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Joined-up Public Services

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What lessons can we draw from current attempts at integrating public services provision in the UK or elsewhere? What are the main benefits, problems and barriers to this process inside those kinds of service provision that are organized, funded or specifically regulated by government? How else might the UK government ensure the joining-up of services in ways that are helpful to citizens (e.g. through one-stop-shops, individual budgets, etc.)? How could services be integrated in the future? Despite the prevalence of such topics in practitioner discussions for many years now,² since at least the White Paper on *Modernising Government* (Cabinet Office, 1999), there is actually only a small research literature that more thoughtfully discusses these issues.³ Most of them focus on particular services or particular client groups where problems of ‘service delivery disasters’ have been most acute, as with children’s services (Frost, 2005; Dunleavy *et al.*, 2010).

In this chapter I want to look more broadly across all the citizen-facing public services. I also seek to locate the underlying dynamic of changes in the government sector, the fundamental drivers of organizational development in the digital era. Essentially they can be summed up in a rather ugly but nonetheless powerfully descriptive word – disintermediation – which means the stripping out or slimming down or simplification of intermediaries in the process of delivering public services. Disintermediation achieves ‘joining-up’ by significantly and visibly reducing the complexity of the institutional landscape that citizens confront in trying to access, draw on and improve public services. A great deal of previous ‘joining-up’ does not qualify as disintermediation

¹ I thank Ed Towers and Jane Tinkler for assistance with the ideas in this chapter.

² See especially NAO (2004); Audit Commission (2005); Ghash *et al.* (2008: 6, 1997: 6); Stoker *et al.* (2002); Richards (2001).

³ See Pollit (2003); Bogdanor (2005); Hood (2005); Catney (2009); Davies (2009).

because it has been back-office in style and approach. It matters to in-the-know bureaucrats behind the scenes (and it may be quite important for how they do their jobs). But it is not obvious or meaningful to citizens, or to firms or civil society organizations, struggling to manage their connections with a complex web of government agencies.

The chapter has three parts. First, I sketch out the nature of this web and why its current complexity creates major problems for citizens. Second, I consider the 'bottom-up' kind of joining-up (and more vaguely 'joined-up thinking'). Third, I situate the need for greater disintermediation in public services against the macrorends in the private sector for a transition to online and e-based services, and also against the rather dialectical 'centralizing plus decentralizing' organizational dynamic of modern information and communication technology (ICT) developments. In the public sector these two key background influences combine with the specific agenda of 'digital-era governance' to make reintegration, needs-based holism and digitalization the key leitmotifs of the next decade and more of public services development.

'What a complex web we weave' – the diversity of UK public service delivery chains

Over more than a decade, as part of my work with the LSE Public Policy Group, I have sat in on a great many focus group sessions with ordinary citizens discussing issues such as how to complain about public services, how to get redress if things go wrong, how to understand government forms and information websites and how to get help if you find them hard going. Almost invariably at some point someone in the group will remark that it is a great shame that UK government cannot be like Marks and Spencer or John Lewis, with their nationally agreed and known policies about returning goods and conveniently located branches in most high streets and major shopping centres. Turning to the group facilitator (or to me if I'm sitting on the sidelines), the people who raise this issue will ask in a detailed and genuinely puzzled way, how it is that the government with all its resources cannot emulate this standard of service and accessibility? Luckily for me the ethos of focus groups is to never give any 'expert' answers but to play back the question for the group itself to solve: 'That's a good question Ed. What do other people think?' The group will normally then divide into two-thirds of people who see government fragmentation and complexity as a Machiavellian ploy to deceive and confuse ordinary

folk, and a third who see it as an inadvertent by-product of officials wanting their own turf and not caring over-much about issues outside their responsibility or about what their decisions mean for citizens.

Yet why is not government more like Marks and Spencer? Why can it not have an integrated outlet on every high street or shopping centre, in the places where people want to go anyway? I am still not sure that I know any rational or easily defensible answer to these questions. One common answer is genetic – we created a system of government long ago, with organizational approaches and technologies for processing information that were the best we could do at the time. Now we have invested so heavily in these departments, agencies and local authorities that we cannot bring ourselves to disinvest or reorganize in more radical ways that might now be feasible, given modern ways of accessing, handling, storing and processing information. Another common answer (popular with top civil servants) rebuts the focus group query as naïve. This view points out that government spends 25 per cent of UK final consumption directly on goods and services (that is, leaving out of account its huge role in redistributing resources via transfer payments of various kinds). So the scale of UK government is just vastly greater than the operations of Marks and Spencer or Tesco. These responses both have something going for them. But before concluding that all is well, it seems important also to think critically

Figure 11.1 Thirteen types of citizen-government relationships in the UK

about how complex and differentiated our government set up actually is. Figure 11.1 shows my quick sketch of how public service delivery chains are currently organized in the UK.

This diagram may look complex, but since we all live and work with it already, it is worth just running quickly through the 13 different types of delivery chain.

- 1 *Central government services* are directly supplied by national ministries to citizens or businesses. Key examples are national taxation via Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, the social security system via the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), or on a much smaller scale the passport system of the registration of vehicles and drivers.
- 2 *Mediated central government services* are funded centrally but directly implemented by micro-local agencies. The key examples are the healthcare provided by primary care trusts and NHS hospital trusts in England.
- 3 *Autonomous micro-local agency services* seem to be rare in the public sector because funding implies control, but local charities and NGOs operate pervasively in this model.
- 4 *Services implemented by micro-local agencies in a public service delivery chain* involving both central and local government supervision (less commonly, also involving state or regional governments) are most important in education, with locally managed schools in England.
- 5 *Local government runs services, but is very closely supervised by central government* and without any substantive local discretion. This category is actually rather rare in the UK. The operations of housing benefits by local governments for the DWP are an important example.
- 6 *Autonomous local government services*, that are substantively uninfluenced by the centre are also not very common. Local planning and environmental services are the best current examples, but even here planning cases can be appealed upwards.
- 7 *Local government services supervised by devolved governments* are important in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, whose governments supervise provision by their local councils and NHS bodies. (This is the counterpart of 5 above.)
- 8 *Local government services supervised by a public service delivery chain involving both UK and devolved or regional governments* are increasing slowly in scope, especially in London government with the key role of the Mayor and Greater London Authority (GLA) and in the northern English regions with the most developed regional institutions.

- 9 *Autonomous devolved or regional government services* (on the pattern of the USA) are rather rare still, but the evolution of NHS and social care policies for the elderly in the UK's devolved nations is an important example.
- 10 *Devolved or regional government services supervised or part-financed by the UK centre (or devolved governments respectively)* are standard for regional policy in Europe, but only slowly growing in the UK.
- 11 *Subnational or local administrations* (usually unelected), delivering public services in a delivery chain involving both state/regional and central/federal governments applied for many decades in the UK to some larger-scale NHS services and used to apply to regional development agencies in England.
- 12 *Services delivered by local or subnational administrations, supervised by state or regional government* applies mainly to some schools and public corporations in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and London.
- 13 *Autonomously delivered services from local government* have traditionally been rather rare in the UK, but have recently seemed to increase in importance in areas like cultural policy and environmental matters, with some localities going 'beyond the basics' in what they provide for their citizens.

If this set up sounds tricky to hold in your head, bear in mind also that UK central government is split up horizontally into around 14 vertical silos, headed in each case by a department of state in Whitehall with its attendant 'departmental group' of quasi-government agencies, or with smaller-scale departmental counterparts in the devolved administrations. Of course, some of the 13 public service delivery chain patterns above apply either in England or in devolved nations (Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) and regions (i.e. only London at present), and some of the departmental silos are found only in one of the 13 chain patterns above. So we do not have anything like $13 \times 14 (= 168)$ different patterns to deal with, and some of the 13 patterns are fairly thinly populated in the UK in terms of absorbing personnel or public expenditure numbers. But overall I would estimate that there are at least 40 different and substantively important ways of organizing the inter-relations across tiers of government in most areas in the UK, each of them with their own distinctive peculiarities, institutional histories and characteristic ways of working.

Existing development in joining-up public services

The picture of delivery chains and horizontal siloing above has been evident to ministers, to parliament and to devolved administrations and local authorities for many years – hence the existence of numerous partnership arrangements between local governments, NHS bodies and other agencies like the police authorities. This apparatus of partnerships has been described elsewhere (Ghash *et al.*, 2008; NAO, 2004; Audit Commission, 2005) and so I will not repeat that analysis here. It is worth noting, however, that in some ways the growth of partnerships has tended to add to institutional complexity in the public sector rather than necessarily to simplify it. For instance, if a local Crime Reduction Partnership embarks on a policy that has adverse consequences for residents or businesses, the job that citizens face in getting redress for any harm done to them, and the political mountain they must climb in order to get policies reviewed or changed, may be more considerable than they were before in dealing with distinct, single public authorities. The ‘organic’ nature of different partnerships, and their variability from one area to another, also add to difficulties in attributing policies organizationally and understanding how they might be changed, not only for citizens but also for public sector decision-makers themselves. Add in the extensive role of contractors in providing social care or cultural or community services, and it is far from clear that a decade of partnering has done much to qualify as ‘disintermediating’ public services.

None of this is to deny that the push towards thinking about local public services in a more joined-up way has been a very valuable initiative, nor that in principle it may be possible to show that the growth of partnerships has increased the effectiveness with which local public services are delivered. Hard research evidence seems to be rather lacking in this area, but there is a fairly broad practitioner consensus in favour of fostering greater joining-up. Given the lack of other evidence, this should certainly count in the scales in favour of partnerships having positive consequences.

A discussion of joining-up services by Professor Nick Frost (2005) provides a very helpful jumping off point for my rather different analysis below. He notes that in the highly stressed area of children’s services, the push for more joining-up between local authority social services, NHS staff, the police, local schools and other bodies reflected very well-known problems, including:

- Information not being shared between agencies and concerns not being passed on. As a result children may slip through the net or receive services only when problems become severe.

- A child may receive assessments from different agencies which duplicate rather than complement each other.
- Several professionals may be in contact with a child over time but no single person provides continuity or co-ordinates services.
- Several agencies spend some money on the child rather than one agency spending an appropriate amount on a co-ordinated package of support.
- Services may disagree about whether the child falls into their categories and may try to pass on difficult cases to other organizations.
- Professionals and services may be based in different locations rather than co-located.
- Co-location can make services more accessible to service-users and improve inter-professional relationships and ways of working.
- Services are planned and commissioned to focus on one particular objective – such as childcare, truancy, or family abuse. Planning services in the round can enable a better response to support the child and be better value for money. Joint commissioning can enable the creation of services that deliver multiple dividends such as children's centres and extended schools. (Frost, 2005: 1718)

Below I look at a modified version of a sequence that Frost argued marked the main 'stages' in the development of 'joined-up thinking' (2005: 3–16).⁴ In general I am broadly sceptical of stages models in most public management contexts, because they often disguise the fact that two or more intermediate 'stages' can often be telescoped together or missed out entirely if a radical decision is taken to do so. For instance, stage 7 below involves mergers or integrations across services, implying that these will perhaps be seen as a last resort. Yet in fact UK governments have often acted to mandate the pooling of services, and historically have more commonly backed mergers over more incremental partnerships. Equally at key junctures, a range of pathways may

⁴ Frost (2005: 13–16) distinguished five levels of joining-up, as follows:

- 1 No joining-up – unco-ordinated, free-standing services.
- 2 Level 1 – Co-operation – services work together toward consistent goals and complementary services, while maintaining their independence.
- 3 Level 2 – Collaboration – services plan together and address issues of overlap, duplication and gaps in service provision towards common outcomes.
- 4 Level 3 – Co-ordination – services work together in a planned and systematic manner towards shared and agreed goals.
- 5 Level 4 – Merger/integration – different services.

I have used his labels and some key concepts but my characterization of the stages with the same labels is rather different from his.

open up for decision-makers, between which they must make choices, often involving dilemmas. For instance, I suggest that at stage 6 below there are in fact three possible pathways. Nonetheless, a stages model is still useful in emphasizing that new organizational practices like joining-up most characteristically will evolve incrementally at local level, rather than suddenly jumping from one level to another. So it is worth running through the modified sequence here, while bearing in mind the caveats above.

Stage 1: Free-standing services

Here provision of services is planned separately by each organization or service-stream involved, within highly siloed professional or organizational compartments, each with their own organizational and professional culture, separate employment conditions for staff, and different legal requirements and capabilities, plus their own systems of central government targets and regulation apparatus, and distinct funding. All connections to other services in relation to areas or individual cases are treated as 'foreign affairs' by each organization and so handled only via occasional 'diplomatic' contacts, usually at senior levels. Organizations are often indifferent to individual cases that 'fall between the cracks' of provision and no 'lead agency' allocations occur. Agencies may also 'compete' with each for 'turf', or compete to avoid handling 'no-win' problems or difficult cases. Similar processes may also occur between government agencies and third sector or NGO bodies over (valued) services. Especially where provision depends on voluntary-sector or NGOs provision, 'boutique bureaucracy' problems can occur with many small social providers each catering for a restrictive client group and hence many gaps between their provision. Multiple agencies cycle episodically and frequently through contact with 'difficult' clients' cases.

Stage 2: Agency co-operation

The key difference here is that organizations or service-streams now recognize that their activities are complementary and acknowledge a need to fit them together in order for the coverage for clients or communities to be improved. Hence they meet regularly (and at a range of levels); know more about each others' plans, goals and programmes; and try to achieve more consistency in their provision (e.g. to synchronize timings so as to act on the same priorities at the same times or in the same areas). But progress is limited because organizations or service-streams do not significantly modify their own strong cultures, and they retain full budgetary and planning independence. Organizations may still use co-operation as a mask to 'bureau-shape' their activities by rebuffing

'difficult' clients so as to 'export' them to other bodies, or by competitively renouncing 'lead agency' status.

Stage 3: Active inter-agency collaboration

Organizations or service-streams now formulate joined-up plans, that at least cross-refer to each other and crucially, they make some efforts to collect information on how (joint) outcomes are being achieved. The planning stage at least systematically seeks to identify areas of overlap and duplication in what the different service-streams do, to chart unaddressed issues or gaps in service provision, and to consider services from a customer/client/citizen perspective. Yet subsequent follow-up can be limited.

Stage 4: Basic cross-agency co-ordination achieved

The organizations or service-streams involved agree some common or overarching goals, which follow through from plans into implementation and even into detailed working on cases or areas. They work together in a planned and systematic way towards realizing shared objectives. For example, information sharing or information-pooling begins, ICT systems start to routinely communicate, and 'front-line' staff know each others' processes and methods of working well.

Stage 5: Co-ordination or partnerships

What changes here is that services work together in a planned and systematic manner towards shared goals that are agreed consensually. Joint committees meet regularly at senior levels and managers emphasize the need for effective joint working inside each organization or service stream involved. Intermediate managers and front-line staff understand each others' patterns of working and organizational imperatives and make effective adjustments to foster good relations and better service delivery to clients or areas.

Stage 6: Difficult next-stage, or 'something more', developments

Achieving further progress in deepening the joining-up of provision across departments, agencies or separate service streams is often at its most tricky here. There are at least three different main pathways that might be taken. Usually only one of these alternatives tends to be seriously explored in a given situation, often responding to the personalities of particularly dynamic or forceful local leaders.

Stage 6a: 'Lead-agency' co-ordination or some re-partition of roles

In different areas, one of the services is recognized by all the participating agencies as being in a better position to co-ordinate or plan overall provision than the others. Accordingly the 'designated lead agency' attracts more resources or power in its sphere of influence to define issues and responses, and here other agencies become more supportive or reactive in turn, downgrading their own planning and strategy effort accordingly.

Stage 6b: Pooled budgets partnerships

A budget is allocated by objective or programme to a set of agencies or several service-streams, with a clear decision-maker and performance measurement. Here agencies or service-streams can only draw down a budget in response to their fulfilling agreed-upon roles against a single, effectively integrated plan of provision that is independently monitored.

Stage 6c: Joined-up top or intermediate leadership

Separate organizations or service-streams (with distinct organizational and professional cultures, employment conditions, and often funding sources) still exist. But the same individuals are appointed to head two organizations at the same area level. Alternatively, joint managers are appointed to head the most joined-up provision across two organizations. Either step takes equal co-ordination a stage further.

From one or another of these pathways it may actually be rather easier to move on to a final stage of integrating previously separated services into a single organization.

Stage 7: Mergers, take-overs or integration

Different organizations or services are brought together to become one organization. Budgets are fully pooled, the provision of ICT and office networks are merged, staff can in principle move freely across internal sectors, and common goals and plans are defined. Over the short term work-tasks and staff are reassigned so as to produce the most inclusive and cost-effective service attainable. Over a longer-term employment conditions and skills/expertise requirements tend to be pooled, usually with a transition phase and with some ring-fenced period for existing staff to apply for new positions. As staff mix together more, and efforts at integrating organizational cultures are made, so previously separate professional and organizational cultures are broken down, stirred together and remoulded in a new and more joined-up form. Cultural

change is generally greater with mergers than where one powerful organization makes 'acquisitions' of smaller services.

Mergers tend to be 'last resort' solutions in the local level or 'organic' development of joining-up, partly because of the substantial costs and time lags involved in making mergers and acquisitions work well. At central government level, there is good evidence that frequent reorganizations have had substantial costs (White and Dunleavy, 2010). Nonetheless, the tradition of top-down government from Whitehall means that this stage can also be directly legislated, even where the existing local-level underpinnings for mergers is not very strong.

Digital-era governance and joining-up services

There is a third and very important stimulus for joining-up public services, which stems essentially from the huge variety of rationalization processes in modern advanced industrial societies produced by digital information streams and the development of the internet and the world-wide web. The ability to hold and access the world's information in digital form may have looked like a utopian dream on the part of Google ten years ago, but it is now clearly an objective (or alternatively a dreaded situation, depending on your point of view) that will in some form be reached in the next decade. By 2020 then, public services in the UK must be much better adapted to the advent of a digital-era than they are now.

The source of this imperative is not in any form of technological determinism. There is no impersonal 'logic' of technology that says that a particular group of organizations cannot go on running their processes within a fixed technology, while the world around them changes radically – as the Amish have successfully done in the USA. But what is socially, economically and culturally feasible for a small religious sect in a rural setting, is not going to be feasible for the public services of a modern economy and nation state. The UK is a small unit struggling to make its way in a global economy where better endowed and innovative competitors create continuous pressures for rapid change in knowledge, innovation in business and new horizons in cultural development. The processes that will force the British state to modernize (perhaps often against the dragging resistance of its leading officials and employees across the picture) are not technological but social and economic. In a digital world we cannot afford to consume resources in doing things wastefully or less effectively

or less cheaply in the public sector than it is possible to do similar or analogous tasks in the private sector economy and in civil society.⁵

Equally, despite the constant refrains to the contrary from IT industry lobbies and consultants, it is important to stress that simply implementing bits and pieces of digital-era technologies on their own and divorced from equally necessary organizational and service-design changes is highly unlikely to yield positive results, or indeed to be sustainable. This approach was feasible in the initial automation of government sector business processes from the 1960s to the mid-1990s. But in the last 15 years the development of the internet means that much more far-reaching changes in organizational arrangements and policy design need to be made in order to create large-scale advances in efficiency and public services development.

One of the complicating factors here has been a widespread difficulty in understanding what the salient impacts of modern ICT changes have been in the private sector, let alone their implications for government. A powerful case has recently been made by Luis Garicano, John van Reenan and others (Bloom *et al.*, 2009) that in fact modern ICT changes have had rather complex, indeed dialectical (that is, partially contradictory), implications for organizational arrangements in business. First, *networking effects* are centralizing. The ability to collect information from more and more data points and to systematize it and analyse it in real-time in ever more sophisticated ways has tended to mean that in modern businesses increased 'spans of control' are possible. Higher tier decision-makers can now keep tabs on more subordinates, be periodically involved in more decisions, insist on being consulted in real-time, and intervene more speedily when key performance indicators go off-trend. The consequences of such changes have been a widely noted thinning out of middle management in modern corporations, a substantial de-layering that has led to flatter, wider hierarchies.

Yet in exactly the same period, and in an equally strong way, a second trend in ICT developments has been for modern databases to be strongly *decentralizing*. Modern workers can now access far more information immediately than their predecessors, whether in services or manufacturing industries. This means that grassroots workers can now handle far more problems themselves, without appealing to superiors. The information they need on adjustments, complications, routines, special case procedures, and so on can increasingly be made

⁵ There is a rather general literature addressing some of the issues here, see: Fountain, 2001, 2007; Brewer *et al.* (2006); Hood and Margetts (2007); Mayer-Schönberger *et al.* (2007).

available to them at the point of manufacturing or the point of service, so that they can decide issues and ways forward without having to appeal to superiors. Equally lower-tier managers can now handle a wider range of issues without asking for guidance from higher tier offices. Thus the same staff can now handle multiple problems and issues, as long as they have extended ICTs supporting them. This effect tends to strongly shift the locus of decision-making down the organizational hierarchy.

How do these macrolevel trends apply then inside public services? A style or approach commonly labelled as 'new public management' (NPM) almost completely dominated UK public services development from 1985 to 2005. Along with colleagues I have previously argued that the three key components of NPM are dying on their feet (Dunleavy *et al.*, 2006, 2008: Ch. 4, 9; Dunleavy, 2007). These macrothemes have each had some good effects in their day, but they have been over-developed in the UK, creating crises in many dimensions. Hence they are now intellectually dead-ends in terms of offering guidance for future changes.

The three fading themes are:

- 1 *Disaggregation*, which fundamentally involves splitting up large bureaucracies via agencification, micro-local agencies (such as locally managed schools or academies), more quasi-government agencies, and purchaser-provider separation.
- 2 *Competition*, which moves away from bureaucratic monopoly providers and introduces alternative suppliers via mandatory competition, outsourcing, strategic review, quasi-markets, deinstitutionalization, asset sales, consumer-tagged financing, and deregulation.
- 3 *Incentivization*, which strengthens or puts in place economic or pecuniary motivations for actors or organizations to make 'the best' use of resources via privatization, PFI schemes and Public Private Partnerships, performance-related pay, user-charging, public sector dividends, and 'light touch' regulation (as in banking before the 2009 financial crisis).

Figure 11.2 shows that one fundamental reason why these older approaches first yielded diminishing returns and later lead to acute crises and reversals of policy was that they ceased to fit well with the macrotrends in business and the wider society towards digital-era processes.

Instead I have argued (with colleagues) that a radically new paradigm of public sector development has emerged, one which focuses on three very different themes and ones that are in many ways orthogonal to those of

Figure 11.2 The transition from ‘new public management’ (NPM) to ‘digital-era governance’ (DEG)

NPM (Dunleavy *et al.*, 2006, 2008). In particular the first wave of digital-era governance DEG₁ focused essentially on reintegration, needs-based holism and digitalization.

Reintegration, which reverses the fragmentation of NPM by joining-up and trying to de-silo processes, by partnership working, by ‘re-governmentalizing’ issues that must inherently be handled by the state, by creating new central government processes to do things once instead of many times, by squeezing process costs, by using shared services to drive out NPM’s duplicate organizational hierarchies, and by trying to achieve radical simplification of services organization and policies.

Needs-based holism is a thoroughgoing attempt to create client-focused structures for departments and agencies, to implement end-to-end redesign of services from a client perspective, to put in place one-stop processes (whether windows, or e-windows, or fully integrated one-stop shops), and to create agile (not fragile) government structures that can respond in real-time to problems, instead of catching up with them only after long lags.

Digitalization covers the thoroughgoing adaptation of the public sector to completely embrace and imbed electronic delivery at the heart of the government business model, wherever possible, for instance by adopting centralized online procurement, or new forms of automation focused on ‘zero touch’ technologies that do not require human intervention. Digitalization also is a key stimulus behind radical disintermediation, the effort to strip out layers of redundant or non-value-adding processes and bureaucracies from service

delivery. As in private services, this will partly involve making (able) citizens do more, developing isocratic administration (or 'do-it-yourself' government), and a transition to full open-book governance instead of previously very limited or partial 'freedom of information' regimes.

As Figure 11.2 also shows schematically, the first phase of digital-era governance (DEG₁) has quickly moved even further away from its anti-NPM beginnings. A new phase (DEG₂) has developed in response to the steepening changes in societal trajectories made possible by so-called 'Web 2.0' developments towards social networking, 'cloud computing' and very rich forms of media-handling. Instead of the text-based systems that predominated in Web 1.0, and that still completely dominate all forms of UK government online provision, the DEG₂ phase adds a new impetus towards the use of more advanced and real-time digital technologies, 'rich' media and social networking approaches. It also stresses the co-production of public services with citizens' active involvement embedded in many different forms. The key problem here is that this active involvement is much better evoked at local level, and is hard to reconcile with the UK government's highly centralized strategy (Dunleavy *et al.*, 2007) and the general under-development of online services at regional and local levels, compared with central government agencies (Dunleavy *et al.*, 2009).⁶

In case this all seems too abstract or vague, in Tables 11.1 and 11.2 I have summarized first some very clear-cut examples of DEG processes already in being in UK government as at June 2010, and second some developments that seem likely in the next decade. The organizing frame of both figures is similar. The vertical columns distinguish between broadly centralizing and decentralizing changes (as spelt out above). The horizontal rows group together developments under the reintegration, needs-based holism and digitalization themes.

In Table 11.1 there is an impressive battery of innovative changes. The coalition government's initial impetus to delay or halt older Labour plans for ICT developments in the public sector produced a bit of hiatus in some of these schemes. But delaying government ICT and reorganization developments is rarely sustainable in the long run. Standing still may artificially squeeze up government productivity levels for a couple of years of acute fiscal stress. But longer-run and more sustainable progress requires innovation, indeed constant, serial innovation – which in modern conditions means more DEG₂-type

⁶ Aspects of the problems of lagging development in local online services are covered by OECD (2007); Timonen *et al.* (2003); Torres *et al.* (2006); and Verboest *et al.* (2007).

Table 11.1 Already apparent public service trends and changes matching ‘digital-era governance’ predictions

DEG Themes	Network effects Centralizing	Database effects Decentralizing
Reintegration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regulatory integration in the Care Quality Commission (across NHS and social care); or between the Bank of England and Financial Service Agency (over banking regulation) • The children’s database planned by Labour ministers (which may not now happen) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Myriad partnerships • ‘Total Place’, the effort to at least map how much public spending flows via what delivery chain into each city or subregion, and if possible to deploy resources more effectively • Single ‘point of service’ schemes, such as that run by Kent County Council • Sharing chief executives or core services
Needs-based holism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benefits pooling and co-triggering (e.g. by pensioner services in DWP) • ‘Tell Us Once’ – an effort to stop duplicating government’s demands on citizens for the same basic information about them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal care budgets • Core packages integration, e.g. further joining-up in children’s protection • ‘Personalized services’ provision in state schools and the NHS
Digitalization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shift to transacting with government online. In 2009–10 HMRC received 74% of income tax self-assessment forms online. Meanwhile in 2008 only 1% of DWP’s customer contacts took place online • Integrated NHS patient care records, useable across the UK • Immigration databases 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the planned development of the NHS Choices website • the continued development of risk-based administration across many ‘regulatory’ public services

changes, compared with the still NPM-influenced DEG₁ changes of the previous Blair and Brown governments. So not all the elements in Figure 6 may continue without changing direction – nor is it essential for the digital-era governance thesis that they do so. Yet the vast majority of these changes seem likely to stay in place and to be irreversible.

Turning to Table 11.2 this is a frankly speculative effort at thinking through

what might be different in the UK public sector by 2020 if the digital-era governance thesis about the direction and accelerating pace of changes is right. Like all futurology it requires the usual strong health warnings about the past poor record of the social sciences (and indeed everyone else) in getting new developments into correct focus. Nonetheless the main directions of travel seem likely to be sustained – in particular towards a UK or England government that serves primarily as an ‘intelligent centre’ for the public sector as a whole, influencing delivery primarily through excellent information rather than seeking to compel adherence to targets or to micro-manage delivery from afar. The centre should also have slimmed down into fewer fixed departments and with more fluid directorate structures emerging, such as those used in EU governance or now inside the Scottish Executive. All public services that can do so will also have moved decisively online, so that the organization of some major departments like HMRC or DWP will have ‘become their website’ and will relate to all their customers predominantly via digital means.

At the grassroots level, public service delivery should be radically pooled into far fewer and more unified (rather than just joined-up) delivery organizations, creating a radically simpler institutional landscape for citizens, businesses and civil society bodies to negotiate. It could also be suggested that in addition to the back-office modes of integration that have predominated up to now, the locus of joining-up is likely to shift towards first customer-focused radical disintermediation – essentially taking out more of the intermediate layers of public services delivery chains detailed in Figure 11.1 above. A second wave of new-style ‘joining-up’ is likely to blur some of the public sector – civil society boundaries, a theme prominent in the Conservatives 2010 election campaign under the ‘big society’ label (see also Blond, 2010). Although at a macrolevel this idea may seem weak or non-credible, at a microlevel there is a considerable potential in forms of integration that try to re-wire or re-connect civil society systems with government involvement and participation. For instance, one could envisage that the frail elderly, and mentally or physically handicapped people with severe care problems, could be cared for more effectively with networks that bring together family members, professionals in health and social care services and other providers (such as NGOs) in real-time digitally connected networks. They would have flexibly assignable budgets and strategies, and many more different kinds of resources than any one caring organization currently disposes of. Or we could connect prisoners in jails back to their families, past employers, lawyers and health professionals via closely regulated forms of digital communication. The central aim here would be to bring down the UK’s currently

Table 11.2 Probable 2020 developments in public services delivery systems

DEG Themes	Network effects Centralizing	Database effects Decentralizing
Reintegration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Government cloud’ set up for all government IT, so that only HMRC, DWP and MOD run their own self-contained IT in central government • Cabinet of 12–15 members only, with no more than 50 UK ministers in all, and more fluid directorate structures replacing some departments • Unitary ombudsman/redress system regionally, with a national collegium of ombudsmen handling overall issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shifts to a unitary local service provider, covering council services, health, police • One-Stop Window or One-Stop Shop provision covering <i>all</i> government services at all levels, online and locally
Needs-based holism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single citizen account with government, integrated to PAYE and direct debits, and probably all run via the banking system (and not via employers as at present for PAYE) • Pooled service alternatives with central departments and local authorities choosing to contract with 6–10 competing alternative providers (some public and some private, possibly with some co-operatives also) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extended personal care budgets • ‘Treatment circles’ for all frail elderly, disabled and long-term ill people. Circles integrate family, friends, NGOs, state carers and professionals
Digitalization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online transactions at 95% for tax, and 80% for DWP • ‘Intelligent’ systems services assist citizens and businesses to be fully compliant with tax and regulatory requirements • NHS and social care safety systems help prevent service delivery disasters • Central government focuses on being an ‘intelligent centre’ using high quality analytics to best influence local provision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Universal customer feedback online • Real-time, citizen activated public responses and redress systems to warn of and prevent ‘service delivery disasters’ from occurring

very high recidivism rate (around 64 per cent) to the levels achievable in some other countries (maybe as low as 50 per cent) by ending the over-isolation of prisoners from all their social networks. Currently, sending someone to jail is a hugely disruptive step which typically pushes them further towards dependence upon criminal activities to survive when they are released from prison. The trick here would be to contingently re-connect prisoners with their lives, so that they could more easily resume family life and gainful employment on their release.

Conclusions

The agenda for joining-up public services from now to 2020 is a large one. Essentially it seems doubtful if the UK as a country can any longer afford to fund and sustain an overly complex architecture of services provision that was already tangled in the early 1980s and was made far worse by the whole new public management episode from 1985 to 2005. A great deal of experience has been rather slowly and painfully acquired by local agencies, local managers, professional staffs and grassroots workers in the last ten years in working in partnerships and developing 'joined-up thinking' about how to provide citizens with better and more effective public services. These innovations provide an extensive seed-bed of learning and new forms of understanding that break out of previous, heavily siloed approaches.

Yet the future will in all probability require far more extensive and more radically thought-through changes, in particular focusing squarely on achieving in the public sector some of the positive 'disintermediation' experiences of digital-era changes in the private sector – and incidentally also avoiding the many negative experiences there. The digital-era governance argument predicts that the direction of travel will be towards more reintegration, more needs-based holism and co-production with citizens and civil society, and towards radically digitalized modes of citizen-government contacting and ways of organizing internal government sector processes. So far the digital wave has only lapped against some of the roughest edges of public services. It has a great deal of momentum still to run in helping to simplify the landscape of public services in which citizens and businesses operate, and in which government officials and politicians themselves try to understand and positively shape societal development.