

The Ministry of Public Input

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Chapter abstracts

Chapter 1: Building the bridge: A methodology for connecting the aspiration and practicalities of public input and political leadership

There has been a significant expansion of public input in government which has the potential to inform and influence our leaders' decisions and strengthen citizen voices within the political system. But it also raises profound practical and democratic questions as to how the public can offer useful input; how we ensure that public input is collected and processed appropriately within the government and what political leaders are supposed to do with that public input. This chapter notes the gap in the research on public input and political leadership and explains the wide ranging methodology to be used to identify practical ways to improve public input in government works including appreciative inquiry; analysis of over government and non-governmental documents; and interviews with over practitioners and ministers.

Chapter 2 Changing Times: Politicians talk of partnership

This chapter explains how political leaders can no longer rely on official authority to give them enough power to do what they want to do and that to achieve a vision they need to consider a range of sources of public input, work more collaboratively, and accept their role is less about knowing the answer themselves and more about reaching out to identify the way forward with others. Governance is transitioning from a traditional, linear and hierarchical system of power to one where leaders work with input from a range of stakeholders, including the general public, to find solutions to highly complex problems. There is a holistic new trend in political leadership towards a more consultative approach to governance.

Chapter 3 Mind the gap: the difference between the ideals of public input and the mucky reality of government

There are many democratic arguments for why public input should be integrated into government and leadership decisions but research into previous practice reports many problems in the way such input is collected, processed and responded to by political elites. Despite the potential benefits of public input in government, there has been little thought into how it can work within the current realities of representative democracy. This chapter outlines a number of factors that explain why politicians might seem to ignore public input such as government presents practical and political constraints; there are multiple inputs into politician's decision making; and both pragmatically and normatively politicians need to show leadership.

Chapter 4 Collecting Public input

A fundamental and significant part of making public input into leadership work is how such input is collected and this chapter outlines principles to ensure it produces high quality data that is useful to politicians. A mix of potential groups should be asked to give input, on any issue, using a range of methods should be used to collect public input including some deliberative approaches which focus on asking for solutions and priorities. Background information should be provided, a professional and conversation approach should be taken to proceedings by organisers and participants, and discussion should consider constraints and conflicts, whilst seeking to generate several not sole options for politicians to consider.

Chapter 5 Processing Public Input

Resources are often channelled into collecting public input without thought being given into what happens with the data. How public input is processed is a fundamental aspect to making public input into government effective and this chapter proposes a range of important principles to processing public input. A centralised institutional unit such as a Public Input Commission needs to be created with properly resourced staffing to process and disseminate data transparently to government and the

public. The public input unit should also communicate the response of political leaders to public input so that there is feedback to participants. A Minister for Public Input needs to head the public input unit and system to champion and support integrated public input in government.

Chapter 6 Developing Political Leaders and Public

This chapter explores how political leadership and the public can develop in the future. The role of politicians is evolving, to one where leaders are there to facilitate collaboration; government is there to initiate, collect and process input from the public, and political leaders then integrate this in their decision making. New forms of political leadership are emerging that are reflective, facilitative and deliberative in the way they integrate public input into government decision making. Similarly the role and capacity of the public can develop to focusing on creating solutions and accepting politicians should no longer be left to solely carry the responsibility for governing. The chapter also presents hypotheses for how the public, political leaders, and process of public input might develop overall.

Chapter 7 Ministers on Managing Public Input

This chapter focuses on what ministers think about how to collect and use public input: who leaders get public input from; how they ask for public input; and how public input in government might evolve in the future. Ministers are well aware of the value of input from the general public as well as more expert sources and prefer to consider a range of inputs from different sources to inform their decision making. Political leaders also integrate deliberative elements into government by favouring conversational and deliberative discussions - even if such activity goes unseen and is not formalised consultation or deliberation. Ministers also attested to the importance of identifying how most effectively to gather and integrate public input into government to enable leadership.

Chapter 8 Ministers on Integrating Public Input into Decision Making

This chapter focuses on what ministers think about how to integrate public input into their decision making and still show leadership within that context of increased input into government. Political leaders work in a challenging environment meaning that their power and knowledge is much more constrained than we might expect. Ministers are aware of the need to balance expert and mass opinion and evaluate the quality of the input they get, seeking alternative information if there are gaps. Public input is integrated within leadership decisions there is a move to more deliberative and consultative forms of political leadership where leaders engage in shared-solution finding with those outside government. The chapter also presents overall principles of effective public input and political leadership from ministerial perspectives.

Chapter 9 Deliberative Political Leadership and The Ministry of Public Input

This chapter puts forward a model of leadership and recommendations for practice. Politicians need to become deliberative political leaders; considering constructive input from a diverse range of sources and integrating it into their deliberations before making their final decision. We also need to develop a permanent government unit to collect, process and communicate ongoing public input such as a Ministry or Commission of Public Input which incorporates a Government Liason Team, a Public Input Collection Unit, Public Input Processing Section and a Public Development Office. By improving public input systems; acknowledging the limits of their own power and knowledge; and devolving creation of the solution to others, politicians achieve change that lasts. Public input is not irreconcilable with political leadership; it is essential to it.