of political dynamics (that civil service reform cannot directly address) and bureaucratic dysfunction leads to a perception that change is too hard. But, in a Reform Moment, an honest conversation that is focused directly on the role of the civil service brings clarity to the problems and the realization that many of these have been persistent.

Reform Moment

Reform is hard, expensive and disruptive, with a high risk of failure. Four features are fundamental for a Reform Moment:

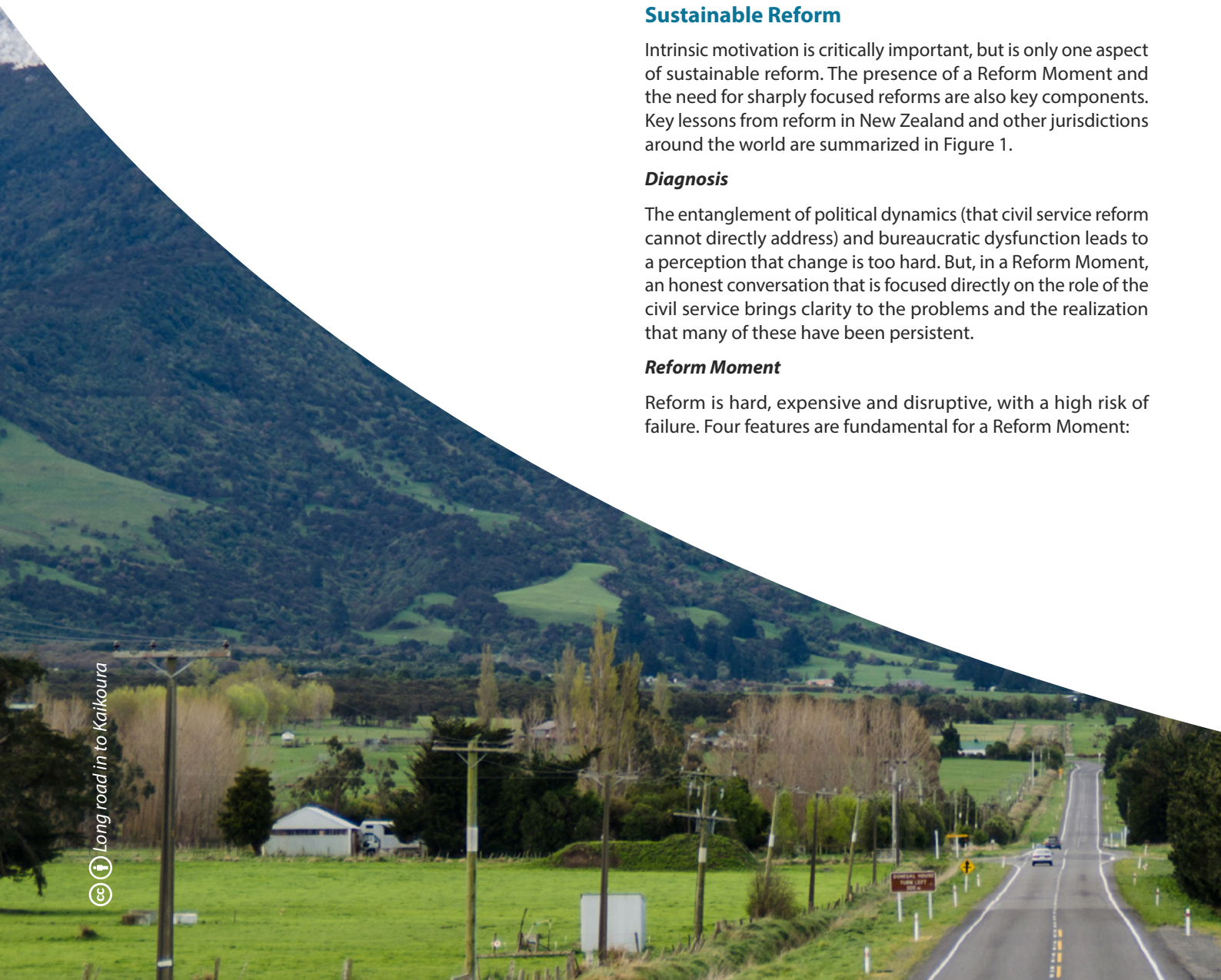
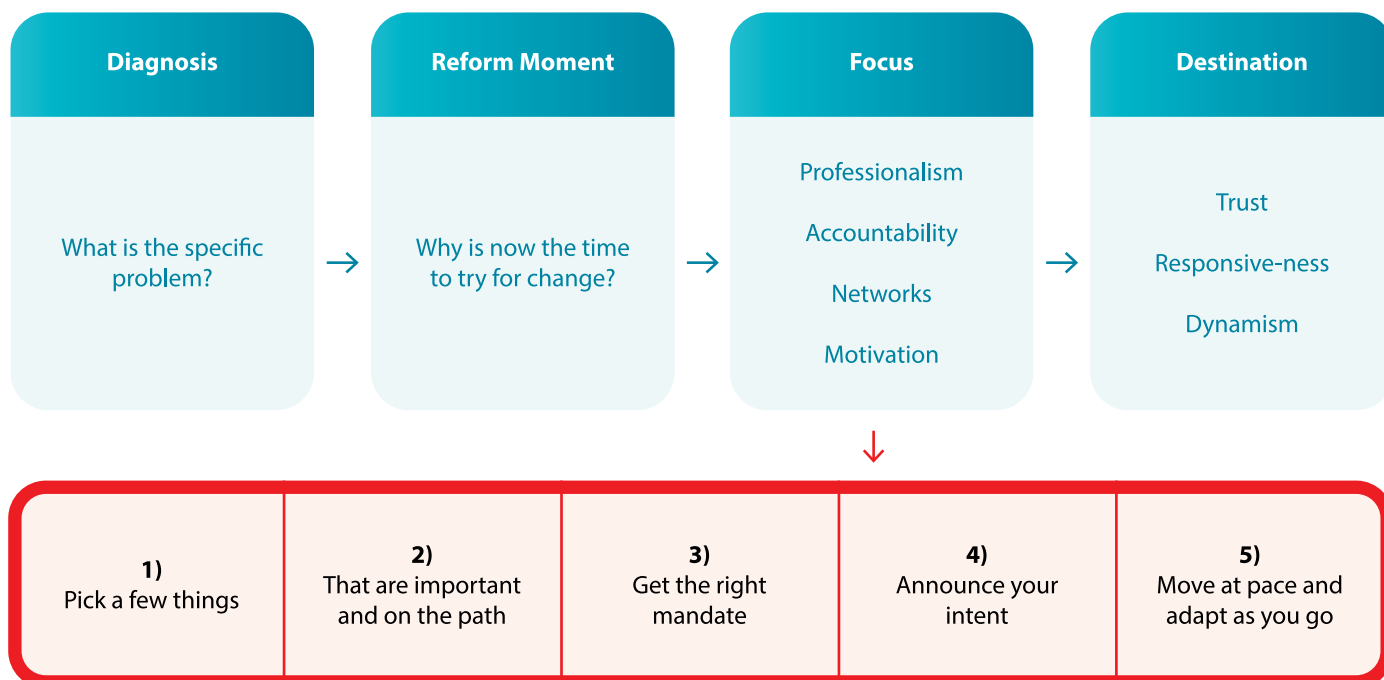


Figure 1: Key lessons for sustainable reform



- 1. Change gap** – Where a system can do what is required or expected but obviously falls short, there is a change gap. Change gaps are necessary for a Reform Moment, but are not enough without the following three aspects being aligned.
- 2. Change readiness** – Any system has a threshold for how much change it can handle. Repeated change, regardless of whether it is successful, leads to change fatigue and can have a catastrophic impact on the harnessing of intrinsic motivation. Picking a Reform Moment requires an understanding of the appetite for change and the capacity for the system to take on change at that time.
- 3. Trigger crisis or opportunity** – Even if a civil service has a clear change gap and has a degree of change readiness, a specific trigger crisis or opportunity creates a catalyst for change and the potential for focus to build reform momentum.
- 4. Reform leadership** – Leadership is vital for successful reform. Reform leadership is required to break with past practice and to take the risk of doing things differently.

A Reform Moment creates real stimulus for significant change and a chance of success. Without the presence of or the ability to generate a Reform Moment, do not attempt reform.

The need to focus cannot be overemphasized. Even if the ultimate destination is to change cultural norms in the system, trying to address all problems in a single Reform Moment will almost certainly lead to failure.

Focus is the driver of five suggested key reform steps:

- 1. Pick a few things:** Do not try to be comprehensive, as the number of things to change will always exceed the capacity to change them.
- 2. That are important and on the path:** It is better to move with urgency and commitment to address selected issues that are clearly important and on the path to your destination than to run an expensive and time-consuming process to be sure about what to do.
- 3. Get the right mandate:** Know who the critical decision makers are and ensure that they are signed up to the reform endeavour.
- 4. Announce your intent:** Announce your intent to ensure that critical decision makers and actors are openly committed to change to help sustain resolve through the difficult times ahead.
- 5. Move at pace and adapt as you go:** In a complex environment, it is simply not possible to predict the full impact of change so be prepared to adapt as you go to sustain momentum.

The **Destination** should not be a static point. Reform is a tool for responding to change dynamically.

The Question: What Does this Mean for You?

The challenges of reform and enhancing civil service performance are universal, but the experience is unique to each particular environment and context. Every Reform Moment is therefore unique and will require a different response to enable change. Three key lessons from New Zealand's reform:

1. *Do not try to fix everything at once.* The reforms progressively gained momentum by shifting the focus from comprehensive restructuring to improving rules to enable change and then focusing on specific areas for implementation.
2. *Do not focus energy on the things that cannot be changed directly in this Reform Moment.* Changing the role of ministers was not up for debate and concentrating on it reduced rather than increased the potential for significant change.
3. *Do not ignore intrinsic motivation.* The passion of the leaders and teams for improving citizen's lives was essential to sustain efforts in overcoming resistance to working differently.

New Public Passion means this: understand, nurture and harness the intrinsic motivation of civil servants in designing, planning and driving public management systems - it matters.

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