



Moving beyond the rhetoric:
An assessment of organisational
leadership in the Australian public
sector

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ABSTRACT

The nature and expectations of public sector leaders have shifted in line with whole-of-government efforts that emphasise coordination and collaboration. This requires a renewed focus in the way public sector leadership is conceived, developed, and evaluated. To this end, academics have argued for greater theoretical development in the application of collective leadership theory to the public sector and, in particular, framing leadership as a group-level phenomenon.

This thesis explores the notion of group-level leadership, termed ‘organisational leadership’, in the public sector within an Australian context. It defines organisational public sector leadership as a collaborative process whereby the senior executives combine their respective competencies to develop and adapt organisations, and its people, to deliver public value. Based on this definition, the thesis proposed a framework as an analytical heuristic that articulates the influences, tasks, and goals of contemporary organisational public sector leadership in a joined-up environment. The framework was subsequently used to structure an assessment of organisational leadership in the Australian public sector using two case studies: the Australian Public Service and the NSW Public Sector. This identified five systemic challenges and issues inhibiting leadership effectiveness: the relationship between politics and the public sector; employee motivation and engagement; risk averse organisational culture and the impact on innovation, change, and driving siloed operating models; values and diversity; and disparate workforce management practices. Collectively, these findings make it apparent that the Australian public sector is at an important disjuncture, highlighting an opportunity to move beyond the rhetoric and in doing so progress the practice of leadership so as to realise the benefits of joined-up working and deliver greater public value.

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List of acronyms

ANAO	Australian National Audit Office
APH	Australian Parliament House
APS	Australian Public Service
APSC	Australian Public Service Commission
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CRP	Capability Review Program
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DoFD	Department of Finance and Deregulation
EL	Executive Level
FaHCSIA	Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
NPM	New Public Management
NSW	New South Wales
NSWPS	New South Wales Public Sector
NSWPSC	New South Wales Public Service Commission
NZ	New Zealand
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PMES	People Matter Employee Survey
SES	Senior Executive Service
TPA	Traditional Public Administration
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States