the history & future of

social
innovation
conference

THE HAWKE CENTRE
Adelaide 19-21 June 2008

OXYGEN – A BREATH OF FRESH AIR IN THE SOUTH
AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC SECTOR

KIMBERLEY KAMMERMANN
ANIA KARZEK

UniSA | Hawke
Research Institute for
Sustainable Societies

"

OXYGEN – A BREATH OF FRESH AIR IN THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC SECTOR

Kimberley Kammermann[1] and Ania Karzek[2]

Abstract

Many of the organisational conditions required to support innovation are not present in government, yet the demand for efficient, effective and responsive service provision and policy advice is growing, not diminishing.

The technological and social landscape has changed rapidly in the last 20 years. The current generation entering the workforce (Generation Y) is native to sophisticated technology that governments are yet to fully exploit. The expectations of this workforce are a multi-faceted mix of instant gratification and desire for constant improvement. As they enter the public sector workforce, they are generally faced with an older workforce who are 'immigrants' to the technological landscape and often sceptical of change, having experienced several significant waves of it.

The low retention rates of Generation Y employees in government suggests that there is poor alignment between expectations and what is delivered. The South Australian government has recognised this and is working on a number of strategies to address it. One of these strategies has been to empower its existing young professionals to tackle the issue in a collegial manner. This has spawned a first of its kind in Australia—a 'virtual village' for young professionals in the public sector, which is named Oxygen (tag line: a breath of fresh air in the South Australian public sector). Oxygen taps into the trends of social networking and work–life integration and attempts to encourage innovative thinking through its informal management structure and philosophy of open participation and personal responsibility.

This paper examines the impacts of changing societal demands on how government does business, considers the organisational factors needed to foster innovation and demonstrates how Generation Y is reacting to these elements.

Introduction

Heraclitus of Ephesus, a Greek philosopher who lived between circa 535 BC and 475 BC is renowned to have said 'nothing endures but change'. A wide body of evidence in literature, experience and the physical world suggests he was correct.

Governments, as institutions that serve citizens, are required to adjust to change, as well as to drive it (Podger 2005). In an era of globalisation, rapid information and communication technology (ICT) development, resource constraints, demographic changes, shifting community expectations and new political ideologies, there are commensurate impacts on government activities (Althaus & Tiernan 2005). In recent decades many long-standing assumptions about what governments do, why and how they do them have been challenged. (Althaus & Tiernan 2005).

While innovation itself has a long and obvious history at a macro level (mankind has progressed a long way from the first known humans), innovation in government as an institution is not necessarily as easy to identify or plot. Innovation is nonetheless increasingly in the spotlight because of both the extent and speed

---

1 Senior Project Officer, Strategy and Policy, Guardianship and Alternative Care, Department of Families and Communities, kammermann.kimberley@saugov.sa.gov.au

2 Senior Program Coordinator, Public Sector Performance Commission, karzek.ania@saugov.sa.gov.au

of change in the world around us and because 'our most significant social challenges … are resisting conventional approaches to solving them' (NESTA 2007). The public is better connected, has access to more information, increasingly demands the opportunity to be involved and wants to see, know about and be beneficiaries of the outcomes of their tax contributions.

These changes create a need for governments to do things differently, which begs the question of how to foster innovation in bureaucratic institutions that are (generally) slow to respond to change. Historically, governments are centralised and authoritative institutions (Shergold 2005) and in an organisation as large and diverse as public sectors tend to be, creating organisational change on a large scale can be metaphorically akin to turning around the *Titanic*.

Creating a public sector that is citizen-centric and responsive is not easy: many public sector structures evolved in a different time to serve different needs. Most public sectors are grappling with how best to enable their staff to think creatively and innovatively, to equip them with the tools to do so and to allow them the authority to implement innovative ideas, without compromising political imperatives and public accountability expectations. This is just the tip of the iceberg. Another large challenge lies in embracing the new wave of public sector employees, the generation who will in the next few years be leading the public sector through a rapidly and continuously changing world.

This new wave of employees (also referred to as Generation Y for the purposes of this paper) is currently under represented in the public sector. However, without this demographic, the public sector will find it increasingly difficult not only to service citizens but to continue to seek and find solutions to the many policy challenges laid at the public sector's door. At present, the conditions required to foster innovation are largely absent from the public sector.

Notwithstanding the very real impediments to innovation in the public sector as a whole, innovation is not only necessary and desirable, but is actively being pursued in a number of areas. Oxygen—a 'virtual village' for young professionals in the public sector is one such innovation.

The business of government and changing expectations

The attitudes and expectations of citizens towards government are changing. So too is the role of the public sector. Keating & Weller (2001:78) observed that '[f]orty years ago, Australian practice assumed that governments could deliver almost anything'. Today however, public sector functions are increasingly contestable, with a number of services commercialised, privatised and outsourced (Podger 2001). Governments are moving away from the traditional roles of regulation, intervention and welfare-state support and progressively taking on more of an enabling role. It is thus not surprising that there has been a shift from the historical position of government in Australia, which was 'centralised, omni-competent and authoritative' (Aitkin 1983 quoted in Davis et al. 1988) to one where it is acknowledged that 'no-one has a monopoly on experience or wisdom' (Shergold 2005).

There is also a shift in government towards more collaborative and consultative practice. The Australian Public Service has its across-government Management Advisory Committee (MAC), while in South Australia this collaborative approach has been exemplified by South Australia's Strategic Plan. This Plan is seen as a blueprint for all South Australians, rather than a static bureaucratic policy position (Rann 2007). It models public engagement through its Community Engagement Board and a number of initiatives stemming from this such as the 'Partnerships Program' (incorporating Alliance Partners and Friends of the Plan[3]).

---

3   The Partnerships Program is run through the Community Engagement Board and comprises Alliance Partners (non-government organisations, business or individuals) who formally recognise their direct contribution the the Plan's objectives and targets. Friends of the Plan join a virtual community of like minded individuals who share a vision for the state.

Many issues faced by the public sector are 'wicked' and 'unbounded', meaning that they are not necessarily solvable and are often of a long-term nature (Shergold 2005). There are inherent challenges not only in managing the issues themselves, but also in doing so in an environment of contestability, where public engagement includes the risk of capture by particular interests and inadvertent (or deliberate) exclusion of competing interests. Bridgeman and Davis (2004) concurred that policy making is not about solving problems, but rather, it is about managing policy conflicts. Those policy makers who seek a final solution to wicked problems will 'condemn themselves to frustration and failure' (Bridgeman and Davis 2004:44). New ways of managing these wicked problems need to be given creative attention.

As the role of the public sector has changed, so to have societal attitudes and expectations. Attitudes to government have been documented in the literature, which typically notes a general decline in the levels of trust and confidence citizens have in government (Rayner 1997; Weller 2001; Bishop & Davis 2001; McAllister & Wanna 2001). Keating & Weller (2001:73) summarised the trends by stating '[p]eople have become more sceptical, better informed, less trusting and still more demanding'. A trends to individualism is also widely documented (Mackay quoted in Eckersley 2004; Keating & Weller 2001; Putman 1995 referred to in Althaus & Tiernan 2005). A growing diversity of lifestyles and an increasingly pluralistic society has also affected attitudes to government. The concept of public good is more difficult to define and apply when there are a variety of values, expectations and conflicting needs (Keating & Weller 2001; Althaus & Tiernan 2005).

A core recurring issue is that of accountability. Sherman (1998) noted that accountability is one of the key distinguishing features between the private and public sectors, in that accountability requirements in the public sector are more demanding. Wilkins (2002:118) stated that '[t]raditional concepts of accountability … assume clear definitions of the role of all parties involved'. In the context of finding innovative solutions to challenges facing the public sector, such assumptions are largely a luxury. The public sector has the difficult task of reconciling conflicting demands and operating in a publicly open, inclusive, flexible and efficient manner while being subject to political directives.

While it is not surprising that risk aversion would be common in a highly scrutinised environment. This is problematic for organisations that wish to encourage innovation. Innovation by definition requires tolerance and a margin for error and correction. Thomas Edison is reported to have said 'I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work'. It is hard to credit the notion that governments could tolerate, much less foster, this type of attitude even if the end results were of similar ilk and import as Edison's inventions. Indeed, it would be a brave government that reported to its constituents that it had expended public funds in successfully finding 10,000 excellent ways not to do something. Furthermore, it is unlikely that many of us as taxpayers or citizens would be impressed with such an attitude from government.

Innovation in government and Generation Y

The complexity of governments' operating environment is increasing while the public sector is shrinking (Sherman 1998), not only financially, but also in workforce size. Figures across public sectors vary slightly but in general their workforce is ageing. Around 20% of the public sector workforce is now eligible to retire; Generation Y makes up only around 5% of the public sector workforce (Sheahen 2006). The median age of the South Australian public sector has been steadily rising for a number of years (CPE 2006). In 2007, the South Australian Office for Youth Action Policy Team (A-Teams) authored a report which advised that

> in the 2004–05 financial year 1,148 … employees aged between 15 and 35 years left the public sector.
> This represents a 19.9 per cent exit rate—6 per cent higher than the average for the public sector as a
> whole. During the same period 15.8 per cent of the sector reached retirement age.

This prompted the A-Teams to seriously question whether the South Australian public sector was indeed one generation away from extinction (A-Teams 2007).

An ageing public sector workforce coupled with low recruitment and retention rates of young people has led to a disproportionately small number of young employees in the public sector. This combination gives rise to valid concerns about the ability of government to retain young people with sufficient leadership skills in the public service to replace those who are retiring (Griffiths 2007).

The South Australian government is not alone in experiencing this shortage of young employees , nor is it alone in recognising the need for action. Nationally, there is an increasing reliance on older workers, as young workers express 'lower overall levels of job satisfaction than older workers, especially with senior managers and work cultures …' (APS 2006).

The issue of workforce regeneration and youth workforce retention has been an on the minds of senior government staff for some time. Recommendations from the A-Teams' report were presented to senior public servants and Cabinet. Cabinet endorsed implementation of five of the A-Teams' recommendations. This suggests that there is an impetus for change, but the mechanisms needed to manage this problem are slow to be institutionalised.

Government is a historically slow moving institution, which is now faced with problems that require quick solutions. The challenge for government in workforce management is to create an environment that provides young employees with what they want and need, from both their workplace and social environment, while maintaining the level of accountability and results demanded by the public.

Fortunately, the wants and needs of young employees are not a mystery. There is research and extensive commentary on the traits of Generation Y and their expectations. Indeed, Sheahan (2006:4) observed that Generation Y does not necessarily require anything different from their employers than other generations, but perhaps unlike their older counterparts, they are prepared to ask for what they want:

> [w]hile previously it was thought that Gen Y had a unique set of workplace demands and desires (and it is
> certainly true that they are unique in many ways) an important feature of the generation is not the nature
> of their demands, but rather the fact that Gen Y are the ones asking the loudest for their desires to be met.
> Most significantly, they are the ones leaving the organisations that fail to meet their demands.

Griffiths (2007) outlined what she believes to be the different needs of Generation Y, particularly associated with the integration of work and social aspects of their lives. This group is technologically savvy, not as concerned with remuneration, needs to be stimulated and challenged in the workplace and highly values networking. Griffiths agrees with Sheahen that Generation Y are highly mobile employees and will move on to other positions or organisations if their present conditions are not right.

Whether the demands of this generation are different to the remainder of the workforce is almost irrelevant—the key point of difference is that they will vote with their feet. The stark message for the public sector is that young employees will leave if their needs are not met—a trend that is apparent. The continuation of this trend should worry the public sector. An organisation that lacks young workers, lacks a future.

Generalising, change requires energy. Innovation requires new ways of looking at problems, new approaches and new applications. While a workforce of any demographic with the right environment and impetus can (in theory) innovate, new views are most easily unearthed in an environment of diversity, energy and openness to change.

Creating a place of employment that entices and retains young workers requires innovation that mirrors the ideals and values of younger employees, and includes access to tools they would use outside the workplace. Certainly the reverse is also true that young workers will not be attracted to a workplace

perceived as old-fashioned, staid and lacking in freedom or technology. So how does government look to Generation Y?

Innovation in government

We have made the argument that governments have little choice but to innovate. Society is changing, expectations of citizens are increasingly diverse, government decision making is contestable and subject to scrutiny and a new generation with high expectations is seemingly (at least according to the employment statistics) avoiding employment in the public sector.

It seems clear that government must create a structure that supports innovation if it is to deliver services in the future. In the face of the far reaching changes and complex problems for government outlined above, it stands to reason that innovation would be highly sought after and highly regarded, yet many governments are slow to embrace the organisational conditions that support innovation.

Innovation requires, amongst other things, active investment, nurturing, supportive systems, openness, experimental mindsets and cooperation (Leadbeater 2007). In particular, the concepts of connectivity, working together, talking and interacting are central to innovation. Leadbeater (2007:9) advised that 'innovative societies are good at mingling: they encourage people and ideas to find one another and combine creatively'. Yet governments are renowned for operating with a bunker mentality, the antithesis of mingling.

There are few effective mechanisms or processes in place to actively encourage across government conversation: the most common response to whole-of-government issues is to create across government committees. While the intent is sound, the irony of expecting innovation from a committee is obvious.

As well as social changes, the technological landscape has also changed rapidly in the last 20 years. In many cases, technology has been the driver for changing societal expectations. As ICT capabilities have improved, demands for access to information have increased and expectations of responsiveness to individual needs has grown, resulting in a shifting balance from collective to individual interests (Keating & Weller 2001). However, Greenberg, in Walter and Strangio (2007) wrote that there is evidence that Generation Y is community and consensus driven. A scan of the web-based communities that have arisen in recent years such as myspace and facebook, and the rise in blogging and community interest groups would support this assertion.

In a world where emphasis is placed increasingly on the individual, Harris in Walter and Strangio (2007:83) reported that young people 'accept that future achievement is dependent on "individual choice and responsible self-making" but resist the diminution of public space … by establishing community, neighbourhood and friendship networks'. These spaces create communities that give users a sense of belonging, and in turn users feel supported and understood by other users who experience the same things.

The rise in the availability of knowledge on demand and the use of new media, such as the internet and push and pull information sharing such discussion boards where information is reciprocal, has generated an increase in knowledge rich, technology savvy young people who now have an avenue for sharing ideas and also acting upon them swiftly.

Huntley, in Walter and Strangio (2007) suggested that Generation Y is looking for alternative ways to get involved, having been turned off by the mainstream media, by politicians and political parties. She argued that Generation Y focuses on issues that affect them directly 'at the local and community level, or international issues, something facilitated by information technologies without borders' (Walter and Strangio 2007:83).

To capture this employment market, an environment for young staff must be created that caters to these traits, one that uses technology, creates a space for social interaction and allows young employees to feel

supported and part of a community. It would make sense that the very people who experience these challenges in the workforce and understand how to approach them should create this environment.

The Oxygen virtual village is an example of grassroots government innovation, 'initiated, owned and collaboratively moderated by users' (Griffiths 2007:178) to address matters of importance to them through non-traditional methods. Oxygen, being a website, uses technology to foster collaboration and consultation and to create a community that supports young employees by sharing information, advice and networks.

Oxygen can drive change not only for young employees, but also for government as a whole. Its intent is to break down barriers between government departments by allowing young professionals to connect. Importantly, Oxygen is a foundation from which to build the momentum for change—cultural, organisational and social—on a much larger scale. The site is intended to improve employee satisfaction, contribute to the sense that they are making a difference and, at another level, aid in the recruitment and retention of young staff under the premise that a satisfied employee will not only remain, but will also extol the virtues of the organisation to others, thus aiding further recruitment.

Oxygen addresses issues of cross-government collaboration by enabling conversations between government staff in a diversity of locations—geographically and departmentally—and allows them to share information, ideas and contacts they may otherwise never have known. Joining up of government in turn leads to better and more comprehensive responsiveness and service delivery.

The site creates a space where innovative ideas for change can be identified, shared and developed. As a result of the membership of young people who are socially aware and willing to participate, these ideas can be either implemented, or can be used as a platform on which to raise issues. This potential applies not only to innovative service provision, but also in championing organisational change in order to manage complex problems such the recruitment and retention of young public sector employees.

Oxygen: A breath of fresh air in the public sector

Oxygen was formed in the context of and in recognition of all of these complex changes that are pressing the public sector.

> Oxygen is a website developed specifically for SA Government employees under 35. This website is a virtual village for young professionals, a place where we can meet, learn, develop and share information relevant to our lives and work. Our site will reflect our ideas, opinions and experiences as people starting out, getting established and making a big impact in the SA Government (Oxygen Splash Page).

Oxygen was created for young people by young people and is entirely user driven. It was organised and is run by a model unique in the public sector. Although the South Australian Department of the Premier and Cabinet fund the site hosting, it is administered by young professionals from across government. Trust and empowerment—assuming users are professionals capable of taking responsibility for their actions—is central to this model as there are no formal agency sign-offs for site content.

Behind the site is a collective group of enthusiastic young professionals who enjoy working in the public sector, are committed to public sector improvement and want to encourage their peers to take ownership of making South Australia great.

Development of the site began in June 2006 and it was officially launched in December 2006. Oxygen was exempted under the *Public Sector Management Act 1995* to provide a service and resource to a specific public sector population, based on age. The young people's group developed the purpose, content and structure of the site, with periodic input from other young professionals within the public sector. Kojo Interactive constructed the site under guidance from the group. The site was initially populated by group

members and has since been added to by users. Since its launch in December 2006 it now has over 2,000 self-registered users, with around 1,150 log-ins and 17,200 page hits per month.

The site is democratic in that it belongs to everyone in the demographic and it is open to any interest they may have. All users can post articles on any topic, create or join a conversation on the discussion boards and use the voting functions. The site is not exclusively for work, rather it is a multi-dimensional space where users can reveal their secret life, voice their opinion, share their knowledge, invite comment, ask questions and make connections. Users become part of a community and a support network of like minded peers. Young professionals can communicate in a style that suits them, guided only by the mantra 'it's our site, yours and mine, so don't be guided by shoulds or coulds—just get on and get involved' (Oxygen).

Oxygen invites its users to become involved, mingle, innovate, cooperate and share, engage and be catalysts for ongoing improvement. Mackay, quoted in Eckersley (2004:33), argued that citizens are increasingly disengaged, a finding supported by Putman (referred to in Davis 2001) who presented trends that show a reduction in voluntary participation in community organisations. However, Cupps (1977:478) quoted in Bishop & Davis (2001) suggested that 'citizen groups have besieged … every level of government with demands that they be allowed to participate fully'. Moreover, Hefferman & Bennett (referred to in Davis 2001) reported that while some traditional civic groups may be in decline, other mechanisms and new methods of engagement are on the rise. These community trends are important to consider in the context that workplaces are microcosms that reflect the broader society. The Oxygen experience has demonstrated both ends of the engagement spectrum within its user base.

Citizens are increasingly savvy consumers of government services and 'rightly demand the delivery of government programs and services in a seamless way' (Shergold quoted in MAC 2004:v). Similarly Generation Y employees have high expectations of workplace integration, accessibility of information and responsiveness in the workplace. As already explained, Generation Y is predisposed to leaving workplaces that do not meet their needs, therefore these expectations need to be heeded and addressed. Keating & Weller (2001:77) suggested that 'governments are ever more conscious of the need for trust and consent, but know that they are losing that consent'. Employment figures indicate that governments are certainly losing their staff, so having the trust and consent of their employees as well as their constituents is critical.

While Shergold (2005) stated that 'in IT lies the opportunity to build virtual one-stop shops for citizens who wish to access information on, or undertake transactions with government', West (2003:22) warned that the 'digital divide is an issue which pervades policy at all levels'. Meredyth, Ewing & Thomas (2003:3) concurred with this argument and cautioned that new technologies 'may open up new channels to discussion, information and education [but these] are unlikely … to solve endemic problems' such as social exclusion and 'inequalities and differences among the included' (Levitas 2005:7). Again, the Oxygen experience has proven the truth of both of these views.

The Challenges of innovation

Lewis (n.d.) suggested that 'the biggest change resistors reside in the executive suite. In general, they have the biggest stake in the status quo, have the least to gain, and have the most to lose when a company changes'. Oxygen is a space that is free of the constraints and processes traditionally associated with bureaucracies: it is very much against the status quo. Notwithstanding the traditional view of a risk averse public sector, Oxygen has garnered buy in and respect from senior management who were 'excited about the experiment' (Griffiths 2007:183).

The Oxygen site and its management is somewhat experimental—it appears that no other government has attempted to instigate such an initiative. As a result, it is both exciting and sometimes confounding. It is also a new concept for the targeted users, some of whom are fresh to government and still learning about the

public sector as an organisation. Others who have experienced a public sector that is slow moving and restrictive are still grappling with the freedom that Oxygen offers. We have found it strange that giving people permission to take personal responsibility to act has not resulted in more taking up the offer.

Although currently regarded as successful, Oxygen has not been immune to the problems common to all new ideas. There are commonly four stages in the resistance to new ideas (Miller 2006):

- this idea is wrong so I will ignore it
- this idea may be right, but it is unimportant
- this is interesting and important
- we've always seen it this way.

And the 'not invented here' syndrome can be a serious barrier to acceptance, not to mention the 'we're special and we need our own product' syndrome common in government.

Oxygen continues to morph, adapt, change, and go with the flow to accommodate the needs of its users. It is not a website that is exists strictly as a policy or legislative response. It was not created because the information it contains is 'for your own good', although it is considered (by those who put it there) to be useful. Its existence is due to a recognised need to fill gaps in the public sector that young employees find. It seeks to help in to manage the problems that cause young employees to leave the public sector. It answers the question of how to get through the bureaucracy by finding a way around it.

Some challenges facing Oxygen

User expectations
Oxygen users are largely 'digital natives'. They are IT literate and have high expectations of sophisticated, interactive technology and high quality, up to the minute information. Consider also the level of sophistication of online games and media Generation Y are accustomed to and then compare it to government's current attempts in the online space—chances are it's like comparing the special effects in Lost in Space with The Matrix. Sheahan (2006) noted that 'You can't dabble in these areas. You are either giving 100% or you are failing in the online space'.

Feedback from users is consistent with academic research into the expectations of Generation Y. At this stage, Oxygen is not in a position to satisfy expectations. It needs to evolve and improve or it will be relegated to the bin of good ideas that didn't quite work. And it is important to realise that the future is about ongoing change—user expectations will never be static so it will never be a case of 'right we've finished, we can sit back now'.

Sophistication of technology
Oxygen was the result of a modest investment and has no current budget for expansion and enhancement. The current content management system does not provide the level of sophisticated interaction expected by the target demographic of a site that is user owned.

Work–life integration
Technology enables people to integrate in a way that blurs work–life boundaries—the cries for flexibility in the workplace are loud and frequent, and trends towards social networking in the workplace are growing in strength. Oxygen picks up on these trends by including both social and work related content. However, this presents a challenge, as there are pockets of public sector culture that do not support this trend and not all managers sanction Oxygen use as being work related. There is also a fear that work–life integration will be unfavourably skewed towards work, which is not the way most people want the scales to lean.

Regional connections

Being web-based, Oxygen can, in theory, be used anywhere in the world. The majority of current users are based in the Adelaide CBD as many regional employees struggle with poor IT infrastructure.

Funding

Oxygen was developed with funding from the Department of Premier and Cabinet, which also currently covers hosting costs. Sourcing content and promotion of Oxygen has been in the hands of people who volunteer their time, largely outside their normal working hours. While this has worked well in that Oxygen has a connected and passionate team driving it, being time poor is constantly a struggle to make some of these challenges become more manageable and realising solutions sooner.

Critical mass

There is a question over the membership and whether it is large enough to allow Oxygen to be entirely user driven. There may be benefits in expanding Oxygen across tiers of government within the state or nationally. Alternatively, a different content management model may be necessary.

As Stewart Brand said, 'once a new technology rolls over you, if you're not part of the steamroller, you're part of the road'. The same can be said of generational change—it is coming whether you want it to or not. Organisations aren't required to believe that Generation Y demands are reasonable. Organisations don't have to innovate. Organisations don't have to go out of their way to support young employees. Organisations don't have to change. Organisations can go out of business: but can the government afford to do so?

There is a groundswell of support for change amongst Generation Y workers. They are hungry for innovation, keen to collaborate, assume change is normal and some are even ready for responsibility. The key for governments will be to find ways to keep them.

Conclusion

What we are faced with is the myth of the mousetrap. It's commonly assumed that if you invent a better mousetrap, the world will willingly beat a path to your door, but there is significant research that indicates almost always the contrary is true (Miller 2006).

We have a generation that is native to sophisticated technology that governments are yet to fully exploit and whose participation in the workforce is growing. The expectations of this workforce are a multi-faceted mix of instant gratification and desire for constant improvement. As they enter the public sector workforce, they are generally faced with an older workforce who are 'immigrants' to the technological landscape and often sceptical of change, having experienced several significant waves of it.

The low retention rate of Generation Y employees in government suggests that expectations and what is delivered are poorly aligned. The South Australian government has recognised the issues and is working on a number of strategies to address this trend. One of these strategies has been to empower its existing young professionals to tackle the issue in a collegial manner. This has spawned a first of its kind in Australia—a virtual village for young professionals in the public sector. Oxygen taps into the trends of social networking and work–life integration and attempts to encourage innovative thinking through its informal management structure and philosophy of open participation and personal responsibility. It is a better mousetrap than the previous vacuum, but is it enough incentive for Generation Y and the generations that will follow to beat a path to the door? In all honesty, probably not. The trouble with today's mice is that they're not just attracted to one type of cheese.

Young employees expect the future to be one of change. Young professionals with a desire to connect, integrate and collaborate to deliver improvements in service delivery and the workplace in general have taken the initiative and formed a common solution. This group of young employees have attitudes and use tools that are largely foreign to the current system but nonetheless, with gratefully acknowledged support, have successfully brokered the implementation of a significant innovation in an environment commonly assumed to be resistant to change. Our philosophy combines the wisdom of both Heraclitus and Ghandi and we say 'change is the only constant and we must be the change we wish to see'.

References

Althaus C & Tiernan A (2005) *Managing up: the framework of public sector management, PSM Program 2005,* Canberra: Australian Public Service Commission.

A-Teams (Action Policy Teams), 2007, *SA Public Sector—One Generation Away From Extinction? The recruitment and retention of Generation X and Y,* Government of South Australia 2007

Bishop P & Davis G (2001) 'Developing consent: consultation, participation and governance', in G Davis and P Weller (eds) pp 175–195, *Are you being served? State citizens and governance,* Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin.

Bridgeman P & Davis G (2004) *The Australian Policy Handbook,* 3rd edition, Sydney, Allen and Unwin.

Davis, G 2001, 'State, citizens and governance', in G Davis and P Weller (eds) pp. 1–6, *Are you being served? State citizens and governance,* Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin.

Davis G, Wanna J, Warhurst J & Weller P (1988) *Public policy in Australia,* North Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

Eckersley R (2004) 'As good as it gets', *The Sydney Morning Herald,* 31 January–1 February, Spectrum, pp. 1, 4, 5 (PSM Manual pp. 32-35 – reproduced under licence, in PSM Program 2005, Managing out: the public sector in the community).

Griffiths M (2007) 'Oxygen: Social Intranets, Collective Intelligence and Government Practices', *EJEG : the Electronic Journal of E-government,* vol 5, no 2, pp 177–190 <www.ejeg.com/issue-current.htm> accessed 19 March 2009.

Keating M & Weller P (2001) 'Rethinking governments' roles and operations', in G Davis and P Weller (eds) pp 73–97, *Are you being served? State citizens and governance,* Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin.

Levitas R (2005) *The inclusive society? Social exclusion and the new labour,* 2nd edn, Houndmills: Palgrave MacMillon.

Lewis B (n. d.) End-users' resistance to technology and change is based on experience, not instinct, at <www.infoworld.com/articles/op/xml/00/03/27/000327oplewis.html> accessed 16 June 2008.

MAC (2004) *Connecting government: whole of government responses to Australia's priority challenges,* Management Advisory Committee, no. 4, Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.

McAllister I & Wanna J (2001) 'Citizens' expectations and perceptions of governance', in G Davis and P Weller (eds) pp 7–35, *Are you being served? State citizens and governance,* Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin.

Meredyth D, Ewing S & Thomas J (2003) 'Divided opinions over the digital divide', *Southern Review,* vol 36, no 1, pp 1–10.

NESTA (2007) 'Innovation in response to social challenges' Policy Briefing, SC/03.

Oxygen <www.oxygen.sa.gov.au>

Podger A (2001) 'Reforms and their significance', *Canberra Bulletin of Public Administration,* no 99, pp 14–20.

Podger A (2005) 'Regeneration—where to in the future?' *Australian Journal of Public Administration,* vol 64, no 2, pp 13–19.

Rann M (2007) *South Australia's Strategic Plan,* <www.stateplan.sa.gov.au> accessed 16 June 2008.

Rayner M (1997) *Rooting Democracy: growing the society we want,* St Leonards: Allen & Unwin.

Sheahan P (2006) *Generation Y in the Public Sector, Final Report 2006.*

Shergold P (2005) Creating a culture of success, speech, 8 April 2005, delivered at the IPAA South Australia 'Connecting Government Conference', <www.dpmc.gov.au/speeches/shergold/together_2005-04-08.cfm> accessed 24 May 2005.

Sherman T (1998) 'The tensions between accountability and responsiveness in a shrinking public sector', *Canberra Bulletin of Public Administration,* no 89, pp 37–41.

Walter J & Strangio P (2007) *No Prime Minister: Reclaiming politics from leaders,* Sydney: UNSW Press.

Weller P (2001) 'The summit of their discontents: crisis or mere transition?', in G Davis and P Weller (eds) pp 196–204, *Are you being served? State citizens and governance,* Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin.

West D (2003) 'Is computer access enough? A multi-level analysis of the barriers to engagement', *Southern Review,* vol 36, no 1, pp 22–33.

Wilkins P (2002) 'Accountability and joined-up government' *Australian Journal of Public Administration,* vol 61, no 1, pp 114–119.