# Reclaiming fairness:
Perspectives on intergenerational equity in public policy in Aotearoa New Zealand

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## About the Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose

The Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose (IIPP) at University College London (UCL) aims to develop a new framework for creating, nurturing and evaluating public value in order to achieve economic growth that is more innovation-led, inclusive and sustainable. This requires rethinking the underlying economics that has informed the education of global civil servants and the design of government policies. Our work feeds into innovation and industrial policy, financial reform, institutional change and sustainable development. A key pillar of IIPP's research is its understanding of markets as outcomes of the interactions between different actors. In this context, public policy should not be seen as simply fixing market failures, but also as actively shaping and co-creating markets. Re-focusing and designing public organisations around mission-led, public purpose aims will help tackle the grand challenges facing the 21st century. IIPP is housed in The Bartlett, a leading global Faculty of the Built Environment at University College London (UCL), with its radical thinking about space, design and sustainability.

# Contents

# 1.  Navigating challenges

Aotearoa New Zealand has historically been a petri dish of innovation and enlightenment in the realm of public policy. From the establishment of a treaty with tangata whenua/Māori (Indigenous peoples) to granting women the right to vote, the early adoption of social welfare, no-fault accident compensation, marriage equality and environmental protection, New Zealanders have long prided themselves on their commitment to 'fairness'. However, as global and domestic challenges mount, there is increasing acknowledgment that the country may have lost sight of what 'fair' means.

A recent public policy wellbeing review by the New Zealand Treasury (*Te Tai Waiora: Wellbeing in Aotearoa 2022*) points to the possibility that, for the first time in recent history, the next generation will not be better off than current generations. This finding is not unique to New Zealand, but it reflects a broader concern about the future impact of public policy. In the face of a confluence of major challenges, including environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, climate change, financial instability, social inequality and technological disruption, there is a growing recognition that current public policy systems are failing to deliver effective solutions and to cope with increasing uncertainty (Schick 1996; Weijers and Morrison 2018; Mazey and Richardson 2021; PCE 2021; NZPC 2023).

The research that underpins this paper sought to better understand these concerns by exploring values, intergenerational awareness and anticipation within the public policy system. The underlying theory of change is centred on the need to shift the public policy system towards a long-term, intergenerational approach that values Indigenous perspectives and non-material value by prioritising sustainability, equity and innovation. The aim is that in doing so it will enable a more anticipatory, resilient and adaptive system that drives prosperity for all. This requires moving away from short-term gains and recognising the generations of people who will live with the consequences of today's choices, ensuring that present-day decision-makers are not borrowing from the future.

To test this core premise, qualitative interviews were conducted with thought leaders from various perspectives to explore the perceived mismatch between short-term policy decision-making and long-term challenges in Aotearoa New Zealand. The following sections present the methodology and identify key themes that surfaced from these interviews.

# 2.  Methodology

To better understand the policy conundrum for achieving intergenerational fairness, analysis was undertaken of interviews with:

- current and former public servants holding senior executive function roles within central and local government, and senior leadership roles within central government agencies;
- those in senior advisory, research and strategic consultancy roles outside the Public Service (including within independent Crown entities, commercial consultancies, universities and think tanks); and
- people from a range of lived experiences and viewpoints, including non-Western and Indigenous perspectives, such as people identifying with Māori, Pasifika, Indian and other Asian cultures.

It's important to note that the interviewees for this research were selected from existing networks; all are people who have expressed concerns about intergenerational aspects of public policy or have been innovators in their fields. As a result, the sample may not be fully representative of all perspectives on this issue. However, the aim of this research is to provide insights and contribute to the public discourse around intergenerational fairness.

Eleven semi-structured interviews of between 30 and 60 minutes were conducted with 12 participants during the latter half of 2022.[1] Interviews were a mix of in-person and online, and were audio-recorded and transcribed using an artificial intelligence live transcription platform[2]. The detailed interview questions were informed by literature (Berentson-Shaw 2018a, 2018b; Babian et al. 2021; Mazey and Richardson 2021), but the interviews were sufficiently loosely structured to allow for participants to offer insights and perspectives of their own.

Offering a rich tapestry of voices, the interviewees represent a diverse array of individuals from a range of ethnic and cultural groups who collectively shape the discourse on public policy. They include retired prime ministers and a former government minister [1] [6], a retired minister/member of parliament [5], senior public servants [3] [9] [12], investment fund experts [7] [8], academics [2] [4] [11] and a youth climate advocate [10]. Each participant brings their unique expertise, experience and perspectives, contributing to a holistic understanding of the challenges and opportunities in the realm of public policy. Their collective insights ensure a well-rounded and inclusive investigation (refer to the Appendix for more detail).

## 3.   Unveiling perspectives – insights from interviews

The following sections discuss key insights aggregated from qualitative analysis of the interviews.

### 3.1   Short termism is embedded in the structures, mindsets and behaviours of the current public policy system, which acts to limit the ability of the system to support or reward intergenerational outcomes

Across the range of interviewees there was agreement that the current system is stuck in a churn of short-term and reactive decision-making behaviour. The public policy system (and political economy) currently support, reinforce and reward this approach. This gives rise to a culture of incrementalism in policy-making and an aversion to new ideas – including innovation and bold decision-making – that challenge the status quo. Such reluctance acts as an obstacle to addressing complex long-term issues such as climate change:

> 'Public policy has been reactive for a good generation. We've got public policy people who have their own ingrained behaviours. It takes a while to shift from a reactive mode of public policy to a proactive frame of mind.' [9]

> 'Short-term responses reduce our ability to address the root cause right through stewardship and kaitiakitanga[3] – our ability to address wider issues, which means in the long term it's actually going to come back and bite us, undermining our long-term outcomes.' [2]

1   One interview was with two participants from the same organisation.

2   https://otter.ai/

3   Māori term meaning guardianship or stewardship of the natural world, especially the land, sea and sky

Many interviewees identified the current three-year electoral cycle as a driver for short-term thinking and investment, and for reactive public policy.

'People want to "get stuff done", which means "things" get incentivised or make it harder to think long-term. As a system it's how do you embed enduring change that goes beyond three-year political cycle?' [12]

'There is a need for strategies that enable change, greater experimentation, greater innovation and longer-term investment. We need a clearer understanding of what we are leaving behind, but also what we want to be organising ourselves towards so that we can create a low-carbon Aotearoa.' [10]

A few interviewees rejected or contested this view, seeing it as part of an established narrative to justify the short-termism and reactive intent of current public policy. They argued that the drivers of short-termism are far more complex and referred to the brevity of the political cycle as a 'scapegoat' for upstream or invisible structural issues that are holding back longer-term policy-making.

'Political cycle is a scapegoat for deeper issues within the system.' [3]

One interviewee identified the New Public Management reform, the privatisation of the 1980s and 1990s, and subsequent governance, as points at which the system shifted its values and focus toward more short-term outcomes, as there was a prioritisation of markets, competition and efficiency.

'Just because you can, it doesn't mean you have to have market economics all the time… You can't make assumptions of the sort that market commerce makes and expect reality to be any different. Of course it was going to drive inequality.' [1]

'If you don't understand why you are how you are, you can't change it.' [6]

Interviewees identified a range of mindsets and behaviours contributing to the short-termism embedded within the current system.

## Status quo bias

'I think we fooled ourselves into thinking that we're going to devise this wonderful policy that's not going to change our behaviour, but it's somehow going to solve the problem that we're trying to solve. It's a form of mis-logic. There's this belief that we can somehow address these challenges without hurting the status quo too much.' [9]

'The way in which we're structured or designed ourselves actually reinforces that way of thinking. So we've become disconnected.' [12]

'That current structure assumes the status quo was great or was fine. So we've got to find an excuse to do something different. And that excuse is this high hurdle rate – you know, risk statements and everything else that we have to fly over before we accept a new policy proposal. And that policy proposal might be about that much [indicating a small amount with his hands] of the total scheme.' [9]

'There is this whole culture that's built around the idea of "protecting what I have", not rocking the boat. Protecting my kingdom and maintaining the status quo.' [11]

One interviewee took the view that acceptance of the status quo is further entrenched by public servants who have been institutionalised in the system:

> 'In that institutional framework, there's very little understanding of why they are how they are. This is what happens when people are in [agencies] too long. It all looks natural. And it's not. It is the product of a set of institutional arrangements. Like annual budget cycles, and quite particular details of accountabilities and responsibilities. All of them are changeable.' [6]

## Incrementalism

One could argue that incrementalism has its place in the public sector (e.g. making existing routine activities better by incremental changes), but it cannot be the only approach. Incrementalism in public policy is often referred to as the gradual accumulation of small changes, a process called seriality or systemic rationality. Currently, there is a tension between doing things slowly, bit by bit, and hoping for one big idea that will come along and replace it.

Incrementalism assumes that system-wide outcomes or results can be achieved through adding up the sum of sectors doing well, and that outcomes can be achieved via linear and predictable (or mechanistic) input/output interventions, rather than recognising the world as a variety of complex dynamic systems:

> '[There's the] perception that marginal change would probably do it. We'll look for that incremental change, that one silver bullet that's going to solve it all overnight, but not hurt us too much. Not change too much, but we'll solve everything with it – which doesn't really work.' [9]

> 'Successive governments keep shying away from bold decisions that will immediately drop our emissions and that we desperately need, because [climate change] is as urgent as our Covid lockdown was in 2020. The consequences are way more severe.' [2]

> 'We kind of need to remind ourselves, it's like these systems are constructs to help us understand the real world. But actually they're not what people know. We need to test some of those assumptions – ask, did it work? – then maybe change the framework. Instead, we go let's try it again until we've slightly tweaked but haven't changed the fundamentals.' [12]

## Siloism

Interviewees consistently raised the issue of siloism, and the absence of a mindset that thinks about public policy as a system or variety of systems that are interconnected and linked, as barriers to the development of any collective long-term vision or direction for the public policy system:

> 'It's sometimes hard to achieve change in institutions. We, as a system, have a challenge in terms of thinking about how to change institutions or establish systems thinking that includes diversity of thinking, different world experiences; that helps see the need to think across the system.' [12]

> 'We have a system, but the system we have is not adequately integrated. And the spheres are getting further apart – kawanatanga sphere and tino rangatiratanga sphere.[4] We need discussions about our diversity and complexity.' [2]

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4   Māori term kawanatanga sphere meaning governorship or the authority of a governor or government, and tino rangatiratanga sphere meaning political control by Māori people over Māori affairs.

'Siloism in development and implementation of policy is still alive and well. Ministers are part of the silos. You get a minister of this or that and they protect their patches. And cabinet discussions can be quite divisive when that happens. But the difficulty is that the Public Service has an obligation to make sure that the full range of policies and interests is looked at properly, and no one has that responsibility. The DPMC [Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet] is a coordinator of things, but coordination is not quite the same thing. What I learned about environmental politics and policy is that you cannot put it in a silo. It belongs to every part of government.' [1]

### Passive security

A few interviewees identified relative passive security as a collective mindset embedded in our public policy system and described this as a barrier to change. By passive security, they mean a sense of exceptionalism or isolation from global shocks and events; a type of complacency of geography.

'The other challenge, I think, for want of a better word, is our relative "comfort" or "perceived comfort" in New Zealand compared to other parts [of the world]. This idea that these things like climate change, inequality or populism are only happening in other parts of the world and they are not going to come here. That sense of passive security and it's not going to touch us just works against the idea that we have to change or that business-as-usual is no longer viable.' [9]

'People do not understand, first, how fragile democracy is, and secondly, if democracy fails what you get is more autocratic government… So what you have to do is educate people so they know what the limitations are and what they have to live with.' [1]

## 3.2 Support for the need to rethink the purpose of Aotearoa New Zealand's public policy systems to ensure long-term outcomes are prioritised

Support for change is one thing, but changing our mindsets and behaviour to address long-term intergenerational issues, such as climate change, is a particular challenge. The following relate to the different aspects of this problem.

### Role

Some interviewees said that the underlying principles that direct the role of the current Public Service need to be reframed to better address future long-term and intergenerational equity needs. They had in mind the purpose and guiding principles, values and behaviours outlined in the reformed Public Service Act 2020, such as:

- the stated purpose to 'support the Government to pursue the long-term public interest';
- the stated principles of providing stewardship, and free and frank advice, and being politically neutral;
- supporting the Crown in its relationship with Māori (the Indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand), as outlined in Te Tiriti o Waitangi (the Treaty of Waitangi);
- service to the community as a fundamental characteristic of the Public Service; and
- building trust in the Public Service.

'The values are just old [world] and this whole [notion of the Public Service as] "trustworthy", "respectful" – they're not what we need, nor necessarily fit for purpose going forward. If we don't reform those now, the Public Service will find itself in trouble because the tensions we feel now will get worse. So yeah, it's time for an overhaul.' [11]

It is important to make the distinction between the operational values and the principles governing 'what it means to be a public servant' set out in the Public Service Act (2020),[5] and the opportunity to set high-level or macro policy objectives or values to direct the public policy system. These are not the same thing.

## Values

There was a feeling among interviewees that the values and normative assumptions espoused within the current public policy system are outdated and not fit for to deliver on future needs.

There was broad agreement that the current system is based on outdated anthropocentric values and assumptions, including reasonably static normative assumptions and neoliberal economic values:

'Neoliberal values, neoclassical and neoliberal economics that influence policy are not particularly long term in nature, because of all the shortcomings we know about betting markets and an unreasonably undefeated way of doing what markets want to do, particularly without extensive pricing or including externalities, which of course never happens.' [3]

The need to broaden public policy values was framed by some in terms of the struggle to shift from measuring inputs and outputs based on neoliberal economic assumptions to decision-making to achieve collective outcomes based on intergenerational equity, wellbeing and environmental sustainability.

'We all value the environment. But it shouldn't have any economic value attributed to it. We will value it because it's important to us, but we shouldn't have to quantify that value and the associated numbers it's given.' [11]

'Treasury should be thinking about a critical value, namely fairness or equity. [4]

'You measure what you value, but what does this mean if we don't talk about what we value – like nature and the rights of nature.' [1]

## Ongoing impacts of colonisation

Both interviewees who identified as tangata whenua/Māori and interviewees who identified from ethnic backgrounds that had also been impacted by colonisation talked about colonisation and its ongoing impact as drivers of resource extraction and the inequitable sharing of rewards. These were also seen as responsible for keeping the system stuck in the legacy thinking of the past, rather than oriented towards the future.

'If we're thinking about who's reaping the rewards of where we're at now and the climate crisis, we'll often think of countries such as Australia, say, with its big mining. But New Zealand

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5    See https://www.publicservice.govt.nz/role-and-purpose/role/

still sends our waste to third world countries such as Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines. Canada sends their waste to the Philippines. So again, who is reaping the rewards of having a clean green image? New Zealand, at the expense of a developing country taking on our waste.' [10]

'I think the system is a bit scared to challenge the colonial ideas. We have a lot of our colonial trappings still, even though we don't apply them in the same way that they were [applied] a generation ago, but they're almost like a security blanket until we develop something else. [5]

Across the sample, and particularly among those who have lived experience of Indigenous values, there was a view that public policy needs to demonstrate a greater recognition of Indigenous world views and values, and to apply them. Core Indigenous values are more aligned with non-material wellbeing than Western values, and could be harnessed to drive collective and long-term intergenerational wellbeing, equity and environmental outcomes:

'The concept of ownership is a totally different concept. [For Māori], land ownership doesn't mean it's yours. Ownership means it's provided to you to look after to pass on. So it's an inheritance and a model of stewardship. You're kaitiaki.[6] Now, that's a different model to what business analysts and economists have been brought up in... The whole point of ownership rights is you own something so that you can do something with it and then sell it – that's its value. Whereas if you've got an intergeneration perspective, the value of ownership is not the value that you can sell it for. The value of ownership is actually what you have to do to look after it. What do you have to do to maintain it?' [9]

'I think we're flipping over to a kind of more tikanga Māori[7] lens... Ideally, it would be better to preserve the relationships and allow the timeframe to extend, because the relationship is the key thing.' [2]

Some believed that use of an Indigenous (e.g. Māori) lens and the mechanism of the Treaty of Waitangi that underpins Māori–Crown relations have the potential to influence longer-term decision-making, and shift collective values to benefit all New Zealanders:

'I think having our two knowledge systems, certainly bringing a tikanga Māori world view and lens into thinking about those decisions, would be a way of reshaping what the public good looks like, because included in tikanga is more understanding of interconnection and the notion that the natural environment embodies our relations, our tīpuna.[8]' [2]

'A Māori lens is a first sort of step which will make all sorts of New Zealanders bristle, but actually it starts to get towards some of the long-term thinking. And the decisions based on your different understandings of the environment and relationships with it start getting us there. I think we're lucky that because of Te Tiriti (the Treaty of Waitangi) these things should be side by side... But there's another rationale behind deploying a Te Tiriti and tikanga lens than just that it's good for everyone. Because there's an obligation there as well. Getting to New Zealanders who are not interested in that to think about it because they have to and then hopefully getting them inspired could be good for us all.' [2]

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6    Māori term meaning a guardian or trustee
7    Māori concept incorporating practices and values from mātauranga Māori, indigenous knowledge.
8    Māori term meaning ancestors.

## Decolonisation and constitutional reform

A number of interviewees engaged with decolonisation, republicanism and constructional reform as potential tools to move the country forward:

> 'I think this larger question is the more complicated question. For our longer term and political sustainability, and for our development as communities, that's the question we really need to work through carefully and calmly with cups of tea and just think it through. But as Professor Jacinta Ruru [New Zealand academic and the first Māori professor of law] has said, that does involve some relinquishing of power on the side of kawanatanga [the Public Service] and that's always difficult for those in power to do. And there's also the question of Parliament and the assumption of the supremacy of Parliament.' [2]

> '[Becoming a republic] – that's a structural thing, but I think it's core in the sense of this is us talking, we're not a sort of a carbon copy or imitation of something else. We're ourselves and the opportunity would then be to shape our society to reflect who we are… The problem is that various people still say it's a good idea, but no one's quite prepared to grasp the nettle of how you leave it, how you bring that change.' [5]

## Diversity and inclusion

Many interviewees suggested that diversity and inclusion are undervalued in the current system. A lack of diversity was seen as a barrier to progressing new ideas and system change. Some saw a lack of diversity as a driver of status quo bias within the system. Others called out the need to create more space for inclusion and diverse representation in decision-making:

> 'That we probably don't have many diverse thinkers is connected to other aspects of diversity – ethnicity, sexual orientation and so on – that actually influence your brain as much as what you have learnt.' [12]

Some interviewees felt that current system values do not reflect the personal values of the public servants it employs. This suggests that there are many people working within the system who have good intentions and are trying to bring about improved longer-term and more equitable intergenerational outcomes, but there are barriers that prevent these values from being realised.

## Defining long term

A number of interviewees talked about the limited ability of the current Public Service to deliver its stated purpose of stewardship in serving the long-term public interest. It became clear that the current system does not have a consistent definition of what long term means. Interviewees' interpretation of what long-term horizons should look like varied greatly, ranging from two-year to 500-year timeframes. Interviewees who applied Indigenous values to long-term decision-making were more likely to define longer timeframes:

> 'Even though we talk about intergenerational, let's be real. We're talking three years. RM [resource management] has been an eye-opener, because I've got to think about 30 years… It's like a big deal for them to be thinking even 10 years ahead. Climate thinking is the only thinking that's, at the most, 30 to 50 years out. And that's in terms of policy thinking. In terms of actual implementation and delivery, they're only thinking three years.' [11]

'The ideal role for the public sector is to uphold/promote intergenerational values – wellbeing outcomes of some description, opportunity for the next generation and so on. And it's about embedding that value, which is reflecting the values of the country that we claim we hold so dear, but is not reflected in our individual market-based decision-making.' [9]

## Providing free and frank advice

A number of interviewees highlighted the importance of the Public Service providing free and frank advice to ministers, but also of transparency to the public more broadly. Some saw this role as limited by a lack of capacity in the existing system, and of investment in research and innovation. They also noted a tendency to accept the status quo and avoid any risk of having to admit fallibility (i.e. fear of mistakes, getting things wrong and being blamed).

'Public servants are required to serve the Government of the day, but also to protect the long-term public interest, which means being prepared to serve future governments, but also to give governments free and frank advice about the ways in which they may be undermining the long-term public interest…

'I think the Public Service has got a key role in providing all of the information about the good, the bad, the ugly, and holding the democratic process in a degree of tension.' [3]

## Stewardship

Generally, interviewees saw the need for the Public Service to perform as a steward and activate stewardship functions across its systems so that intergenerational solutions can be found that will travel the boundaries of government terms in office. This was expressed most strongly by those who saw guardianship and the protection of resources as central to the Government's obligations to Māori guaranteed under the Treaty of Waitangi:

'There is a need for people to see from a stewardship perspective, rather than maximising your utility when you're alive.' [12]

A number of interviewees said that the role of the Public Service needs to go further than implementing the Government's policy programme and should include the following roles if it is to become more future focused:

- a role in decolonising power and decision-making structures;
- a stewardship role that is inclusive of Indigenous world views;
- a role influencing ministerial agendas and shaping public discourse about complex future issues;
- a role in representing collective values; and
- a role that nurtures a more inclusive and participatory democracy.

## Influence

One interviewee argued that the role of the Public Service goes further than implementing the Government's policy and that it should be an influencer of ministerial agendas and public discourse:

'In the old days I don't think that was on the agenda at all. The tradition is very much: "Here's the job we do. This is how we do it. This is the way we've done it."' [5]

'To implement government policy, but also to shape the agenda at the ministerial and public level, the role of the Public Service is to implement the Government's policy to ensure that it carries on and proceeds as best it can. At another level there is a sort of agenda-setting and what influences that agenda-setting, not just in terms of what do you put up to the minister, but how do you shape some of the wider debates around which of these issues might be being addressed? [5]

## Representation and inclusion within a participatory democracy

Some interviewees believed that for the Public Service to serve the community in the spirit of service outlined in the Public Service Act 2020, it needs to broaden its role to represent collective values, and nurture an inclusive and participatory democracy:

'Let's not forget that those voices, the voices that have been heard the most and the loudest, are the ones that really won't be hurt that much. So they're the ones who could stall a lot of change or make sure that any change is incremental rather than transformative.' [9]

One interviewee argued that the Public Service role in upholding the long-term public interest implies a protection of its citizens:

'Both academia and the Public Service have a critical and conscience role for the constituency: to protect constituents. So Public Service, in my mind, was to implement Government's aspirations and desires but to do so in a way that reflected what the constituents needed and wanted. And that kept some kind of consistency to policy and to governance so that we didn't have huge ebbs and flows in the three-year cycle. I guess I came into it a wee bit naive that the public sector was us serving governments but serving governments in ways that protected constituencies or citizens.' [11]

Diversity of perspective, voice and thought was also raised by interviewees:

'Equitable consultation needs to include a diversity of thought. It's assumed that the public sector has a role in ensuring things run smoothly, ensuring that equity and diversity of thought is included in consultation, but that's often bumpy and not how it happens.' [11]

## Distrust and mistrust

Some interviewees described an increasing distrust of the Public Service as a credible decision-maker for the 'public good'. This, in turn, limits the ability of the Public Service to engage civic society in meaningful conversations about long-term problem-solving.

One interviewee identified the role of the media in driving an erosion of trust in the system:

'It would be interesting to know whether the parliamentary press gallery would change its very reactive hunt-with-a-pack, trying-to-get-a-scalp kind of mentality if the politicians started behaving differently around their fallibility, because it's a chicken-and-egg question for me on that. I suspect that the parliamentary press gallery would act differently if politicians acted differently. They feed on each other.' [3]

Another interviewee raised concern that 'trust' in the public management system is not felt by all and that the Public Service has a role in providing a more holistic system that people can see themselves represented in:

> 'We created a system where a bunch of experts sat around and made decisions on behalf of society and we had trust in that, and by and large it delivered wellbeing for New Zealanders, whether longer life expediency, levels of education or reasonable infrastructure. There are lots of strengths to this approach, but a lot of people feel very excluded by that who have no trust in the systems.' [3]

## 3.3 The Public Service has become inward-facing, and risk-averse to innovation and experimentation

Innovation was consistently identified as essential for addressing complex future challenges, and for reimagining the system and its role, and for inspiring new ways of working. However, some interviewees suggested that New Zealand's historical reputation as an innovator has eroded over time, so we are no longer cutting edge in our thinking. International developments have overtaken us, yet our mindsets have not altered (Palmer and Clark 2022).

> 'I can remember when the Public Service was the centre of most good innovation in New Zealand, and there were some great minds who had freedom to innovate and were very good at it... Now it's a pale shadow of itself. It's become disabled from doing anything innovative.' [1]

Interviewees struggled to clearly identify examples of current policy innovations that are designed to deliver more equitable and longer-term outcomes. Where they could identify examples of innovation, these tended to be policy innovations or initiatives that worked around or outside of the current public policy system – not within it or enabled by it. This suggests that conditions within the current system are limiting the ability for new ideas to thrive or be nurtured (an example is the fate of the social investment approach with a change of government).

Multiple interviewees described the current system as risk-averse and inward-looking. This suggests that it may be ignoring alternative models or thinking from outside the system (such as Indigenous models or international thinking on transformation change).

Many interviewees suggested that the current system does not provide the preconditions necessary to nurture a mindset or culture of innovation. They identified not only an absence of risk-taking and fear of fallibility, but also a lack of dedicated innovation spaces, targeted funding and international collaboration as barriers to innovation:

> 'We don't have institutions with the wherewithal and statutory responsibilities to do long-term thinking. So we don't have any dedicated centre for foresight in the academic world or anywhere else in the system.' [4]

> 'If there was one single thing that I thought I could do to make a difference in the system, if I could wave a wand, it would be to get every prime minister and probably minister and cabinet to feel comfortable about admitting when they've made a mistake or got something wrong. All the public really want them to say is, "Yeah, you know, we got a few things wrong..." I go out to the community and I say, "You know, we've really fucked this up and this is all a mess." And

people love it. They love the fact that you front your mistakes, you're honest about it, and you're not doing a snow job on them. And then you're talking about what we're going to do differently and people have a very high tolerance in New Zealand, I think, for innovation, for risk-taking, for those sorts of things. As long as you create the atmosphere in which it's okay to fail. And I just think it's really disappointing that for some reason our politicians feel like they can't do that. And I think that stifles innovation and stifles debate.' [3]

## 3.4 Aotearoa New Zealand's public policy system is not fit for the purpose of addressing the complex intergenerational challenges we face

As we have seen, a number of interviewees found it easy to identify structural flaws, barriers and underlying assumptions within the public policy system that have implications for long-term investment and decision-making. But few interviewees were able to point to solutions that are actively resolving these issues within the public policy system or Public Service.

### Authorising environment

There was a sense among interviewees that the authorising environment is disconnected from the scale and pace of humanity's intergenerational challenges. By authorising environment they meant the implicit social licence or tension held between the spheres of government and the Public Service. Across the public sector public policy approaches to long-term issues or complex intergenerational challenges are not consistent. Interviewees expressed concern that the absence of uniform thinking about timeframes limits the Public Service's ability to address and invest consistently in the long term and/or to hold future perspectives at the decision-making table:

> 'Within the public sector institutional framework there is no institution that has a mandate to look with foresight at that objective [i.e. future generations]. We've got a whole lot of institutions that are literally driven by the ministerial cycle: who happens to be the minister of the day and/ or government of the day… We've got elements of it: long-term insights briefings and long-term investment statements in Treasury, the Infrastructure Commission do an infrastructure strategy, but these elements are ad hoc. And my worry is that they are embedded in institutions that are continually responding to the short-term stuff.' [9]

Some of these interviewees framed this issue in terms of structural (or systemic) flaws embedded in the public policy system. For example:

- low levels of implementation and accountability to drive better long-term outcomes;
- a lack of shared vision for where accountability and risk mitigation for long-term complex issues sit; and
- an absence of strategic long-term budgeting and investment decisions.

This applies at multiple levels:

> 'There's still no long-term execution or long-term implementation. There's a disconnect between a plan that says you're going to do this and the lack of a proper budget or actual roadmap to get that to happen.' [10]

> 'There are very few checks and balances, such as adequate accountability. There is a need for better monitoring, and feedback thinking and learning.' [6]

'The complexity of the problems, particularly with climate change, have become so great, so all embracing, but if you analyse New Zealand's response from the beginning [of the] 1990s when the first IPCC [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change] report came out till now, it's just a catastrophe. And no one seems to own it.' [1]

'There's a lack of shared vision for where accountability and risk mitigation for climate change sits. There's a big challenge with climate change in terms of who is going to pay for the mitigation. Who's going to pay for managed retreat, for example? The insurance industry is saying you can't lay it all on the insurance; that's not actually going to solve it. That's a big issue for local government. And central government.' [7]

## Foresight and futures thinking

Several interviewees regarded the recent introduction of long-term briefings under the Public Service Amendment Act (2020) as an initial step towards enabling longer-term decision-making. Other interviewees, however, felt these briefings lacked the ambition to effect any meaningful change:

'Long-term insight briefings in theory are meant to be ambitious, but they're not going to be. We know that. But that's what the long-term insight briefings should be: the crazy, ambitious think tank that's going, "Okay, where do we want to be in 50 to 100 years' time and what's it going to take to get there?"' [11]

'For 20 years now, it has been a requirement for Treasury to produce long-term fiscal statements. Unfortunately, however good those statements are, they get very little attention in the media or from Parliament, policymakers and probably even people in the Treasury. So there's no easy solution here. People are just going through the motions in long-term insight briefings. Some departments are doing what they must do, but in the minimalist sort of way…

'While there are some really interesting and important topics being worked on, there are also some very strange topics which point to – how can I put it – a degree of risk aversion on the part of senior public servants. It looks like they're not wanting to tackle some difficult challenges, because they might be politically embarrassing for the Government or career-restricting for the individuals concerned.' [4]

## Independent commissions

Some interviewees stressed that while some long-term thinking is taking place in independent commissions (or Crown entities), the Public Service is not obliged to comply with or implement any recommendations that come from them:

'Over the past 20 years or so they have brought in institutions like the Productivity Commission to think about some of these long-term issues. I know they spend a lot of time writing reports and thinking, but I don't know if it ever goes anywhere and whether that's because no one's required to take it on.' [8]

Consistent with this critique, other interviewees were concerned that the current constitutional arrangements may be contributing to a lack of capacity within the Public Service to adequately respond to intergenerational issues and impacting the ability to innovate in particular.

One interviewee identified the political architecture of government as a structural barrier to longer-term decision-making. That is, the size of Parliament and the current constitutional arrangements are contributing to both the lack of capacity to reset the agenda and the difficulty of making multi-partisan agreements to drive longer-term decision-making:

> 'The problem is that… the political machinery runs the risk of becoming more sensitive to the issues of the moment and less stable to deal with very long-term intergenerational questions.' [3]

> 'New Zealand has a very powerful executive system that's become more powerful over time. Mixed Member Parliament (MMP) has not inhibited this issue, because the two main parties have managed MMP so that they can dominate the outcomes. For issues such as the environment, where there should be bottom lines, they have got away with blue murder. The executive has skirted around this and there are not adequate systems in place to protect the environment.' [1]

> 'There is a lack of maturity in the political system, which means when things start to shape with a change of government, things get shut down, sometimes because they are not sufficiently advanced, but it's a hard system to make long-term progress in.' [6]

Whether this is largely due to a lack of political will or the inability of the public management system to lead and deliver complex change is a moot point, given how intertwined those two things are.

## 3.5 While interviewees struggled to identify specific system-level solutions, they described a range of enablers to support long-term decision-making and intergenerational equity

Specific systems-level solutions might be elusive, but interviewees suggested a number of options for achieving long-term goals. These included:

- better monitoring and an improved role for data;
- alternative system design addressing power sharing, partnership and guardianship;
- clearly defined, longer timeframes;
- learning from Indigenous models and international thinking;
- initiating multi-partisan agreements;
- acknowledging the role of government to educate and have difficult conversations with the public and the role of the media;
- collaboration across the political spectrum, as well as with community and commercial sectors;
- creating a culture of innovation;
- nurturing an inclusive and diverse participatory democracy.

> 'We need to get to a space where the public and the constituency are coming together to say to the political parties we don't care which ones are in charge, but this is what we've agreed to. [Such as saying] we've all agreed to free public health care for everyone. You've got to make it work.' [11]

**Context**

Since the interviews were conducted, Aotearoa New Zealand has faced a series of 'once in a hundred years' weather events, which have sparked a national conversation around the country's long-term climate change preparedness. These climate events have raised public concerns about our ability to deal with the uncertainty of future challenges, and highlighted questions about the effectiveness of our public policy system to anticipate and adapt.

Also worth noting is that significant and meaningful discussions are underway across Aotearoa New Zealand about how better to incorporate Te Tiriti o Waitangi (the Treaty of Waitangi) into public policy, as well as the potential benefits and drawbacks of constitutional reform as a means of achieving this objective. While this paper does not delve into this debate, it recognises the immense importance of addressing these matters and the ongoing impacts of colonisation (Connolly 2023; Haemata 2022a, 2022b; Mika et al. 2022).

# 4. Discussion

The insights obtained from interviews and analysis conducted in this research reveal the tension between the wider political system and the capacity of Aotearoa New Zealand's existing public policy system to address complex challenges and ensure future fairness. It is apparent that a fog of complacency or passive security has overshadowed the once vibrant aspirations of a nation known for its ambition.

As part of the attempt to comprehend the interconnections between these challenges, and to interrupt the narrowing focus on sectoral, ministerial or department interests or activities, causal loop diagrams[9] were used to develop an integrated picture of the complexity of the issues at play (not all the insights have been mapped). Causal loop diagrams are a tool of systems thinking, which focuses on moving away from thinking of causality as linear, and instead views it as circular and interconnected (Figure 1). In essence, they recognise that in our complex world influence often 'feeds back' on itself. These diagrams are a tool for helping make these assumptions explicit and articulating them visually.



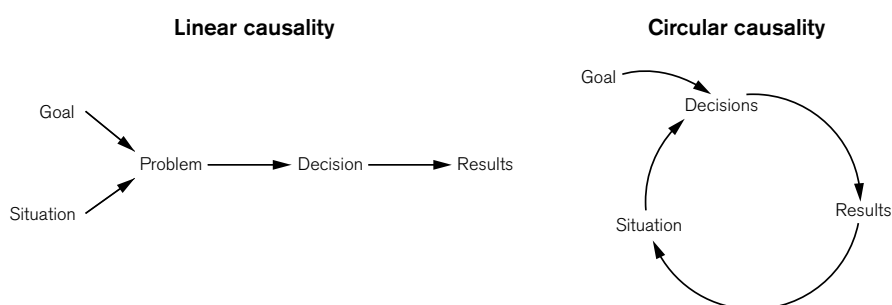Figure 1. Systems thinking – moving from linear causality to circular causality

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9    For a more in-depth understanding of this approach and methodology please refer to Connolly, J.D (2023). Causal diagrams to support 'a fair chance for all' (A report for the New Zealand Productivity Commission). See https://www.productivity.govt.nz/assets/Inquiries/a-fair-chance-for-all/A-Fair-Chance-for-All-Causal-Diagrams-2023.05.03.pdf

There are two types of feedback loop – reinforcing (R) and balancing (B) (Connolly 2023) (Figure 2). In a reinforcing loop, a series of influences will reinforce on themselves, resulting in those factors spiraling up or down with each other. In a balancing loop, a series of influences will balance themselves out. Systems thinking is agnostic as to whether a feedback loop is a 'good thing' or not and the direction in which feedback loops move factors alone is not an indication of the qualitative merit of a series of influences. For example, a reinforcing feedback loop that moves factors in an upward or increasing direction is not necessarily a 'good' thing – a sapling tree will experience reinforcing growth early in its life, which is a desirable thing; while the spread of a virus will also experience reinforcing growth while it is spreading through a community, which is not a desirable thing.

**Reinforcing feedback loop**  **Balancing feedback loop**

Condition

R

Action

Exponential Growth

Time ⟶

A certain condition encourages a certain type of action, which encourages more of the same condition, thus reinforcing itself in a cycle

Condition

B

Action

Oscillation

Time ⟶

A certain condition encourages a certain type of action, which in turn has a balancing or cancelling effect on the initial condition.

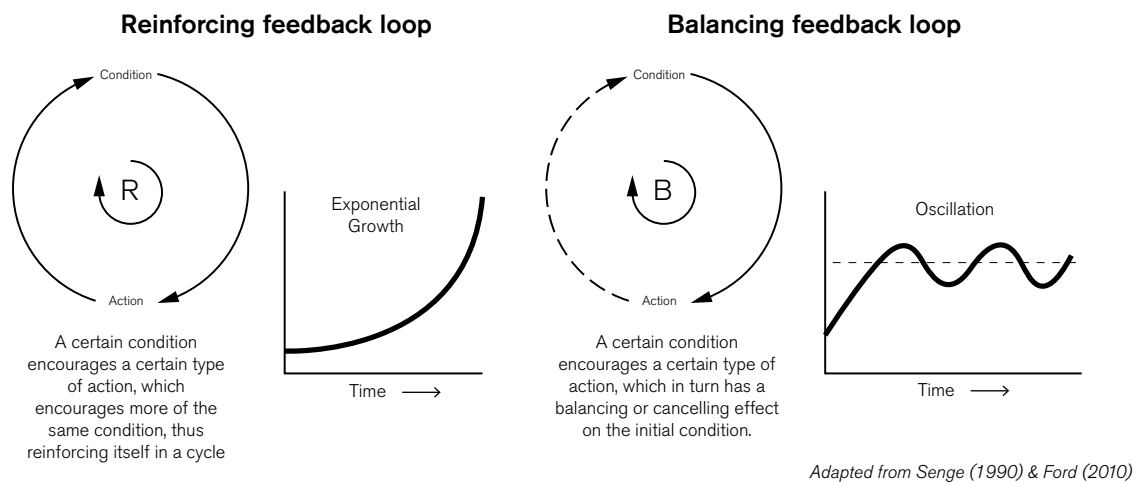*Adapted from Senge (1990) & Ford (2010)*

Figure 2. The two types of feedback loops – reinforcing and balancing

The diagrams show how feedback loops are made up of words/phrases and arrows, which represent the way factors influence each other. Words/phrases can move up or down (i.e. increase or decrease, strengthen or weaken), and this leads them to influence other factors in the same or opposite direction. If factor A increases and then so does factor B, it is a same influence; if factor A increases and then factor B reduces, it is an opposite influence. Relative delays are represented with a small double line across the arrow (see Figure 3).

**If factor A *increases*…**   **If factor A *decreases*…**

**'Same' relationship**
(the impacted factor moves in the **same** direction)

A → B

A → B

**'Opposite' relationship**
(the impacted factor moves in the **opposite** direction)

A → B

A → B

**Relative delays**
are represented with a short double line across arrows
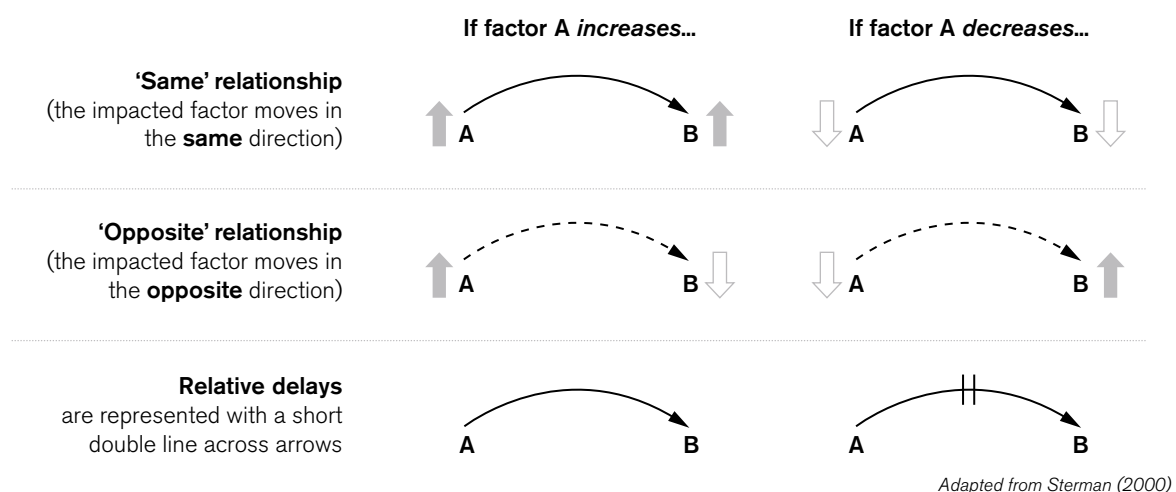
A → B

A ‖ B

*Adapted from Sterman (2000)*

Figure 3. How to read a causal loop diagram

The figures that follow attempt to visually articulate how some of the insights described above are related and influence each other. Not all insights have been included in the diagrams. Further, it is important to note that the diagrams are not a complete representation of all influences – they are necessarily an abstraction from reality. They are, however, intended to highlight important influences that have been identified in this research and particularly where they form parts of chains of circular causality.

Figure four illustrates the interconnections in the way short-termism is embedded in the structures, mindsets and behaviours of the current public policy system. This limits the ability of the system to support or reward intergenerational outcomes.
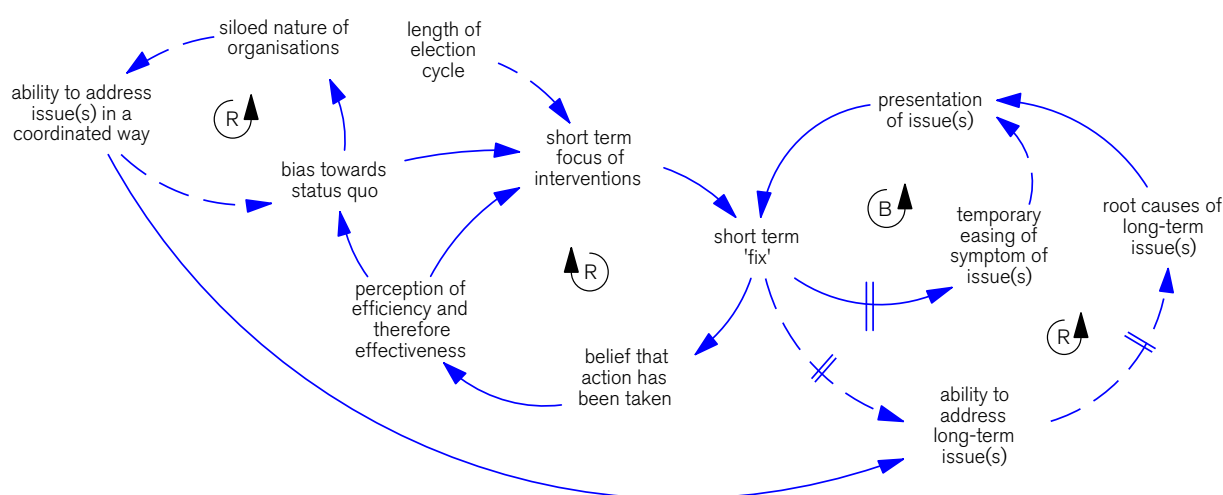


Figure 4. Short-termism, status quo bias and an inability to address long-term issues

This shows that siloed organisations, status quo bias and a low ability to address issues in a coordinated way all reinforce each other. Similarly, a belief that action needs to be taken reinforces short-term-focused interventions and short-term fixes. While short-term fixes may temporarily ease the symptom of an issue (a balancing loop), they reinforce a reduced ability to address the root causes of issues in the long term and thus further reinforce the presentation of the issues.

This gives rise to an important question: if change is needed to achieve long-termer outcomes, where does it need to originate from or sit within the system – the Public Service or the wider political system?

The literature suggests that fostering experimentation, open debate and purpose-led participatory approaches (that include diverse perspectives) are crucial to innovation and challenging the status quo. But creating a creative bureaucracy that has dynamic capabilities is a harder task than just creating space for robust discussions (Conway et al. 2017; Kattel et al. 2023; NZPC 2023). The goal should be to create a system that is accountable for the challenges faced and reflective of the broader community's needs and aspirations. Seeking to reverse the trend of factors in the reinforcing loops identified above can help these loops and influences to spiral in the opposite, and therefore more helpful, direction.

Figure 5 explores a range of factors that may help influence the pursuit and prioritisation of long-term outcomes. These highlight elements of the authorising environment that are needed, but also the distinction that needs to be made between symptoms and underlying root causes in terms of public policy interventions.
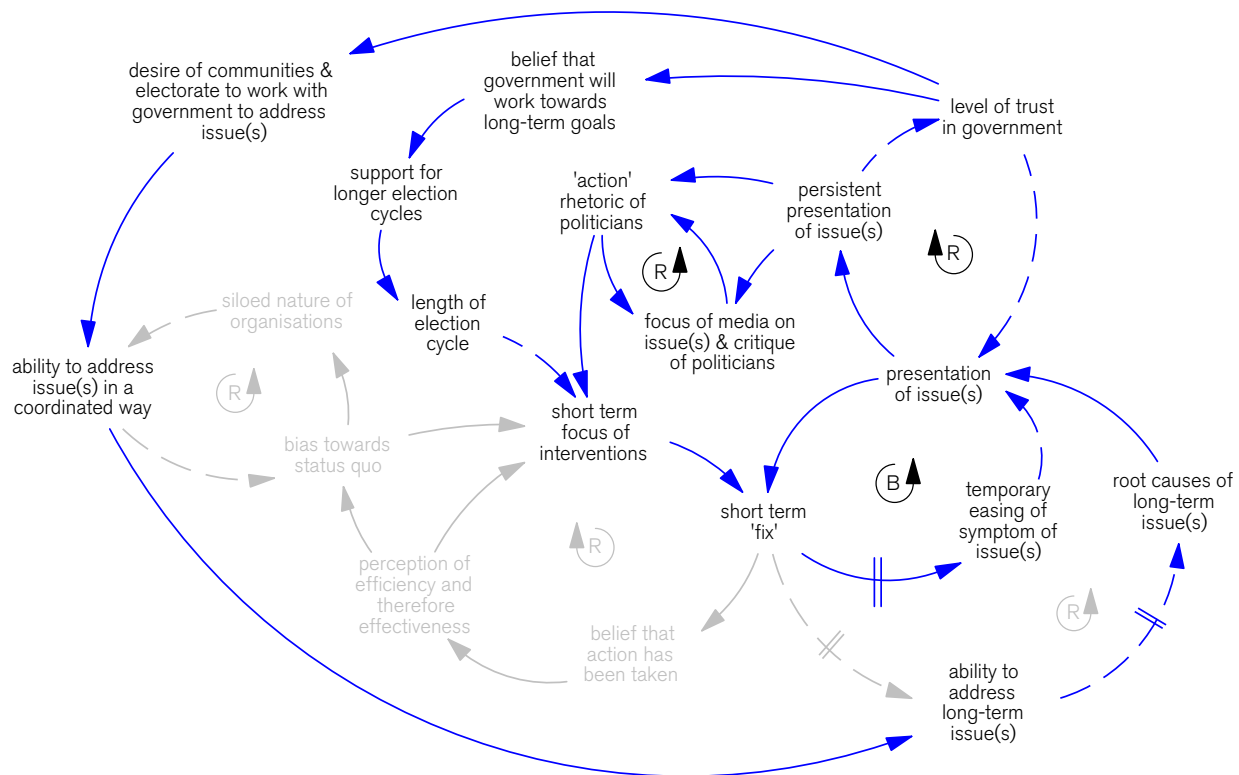


Figure 5. Factors to help influence long-term outcomes

This diagram highlights how the level of trust in government is linked in a spiraling loop with the persistent presentation of an issue(s). The more issues persist, the more trust in government is eroded – something that this research suggests is occurring. The behaviour of politicians and the media are also linked in a reinforcing spiral – the problem focus of the media helps drive the action rhetoric of politicians, which reinforces the short-term focus of interventions.

It also highlights that the greater the desire communities have to work with Government to address issues, and the greater the belief they have that Government will do this, are important influences on taking a longer-term view and addressing issues in a coordinated way. Interventions that influence these factors will, over time, help reduce short-term fixes and increase the ability to address long term issues.

The incentives that shape decision-making processes are multifaceted. While politicians are motivated by the objective of improving the quality of life in Aotearoa New Zealand and, inherently, acting in the long-term interests of the country, they also face the challenges posed by the short-term electoral cycle, the influence of key sector perspectives and support, media scrutiny, and the need to maintain a general political consensus on economic settings. The complexity of the issues at hand often leads to a preference for incrementalism and actions that uphold the existing political consensus within a specific paradigm, offering a narrow set of choices bounded by the prevailing paradigm.

These insights and interviews raise a profound question: how can we effectively address challenges like climate change when the Public Service has become inward-facing and risk-averse, thereby impeding innovation and experimentation? This issue is illustrated in Figure 6, which emphasises the need to confront these barriers in order to foster meaningful change.
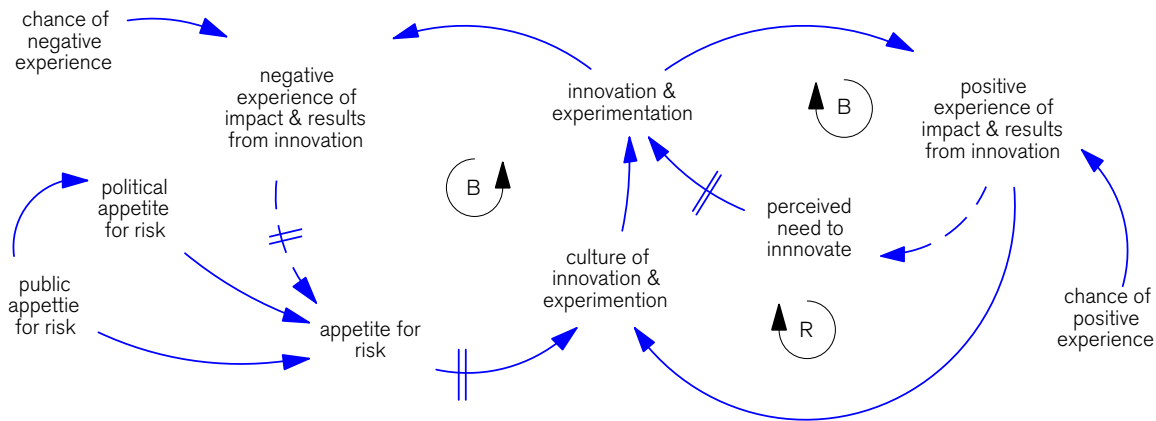
Figure 6. Influences on innovation and appetite for risk

This diagram highlights that innovation can result in either (or both) positive or negative experiences. On the right-hand side, positive experiences continue to reinforce and further spiral a culture of innovation and experimentation, encouraging further innovation. It is also noted that successful innovation may reduce the immediate perceived need for further innovation, although this will depend on the context. On the left-hand side, negative experiences of innovation reduce the Public Service's appetite for risk and erode the culture of innovation and experimentation. This also influences the public and political appetite for risk.

The perception of risk appetite should not be based solely on negative experiences. The outcomes of innovation can have different impacts on various sectors of society, leading to diverse experiences. Moreover, an individual's position within a system can influence their willingness to take risks or perceive the need for innovation. It is important to acknowledge that innovation and experimentation do not guarantee a high success rate and can introduce uncertainty (potentially resulting in both positive and negative experiences), which can affect people's risk appetite and their willingness to collaborate with the Government. This signals the need for a safe-to-fail or learn-as-you-fall authorising environment, typically supported by mixed investment funding. However, it is often overlooked that not experimenting or innovating can also have consequences. The increasing frequency and severity of climate events highlights the importance of sharing the costs of transition. To foster an environment conducive to change there should be a common understanding of what constitutes policy innovation, and a high level of public acceptance and support for the processes involved. This is an essential precondition for political action and the willingness of decision-makers to embrace change.

This calls for a deeper exploration of the underlying dynamics and the need for transformative actions to foster a more outward-facing and innovative Public Service that can effectively address the complexities of our society. This is not necessarily trying to draw a comparison with other jurisdictions'

public policy systems, but instead acknowledges that Aotearoa New Zealand's public policy system is not activated or operating in a way that is delivering the outcomes that New Zealanders need now and in the future.

Different governments will set more or less ambitious goals, but it is essential to move beyond this political churn to identify strategic leverage points and tangible actions. These leverage points could serve as intervention areas where targeted efforts can have a significant impact on shaping the direction and outcomes of public policy. By focusing on these critical leverage points, transformative change can be effectively driven, creating the outcomes of a more equitable and sustainable future for all.

**Leverage points**

Leverage points have been discussed for decades as specific places in a system where a shift can lead to a significant change. By identifying these points and taking action to intervene strategically, change can be envisaged and amplified (Abson et al. 2017; Fischer and Riechers 2019; Meadows 1999, 2010; Zahra and George 2002).

Government-held leverage points are well known; these include purpose, responsibility, accountability and delivery (Carey and Crammond 2015; Carlisle and Gruby 2019). Typically, these leverage points are used separately or in combination to achieve a desired outcome. The leverage points explored within this paper are relevant to the existing system, but could also be relevant to potential future constitutional reform. Informed by literature (Babian et al. 2021; Boston 2021a; Bray 2019; Carey and Crammond 2015; Chapman and Duncan 2007; Conway et al. 2017; Cottam 2020; De Vries et al. 2016; Eppel and O'Leary 2021; FSG 2015; Gill 2000; Hock 2017; Hughes 2019; Lodge and Gill 2011; Lowe and Wilson 2017; Kattel et al. 2018; Katel et al. 2023; Mazzucato 2016; Mazzucato et al. 2020; Mazey and Richardson 2021; McLaren and Kattel 2022; Meadows 1999, 2010; OECD 2011, 2017; Snowden and Boone 2017; Sundqvist and Nilsson 2017; Swartling and Lidskog 2017; Zahra and George 2002) and in response to the insights gathered from the interviews, the following ideas might contribute to the discourse surrounding what a future public policy system could look like.

## 4.1   Rethinking public purpose

Rethinking the contemporary purpose of the public policy system presents the opportunity to transform it into a vehicle that prioritises long-term outcomes and better delivers a fair society. This rethinking needs to involve examining the system's role, such as shifting from a passive approach to a more active one (Karacaoglu 2021; Mazey and Richardson 2021; Mazzucato 2021). It also requires better alignment of the system with underlying values, assumptions and Indigenous perspectives, integrating tikanga frameworks (indigenous frameworks) that reflect the unique cultural heritage of Aotearoa New Zealand (McMeeking, Kahi and Kururangi 2019; McMeeking, Kururangi and Hamuera 2019; NZPC, 2022, 2023).

The adoption of a 'wellbeing approach' and 'living standards framework' would be a good start, but to achieve a more holistic vision of the future it is crucial to engage in increased public discourse and undertake national conversations that explore the type of future New Zealanders desire. Such conversations should establish a shared understanding of wellbeing for future generations and define the purpose that the public policy system should uphold or reflect. To do this effectively and in a way that prioritises the wellbeing of future generations, a new mechanism or tool is needed. Establishing

a formal commitment to future generations in legislation has been used in other jurisdictions (such as Wales) as a way of providing a mechanism for purpose-led and participatory discussions, enabling the translation of collective understanding into actionable policies. Aotearoa New Zealand has yet to take this step.

Additionally, bridging the gap between the public and government spheres is important to foster greater trust and social cohesion. A national conversation could serve as a platform to find the pathways to bring the spheres closer together. The notion that to steer you must row is one that resonates here. Starting points for these conversations could be to redefine what economic success beyond GDP growth means for Aotearoa New Zealand and to explore the concept of 'sufficiency' (CLEVER 2023). By engaging in these types of conversations and challenging existing paradigms, we can reshape the public policy system to better serve the long-term interests of New Zealand and its future generations.

## 4.2   Clarifying responsibilities

Reshaping public policy responsibility comes with implications fundamental to the nature of the system. It encompasses the concept of the public good and the stewardship of public resources, prompting a re-evaluation of the responsibilities inherent in policy-making.

Policy-makers exercise their powers ethically in service of the common good and intergenerational concerns. What is needed is a system that prioritises transparency, inclusivity and accountability, and pluralism, and that actively evaluates itself, creating a 'feedback thinking' system that exhibits adaptability, resilience and openness to innovation, while remaining accountable to the public and continually improving policy approaches.

The responsibility held by public policy decision-makers plays a transformative role in shaping the legitimacy, trajectory and impact of the system, fostering a fair and sustainable governance framework. This sounds like a tall order, but as the Productivity Commission's Fair Chance for All inquiry notes, the seeds of change have been sown in different parts of the system. What is needed now is a mandate and space for these ideas to thrive (NZPC 2023).

## 4.3   Resetting accountability

Improving accountability as a leverage point requires addressing several key issues raised by the interviewees. These include the low levels of implementation and accountability for driving better long-term outcomes, the lack of a shared vision for accountability and risk mitigation, and the absence of strategic long-term budgeting and investment decisions. These challenges persist at multiple levels, hindering the effective execution of long-term plans and impeding progress on complex issues like climate change. Moreover, the lack of clear ownership of these challenges exacerbates the problem, resulting in inadequate monitoring, feedback and learning.

To address these gaps in the accountability system, it is crucial to prioritise the development of a robust evaluation and monitoring approach. This can be achieved through purpose-led engagement and participatory initiatives that enhance transparency and trust (Controller and Auditor-General 2019, 2021a; Dormer and Ward 2018; NZPC 2023). It is also important to reconsider the relationship between Parliament and the Public Service, ensuring that accountability is directed towards the public and Iwi/Māori as Treaty partners. Granting autonomy to independent bodies and establishing

intergenerational select committees are potential strategies to strengthen accountability and ensure long-term considerations (Palmer 2017). By implementing these measures, the accountability system can be reset, enabling more effective and transparent governance for the benefit of current and future generations.

## 4.4   Improving delivery

Leveraging the potential of delivery to address the deficiencies of the current public policy system and promote long-term decision-making requires a strong emphasis on longer time horizons, experimentation and innovation. This is particularly crucial considering the complex challenges highlighted by the interviewees, which indicate that the existing system is no longer fit for purpose.

To overcome these challenges, it is important to adopt decision frameworks that prioritise broader values, and that can deal with uncertainty and risk. Additionally, measuring and assessing wellbeing should be actively incorporated into policy evaluation processes. Investing in institutional capacity and fostering a culture of anticipatory, long-term strategic planning are also vital. These measures would facilitate coordinated efforts across sectors and stakeholders to address pressing issues and achieve intergenerational equity.

The insights of interviewees made it clear that it is essential to nurture inclusive and diverse participatory democracy by engaging with Iwi/Māori and the wider public in new ways, and by fostering multi-partisan agreements with a long-term focus. The role of the Government in educating the public and initiating difficult conversations, supported by a responsible media, is crucial for creating a shared understanding and commitment to desired outcomes.

**How could these ideas be brought together into actions?**

In light of recent climate events and the escalating costs associated with post-disaster recovery, there is growing consensus around the need to prioritise longer-term policy and decisions (50 to 100-year time horizons) and reimagine a fairer New Zealand. This can be achieved by intentional interventions and committing to tangible actions or pivots within the context of the leverage points discussed to systematically and strategically reimagine the public policy system. Informed from the insights, augmented by literature and discussions (outlined in Table 1), the following ideas need to be considered. In the course of these proposed actions, what it means to decolonise our public policy systems and give greater consideration to Ti Tiriti o Waitangi (the Treaty) needs to be considered across all the tangible actions.

Table 1. Ideas for tangible actions

| Actions/pivots | Description | International example |
|---|---|---|
| *Rethinking the role of the state*<br><br>*(e.g. from passive to active)* | Emphasising the significant role the Government places on driving innovation and creating value in the economy through policies that encourage or promote common good | Mazzucato 2016; Mazzucato, Kattel and Ryan-Collins 2020; Mazzucato 2021 (e.g. mission-orientated innovation) |
| *Setting long-term systems objectives*<br><br>*(20–30 years)* | A starting point for change could be addressing the lack of consensus regarding what is meant by 'long term' in public policy and therefore how the future is accounted for in public policy decision-making by setting long term system objectives in legislation | OECD's toolkit (good practice policy coherence for sustainable development) 2015; Sweden Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2022; BarBrook-Johnson et al. 2023 |
| *Developing new technologies (such as alternative decision-making frameworks)* | Alternative or new frameworks and tools that move past codification of 'value' to broader approaches such as anticipatory governance | Sharpe et al 2021 (e.g. risk opportunity analysis); Centre for Strategic Futures, Singapore Government, (https://www.csf.gov.sg); OECD Observatory of Public Sector Innovation (https://oecd-opsi.org/) |
| *Establishing a systematic investment fund to foster innovation and drive transitions* | Better coordination of forward-looking public policy and the allocation of resourcing/investment (i.e. bringing together government, business and philanthropy funding) | Scottish National Investment Bank (https://www.thebank.scot/) |
| *Measuring and collecting data that better aligns with system values* | Transforming how the system evaluates and learns, moving beyond narrow measures like GDP growth and embracing a broader range of factors (e.g. adopting tikanga frameworks like He Ara Wairoa) | Center on Wellbeing, Inclusion, Sustainability and Equal Opportunity (WISE) (https://www.oecd.org/wise/measuring-well-being-and-progress.htm); Chapter by Sir Bill English, 'Feedback Thinking'; in Mazey and Richardson 2021; Productivity Commission 2023 (https://www.productivity.govt.nz/assets/Inquiries/a-fair-chance-for-all/A-Fair-Chance-for-All-Causal-Diagrams-2023.05.03.pdf) |
| *Investing in dynamic capability (e.g. improving the absorptive capacity of the system)* | Capacity supports the adoption of innovative approaches, including new decision-making frameworks and technologies with investment in learning, knowledge and upskilling important for creating an agile and adaptive workforce | Kattel et al. 2023; Khan 2022 |
| *Developing a Wellbeing for Future Generations Act and Commissioner* | Establishing a legislative framework and independent authority dedicated to safeguarding the interests and wellbeing of future generations | Boston 2019; Dale 2021; Future Generations Commissioner for Wales 2020, 2022; Jones et al. 2018; Oxford Martin Commission 2014; NZPC 2023 (e.g. Committee for the Future, Finland (https://www.eduskunta.fi/)) |
| *Investing in a central all-of-government Futures Unit or Innovation Observatory* | Bolstering the public policy system's capacity for forward-thinking and innovation (e.g. horizon scanning, foresight, scenario planning, meta trends) | Center for Strategic Future, Singapore (https://www.csf.gov.sg/); Vinnova, Sweden (https://www.vinnova.se/en/); Government Foresight Group, Finland (https://vnk.fi/en/foresight/government-foresight-group) |

# 5.   Conclusion

Senior leaders and public servants often express concerns about the future and the world their children and grandchildren will inherit. This is a poignant mix of social empathy, climate grief and eco-anxiety borne by a group of people who take their responsibilities to heart and possess a profound sense of service – qualities that often go unnoticed by the public. To truly embody the values and mindsets of those working within the public policy system, there needs to be a fundamental shift or reimagining of how we approach public policy-making. The focus cannot be dominated by short-term gains; rather, it should be on the long-term wellbeing of all people, interconnected with the natural environment. By adopting this approach we can build a more sustainable and equitable future, one that is grounded in values of kaitiakitanga (stewardship), fairness and intergenerational equity.

The insights highlight the underlying causes that act to constrain how the public policy system operates in Aotearoa New Zealand. The evaluation identifies the presence of leverage points and subsequent actions that could be taken as systematic opportunities to drive meaningful change within the public policy system. It requires collective self-reflection, collaborative efforts and a steadfast commitment to the future.

By reclaiming the fairness that is currently lacking we can collectively work towards a better future. Together we have the power to shape a public policy system that is both transformative and inclusive. This paper presents a collection of ideas that contribute to the discourse and will hopefully catalyze change-making. It is important to acknowledge that no single individual can navigate the way; it involves all of us collectively dancing with these systems to try and achieve change.

We cannot place the burden of resilience solely on communities and individuals. It is the responsibility of the public policy system to build resilience and fairness through creating and continually innovating the infrastructure necessary to drive the wider political system past short-termism (or democratic myopia). We need to have the social and political maturity to recognise that sometimes the only thing we have in common is the future, and for this to be enough.

**This thinking gives rise to future questions**

This paper provides some insights and evaluation of the need to reimagine the public policy system. Hopefully, if provides potential green shoots for further thinking and research, including about the following:

- What are the key factors that influence the adoption of an anticipatory decision framework in public policy? How can institutional preconditions, such as political will, capacity and governance structures be created or strengthened to support this shift towards a more future-oriented approach?

- What are the political, social and economic factors that hinder the development and implementation of future-oriented policies? How can vested interests and personalities be identified and addressed to enable more effective decision-making for the common good?

- How can dynamic capabilities be developed and integrated into the Public Service to support the adoption of a new decision framework? What are the key skills, knowledge and practices required to effectively scan the horizon, anticipate future trends and risks, and design policies that are resilient and adaptable?

- What are the institutional and systemic barriers that impede innovation in the public sector? How can accountability structures and incentive mechanisms be designed to encourage experimentation, learning and risk-taking in policy design and implementation? Can policy-makers be held to a fiduciary duty to ensure that policy decisions are made in the best interests of the public and future generations?

# Appendix

**Methodology: in-depth interviews**

- Interviews were undertaken using a semi-structured discussion guide made up of questions and prompts to address the core research question: How do we achieve improved intergenerational equity and wellbeing in the context of political cycles that amplify political expediency in Aotearoa New Zealand?

- Interviews traversed the following key topics:

  - Public good (or public value):

    - What are the current roles, values and motivations within the Public Service, and what drives them?

    - How can the current concept of value in the Public Service be broadened?

  - Long-term decision-making and enablers of change:

    - What are the key challengers (e.g. barriers and/or enablers) to long-term decision-making in Aotearoa New Zealand?

    - What are some of the big transformations that are required by the Public Service?

    - What is the future role of government in directing longer-term outcomes?

  - Equity and wellbeing:

    - How do we define intergenerational equity and its role in policy/decision-making in Aotearoa New Zealand?

    - What are some of the considerations for decision-makers trying to shape international equity and wellbeing outcomes in public policy in Aotearoa New Zealand?

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