

10. The Institutionalisation of Leadership in the Australian Public Service

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Introduction

Public sector leadership is aspirational and contextual. It relies on a strange and complicated mix whereby politicians and bureaucrats are both meant to exhibit skills and outcomes emblematic of leaders whilst at the same time ensuring they respectively exercise their own responsibilities and duties without treading on each other's toes. Nevertheless, leadership is often a team or collaborative process where the various players combine their respective competencies to progress desired means or ends.

A traditional 'responsible government' view insists that politicians are the transformational leaders and bureaucrats simply the transactional managers. Administrative leadership according to this perspective is mundane and implementation-focused. Bureaucrats are risk-averse and lack vision; their task is simply to 'take the dreams of politicians and bring them gently to earth' (quoted in Ingraham 2005: 19). Hence, Bailey (2001: 80) insists:

Between leaders and bureaucrats there is an inevitable dissonance; their styles and their values are discordant. Politicians are visionaries; they are bold, ready to take risks, and eager to venture into the unknown. The bureaucrat's task is to reduce the unknown to the known, to make the political process non-political by making it entirely predictable, so that it has a rule for every contingency and thus eliminates contingencies.

The converse view suggests that the administrative task is much more active and participatory. Bureaucrats contribute vision and policy ideas. In many ways they guide the minister towards certain goals and dominate their political masters by providing the brains behind the scenes.

According to Peter Edwards' (2006: 67) biography of Australian public servant Arthur Tange, by the 1950s and 1960s 'it was generally accepted that permanent heads were major contributors to policy-making'. Tange himself estimated at one point he spent 60% of his time on policy and 40% on administration (Edwards 2006: 67). This dominance of the bureaucrats in the policy making domain was explained by the relative endurance and focus of permanent heads compared to the transient tenure of ministers. Moreover, many ministers were

seen to be weak and merely transactional in the federal arena during the 1940s-70s, preferring to rely on their bureaucratic advisers. Occasionally, strong ministers, such as McEwen, used their departmental head as strategic allies in forging a formidable alliance.

Today, however, the attributes and capacities of leadership are more formally articulated and instrumentally nurtured (Althaus and Wanna 2008). An interview survey of Australian Public Service (APS) senior executives showed that leadership is overwhelmingly viewed as an organisational management task (Althaus 2008). Executives defined leadership as a 'tool' for getting staff and resources to meet the goals and objectives of the organisation of which they had charge to a maximal extent. A typical definition of leadership was 'the capacity to develop goals, set programs to achieve them and encourage others to participate in reaching desired outcomes'. What was still striking from these interviews was that only two participants even mentioned the minister in reflecting on leadership in the public service. Either the relationship was assumed and taken for granted or contemporary public servants are more likely to view leadership as a component of management. Leadership was not a separate attribute (of 'leading') but enmeshed with the managerial aspects of their jobs and continually reconfigured because of the political context in which they worked. Leadership was not understood or discussed as charting or serving the public interest (indeed, the notion of the 'public interest' was mentioned only once), it was instead framed in the language of effectiveness and responsiveness to political imperatives.

This prominence given to the importance of leadership implies that it is now the 'latest big thing' in public sector reform. Rhetoric, at least, suggests that leadership now dominates the public sector agenda. It is a leading 'heading' in annual reports and corporate plans, and agencies report on their progress in this regard; it is a crucial part of the architecture of agency governance (often centred around internal 'boards of management' and executive team meetings); it is a developmental learning skill that ought to be taught to apprenticed executives. Top executives will regularly give speeches on the importance of leadership to public policy and the professional standing of the agency in the service.

The embrace of the discourse of leadership has occurred at the same time as governments have taken seriously the development of leadership skills more widely across the service. The APS has begun to institutionalise the concept of developmental leadership, especially since the inception of the Senior Executive Leadership Capability (SELC) framework in 1999, making it part of its senior executive recruitment, training and promotion framework. Officials undertaking managerial roles can be trained to display better leadership skills, and as a consequence huge investments are now being made in leadership training and development across the service (APSC 2008; Althaus 2008).

This chapter considers this evolving attempt to institutionalise leadership in the APS and reflects upon the various receptions of such endeavours among the target public servant population. It asks: how do changes in ideas about leadership relate to other forces shaping 'life at the top'? What does it matter if dominant conceptions of leadership within the APS shift? And, how has the institutionalisation of leadership been achieved in the APS and what has it achieved?

What this chapter suggests is that we need to take a closer look at the administrative-political interface before rushing to conclusions about the type of public sector leadership we should expect, or the best ways to encourage and improve leadership in practice. We argue that the institutionalisation of administrative leadership in the APS has been a bureaucratically-inspired initiative which, in part, reflects a need to reassert public service independence ('duty') amidst a more contestable world of policy advice and in an environment dominated by political frustrations concerning capacities of responsiveness and innovation in public sector agencies.

Separating indivisibility: from partner adviser to administrative secretary?

Referring to British experience, Kavanagh and Richards (2003) argue that there has been a radical change in the idea of the role to be played by officials in the British political system. The conventional understanding, perhaps best articulated in Lord Haldane's *Report of the Machinery of Government Committee* of 1918, believed that at the heart of the core executive rested a system of *advice* rather than rules. Just as cabinet ministers constitutionally advised the sovereign, so they, in turn, were advised by the senior practitioners of the civil service who were thought of as partners in the task of government. Central to this advisory relationship was the notion that officials-as-advisers maintained an 'indivisible relationship with their political masters' such that there was 'no requirement for the separation of powers between the two' (Kavanagh and Richards 2003: 178).

Kavanagh and Richards propose that British officials have experienced a shift in this 'indivisible relationship' over time, from a relationship of privileged *advice* and *partnership* to one of *assisting* ministers to carry out government policy. Kavanagh and Richards attribute the change in attitude and approach to a growth in bureaucratic power through to the 1970s. In turn, such an exercise of power caused a backlash from ministers who felt public officials were unhelpful and part of the 'governance problem'. During the Thatcher years there was a perception that ministers needed to gain greater political control over bureaucracy. Thatcher's attitudes to the civil service were influenced by her negative perception of the behaviour and attitude of officials. For instance, she was reputedly told by William Armstrong, Head of the Civil Service from 1968-74

that the role of civil servants was to ‘manage the decline of Britain in an orderly fashion’ — not a point of view she shared (Kavanagh and Richards 2003: 181).

Hence, Thatcher was determined to ensure that civil servants became specifically attentive to serving ministers rather than working to their own ideas of their historical role — or their own take on the public interest. Moreover, if ministers sought to become more proactive in policy making they had to turn to other sources of advice from outside the civil service. The monopoly of bureaucratic power was broken. According to Kavanagh and Richards, other factors contributed to the shift away from a dependency on the civil service, especially the heightened media scrutiny on ministers and expectations they could effect change.

This shift in the nature of relationship between minister and administrative official can also be identified in Australia. Althaus and Wanna (2008) argue that nomenclature change for departmental heads in the APS — from ‘permanent head’ to ‘secretary’ and sometimes to ‘chief executive’ — is an indicator of the shifts in attitude towards the roles of senior officials. The process of dismantling permanency and monopolistic advice was gradual and episodic (see Weller and Wanna 1997, Halligan 2007). Along with the introduction of fixed term contractual employment (or rather, ‘letters of offer’ with statements of expectations) and performance pay, politicians have used nomenclature to clarify the role expectations for their departmental heads (and, in doing so, for ministers as well). Today’s secretaries became unsure how far they could sponsor new agendas or policy initiatives ahead of the government’s immediate agenda — believing they were consigned to administering expediency (Wanna interviews 2005).

Such changes can also be discerned from the observations of reflective former long-serving departmental heads. For example, Tony Blunn argued (in Weller 2001: 201) that there has been a radical change in the concept of public service since the time of Fraser through to the Howard era:

The whole concept of the public service as the partner of the government rather than the servant of the government changed ... those reforms said, no, no, the minister is responsible. You didn’t hear that the minister being responsible for the management of the department before the Dawkins reform; technically, and legally it was always the case but no one ever mouthed it. Dawkins really placed the responsibility for managing the department with the minister, with the secretary as his principal agent. That was a big shift.

The movement away from an adviser-partnership model to a more technocratic managerialist role is indicative of the type of leadership that is now expected from administrators, at least in the APS. Furthermore, the preferential elevation

of the 'generic' mobile executive suggests an emphasis on administrative competence ('neutral competence') rather than policy or technical expertise (although some executives have challenged this orientation — see Henry 2007).

So is 'indivisibility' dead? Although traditionalists often articulate that ministers and departmental heads 'were on the same side' — at least for the life of the government — many public executives today dispute this cosy relationship, sensing they both have different interests and motivations which can conflict. Collaborative leadership between minister and bureaucrat then is highly contingent, it waxes and wanes not only according to the era but also according to personalities and differences or similarities in work practice and style. Many secretaries continue to refer to ministers as 'the Minister' even when speaking one-on-one or in informal settings — insisting on some degree of separation and role distinction. Speaking of his stint with Local Government minister, Tom Uren, Tony Blunn (in Weller 2001: 200) spoke of the uncertainty in relationship that he endured:

You did not know if he was going to hit you or hug you, and I mean that's hard.

But it is not all down to personality. Collaborative leadership can vary according to the policy at hand and in particular who is, or was, involved in the trajectory the policy has followed to date. Leadership may be divisible or indivisible depending on who claims carriage and ownership of the policy and who disowns it. This can vary according to whether the policy problem is old and inherited or whether it is new and the creation of one of the player's own making (Loverd 1997: 24).

So, present debates over the roles and level of responsiveness of top public officials hints more at changes in the underlying Haldane model rather than at compromised independence or suspicions of politicisation. The subsequent emphasis upon public sector leadership suggests that the new model of technocratic management, contingent on the removal of tenure, has not yet resolved the tensions inherent in the key relationships at the centre of the policy making process.

Service-wide leadership: competition or cooperation?

There is also a wider notion of administrative leadership *across* the public service — a service-wide responsibility to assist and integrate government policy approaches. But how does administrative leadership manifest itself across the service as a whole? There have been competing patterns and expressions of leadership shown in the service in different eras, and vestiges remain to this day. We can think of these competing traditions as ranging from adversarial and pluralistic forms of competition for influence to orchestrated collaboration across and between agencies. Such patterns are significant in defining what

administrative leadership means — it is a potent blend of individual careers, institutional power and policy ends.

In the early eras of the APS, Roland Wilson (in Edwards 2006: 83) made it clear to Arthur Tange that it was

perfectly normal for departments to be as antagonistic to one another as two rival banks competing for market share and political influence. In short, what mattered for public servants was how their department was faring in a constant battle for influence. A truly successful public servant was one who led a department that was at or near the top of an imaginary league table. Standing in this table depended on perceptions of the department's strength and influence, particularly in the eyes of senior ministers and other departmental heads.

Departmental power and inter-agency rivalry, in other words, were the order of the day for earlier versions of the APS. Today, the leadership emphasis is on interdepartmental cooperation and whole-of-government collaboration. Departmental heads and senior executives are meant to operate as a team and to build trust and across-agency networks to facilitate smooth policy making. The APS with its largely graduate intake and generic responsibilities for facilitating and overseeing policies and programs is now far more homogenous than in former times, thereby making the service more amenable to a leadership focus than ever before (Gourley 2007). Competition is more about individual recognition and career progression than policy rivalry or institutional reputation. This is especially so given the move to enterprise bargaining which places the terms and conditions of employment with respective agency 'leaders' rather than with a centralised arbitration system (Henderson 2007).

The past internal rivalry between departments for the ear of government has also become superseded by the ability of ministers to source alternative policy advice from external parties. Nowadays, ministers have an amazing array of advisers ranging from their extensive political advice structures (Tiernan 2007) through to think tanks and direct contact with service providers, as well as sophisticated polling mechanisms that connect them to their constituencies (Stone 1996). The sharing of international experience and best practice as well as policy learning and the wide array of media sources has also heightened ministerial options and discretion. Public officials are no longer the sole purveyors of information or advice. Carving out a niche market in advice relevancy and usefulness is now a distinct aspect to the job of a public official rather than relying on monopoly positions once taken for granted.

The shift is a double-edge sword. Notions of generic administrative leadership have shifted in emphasis away from mere technical proficiency to greater attention to competence, managing to the bottom line, and operational fitness.

At the same time, however, officials are having to become more responsive to the (expedient) policy directives of the government of the day, making it challenging to contribute much in the way of strategy or vision without being seen to be 'interfering' (Gallop 2007). There are other paradoxes. Public officials appear now to pay more attention to interdepartmental cooperation and horizontal alignment. They are meant to work in dynamic partnership with private and non-governmental organisations, to show initiative and take calculated risks to achieve exemplary social outcomes (Shergold 2007; Kane 2007). All this at the same time as they are supposed to be responsive to community demands and have been placed under strict accountability regimes that demand almost excessive process requirements (Shergold 2004). Engaged in such complex intra and extra-governmental relationships, it is not surprising that secretaries find their relationship with ministers can be fraught with less trust.

The changing loci of leadership: top-down or bottom-up?

Leadership in the public sector was traditionally viewed as a top-down process governed by a command-and-control approach where strong individuals dominated through force of personality. According to Kavanagh and Richards (2003: 175-7), both ministers and civil servants operate on the basis of a 'leadership' conceptualisation of elite democracy premised on the core idea that 'government knows best'. Kavanagh and Richards see this as being a particular feature of British government which entrenches executive dominance over the legislature. As they see it, British — and by default Australian — members of the executive have a top-down view of representative democracy which downplays responsiveness to the populace or their participation in the policy process. Instead, the governing elite 'should be capable of taking decisive and necessary, even if unpopular, action' (2003: 177).

But as Broussine (2003) makes clear, this is not the focus that modern approaches to leadership adopt. The contemporary focus is to conceive of leadership as being at the core of what everyone does within an organisation; it is collective and team-based more than individual-reliant. Under the old autocratic model, leaders could expect to solve the problem, announce the decision and get compliance, based on their authority. But public sector leaders today must gain commitment, not just compliance and, therefore, a collaborative style is needed, built from the bottom-up. In the past, administrative leadership capacity and leadership practice was assessed according to perceived 'strength' of the departmental head and the results achieved in the 'departmental league table'. Now, according to the National Institute of Governance Report on Public Service Leadership (2004), public sector leadership capacity must be measured according to how well a government achieves horizontal and vertical alignment to connect policy intent with delivery and integrate organisational goals with performance.

These different approaches towards leadership have led Kavanagh and Richards (2003) to question whether leadership is genuinely being actualised or whether a smokescreen or mirage is occurring. As they see it, 'Ministers and civil servants have been adept at publicly pursuing a strategy of greater openness, inclusivity and flexibility, while privately being able to remain a homogenous elite with a tight hold on political power ... British political elites have been successful at ensuring that there is plurality without pluralism in the political system' (2003: 175). Administrative leadership, in other words, may not really have changed at all. For Kavanagh and Richards, until participative policy making is a genuine reality, the call for leadership and the notion of a 'leadership gap' will remain. Continuing to situate the locus of administrative leadership within a top-down framework implies that while the rhetoric of leadership may have changed, the practice has not yet.

Expressing attributes of leadership: codification versus convention?

Competency-based leadership recruitment, promotion, and training are now the order of the day in public services across the globe (Hood and Lodge 2005). In Australia, the SELC framework ensures that senior executives are now selected and assessed on the basis of their abilities to match skills with five core competency criteria derived from public sector experiences. These are:

1. Achieves results;
2. Shapes strategic thinking;
3. Cultivates productive working relationships;
4. Communicates with influence; and
5. Exemplifies personal drive and integrity.

Aspiring public executives must address each of these competency criteria and outline their relevant experience in applications for promotion to the SES — and referees are asked to assess their performance in each category. Many agencies also use the framework to structure their own internal staff development programs and performance appraisal systems.

So, for some jurisdictions, this codification system of leadership provides a useful approach. It establishes a generic framework for the public service against which to nurture and judge leadership potential. It has thus helped focus attention both on the distinctiveness of public sector leadership from its private sector counterparts and on the requirements of agencies and executives to develop leadership attributes in their organisations (Page, Hood and Lodge 2005).

At the end of the day, however, it is worth asking the question of whether leadership needs to be defined and detailed with precision into taxonomic categories and have criteria fastidiously applied? John Uhr (2005: 82) points out that the term 'leadership' is not mentioned in the Australian Constitution. Yet

again, neither is the term 'prime minister' nor 'cabinet'. That, according to Uhr, is the fascinating point and, in many ways, the beauty of the leadership concept. It rests on convention, on shared understandings that can shift and develop as times and people change. He prefers the notion of 'matrix leadership' contingent upon players, processes and structures, the public and personal, and the contextual circumstances.

Inevitably, the main problem with public service leadership as an object of study is that it is amorphous and obscure. While we tend to recognise leadership when it is both present and when it is lacking, either way we struggle to articulate exactly what it is. It is not clear whether public leadership is 'smart politics', 'good policy', 'strategic direction', or something 'well administered'. Serendipity and luck can play a big part — the 'right decision at the right time' — which is not something that can be learnt or taught in training programs.

There appear to be different underlying premises espoused by various proponents as to what is meant by public service leadership. Academics tend to conceptualise it in terms of the theory of democratic institutions, framing leadership according to concepts of politics, accountability, and power. Practitioners view it as an administrative responsibility — in organisational terms and part of the management task to which they have been assigned. According to the 'self-help literature' on the topic, organisational leadership is about intrinsic qualities and achieving change through persuasion and example, but also couched within organisational culture. Meanwhile the public tend to view administrative leadership as being in decline — they bemoan the absence of vision, integrity, and hard work on the part of public officials — yesterday's leaders tend to radiate with the passing of time!

It is an obvious but nevertheless important point to recall that leadership can be different things in different times and can be appreciated as different things to different people. Its malleability is simultaneously its usefulness and its bane. Who would not want great public leadership? But who knows exactly what this means? Codifiers can assist here and their criteria gain traction precisely because the bureaucracy adopts them, applies them in practice, and gives them cogency. Attempts to codify administrative leadership usually depend on formulating a number of 'competencies' which are then used extensively to develop training programs and skills development (Lodge and Hood 2005). If such competencies are mandated (or gain authoritative backing) then public servants must meet these criteria if they are to be recruited or promoted to senior ranks (APSC 2008). However, research undertaken on the Senior Executive Service by Althaus (2009) shows that links between leadership training and career progression remain weak. Senior executives themselves do not see a direct correlation between the undertaking of leadership training and promotion to executive positions. At the same time, these same executives *do* support a regime of leadership training

although they tend to place greatest value in varied experience, on-the-job training and mentoring over formal training courses taught away from the workplace. As one participant observed: ‘you can teach content, but not leadership’.

In many ways, the problem is that today’s ordinary public servants, even if only implicitly, are being asked to deploy

the acute political knowledge and instincts that had once been expected only of mandarins, even as they were admonished to remain strictly apolitical ... The new generation of public servants soon learnt by experience the deeply political nature of their enterprise, but few of the extensive training programs they undertook made note of it or gave them the means, understanding of even permission to cope with it ... (Kane 2007: 139).

This paradoxical demand for political passivity and responsivity mixed with finely honed appreciation for, and interaction with, the political dimension to policy making can be a volatile cocktail. Whereas the skills for navigating this delicate prudential site once rested within the leadership domain of the mandarins, now it is a widespread exercise given leadership has now been widely institutionalised within public service practice.

Parallel or complementary: the institutionalisation of leadership

These deeper dimensions to the public sector leadership conundrum are perhaps not yet fully appreciated and were hardly intended. Leadership was introduced into the public sector mantra in its most modern form because it was a ‘safe agenda’. The concept of leadership is useful because it offers stories of inspiration as well as techniques and a focus on the laudable goals of enhanced ethics, due process, and integrity. When introducing the SELC framework, the APSC was acutely aware of trying to balance the introduction of substance in the leadership criteria at the same time as not wanting to impose too many rules into the system which might stifle recruitment flexibility (Podger 2007).

Many arguments can be found that might explain the rationale behind institutionalisation of the leadership agenda. The public service appropriated the leadership discourse not only because it was ‘safe’ but also because it found that the management jargon was not enough. The task of public service is not a simple matter of following commands blindly nor is it an endeavour where risk-taking and innovation can be employed at will or without boundaries. The public sector was facing competition in advice, was trying to define and delineate its unique nature from its private sector and NGO counterparts, and was trying to interpret and make sense of what politicians were demanding of it. Institutionalisation of leadership may not have provided the equivalent salaries

to the corporate sector but it did offer a way of the public service reasserting itself and coherently reshaping its relevance in the new order of policy making. The concept of public sector leadership allows for public sector distinctions to be identified, it reinstates the notion that there is a sense of public duty to be performed and it gives a sense of professionalisation and meaning to the task of public service.

The drive to place leadership at the apex of the public sector mission (and its training regimes) was not a discourse introduced by politicians. Public servants have avidly embraced the language and appropriated the term. It provides a discourse and a malleable framework through which to understand their changing roles and negotiate changing expectations. Importantly, it also allows public executives to get onto the front foot and become conversant with the 'leader frameworks' of their political masters and private sector counterparts. Public service leaders are necessary (though not sufficient) for the success of political leaders and can be compared with the corporate leadership examples that dominate management texts. The concept of leadership offers a bridge to speak with the professionals in these other domains.

The leadership discourse sat neatly with the competing demands being made of the modern public service and gave public sector work a needed boost of legitimacy that coalesced with other agendas of the time such as the 'creating public value' model of Mark Moore (1995). Whereas the managerialist reforms of the 1980s relegated the public sector to mere imitation of private sector practice, the public value and leadership programs helped swing perceptions the other way, back towards the public sector contributing its own unique professional and technical skills. Leadership could be used to meet the demands of politicians for greater responsiveness from the public service at the same time as enhance the image of the public service task.

Hence, the institutionalisation of public sector leadership made a great deal of sense. It served multiple needs of the public service without causing any major political concerns. The language of leadership could creep seamlessly into the discourse of public service without a tremor. Managers across the public service could give added meaning to their work by becoming public sector leaders.

What we have suggested here, however, is that, in institutionalising leadership, public sector leadership doyens have perhaps introduced a parallel relationship with government rather than a complementary one. In many ways the role of a senior public servant can be likened to an experienced mountain guide. Without the expertise of the guide, the political climber is likely to get lost, hurt themselves, or fail to achieve their objectives while having a poor experience of the adventure. Both the guide and the climber provide leadership but it is of a different nature and both require each other if the goals of the exploration are to be achieved. This symbiotic relationship requires a particular form of

cooperation to produce a successful partnership. In their laudable effort to highlight the unique contribution of public servants to the leadership task, proponents of the public sector leadership agenda may have, perhaps unhelpfully, gone off to climb their own mountain leaving their political leaders stranded at base camp.

So, is there a conclusion?

In this chapter we have examined some of the forces moulding the changing concept of administrative leadership in the modern era. Some aspects have changed markedly from former periods, others have remained the same. The significance of the term leadership has become more pronounced in current times but the same dilemmas challenge the executive; the relationship between officials and ministers remains one of complexity yet promise. The contemporary uptake of the leadership mantra might remain in place for some time in order to help practitioners and observers put some words and concepts around the need for greater panache in decision making at the top levels of government. Leadership by itself is not, however, a panacea for the policy making dilemmas facing the executive.

In one sense, it is easy to separate political from administrative leadership and to assume (wrongly) that responsible government provides for these respective leadership functions to be discharged simply and effectively. A raft of public sector leadership training programs now in place across the globe run the risk of embedding this naivety, even as they struggle to convey the complexity of the public sector leadership task.

In trying to establish a particular set of meanings for administrative leadership, modern public servants have perhaps sold themselves short. How accurately can public sector leadership be codified without limiting the understanding of what, exactly, it is that public servants contribute to the policy process? Public servants are not politicians, yet they do not simply carry out what politicians want. Public servants also provide strategic vision, policy expertise and innovative risk-taking flair, but not in isolation. They do so within a relationship with their political masters that cannot be neatly compartmentalised and which can vary from minister to minister and from government to government.

At the end of the day, any definition of administrative leadership runs the risk of being so vacuous that it is meaningless. Putting in place a rigorous leadership framework does not guarantee any change in the substance of leadership practice, and 'good leadership' could indeed potentially be the opposite of the attributes proposed given circumstances. Despite overwhelming support for the usefulness, rigor and rollout of the Integrated Leadership System and the SELC framework, the 2005/06 *State of the Service Report* reiterated the common longstanding view of lower level public servants who tend to rate lowly their supervisors' skills in

strategic leadership capacities (Korac-Kakabadse and Korac-Kakabadse 1996; Burgess 2007). Moreover, shifting the mantle of leadership from senior mandarins to almost all public servants — even if the leadership skills are supposed to graduate the higher the level — potentially empties the leadership term of its potency.

What exactly is being sought when people demand public sector leadership? If it is *responsiveness*, then this term should be preferred and that agenda should be scrutinised. If it is *professionalisation* and greater meaning for public service work then using an institutionalised leadership framework can be a risky strategy as it plays into the arms of management gurus and threatens the delicate balance of the public service role.

Has the public sector leadership agenda made life easier for the public servants it affects? We would suggest not. To return to our climbing analogy: perhaps what we need from the public service is not so much greater leadership, but rather more attention be paid to addressing the challenging task of being a ‘good guide’ as the journey of good government is pursued through the myriad of tracks open to executive government.

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