

OECD, Paris, France

Opening Comments

1 October 1995

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My aim is, using an Australian expression, to stir the possum a little.

1) Who are the realists?

- those who stress the political, value-driven environment with shared, although not well defined, responsibility for program outcomes and therefore with a primary focus on overall performance of those outcomes, or
- those who stress a clear distinction between political and bureaucratic responsibilities and a focus on accountability for defined program outputs by the bureaucracy.

In short, from a public administration viewpoint, should the prime focus be on program outcomes or outputs??

- This begs the question as to how realistic it is to separate outcomes and outputs. It also raises the issue of primacy between performance and accountability. Most would argue their complementary. However, the view is largely likely to be a question of attitude and culture. Do we orient our people more towards performance or to accountability?

- 1) In Australia, we have tended to go the way of creating two public services along the above lines where the boundaries are blurred but where the emphasis on core government is predominantly on program outcomes and that on non-core government is predominantly program outputs.
- 2) Again in broad terms, this distinction is directly related to the extent to which commercial approaches and instruments are used by particular agencies.
- 3) For Australia, this has worked well in a quite pragmatic fashion despite reservations expressed by our predominantly academic critics who are still arguing about economic rationalism and its inappropriate application to public administration.
- 4) What we are in fact seeing is a public administration in transition with its inevitable uncertainties and inconsistencies, hopefully staying predominantly at the margin as it is today.
- 5) In Australia, we now have a particular challenge with a move towards private sector provision of traditionally core government activities.
- 6) In my opinion we are indeed in the process of redefining government in a modern society.

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7) In essence, the transition taking place in public administration is helping Governments in that task while ensuring that there is public confidence and trust in the Institution of Government. The key to the reforms in Australia is transparency of decision-making, involving maximum disclosure and availability of all relevant information. This allows both awareness raising and education of the general community, thus providing the opportunity at least to question and debate policies and actions of Government, which, in themselves, are a discipline on Government. It is well understood that Governments have to seize the moment if they wish to make significant change but being wary that they do not undermine that confidence and trust. In essence, it is probably why, at least in Australia, successive Governments have chosen a policy of hasten slowly.