

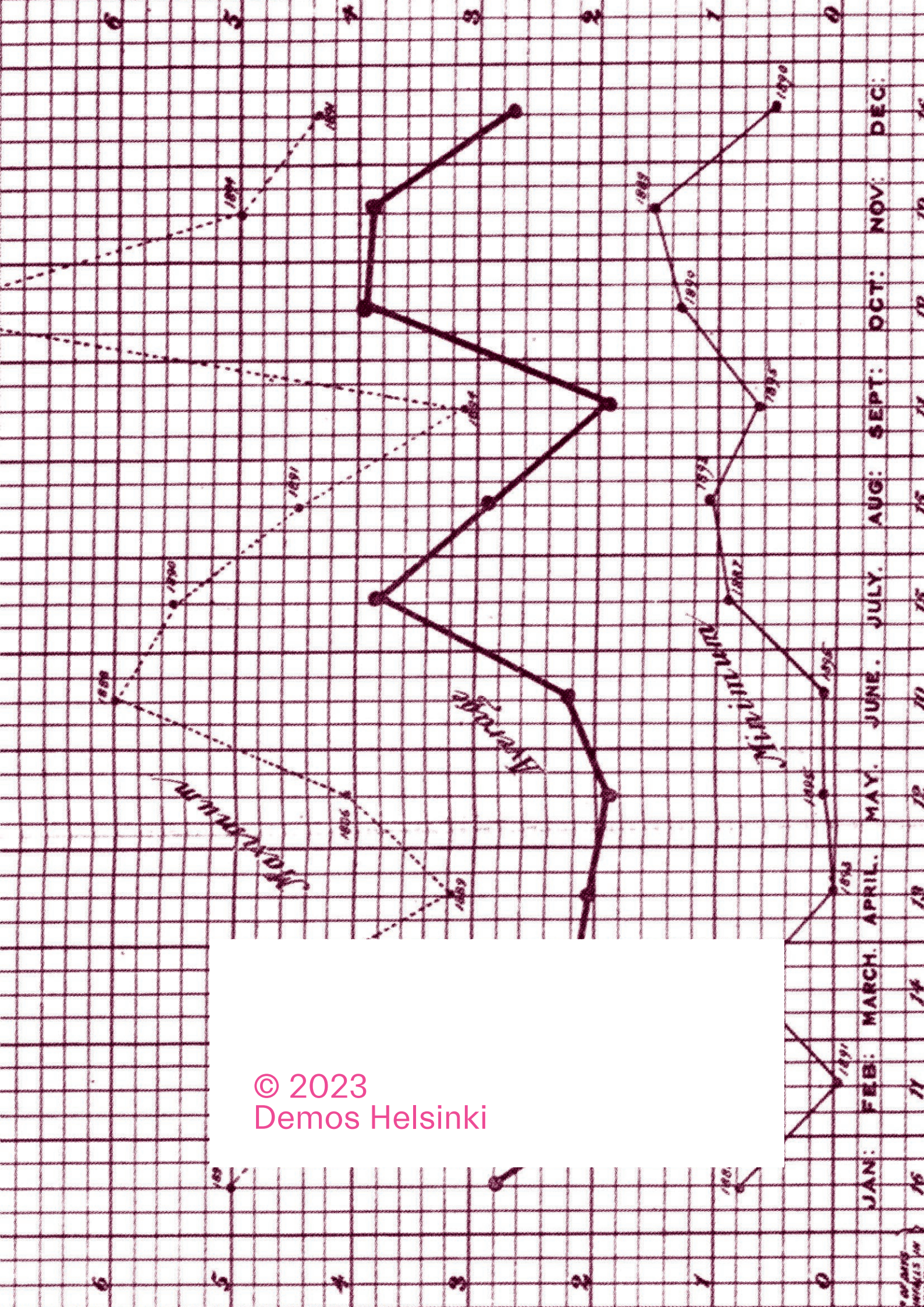
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# AND WE HOSTER THE CIVIL SERVICE

From Bureaucrats to Agents of Governance







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 Demos Helsinki

# About Demos Helsinki

Demos Helsinki is a globally operating, independent think tank. We conduct research, offer a range of services, including capacity-building and training, and host a global alliance of social imagination called Untitled. Since day one, our community has been built on the idea that change can only happen together. That is why we carry out direct engagements and research projects with hundreds of partners around the world. Unlike many think tanks, we are predominantly project-funded and fully independent, without any political affiliations.

Read more about Demos Helsinki at:  
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# Foreword

**P**oliticians, secretaries of state, bureaucrats: our communities may well depend on them. That's what the last three years taught us. Not only did Covid-19 demand our governments' exceptional efforts. It did so in a context where **decades of civil service rollback** led to a lack of essential capabilities within public administrations at large. While the disruption of the pandemic provided a formidable challenge, a majority of national governments across the world was caught off guard, under-staffed and unprepared. Yet, steering us through the pandemic became a necessity, often requiring vast shifts in how, where, or why public administrations work.<sup>1</sup>

Let's face it: **the value of civil service for our societies has been neglected for too long.** As it turns out, a world in turmoil turns to governments to look for solutions. This has sparked a revival in debates around the role of the state and the purpose that should drive its action. Yet, as we debate, it's easy to think of government as an amorphous, soulless mass. At its best, it is an efficient machine; at its worst, a tool for tyrants. Too many theories – even those that mean well – seem to forget the agency of each government's people: civil servants. But civil servants are neither a machine, nor a tool. We need to reappraise and support them.

The implementation of continuous and intentional investment in the re-skilling, upskilling, and better resourcing of civil service is paramount to address the main challenges of our times.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the world is full of



early signs of change – an ever-growing number of governments and civil servants exploring new directions for their future.<sup>3</sup> There are ways to speed up and upscale the ambition of these efforts.

Providing us with unique administrative expertise, local wisdom, and a stable infrastructure to enable collective action, a 21st-century civil service can lead societal transformation. As we enter another century of many foreseeable disruptions, the *raison d'être* of our civil servants must be reignited with purpose. Four values can propel their role as indispensable agents of governance: humility, wisdom, imagination, and collaboration. The goal of this vision paper is to define them and provide initial recommendations on how to foster them in practice.

Providing us with unique administrative expertise, local wisdom, and a stable infrastructure to enable collective action, a 21st-century civil service can lead societal transformation.

# Civil Servants as Agents of Governance

In the absence of faith in politics, civil servants enjoy high levels of trust from the public.<sup>4</sup> Yet, the plethora of proposals for civil service reform reflect an image of them as bureaucrats – project managers at best – as if they’re meant to carry out mundane tasks defined by precise legal boundaries and well-established courses of action.

Epitomised by the ideal of good governance, such image portrays civil servants as an intermediary: a neutral conduit whose quality is defined by the ability and efficiency in transporting political directives from statement to practice.<sup>5</sup> Yet, not only is this image distant from the everyday reality of government: it neglects the significance of civil servants’ societal role and moral agency.<sup>6</sup> Civil servants participate in policymaking, make substantive judgments and manage multi-stakeholder relationships.<sup>7</sup> In a few words, civil servants are agents of governance. We need them to be good ones.<sup>8</sup>

Take the climate crisis: an existential threat demanding nothing less

Trustworthy and effective governments need civil servants to act as agents of governance, rather than mere implementers.





than the renewal of whole industries, the reorganisation of our cities, the overhaul of entire mobility systems, and many more radical shifts. For each of them, no meaningful progress could be devised without civil servants. Civil servants' technical knowledge and expertise is essential, as is their ability to navigate difficult processes and choices – many of which cannot be predefined or even foreseen by politics.

The same goes for other contemporary challenges – like radical digitalisation, ageing, mass migrations, or structural inequalities. All of them share one characteristic: they are complex and cannot be solved by any stakeholder alone. To be effective, governments thus need civil servants to act as agents of governance rather than mere implementers: that is, capable not only of translating politically-mandated goals into actual processes, structures and actions, but also of figuring out proactively the best routes for achieving them.<sup>9</sup> →

Trustworthy and effective public institutions depend on the ethos they instil in their agents. Developing a new ethos for a 21st-century civil service may be the key to accomplishing more ambitious plans, faster, and with great integrity.<sup>10</sup> The following pages:

- i. describe the current challenges affecting the ethos of civil service,
- ii. highlight cases of governments that are already investing in a new ethos and seeing the rewards, and
- iii. provide recommendations about where to start for upscaling its impact.

Today, history defines public interest as a **fragile balancing act** between political, administrative and societal **stability** and proactive steering of societal **transformation**. This is why civil servants need new skills and capabilities, as well as — more broadly — **a new ethos**.

## WHAT IS THE ETHOS OF CIVIL SERVICE?

The word “ethos” has Greek roots (ἦθος) (“ēthos”). It identifies the “distinguishing character, sentiment, moral nature, or guiding beliefs of a person, group, or institution”.<sup>11</sup> The ethos of a public sector organisation can be seen as the result of an interplay between two distinct and complementary systems of control that help define what is “good” or what is “bad” public action.<sup>12</sup>

- The first system is outward-facing. It is enshrined in formal commitments against which civil servants can be held accountable by means of objective criteria – such as the rule of law, and the adherence to tasks dictated by organisational statutes. As such, this system represents the “guardrails” of public action: the limits not to be crossed.
- The second system is inward-facing. It is enshrined in civil servants’ routines and reflected into how each of them interprets and fulfils their mandate in an operative context where formal commitments rarely prescribe one way for doing so. This system reflects civil servants’ operational values, and represents the “steering wheel” of public action: the (largely soft) rules that make up the driver’s manual.

This duplicity is reflected in the tensions that pervade today’s civil service. On the one hand, civil servants have to adhere to essential codes of conduct; on the other, they have to guide societies through essential transformations. The following pages show that, while the “guardrails” of public action have changed little if at all in the last 20 years, the values that drive civil servants’ behaviour did change. By unearthing this transformation, we aim to explore such tensions, and spark a debate around the ethos that would ignite a new role of civil service in our societies.

# The Case for Transformation

## FROM INDUSTRIAL ERA TO 21ST CENTURY

**A**s societies evolve, so do the challenges they deal with. In turn, ever-changing challenges call for new governance solutions. The **need to reimagine how we govern society is not new**. In the early 1900s, societies faced manifold transformations all at once: the rise of big industries and cities, unprecedented technological innovations, the rise of stark inequalities, labour unrest, mass migrations, and major shifts in the international political order. In the US, concerns for the capacity of the administration to deal with those were wide and warnings loomed large about the US “government” being “three generations behind our necessities”.<sup>13</sup>

Appeals for an intentional overhaul of the government’s “antique machinery” surfaced. Led by Charles Merriam, **public administration** emerged as a field tasked with accomplishing the “fitting of government to the facts of the modern world”.<sup>14</sup> Reform followed soon. From the creation of entirely new departments that deliver social services to the systematisation of urban planning functions, public management had to be reinvented as well – and so did civil service. **Industrial-era governance was born.**

Industrial-era governance encompassed timely values for effective public action – such as fairness, predictability, and accountability. Today, these are not relics of the past; they still are quintessential pillars of just and reliable public action. Yet, they do not suffice anymore. To address the problems that define our century, we need to complement the stability

provided by such features with new values that can help us navigate change. In other words, we need to achieve what has been termed as “agile stability”.<sup>15</sup>

**Governments have now recognised a dire need for societal transformation:** a deep, sustained, and non-linear systemic change encompassing multiple dimensions – cultural, political, technological, economic, social, environmental.<sup>16</sup> In the Western world, the European Commission’s Green New Deal and large investment packages such as the United States’ Inflation Reduction Act

prove this. However, no government has proved capable of triggering transformation. Our hypothesis behind this failure is that, to transform society, governments first need to nurture a transformative civil service. If this is the case, then what would such a civil service look like?

At least **four features of industrial-era governance act as barriers to societal transformation.** These are exactly the ones that provide civil servants with a sense of stability: a rule-based mindset, short-termism, incremental decision-making and silo-based implementation. Now, emerging from different corners of the world, **there arise new values for a 21st-century civil service.** By infusing organisations and individuals with them, we can foster a new ethos for civil service: one to lead societal transformation. These values are four: **humility, wisdom, imagination, and collaboration.** Here is what each of them means in practice.

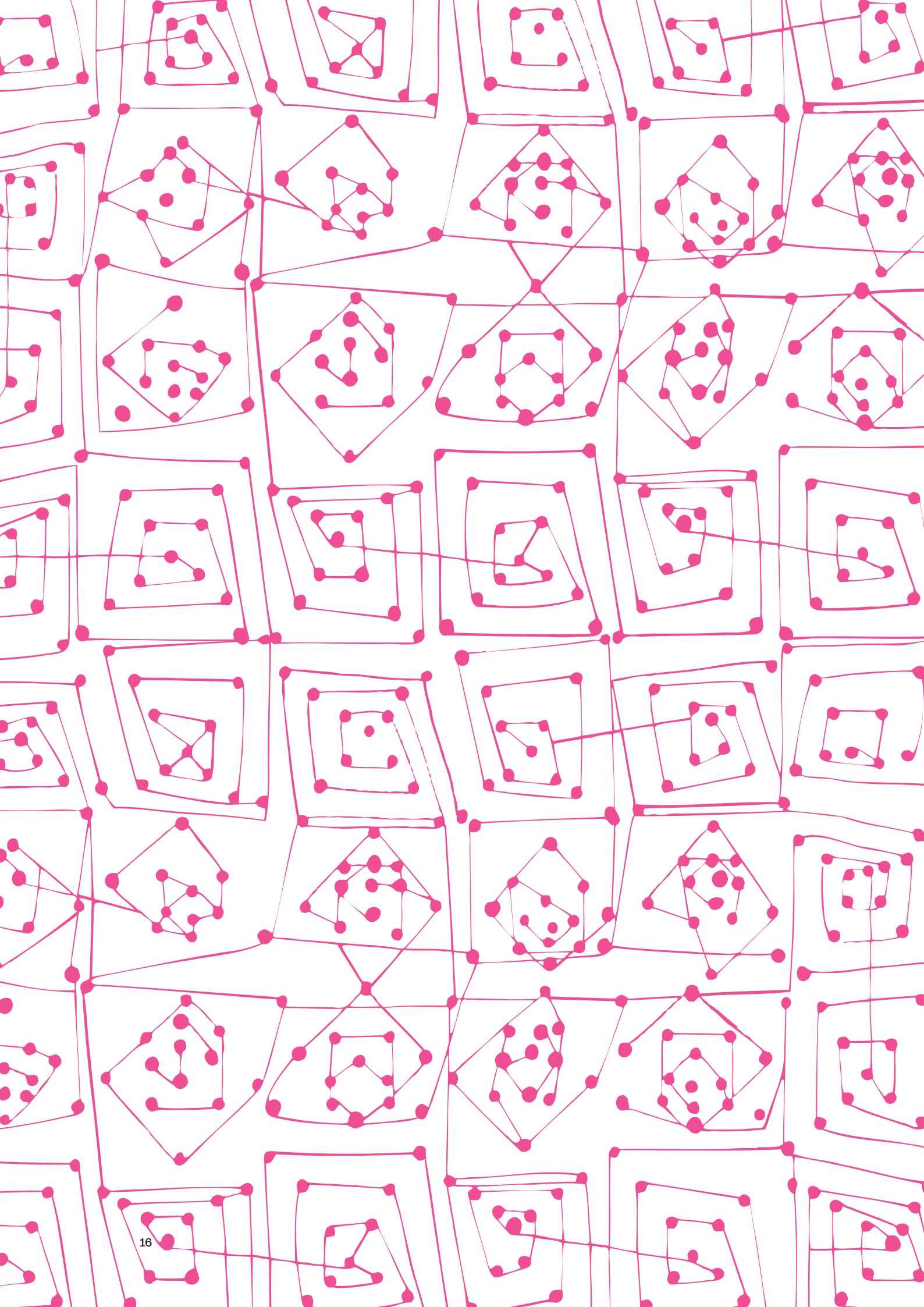
Industrial-era governance encompassed timely values for effective public action – such as fairness, predictability, and accountability. Today, these are not relics of the past; they still are quintessential pillars of just and reliable public action. Yet, they do not suffice anymore.



# Rule-Based Mindset + Humility



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**T**raditionally, the ability of civil service in pursuing the common good has always been based on the respect of prescribed rules and predetermined procedures. This **mandate** was and still constitutes the precondition for **the legitimacy of bureaucratic decision-making**. However, a side effect of the rule-based mindset is that it compresses room for administrative discretion in favour of conformity. It can make civil servants more risk-averse and **perpetuate the assumption that existing rules will always be suitable** – even when the issues they address are new and unpredictable. For example, in 1998 the US Department of Justice sought to restore competition in the PC industry against the monopoly of Microsoft. At the time, its civil servants took for granted the applicability of existing antitrust law, and sued the company. Yet, as the legal case dragged on to 2001, new competitors emerged and the legal case became useless. Eventually, they dropped it and had to seal a separate agreement: a sobering outcome for 3 years of civil servants’ work and a failure of public action to reflect on how to navigate a changing technological landscape.<sup>17</sup>

The 21st century is for civil servants that look at the same time within and beyond existing rules, in order to reinterpret, adapt, and enforce public action based on continuous learning – like philosophers and scientists. To make it happen, we need civil service to be infused with epistemic humility: a capability to revise assumptions and ensure iterative learning through experimentation. Failure to seize new information that emerges from policy design or implementation often results in a lack of fit policy solutions – as above. Humble civil servants have the analytical capabilities to amend policy in light of new evidence. They are willing and capable of acknowledging the limits of existing rules and involving actors to ideate new solutions, test them, learn from them, and revise them.

We need civil service to be infused with **epistemic humility**: a capability to revise assumptions and ensure iterative learning through experimentation.

# Case Study

A case in point is the **Experimentation Works programme** led by the Government of **Canada** in 2018.<sup>18</sup> The programme encouraged civil servants to design and lead pilot projects around strategic policy issues. The goal was to foster their skills via learning-by-doing and ensure broader policy impact by providing open access to learning materials, updates, and results. The programme involved 3 departmental teams that led 4 small-scale experiments over 12 months. These were led as a cohort: a group enabling civil servants to grow together and share what it takes to become humble: i.e., to analyse the effect of their policies, review their assumptions, and learn from evidence how to improve action. As a result, **the programme also helped the Government identify pitfalls in its policy process** – e.g., the need to

- i. build stronger experimentation capacity in government,
- ii. share internal resources and experts beyond silos, and
- iii. develop flexible policy design that enables learning and adaptation.

Launching Experimentation Works, we focused on a few demonstration projects while helping a small number of people in identifying when and how to experiment. Four years in, system-level maturity has grown exponentially and experimentation is becoming an integral part of the policy/service design toolbox of the Canadian Public Service.

■ MYRA LATENDRESSE-DRAPEAU

Director General, Transferable Skills  
Canada School of Public Service





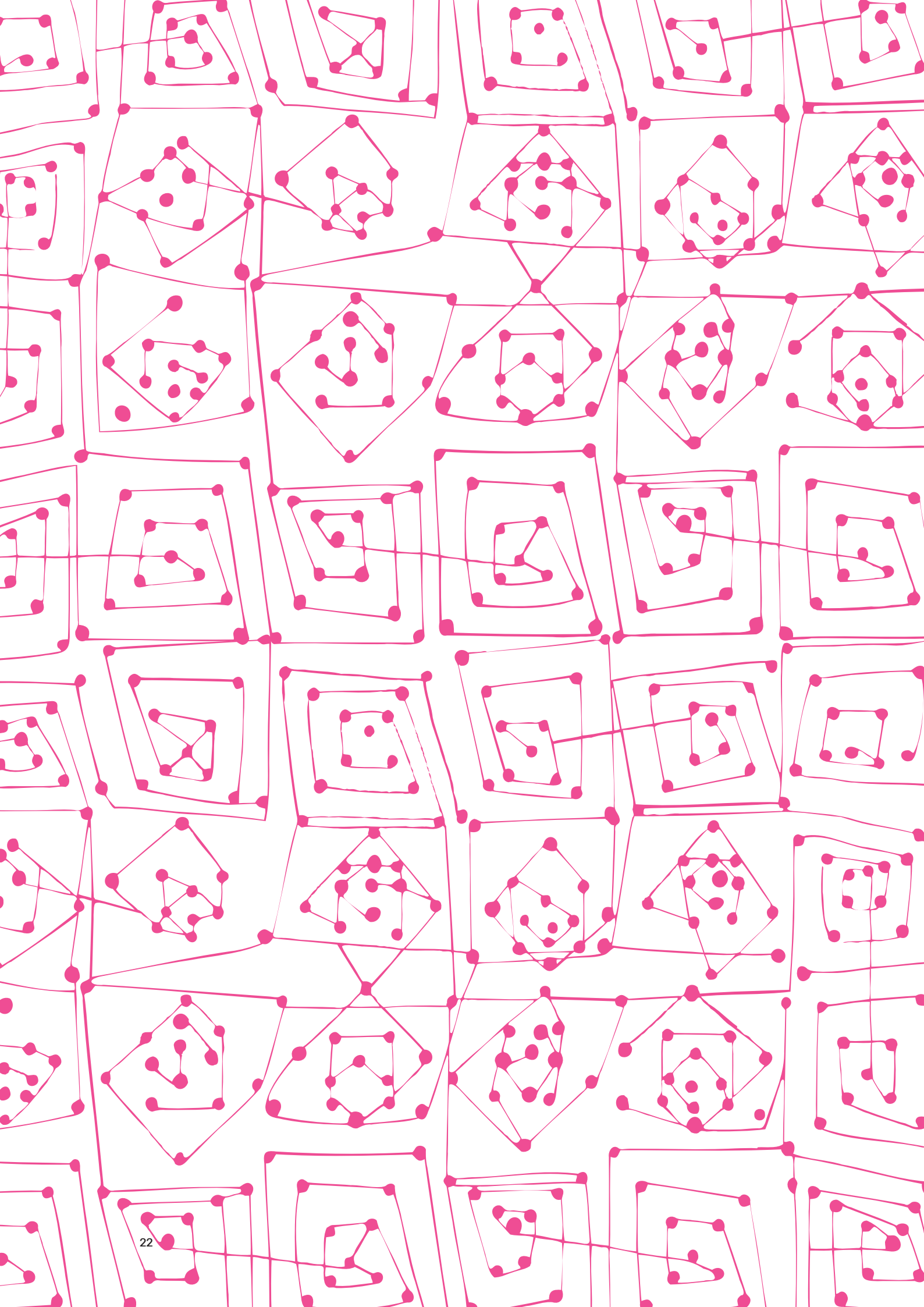
Short-Term  
Accountability  
+ Wisdom



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**M**ost often, civil servants work within institutional environments that prioritise short-term, or crisis-induced, needs over long-term issues. Largely **stemming from political dynamics that go beyond civil service itself** (e.g., electoral cycles), however, the need to comply with short-term accountability peaks in the absence of bodies, boards, or organisations tasked with understanding long-term risks and prioritising them in the administration's day-to-day. No example shows this more clearly than the Covid-19 pandemic. Take the UK. In 2002, sudden disruptions in the fuel and food industries led the Government's Strategy Unit to ideate a new risk management package – including policy tools, dedicated units, and training programmes that aimed at increasing key civil servants' preparedness to unlikely events. Yet, when the pandemic hit in 2020, short-termism had come back: years of austerity and weak enforcement of the package led gradually to the hollowing out both of pandemic preparation teams and of those regional offices that would have been so vital to coordinate a response. Despite past efforts, the public administration was found once again unprepared for an unlikely, yet risky scenario.<sup>19</sup>

In the 21st century, this is no longer viable: civil servants must respond to short-term needs while also anticipating and preparing to deal with potential long-term challenges. Like Sherpas and pathfinders, they must be infused with tools and methods that enable them to tap in collective wisdom, and enable wise decisions. In this context, wisdom is the capability to anticipate future changes in the policy context and reform institutions to cater for long-term phenomena. Civil servants cannot be limited to reacting to shocks. They need to be well-equipped to devise future-proof processes. Wise civil servants have the reflective capabilities to foresee alternative futures and are prepared to deal with them. They develop a long-term vision against grand societal challenges and use it to steer beyond the limits settled by electoral cycles.

Wise civil servants develop a long-term vision against grand societal challenges and use it to steer beyond the limits settled by electoral cycles.

# Case Study

**Singapore** is one of the most prescient cases of wise government across the world. Rooted in the experiments first led by the Ministry of Defence in the 1980s, today Singapore's foresight approach is embedded at the core of public action. On the one hand, long-term strategic planning is ensured at high-level policymaking by the role of the **Centre for Strategic Futures** (CSF) in the Strategy Group of Singapore's Prime Minister Office. On the other hand, foresight capability is nurtured across the whole of the Singaporean civil service through Executive Education courses – such as the **Singapore Futures programme** from the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy (LKYSPP): the first university-based programme with specialist expertise in futures thinking applied to the public sector. The results of these efforts enabled the Singapore government to react promptly in the wake of the Covid-19 crisis; they also helped it make sense of its long-term implications.<sup>20</sup>



Through its Executive Education Singapore Futures initiatives, LKYSPP aims to democratise futures thinking for public officials and other key public policy stakeholders. Today, it is very encouraging to see more of them become aware of emerging strategic issues and think almost instinctively about how key drivers of change may shape our individual and collective future. This enables us to harness the full strength of our diverse society and improve Singapore's capacity for long-term policymaking.

■ ANIE FEBRIASTATI

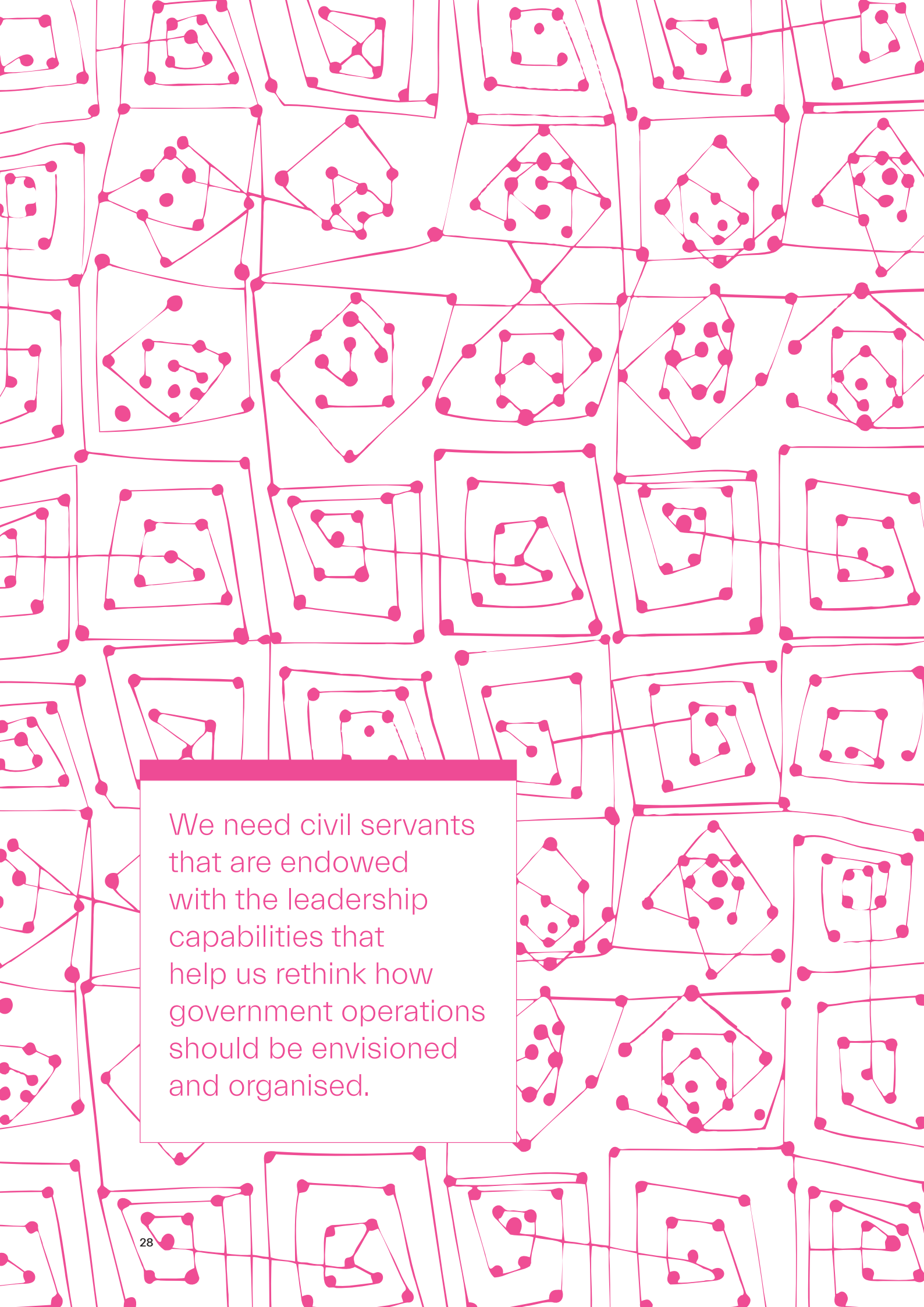
Senior Associate Director  
(Executive Education Singapore Futures)  
Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy,  
National University of Singapore



An abstract graphic on a black background. It features five small pink squares connected by thin, curved pink lines. The lines form a complex, looping path that starts at the top square, goes down and left to the second square, then curves around to the right and down to the third square, then loops around to the bottom square, and finally curves around to the right and up to the fourth square. The text 'Incremental Decision-Making + Imagination' is centered in the middle of the graphic.

# Incremental Decision-Making + Imagination





We need civil servants that are endowed with the leadership capabilities that help us rethink how government operations should be envisioned and organised.

**A**lbeit within the scope of the mandate defined by the law, civil servants always exert some degree of administrative discretion: that is, they interpret the mandate on the basis of their own professional expertise and judgment. However, bound by the hectic complexity of the administrative day-to-day, **civil servants are always exposed to narrowing their use of discretion to embrace incrementalism**: a cautious decision-making approach that tends to develop solutions out of the current situation, step-by-step and by small degrees. Incremental decision-making emphasises solutions that are feasible from a political and administrative standpoint. There is nothing inherently wrong with it. Indeed, if leveraged with purpose, **incrementalism can be a powerful tool for promoting continuous learning**. Yet, **it can also degenerate into policy lock-in**: a position where it gets difficult to explore new ways to deal with a problem. That's how the European Commission saw its climate leadership dreams stall in the 2010s: paralysed by the failure of the 2009 Copenhagen Summit and overlapping political-economic crises, deprived of effective tools to organise collective action, and bound to develop non-binding, unambitious energy targets built on existing policies.<sup>21</sup> While 2019's European Green Deal marked a big step forward in this respect, its introduction – long from being encouraged – happened against the odds. The result is before our eyes: a continent that lost a decade and now in the conundrum of pursuing decarbonisation targets while dealing with the repercussions of the Russia-Ukraine war.

If many of our tools need to be reimagined, civil servants need to resemble artists and creatives in how they interpret administrative discretion. They need the capability to design, inspire, and motivate change in the operational routines of their organisations while ensuring stability in delivery. To thrive in a changing environment, governments must imagine novel visions for societal development and look for out-of-the-box approaches to achieve them. In a few words, we need imaginative civil servants, endowed with the leadership capabilities that help us rethink how government operations should be envisioned and organised. Imaginative civil servants are those who build spaces and opportunities to do so. They are those who support politics in developing new ways to steer societal transformations.

# Case Study

This is what happened in **Finland**. In 2015, Demos Helsinki co-created with key civil servants a model to integrate experimentation into the policymaking process.<sup>22</sup> Commissioned by the **Prime Minister's Office**, the model led to the creation of Experimental Finland: a platform to support strategic policy trials within and beyond government. The platform enabled the PMO to explore new tools — such as with the world-renowned basic income experiment in 2017–2018. As a result, **Finland** became the first country to put experimentation on top of its agenda. Now globally admired for its approach to climate change, Finland's success is also due to the cultural shift sparked by those civil servants who first imagined and built room for new decision-making approaches to grow when there was none.

In Finland, political support to enhance experimentation has meant a significant change of mindset in policymaking and within civil service. It is accepting humbly that there are no once-and-for-all solutions in an ever more complex world. And that learning is vital for adapting to rapidly emerging situations.

■ SIRPA KEKKONEN

Former Head of Strategy Finland's  
PMO Secretariat

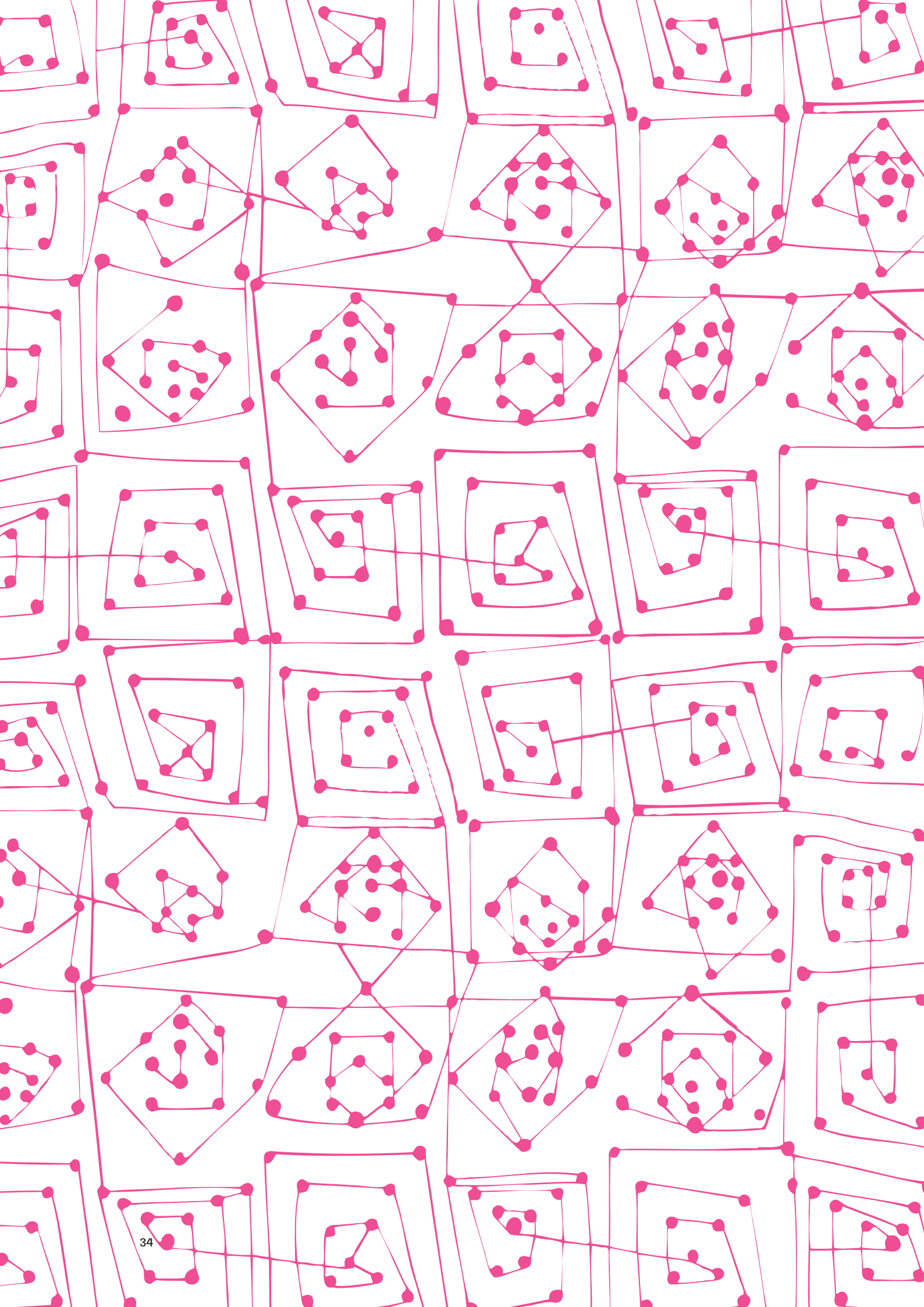




Vertical  
Responsibility  
+ Collaboration







**C**ivil servants work within an organisational arrangement that favours hierarchical structures and siloed operations. The **siloed structure is characterised by distinctive benefits**: most importantly, it provides a clear mechanism for allocating responsibility through hierarchy. But it **also has limits: silos heavily predetermine how civil servants frame, address, and implement measures against the issues they face**. As with incrementalism, the most urgent example of the problems posed by silos is the climate crisis. A current example of such conundrum is provided by Sweden – where the governance model has proven inadequate to achieve the desired results. Characterised by a large family of independent public agencies all expected to play a role in the transition, the Swedish Climate Policy Council pointed out that the lack of a clear mandate from the Government for them to cooperate is **holding back the pace of the transition**. The result is that, instead of being incentivised to synergies, civil servants are left alone in dealing with a maze of initiatives and actions that are scattered across too many ministries and agencies.<sup>23</sup>

As we ask civil servants to deal with challenges as daunting as the climate crisis, we should also be able to find ways to enhance rather than prevent their collaborative capacities. Like members of an orchestra, each of them should have their specialty but be able to work seamlessly with others to produce a cohesive outcome. In a few words, we should ensure the accountability guaranteed by silos, while also addressing challenges beyond the limits defined by them through **horizontal collaboration**. In a collaborative environment, civil servants realise that policy development is the fruit of a multi-stakeholder effort, and are qualified to call on resources, knowledge and commitment from multiple stakeholders throughout the policy process. As such, they put in place new incentives to foster collaboration within and beyond administrative boundaries, and erect cross-sectoral units to do so where needed.

In a collaborative environment, civil servants realise that policy development is the fruit of a multi-stakeholder effort.

# Case Study

In the **Netherlands**, the emergence of a collaborative civil service can be largely seen in the country's main industrial and innovation policy: the Mission-driven Top Sector approach.<sup>24</sup> Launched in 2011 by the **Ministry of Economic Affairs** and updated in 2018, the approach provides mechanisms to coordinate agendas, budgets, and activities of key public actors (national, regional or local) with those of major Dutch industry players. In this context, civil servants engage external actors in the co-creation and implementation of Knowledge and Innovation Agendas (KIAs) linked to key societal challenges: energy transition; agriculture, water and food; health and care; security. To make it happen, they act both as matchmakers (bringing together different stakeholders) and as facilitators (cutting through the red tape), hence promoting strategic and operative alignment throughout the innovation process.<sup>25</sup> Over time, **the Netherlands has substantially strengthened the innovative capacity of these industries**. Moreover, it tied up their development to key societal priorities. **The role of civil servants** in this transition cannot be underplayed: **it needs to be recognised as the enabling condition determining the capacity of the state to become a platform for collaboration.**

The Netherlands is a pioneer in mission-oriented innovation policy. Five years ago we transformed our successful public-private Topsector approach, created to boost the innovative strengths of the Dutch economy, into an innovation system focusing on selected missions. In this way corporations, research institutes, and the government combine their strengths to increase the impact of their research and innovations on the great societal challenges.

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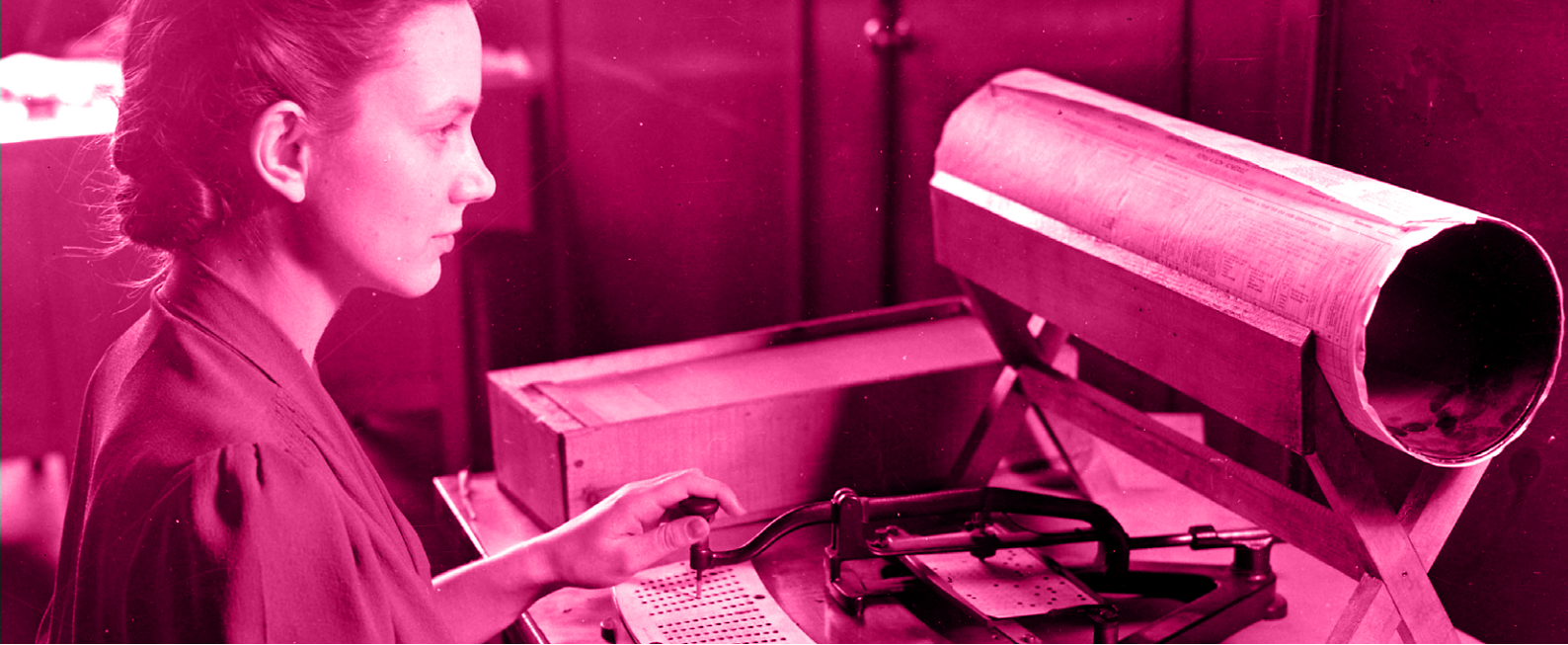


# The Quest for Transformation

## REBALANCING STABILITY WITH AGILITY

**R**ebalancing stability with agility rests on two premises. First, that governments are not amorphous entities, but communities of human beings driven by interests, hopes, fears, aspirations as any other. Second, that such individuals — civil servants — play an essential, yet surprisingly neglected role in helping us navigate the starkest challenges of our times. During the last decade, they have been imagining, leading and experimenting with initiatives to reignite governments' ability to steer societal transformations. In doing so, they sowed the seeds of what increasingly appears as a new ethos: one founded on values such as humility, wisdom, imagination, and collaboration. Still, **almost no one has given them wide recognition** for such efforts in the public and political debate,<sup>26</sup> **nor have we even started to seize the full potential** of their innovations. Why is this the case?

A preliminary hypothesis is that the answer might lie right in front of us: more specifically, in how public organisations work. **Only a few governments have developed clear pathways to ensure civil servants' upskilling, reskilling, and life-long learning.** Moreover, the importance of civil servants' everyday job is largely overlooked by politics and neglected by the public — when not bashed — hence diminishing their ability to attract young talent. Yet, innovation does happen: the problem is that it is not put into value. We think that the key obstacle that has prevented more than 10 years of public sector innovations to turn from niche initiatives to institutionalised practices lies in our public organisations' reluctance



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to change: to put it simply, in their need to ensure stability to public action. This need is deeply rooted in professional cultures; codified in the legal constraints and incentives influencing how civil servants behave; and re-enacted daily in the practices they encourage (or discourage). As a result, the institutional entrepreneurship of bold civil servants remains hidden in plain sight. →

1	18652	3290				May	15	19428	599375			May	29	19828	242	Apr	20	20654	
2	18663	732							1230									25	20657
17	18654	640				"	"	19435	61590			Apr	1	19834	1950	"	"	28	20665
12	18691	15180				"	"	19436	35245			Mar	31	19837	6077	"	"		20666
21	18718	250				"	"	19437	59120			Apr	25	19838	6445	"	"	25	20667
30	18746	2250				Apr	27	19439	33060			May	16	19858	240	"	"	29	20672
31	18773	53872				"	"	19440	26595			Apr	27	19868	21150	"	"		20673
22	18803	5470				"	"	19441	37665			May	15	19875	9670	May	4	20674	
17	18817	30				Mar	30	19442	1010			Mar	31	19882	34	Mar	31	20677	
14	18818	76				Apr	29	19443	168			June	1	19888	75	"	"		20680
24	18819	11				May	10	19444	7			Mar	31	19888	74	Apr	27	20683	
30	18894	152				Apr	30	19489	2430945			"	"	19994	145	"	"	25	20685
12	18900	236				"	"	19490	9760			"	"	19995	1995	"	"	28	20690
22	18902	4				"	"	19491	5640			"	"	19996	95	"	"	29	20693
30	18955	533				"	15	19493	225			April	1	19997	4	"	"		20697
29	18960	708				May	15	19503	149130			"	"	20000	675	"	"		20705
8	18961	140				"	"	19504	381795			"	"	20001	100	"	"		20707
1	18929	236665				"	"	19533	50			"	"	20004	3750	Mar	24	20708	
10	18934	3960				"	"	19534	221205			"	"	20006	7	Apr	29	20710	
17	18940	16887				"	"	19535	51120			"	5	20011	48	"	"		20712
21	18953	24				"	"	19536	161314			Mar	31	20064	190	"	"		20714
31	18958	131314				"	31	19581	210495			May	2	20013	13	"	"		20715
24	18960	5				"	"	19599	200			Feb	28	20063	215	May	30	20721	
25	18990	7666				Mar	31	19531	242153			Mar	30	20065	1662	Apr	19	20732	
31	18991	30				May	20	19626	75			"	31	20068	667	"	"	28	20744
8	18992	7				"	23	19628	1			"	30	20069	1	"	"	31	20747
13	18993	1003				"	31	19640	40145			"	"	20070	85	"	"		20753
22	18994	1250				"	"	19641	100			"	31	20073	6	"	"		20754

The need for stability is motivated by very good reasons: rule of law, short-term agility, incrementalism and administrative silos are not relics to get rid of, but quintessential pillars of fair and predictable public action. However, if left unchecked, they may also bring downsides.

- A blind adherence to old rules may lead to the misinterpretation of new events.
- An excessive focus on short-term needs may obfuscate visibility on long-term risks.
- A purely incremental use of discretion may preclude potentially path-breaking ideas.
- A strict adherence to vertical responsibilities may prevent necessary collaborations.

This is why civil servants around the world are coming up with new solutions: they are looking for new compromises between the need for stability and that for transformation. In other words, they are looking for ways to rebalance stability with agility. The tensions that underlie such opposite



25990	July 3	21289	6764	"	"	22190	14901	"	"	23315	21250	
5410	Apr 29	21304	5349	"	12	22204	9250	"	"	23317	100	
135	June 26	21306	3511	June	23	22205	1980	"	"	23318	40250	
163	Apr 29	21307	2979	"	28	22206	6	May	31	23340	2119	
619	"	21308	81	July	21	22276	19883	July	31	23341	2900	
17	Mar 24	21378	764	"	15	22293	99475	May	26	23342	20120	
1025	May 1	21379	2275	May	31	22311	2225	June	19	23400	5	
9449	"	15	21380	60	Apr	28	22313	353	"	"	23401	15
621	"	18	21381	3875	May	31	22315	1161	"	30	23404	8
205	June 9	21382	21	July	20	22318	50	May	31	23424	2964	
825	"	21	21383	215	"	21	22319	350	"	27	23455	40
180	Apr 11	21403	975	"	31	22359	200	July	7	23478	146	
225	"	29	21404	17060	"	30	22409	68284	"	"	23479	1275
210	Mar 31	21451	1260	June	30	22412	206785	"	8	23485	2	
113	Apr 20	21456	4	"	"	22417	225396	"	5	23490	46	
5125	"	22	21460	360	May	25	22428	401	"	26	23493	287
17	"	25	21463	6124	July	25	22446	255	"	8	23537	
1179	"	28	21469	1	May	31	22452	97015	"	31	23601	160350
205	"	29	21487	24093	July	31	22496	6250	"	"	23603	18080
36	"	"	21490	28168	"	"	22497	30250	Aug	17	23615	71630
107	Feb 1	21494	3445	"	"	22499	150	July	31	23645	93750	
3025	May 29	21495	737	"	"	22501	21250	Aug	15	23654	60	
2982	June 1	21505	9150	"	"	22502	6250	"	21	23678	741	
80	May 31	21507	1265	"	"	22504	100	July	31	23681	24	
650	Apr 26	21508	605	"	"	22505	6250	Aug	9	23685	8	
278730	July 7	21523	87440	"	"	22537	5985	June	7	23765	55	
244533	Apr 29	21534	406	"	"	22538	44108	"	26	23766	69	
40515	"	"	5050	"	"	22545	52550	"	19	23767	167	

needs won't be (nor should be) resolved once and for all. However, the case studies above illustrate how political and administrative decision makers are renegotiating their terms to create better capacity for them to address today's challenges. **The current mission of public sector innovation practitioners, scholars, advocates and promoters** – both within and outside of government – should be not just to catch up with these pioneers, but **to leverage their insights, successes, failures, and lessons to determine how to build a 21st century-fit civil service.** This entails

highlighting stories such as the ones illustrated above, but also inquiring into how these innovations can be codified and institutionalised at the core of how governments work. Doing so is essential to usher our societies through present and future challenges.

Civil servants around the world are coming up with new solutions: they are looking for new compromises between the need for stability and that for transformation.

# Recommendations

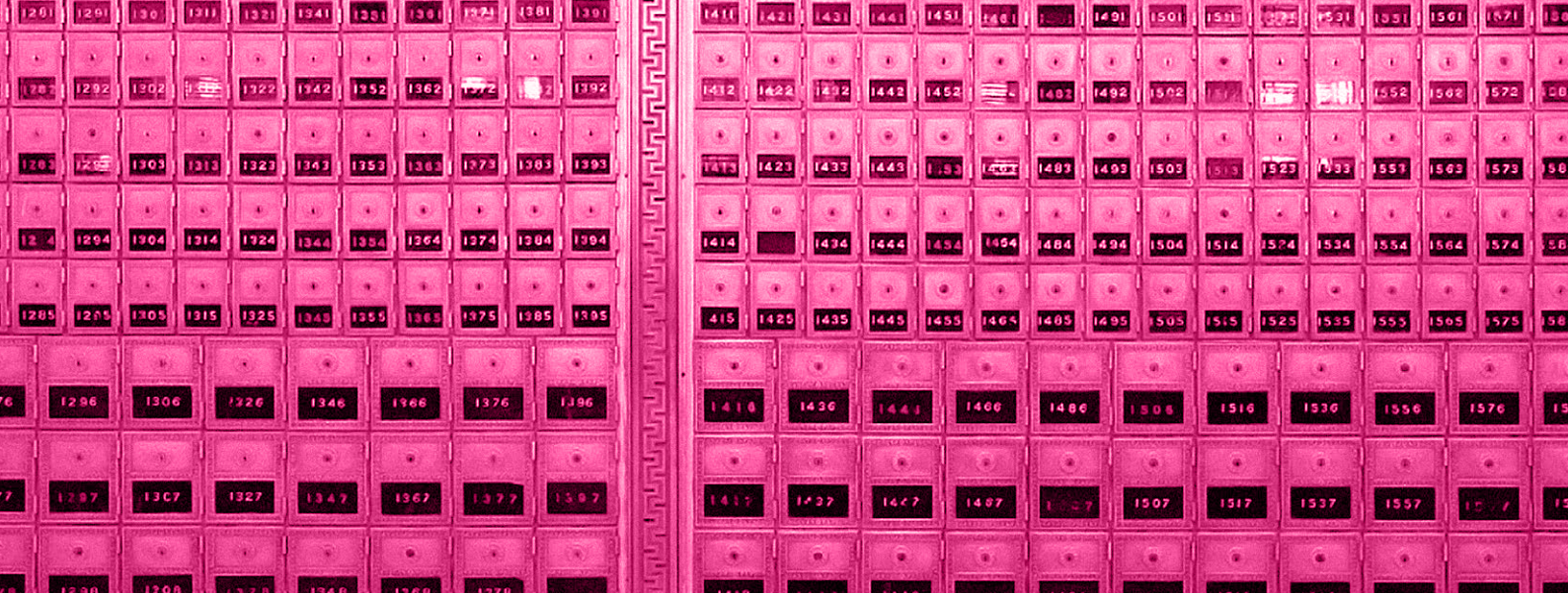
## UNLEASHING A 21<sup>ST</sup>-CENTURY CIVIL SERVICE

**C**ivil servants are agents of governance: to invest in their personal and professional growth is to invest in our societies' collective ability to build a fair, sustainable, and joyful future. Yet, everything in government seems to preclude the blossoming of their agency. Of course, there is no mechanical solution to change this: no silver bullet can transform civil service as if by magic. Yet, the stories illustrated above demonstrate that there is potential awaiting

to be unleashed. Any public leader can start to explore how to tap into it.

Civil servants are agents of governance: to invest in their personal and professional growth is to invest in our societies' collective ability to build a fair, sustainable, and joyful future.

To this end, traditional strategy-making won't go very far: an ethos can only be cultivated by action, so there is no way to engineer its emergence. If you head a ministerial department, public agency, or school of administration, here's how doing so might look like in practice:



- 1 Scout forerunners and co-create a bold vision for the ethos of your civil service.** First, identify what is already happening within your administration: engage with actual practitioners of public sector innovation, and leverage their **insights** to grasp the key **obstacles, resources and opportunities** within it. Afterwards, engage key personnel into **co-creation**: lead them to reflect on their organisation's purpose, and shortlist critical elements preventing (or solutions promoting) its fulfilment. Once the process is completed, publish the **vision** and state that your organisation will take it seriously. Thus, start to systematically explore what the new ethos would look like in practice for your administration's daily operations. How could civil servants embed these values within their everyday job? What would their key implications be?
- 2 Set the stage for real-life experimentation and spread the learnings.** Now that the ethos has been debated, defined and assimilated by your civil servants, put it in motion by means of experimentation. Operationalise its implications for their everyday job into **small pilots** that affect key activities of your entity – such as policymaking, budgeting, procurement, or service delivery. In parallel, draft a **review plan** to ensure that the outcomes generated from the use of new methods and practices are iteratively collected, evaluated, and leveraged to distil the **key lessons** learnt. Once you start understanding what works and how, start to codify those insights in **policy manuals, guidelines and protocols**. These can then be used in order to spotlight the most promising practices and disseminate them in the administration. →

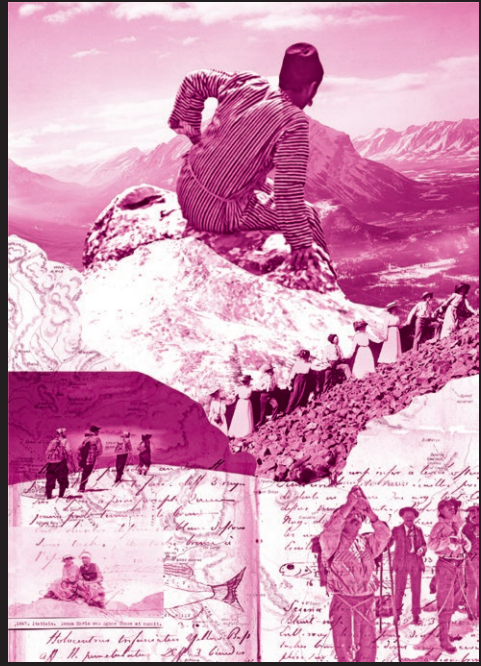
NO. OF VOUCHER.	NATURE OF PURCHASE OR EXPENDITURE.	TO WHOM PAID OR OF WHOM PURCHASED.	AMOUNT.	
			Dolls.	Cts.
1	Photograph	J. D. Edwards	✓ 109.	4 ✓
2	Flooring of New Post Office	S. M. Cornell & Co	✓ 437.	22 ✓
3	Machinery	Seeds & Co	✓ 134	37 ✓
4	Lumber	Medina & Clobery	✓ 455.	0 ✓
5	Roof	P. J. Mancoske	✓ 663	25 ✓
6	Hardware	Saml. Locke	✓ 9.	11 ✓
7	Printing	Book Young & Co	✓ 8	0 ✓
8	Oil	S. Sturtevant & Co	✓ 42.	50 ✓

**3 Consolidate, institutionalise, and codify best practices.** After a sufficient number of rounds of experimentation, the times are ripe to consolidate their **adoption**. To do so, look at the career development pathways and core incentives that influence how civil servants work in your entity, and align them with the new ethos. Doing so will ensure that the ethos is fully operationalised and can facilitate substantial shifts in their daily job. Acknowledge and communicate the **relevance** of such a shift in visible ways: for example, by considering a re-labelling of ‘civil servants’ and forging new categories that echo identified 21st-century values, chores and responsibilities. If possible, share your **journey, learnings, successes and failures** with peer public sector leaders: the effort will inspire them and ignite similar reflections in their entities. At long last, ensure that the most important changes are codified into the **statute** of your organisation, if not in civil service law.

10	State	J. & J. C. Davidson	✓ 39.	40
11	Salary	Francis Mezey	✓ 62	50
12	Officials' pay roll	J. H. Wharton	✓ 768	"
13	Post office	Lawson & Able	✓ 33	93
14	Mechanics' pay roll	J. H. Wharton	✓ 1211	98
15	Laborer's pay roll	D.	✓ 1366	73
16	Tending Mules	J. M. Mann	✓ 12	25
			5356.	28
Com. <sup>on</sup> 1/4 of 1% on \$ 5356. 28			13	39

**Civil servants live between two realities.** On one hand, they are ordinary citizens – grappling with the same anxieties many of us face amidst our times. On the other, they are public officials whose position compels them to both ensure societal stability and steer societal change – even when the whole world is burning. Hindered by the “antique machinery” of government, their mandate needs to be infused again with genuine passion, a gist of boldness, and a recognition of their commitment to addressing the greatest challenges of our times. At the same time, their work needs to be leveraged at a broader and bolder scale, and their innovations brought from the fringes to the core of government. This entails **moving beyond “exceptional” cases of successful “bureaucracy hacking” to develop more cohesive visions of how to redefine the meaning of bureaucracy:** that is, to unleash codified, systematic, and institutionalised attempts at building a 21st-century civil service. This paper provided a preliminary attempt at sketching out the rationale and direction for such a task. →

Today, civil servants have a unique opportunity to step up and recognise their role as stewards of our collective future. Yet, no transformative civil service can develop without a parallel transformation in how our societies appreciate and invest into the values that civil servants have already begun to embody and provide us with: humility, wisdom, imagination and collaboration. It is by recognising, seizing and expanding the scope and the ambition of this new ethos that we can nurture a 21st century-fit civil service: one for ushering us through the urgent and essential transformations ahead. ■



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