

Editor's Note

On 30 August, over 70 leaders from across the public service gathered for the first Strategic Perspectives Conference. The conference, organised by the Institute of Policy Development, Civil Service College and the Prime Minister's Office, Public Service Division, will be held periodically and aims at helping key public sector leaders build shared perspectives on national or whole-of-government priorities and outcomes. It will also serve as a forum for discussing imperatives that stretch across the civil service, and for strengthening a networked government.

Head of the Civil Service, Mr Peter Ho, kicked off the conference by asking how government can prepare for an unpredictable future. He also asked, "Can government be optimised for the future if it is optimised for the present?" He argued that a networked government that harnessed diversity, in terms of ideas, individuals and organisational structures, was the best bet.

In a thought-provoking presentation, Lam Chuan Leong drew on complexity theory and knowledge management to describe the current policymaking landscape. He showed the usefulness of different analytical tools, such as competitive analysis, innovation analysis, horizon scanning and scenario planning. Mr Lam also introduced a conceptual framework for knowledge developed by academic Max Boisot called the Information Space. He applied it to the bureaucracy in Singapore and to the idea of networked government. This issue carries an edited excerpt of his paper.

Brigadier General Jimmy Khoo of the Future Systems Directorate at Ministry of Defence showed what networked government might mean in practice. He described the twists and turns in the Singapore Armed Force's journey towards integration. He shared some broader lessons from the SAF experience and asked the important question of whether the civil service needs to be networked, integrated or joint.

The theme of networked government also featured in a speech by Yeoh Chee Yan, Dean of the Civil Service College, in September at a Senior Management Conference in South Africa. She outlined the approach that Singapore has taken so far as one that aligns "key organisational elements—vision, leadership, mindsets, perspectives, ideas, relationships, values, structures, strategic planning processes, funding and human resource levers".

While discussions of networked government have centred mainly on organising government itself, there is also a growing recognition of the need to broaden perspectives by reaching beyond the civil service.

In this issue, our Governance Perspectives interviews feature two civil servants who have done this in their careers. Howell James, Permanent Secretary for Government Communications in the United Kingdom, has spent many years as a communications professional in the private sector while Michael Wintringham, former State Services Commissioner of New Zealand, worked with Hay Management Consultants.

We will try to extend our Governance Perspectives interviews next year, to tap the knowledge of thought leaders in a variety of fields, from both inside and outside the public sector. In the meantime, we hope this issue opens the first of many windows into a wide world of ideas.