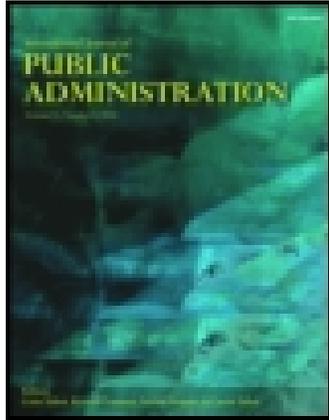


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# What Works in Joined-Up Government? An Evidence Synthesis

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While coordination across departments has long been a goal of government, since the late 1990s joining-up (in various forms) is now viewed as essential to the core business of government and public administration. However, research is still catching up on the expansion of joined-up working, and there continues to be no specific body of evidence upon which judgments about its success, or which can be drawn on in the planning and implementation of new initiatives. This article draws together peer-reviewed, empirical investigations of joined-up government, synthesizing available exploratory evidence on the process of creating joined-up government.

Keywords: joined-up government, whole-of-government, horizontal government, joined-up governance, wicked policy problems

## INTRODUCTION

The aspiration to link different parts of government is not a new goal; coordination is, in fact, one of the oldest preoccupations in public administration (Pollitt, 2003). “Joined-up government,” popularized by the Blair government, continues to have both political appeal and policy relevance, as governments continue to search for ways to address wicked policy problems. For example, “joining-up” is seen as critical within austerity-driven reforms in countries such as the UK, as a means to effectively and efficiently deal with social issues through efforts such as improved data sharing (National Audit Office, 2013). Since New Labour, joined-up government has become synonymous with modernization, future-proofing, and proactive government. Despite the fact that coordination has long been a goal of public administration, “siloe” working is seen to be old and outdated,

while efforts to promote “joining-up” are the mark of governments who are ready to meet the challenges of the future.

While a certain amount of joined-up fervor continues to exist, caution is creeping into current debates and scholarly writing. As Head notes, there is a normative bias in much political and policy discourse, where joined-up working is viewed as wholly positive (Head, 2014). Increasingly, this normative bias is being challenged by researchers, who have demonstrated that joined-up rhetoric is out of synch with the state of the evidence. As Bryson suggests, “cross-sectoral collaborations do not solve all of the problems they tackle. Indeed, some are solved badly, and some solutions have created [new] problems” (Bryson et al., 2006, p. 44). In many ways, researchers are only beginning to catch up with the rhetoric and proliferation of joined-up working; there continues to be no specific body of evidence upon which judgments can be made about the overall success of joined-up initiatives (Christensen & Laegreid, 2007).

This article draws together peer-reviewed, empirical investigations of joined-up government. In doing so, we aim to synthesize the diverse experiences of joined-up government to provide knowledge of what works for planning and design of future efforts.

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## THE “EVIDENCE-BASED” TURN IN POLICYMAKING

The last 20 years has seen the rise of the evidence-based policy paradigm. This trend has its roots in the evidence-based medical movement, which began in the 1970s under Archie Cochrane. Cochrane argued that randomized controlled trials offer the most effective means by which to just the value of health interventions (Cochrane, 1972). Evidence-based medicine is credited with many advances in medical knowledge, from the uptake of new technologies to disinvestment in others (Academy of Medical Royal Colleges, 2013).

Evidence-based medicine kicked off a paradigm shift where the refinement of ‘practice’ was seen as best achieved through systematic evaluation. In policy, the evidence-based approach was thought to provide a means by which to improve policy outcomes by strengthening decision-making processes and accountability mechanisms, drawing politicians away from seemingly arbitrary ideologically driven decision-making (Bacchi, 2009; Donald, 2001). As Donald (2001, p. 279) suggests, “People were fed up with the extent to which politicians’ whims could change their lives – not obviously for the better [based on ideological opinion].” Governments influenced by the Third Way have tended to see a strong link between evidence-based policy and good governance (Hood, 2005). Core features of evidence-based policy include sourcing rigorous and reliable knowledge and ensuring better uptake of research (Head, 2010).

Recently, there has been a pushback against evidence-based policy discourses. The criticisms have been diverse: some have argued that the “evidence” upon which policy is supposed to be made is too narrow, that evidence can still be chosen selectively or interpreted differently, depending on different ideological persuasions, and that the evidence-based policy movement relies too heavily on an unrealistic rationalist view of policymaking (i.e., where policymaking is a linear process from the evaluation of the available evidence to the selection and implementation of the best solution) (Head, 2010; Matthews, 2013; Russell et al., 2008). Increasingly, it is suggested that evidence-based policy should be seen as an aspiration, and the closest we may come is evidence-informed policy (Head, 2010).

However, we must be careful not to throw the baby out with the bathwater. While the evidence-based policy paradigm can be narrow and constrictive, limiting perceived policy options and innovation (Matthews, 2013; Russell et al., 2008), there is still much to be gained by an evidence-based approach. Rather than refuting the evidence-based paradigm entirely, more work is needed concerning *how* evidence gets used in the policy process. Evidence, as Matthews (2013) suggests, tells us about what is known. This means it can give us important hints about how to handle the *unknown*, providing we acknowledge its limitations: “If we take the time to consider the terrain that can

be seen (the known) and to try to identify general patterns in the landscape then that can help us to visualise what (for example) the unseen valley to one side might look like (the unknown)” (Matthews, 2013, p. 2). Hence, while we need to recognize that there is no easy answer, or panacea for dealing with the uncertainty of the future, searching for “patterns in the terrain” is important.

It is these patterns we need to unveil in the varied experiences of joined-up government, from which we can begin to visualize what is required to make joined-up working possible and effective. Understanding these patterns may not give us straightforward answers, but it can provide us with important clues, guiding principles, and heuristic devices that will help us to avoid repeating past mistakes.

## METHODOLOGY

Bacchi (2009) has argued for the importance of research synthesis for policy: “meta-analysis provides a forum by which disparate empirical studies can be reduced to a common metric, and so if policy formulation is desired on some topic, issue or problem, what better way to proceed then to show that some ‘effect’ or direction can be shown to be better than others?” (Miller et al., 2008, p. 6).

The intent of meta-analysis is to search the peer-reviewed empirical literature in order to detect patterns in what is, and is not, effective. While meta-analyses often rely on statistical analysis, the one presented here takes a thematic approach—synthesizing qualitative insights from empirical case studies of joined-up government.

At present, there is no agreed-upon method of qualitative research synthesis, and debate in this area has continued for some time (Dixon-Woods et al., 2005; McDermott et al., 2004). Overall, thematic approaches to meta-analysis seek to uncover concepts and their meanings from the data (rather than predetermining them), using interpretive approaches to ground the analysis of that data (i.e., existing studies). Thematic approaches are useful for hypothesis generation and explanation of particular phenomena, though they provide less of a picture of the context and quality of the individual studies that comprise the review (Dixon-Woods et al., 2005).

As McDermott suggests, the epistemological and methodological debates and tensions concerning qualitative meta-analysis center on the contextual nature of qualitative research: “What this means is that we cannot assume that concepts, experiences and practices have homogenous meanings, which stay constant across time and place; different contexts support a variety of meanings” (McDermott et al., 2004, p. 11). This approach, however, is to deny the generalizability of qualitative research (Stake, 2005). While a qualitative case study is a comprehensive examination of a single example, it can provide “trustworthy” information about the broader class to which it belongs. To claim that

generalization is not possible is to deny the transferability of any shared meanings or generative mechanisms (McDermott et al., 2004).

Hence, the meta-analysis provided here presumes that it is both possible and desirable to seek out, and synthesize the, lessons that emerge from individual qualitative case studies, in order to develop an evidence base to inform policy and practice.

In order to identify relevant empirical research on joined-up government, searches were conducted in Expanded Academic, Academic Complete, JSTOR, Web of Science, and Science Direct between 1990 and 2014. Prominent journals in the field, including the *International Journal of Public Administration* and *International Public Management Journal*, were also searched independently. Search terms included joined up government, joined-up government, and whole-of-government. While joined-up case studies may also fall under more general terms such as “coordination,” “collaboration,” and “partnership,” a narrow set of terms were used in order to pinpoint the most relevant studies from what is otherwise a vast literature. Inclusion/exclusion criteria are provided in Table 1. Results of the review are shown in the PRISMA flow diagram in Figure 1 (the preferred model of reporting for meta-analyses) (Moher et al., 2009).

In total, 823 papers were identified once duplicates were removed. Abstracts were screened for studies which were empirical evaluations of a past or existing national-level joined-up government initiatives. To be classed as an empirical evaluation, studies must have collected qualitative or quantitative data on the success of an initiative according to any indicator (see Pollitt 2003 for a discussion on success). Studies were assessed for quality. Eleven further studies were excluded for either not collecting empirical data, not having sufficient data quality, or addressing international governance.

The remaining 16 studies were subject to further analysis of their quality, using a framework adapted from McDermott et al. (2004) (see Figure 2). The following scoring criteria were used:

- A—No or few flaws (5)
- B—Some flaws (8)
- C—Significant flaws which may affect the validity of the findings (1)
- D—Untrustworthy findings/conclusions (2)

Studies that scored a D were removed. The details of the remaining 15 studies and their scores are presented in Table 2.

Fifteen empirical studies are included in the review, which are natural experiments of one or more joined-up government initiatives. In total, these studies comprise evaluations of 26 joined-up initiative case studies. Here, a case study is understood to be in-depth study of a single unit, or a group of units, where the researcher’s aim is to elucidate features of a larger class of similar phenomena. From these 26 case studies, characteristics associated with success or failure of joined-up initiatives were identified through thematic analysis. Here, like data (in this case, findings, observations, and analysis) are grouped together, forming categories and subcategories (Strauss, 1987). Guided by the work of Keast (2011), these characteristics are organized into six categories, reproduced in Table 3.

## FINDINGS

Table 3 provides an overview of features found to promote joined-up government identified in the public policy literature. Five areas of concern are identified from the case studies which provide an indication of success: operational level, nature of control, top/bottom focus, instruments, and membership. While, as Keast (2011) notes, joined-up initiatives can create some progress with only a few key elements and need to be “fit-for-purpose” (p. 227), a number of clear commonalities emerged from the review. For effective integration, research has found that ‘joining’ must happen at multiple levels and be supported by a range of cultural and structural interventions (Kickert et al., 1997; O’Flynn et al., 2011; Ross et al., 2011).

### Operational Level and Top-Down/Bottom-Up

First, joined-up initiatives appear to be most effective when they are supported by change at multiple levels, from strategic political commitment throughout collaborative practitioner relationships at the street level.

Strategic commitment from politicians was universally regarded as key to successful initiatives (Askim et al., 2009; Cowell and Martin, 2003; O’Flynn et al., 2011). As well as providing a mandate for change, politicians proved critical for cutting through administrative silos in times of need, or putting out emerging ‘turf wars’ (Askim et al., 2009; Larner and Craig, 2005). Yet, it is important to note that this is just

TABLE 1  
Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

	Inclusion	Exclusion
Focus	Domestic policy	International policy
Language	English	Other
Time frame	1990 onward	
Levels of government	All	Intergovernmental bodies
Empirical	Quantitative or qualitative case study data	
Peer-reviewed	In any area	

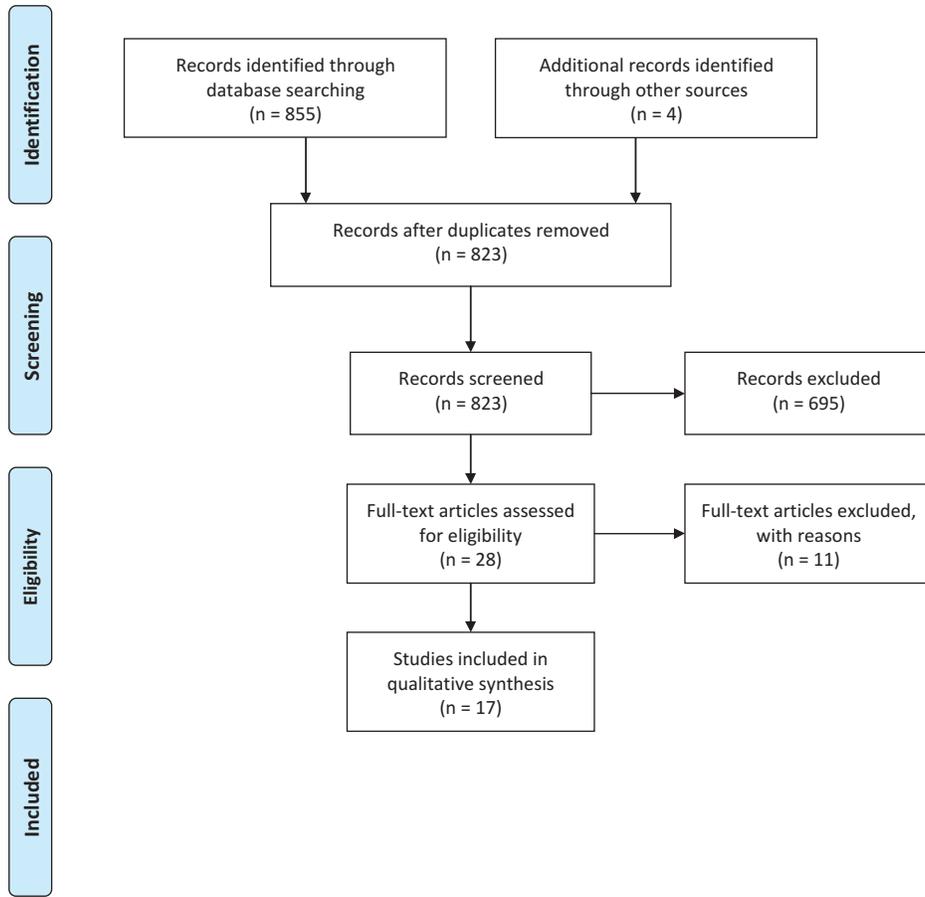


FIGURE 1 PRISMA diagram.

1. Clearly stated aims and objectives: does the report explicitly and clearly state the aims of the study?
2. A clear description of context: does the report adequately describe the specific circumstances under which the research was developed, carried out and completed?
3. A clear description of sample: does the report provide adequate details of the sample used in the study including details of sampling and recruitment?
4. A clear description of methodology: does the report provide an adequate description of the methods used in the study including its overall research framework, methods used to collect data and methods of data analysis?
5. The inclusion of sufficient original data to mediate between data and interpretation: does the report present sufficient data in the form of, for example, data tables, direct quotations from interviews or focus groups, or data from observations, to enable the reader to see that the results and conclusions were grounded in the data? Could a clear path be identified between the data and the interpretation and conclusion?
6. Efforts to validate findings: have the researchers undertaken member checking, provided opportunities for feedback or other mechanisms that would strengthen the validity of their analysis?

FIGURE 2 Quality assessment criteria (adapted from McDermott et al. (2004).

one ingredient in the mix; as Pollitt (2003) suggests, politicians cannot make joined-up working happen on their own (although they can undermine it).

The need for strong leaders at all levels emerged from our review as critical. Stories of strong leaders at strategic, managerial, and local levels emerged regularly in the

TABLE 2  
Studies Which Met the Quality Assessment

<i>Article and ranking</i>	<i>Aim and objectives</i>	<i>Description of context</i>	<i>Data collection</i>	<i>Country</i>
Askim et al. (2009) B	To exact lessons about joined-up government reform practice	2001–2006 Norwegian Welfare Reforms	Document review Semi-structured interviews	Norway
Burnett and Appleton (2004) B	Provide detailed case study analysis	Youth offending team under, implementing joined-up response to youth justice	Ethnographic Interviews	UK
Cowell and Martin (2003) A	Examine the practice of joining up in local government	Local government modernization agenda	Interviews Survey	UK
Darlow et al. (2007) A	Formative evaluation of strategies to deliver joined-up governance	Local government modernization agenda	Document review Semi-structured interviews Survey	UK
Davies (2009) A	Study effects of local politics on social inclusion partnerships	Local partnerships in two UK cities	Document review Semi-structured interviews	UK
Karré et al. (2013) A	Investigate the experiences of creating joined-up ministeries	Creation and integration of two ministeries to tackle child abuse	Document review Semi-structured interviews	Netherlands
Keast (2011) B	Examining drivers for integration and preferred models	Six case studies of joined-up initiatives	Document review Focus groups Semi-structured interviews Surveys	Australia
Larner and Craig (2005) B	Examine the role of strategic brokers in joined-up governance	Mandatory local partnerships	Interviews Workshops	New Zealand
Lips et al. (2011) A	Investigate cross-agency information sharing practices	Multi-agency information sharing	Interviews Focus groups	New Zealand
Moran et al. (2011) B	Explore failure of integrative funding streams	Individual budget scheme in local authorities	Document review Interviews	UK
Naidoo (2013) A	Investigate implementation	Multidepartmental development program	Document analysis Interviews	South Africa
O'Flynn et al. (2011) B	Experiences of implementation	Joined-up indigenous coordination centres	Document analysis Interviews	Australia
Ross et al. (2011) B	Drivers of whole-of-government approaches	A whole-of-government strategy for Family Violence Reform	Interviews	Australia
Scott and Thurston (2004) B	Investigate the role of context in partnerships	Health system partnerships	Interviews	Canada
Signoretta and Craglia (2002) C	To examine the barriers to data sharing to improve services to young people	To a statutory requirement to establish service plans for young people	Researchers experiences of establishing data sharing	UK

empirical case studies. Many stories of successful joined-up working emphasized the actions of key individuals, who were able to nurture the right skills and attitudes amongst their staff or find work-arounds for structural issues. These leaders can be formally appointed (to facilitate joined-up working), or emerge naturally alongside formal processes (or sometimes in spite of them). Without champions at each level, joined-up ethos tends to 'wash-out' and fail to take hold.

Of joined-up programs that were not successful, inability to secure joined-up working within central government was frequently cited as a contributing factor. Here, strong local leaders play an important role in protecting staff from dysfunction at other levels (Cowell & Martin, 2003). Successful initiatives tended to have leaders who worked to create a supportive, trusting culture conducive to problem solving, where staff are free to find 'work-arounds' to problems (Buick,

2014; O'Flynn et al., 2011). This managerial creativity is encapsulated by Bardach's (1998) notion of craftsmanship, which emphasize smart practices and the exploitation of collaborative opportunities. This craftsmanship often required staff to step outside of formal structures or rules, in order to facilitate joined-up working (Bardach, 1998). This type of problem-solving culture appears to be best nurtured by bottom-up control (Cowell and Martin, 2003; Darlow et al., 2007; O'Flynn et al., 2011).

While political mandates and visionary strategy needs to be secured at the top, in terms of integrated collaborative practice, those at the 'bottom' or street level are often more advanced, as joined-up working is often demanded in case management and responsiveness to local issues (Cowell & Martin, 2003; Darlow et al., 2007). Consistent with this, successful initiatives also tended to engage nongovernment actors at the local level (such as nongovernment, third-sector

TABLE 3  
 Characteristics Associated with Successful Joined-Up Government Initiatives

	<i>Factors found to aid joined-up approaches</i>	<i>Supporting studies</i>
Operational level	Target multiple levels: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic government</li> <li>• Managerial</li> <li>• Practitioner</li> <li>• Community</li> </ul>	(Burnett and Appleton, 2004; Cowell and Martin, 2003; Darlow et al., 2007; Karré et al., 2013; Keast, 2011; Larner and Craig, 2005; Moran et al., 2011; Naidoo, 2013; O'Flynn et al., 2011; Ross et al., 2011; Scott and Thurston, 2004)
Top-down/bottom-up	Top-down and bottom-up	(Askim et al., 2009; Burnett and Appleton, 2004; Cowell and Martin, 2003; Keast, 2011; Larner and Craig, 2005; Naidoo, 2013; O'Flynn et al., 2011; Signoretta and Craglia, 2002)
Nature of control	Decentralized	(Askim et al., 2009; Burnett and Appleton, 2004; Cowell and Martin, 2003; Keast, 2011; Lips et al., 2011; O'Flynn et al., 2011; Ross et al., 2011; Scott and Thurston, 2004)
Membership	Reflects the multiple levels targeted for change (i.e., strategic government, managerial, practitioner, community)	(Askim et al., 2009; Burnett and Appleton, 2004; Cowell and Martin, 2003; Davies, 2009; Karré et al., 2013; Keast, 2011; Larner and Craig, 2005; Moran et al., 2011; Naidoo, 2013; O'Flynn et al., 2011; Ross et al., 2011)
Focus	Designed based on both the purpose and the context	(Burnett and Appleton, 2004; Davies, 2009; Keast, 2011; Moran et al., 2011; O'Flynn et al., 2011)
Instruments and their functions	Fulfil a range of functions depending on objectives. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Governance and structure (e.g., committees/taskforces, creation of shared leadership)</li> <li>• Managerial changes (e.g., to improve relationships)</li> <li>• Adjusted systems, processes and finances</li> <li>• Cultural and institutional change</li> </ul>	(Burnett and Appleton, 2004; Cowell and Martin, 2003; Darlow et al., 2007; Karré et al., 2013; Keast, 2011; Lips et al., 2011, 2011; Moran et al., 2011; Naidoo, 2013; Scott and Thurston, 2004) (Askim et al., 2009; Larner and Craig, 2005; Lips et al., 2011; Moran et al., 2011; Sang et al., 2005; Signoretta and Craglia, 2002) (Askim et al., 2009; Burnett and Appleton, 2004; Darlow et al., 2007; Karré et al., 2013; Keast, 2011; O'Flynn et al., 2011) (Askim et al., 2009; Burnett and Appleton, 2004; Davies, 2009; Keast, 2011; Lips et al., 2011, 2011; Naidoo, 2013; O'Flynn et al., 2011; Scott and Thurston, 2004; Signoretta and Craglia, 2002)

organizations) in collaborative (not just contractual) working arrangements, based on a high degree of mutual trust. This is because governments are increasingly reliant on individuals, groups, and organizations that exist within the policy environment, but are external to government (Rhodes, 2007). Not surprisingly, this broad, and dynamic, set of actors need to be engaged for horizontal working to be effective. As Keast argues, “while top-down approaches are important to set priorities and push through a joined-up ethos, cooperative relations on the ground may prove to be more important in the long run” (Keast, 2011, p. 229).

The importance of engagement across policy networks, coupled with strong leaders at multiple levels, suggests that initiatives need to be both “top-down” and “bottom-up” (Keast, 2011, p. 222). Efforts to create joined-up government can target either vertical (e.g., linking national and local actors) or horizontal (e.g., forming partnerships between actors at the same level) integration (Ling, 2002; Matheson, 2000). Depending on which approach they favor, these initiatives are often described as following “top-down” (vertical

integration) or “bottom-up” models (horizontal integration at the practitioner level) (Keast, 2011, p. 222; Matheson, 2000).

Hence, it appears that a delicate balance must be struck between top-down and bottom-up approaches. Commitment at the top is critical—without it, there is limited impetus for individuals to challenge or changed entrenched cultures and ways of working. Moreover, key drivers for change, such as objectives, goals, and incentives, can only be set centrally. Yet, bottom-up autonomy and control is equally as important, primarily because it enables nonregulated, rule-bending practice that enables the patterns of siloed working to be broken. Mechanisms for creating integration at the local level include establishing shared problems, seeking agreed solutions, intersectoral planning, and inter-agency models (Keast, 2011). As Keast (2011, p. 227) argues, “Successful joined-up approaches [should] draw from top-down and bottom-up models to shape hybrid arrangements which draw on the strengths of both, thus forming new models.” Our synthesis indicates that these models need to include strong leadership at multiple levels.

Interestingly, the idea that powerful figures are required to “push through” joined-up working runs counter to much of the rhetoric on joined-up, holistic government: these new modes of working are said to be about partnerships, networks, flat relationships, and trust (Ling, 2002). However, strong patterns emerge from the evidence on joined-up government that suggest that strategic direction (which can only be set by authority figures) and strong leaders at multiple levels are key ingredients for success.

### Control

Enabling top-down and bottom-up strategies to function simultaneously requires decentralized control. As Hood (1982) observed, “patterns of behaviour by agencies towards one another in the process of policy delivery can become increasingly complex,” while the manipulation of the overall system can become very difficult to control centrally (p. 67). Central control appears to be a problem for both “pushing” change through to the street level, and for securing joined-up working in central agencies. Within government, centralized approaches have been unable to breakdown programmatic and departmental silos (Davies, 2009; Keast, 2011; O’Flynn et al., 2011). However, loosening of vertical authority does not necessarily translate into horizontal working (Cowell and Martin, 2003), highlighting the need for agenda-setting at the top, a mandate for change and strong leadership.

A common theme for navigating this challenge is the creation of positions, groups, or whole agencies that sit outside of the system and are not governed by the same rules (Askim et al., 2009; Cowell & Martin, 2003; Darlow et al., 2007; Larner & Craig, 2005; Signoretta & Craglia, 2002). In some instances, new positions were created for the purposes of joining up; in others whole agencies were established that sat outside the siloed structures (Askim et al., 2009). As noted above with regard to leadership, the subversive nature of these bodies can be formal or informal. While no doubt presenting their own challenges, these adjacent bodies and/or positions assist in balancing the control and flexibility required for system change. A key determinant of their success appears to be ensuring that they are not subject to the same functionalist bureaucratic rules and processes as other parts of the system.

### Focus

Successful joined-up initiatives are designed on both the purpose (what they hope to achieve) and the context (the system in which change has to occur, including structures, values, and norms). Important considerations include: how many other programs or “joined-up” solutions are being sought at one time; what is culturally appropriate within different settings; or, put another way, given existing structures, values, and norms, what types of instruments or interventions are likely to be most compatible at the outset.

For example, Naidoo found that when responsibility for joining up was spread across two authoritative bodies, they undermined one another’s credibility (Naidoo, 2013). While intuitively joint responsibility seems reasonable, the system was too geared toward a centralized authoritative leadership style to assimilate to such substantive changes at the outset. In another study, Askim found that placing key actors responsible for designing and implementing a joined-up initiative into a new ministry, separate from old structures, provided the time and space to adapt and create a new organizational culture (Askim et al., 2009). The differences between these two cases highlight the need for a deep appreciation of the contexts in which change is sought, to avoid potentially harmful or unproductive unintended consequences.

### Instruments

It is broadly recognized that one or more instruments, or tools, are required to make joining-up happen. The empirical case studies examined in this research suggest that they range across governance and structure, management, process, and cultural and institutional change. While each of these appears to be important, it is worth noting that not all initiatives that had some degree of success were characterized by instruments that tackled each of these elements. Similarly, not all unsuccessful initiatives failed to take account of these multiple dimensions. This suggests the need for “fit-for-purpose” approaches, which will be discussed in more detail later.

#### *Changes to processes and culture*

The setting of objectives and targets at senior levels is a common feature of joined-up reforms. These are often accompanied by policy narratives, or provocative metaphors, like “social exclusion” or “inclusion” which help to act as a rallying point for agencies across government—creating critical cultural and institutional change. Policy narratives are said to sit “above” policies and act as a rallying call, directional pointer, and broad benchmark for change. Policy narratives are an attempt to unite actors behind a common goal; they are not intended to directly modify behavior, but rather create shifts in values and the ways in which problems are perceived, which is seen as an important precursor to change (Christensen & Laegreid, 2007; de Bruijn & Heuvelhof, 1997; Kickert et al., 1997).

Indeed, instruments that tackle culture are critically important for successful joined-up working. Policy rules may be “less important than people and organizational cultures” (Lennon & Corbett, 2003, p. 11). As noted in earlier discussion, strong leaders are needed to break down existing patterns of working and entrenched practices and values. Instruments that can break down existing structures will, in time, lead to significant shifts in culture, or the norms, values,

and practices of that group (Cowell & Martin, 2003; Darlow et al., 2007; Giddens, 1984).

The very siloed structures that joined-up working seeks to break down are, perhaps not surprisingly, the most commonly noted barrier to joined-up government. Existing structures reinforce entrenched, siloed practices on a number of levels: first, through their iterative relationship with culture, norms, and values (Giddens, 1984), second through their limiting bureaucratic processes, and last in gaining consensus to join up. To clarify this last point, in order for a joined-up reform to be accepted (in principle or in implementation), it has to work through and be signed off within siloed departments. In other words, before joined-up reforms can work around departmentalism, first they must work through it. Again, this highlights the critical importance of strong leadership and political commitment.

The use of interdepartmental working groups is one of the most common instruments used to pursue joined-up working (particularly across different parts of government) (Keast, 2011; Ross et al., 2011). Different from the types of new collaborative agencies set up adjacent to existing departments, these ‘taskforces’ have a mandate to work across government to bring about changes in process, break down organizational silos, remove contradictions and dysfunctions in existing structures, and promote holistic and innovative thinking (Ling, 2002). However, these types of committees and taskforces have been found to *limit*, rather than facilitate, collaboration (Davies, 2009; James, 2004; Keast, 2011; Kickert et al., 1997). Interdepartmental groups charged with leading joined-up reforms that have no formal authority in other departments generate limited change at best, and at worst, can create “serious dysfunction” (O’Flynn et al., 2011, p. 248). Pollitt and James warn against creating new sets of organizational enclaves, or silos, in the pursuit of integration (James, 2004; Pollitt, 2003). Developing interdepartmental committees can end up creating new teams and administrative structures that are not well integrated with existing departments.

Here, departments continue to carry the burden of accountability and implementation, while interdepartmental teams generate ideas, but lack the implementation capacity or accountability mechanisms to get things done. This makes them vulnerable to budget cuts in the face of cost pressures, as they are perceived to be ineffective and a drain on departmental resources. This is important because joined-up action carries high costs, including money, time, and energy, along with ‘policy costs’ resulting from compromises that must be accepted for collaborative efforts to work (Kickert et al., 1997). This makes them easy targets. To avoid this, interdepartmental groups need to be supported by strong structural links to the departments they are working with through, for example, accountability mechanisms. Shared outcome targets is one way to structure upward accountability (Cowell & Martin, 2003; Darlow et al., 2007).

### Skills

While few initiatives utilized training and skill development, a picture of the set of skills required for joined-up working does emerge from the case studies. These are: problem-solving skills, coordination skills (getting people to the table), brokering skills (seeing what needs to happen), flexibility, deep knowledge of the system, and, for front line workers, knowledge of both how to work with their community and how to obtain information about their community (demographics, needs, and so on), a willingness to undertake the emotional labor associated with relational working. These skills are particularly important for leaders.

Technological know-how and good supportive technological systems emerged as vital, particularly for supporting collaborative working and information sharing. Confounding factors in the progress of joined-up working were sometimes as simple as e-mail or appropriate platforms for data integration and sharing (Askim et al., 2009; Larner & Craig, 2005; Lips et al., 2011; Signoretta & Craglia, 2002). These issues highlight the need for dedicated resources (Head, 2014; Kickert et al., 1997). Joining up is expensive, in terms of staffing, financial costs (for example, associated with technological improvements for cross-boundary working), and time. Assuring dedicated resources, particularly at lower levels, is essential for success.

## A SUPPORTIVE ARCHITECTURE

As a whole, empirical investigations suggest that the instruments used to create integration and collaboration are often inadequate or inappropriate for context (Keast, 2011). Two underlying factors can be identified that explain this shortcoming: (1) joined-up initiatives often lack a strong “supportive architecture” (O’Flynn et al., 2011, p. 248) and (2) there is often a fundamental mismatch between the goals they aim to achieve, the mechanisms used to achieve them, and the level at which they are deployed (Keast, 2011).

O’Flynn et al. (2011) warn that “without careful attention to, and investment in, creating [supportive] architecture, most attempts at joined-up government are doomed to fail, as the power of embedded ways of doing things restrains innovation and undermines cooperation” (p. 11). Initiatives that seek to create system change require high degrees of collaboration and integration, which in turn need to be supported by stricter mechanisms and arrangements than those only seeking to share information (Keast, 2011).

Table 4 outlines elements of a supportive architecture. While initiatives do not need to have all of these characteristics to achieve some success, each has been found to be associated with positive outcomes. These elements are divided into “hard” and “soft”: hard elements pertain to structure, while soft elements are aimed at creating cultural and institutional change.

TABLE 4  
Elements of a Supportive Architecture

<i>Hard</i>	<i>Soft</i>
A mandate for change	Deliberate and strategic focus on collaboration
Decentralized control	Training and skill development
Accountability and incentive mechanisms	A call to action or a rallying point
Dedicated resources (including flexibility in the way they are used at different levels)	Information sharing

Perhaps one of the strongest lessons to emerge from the empirical literature on joined-up government is the need for multiple instruments and flexibility. Joined-up reforms need to be activating multiple leverage points but also remain fluid and flexible. Joining up is a dynamic process in itself and, as it progresses, instruments and approaches need to be able to shift with it. What works to kick joined-up working off, such as the creation of a new agency or working group, might in time become limiting. There needs to be a willingness to add, remove, or refine mechanisms as joining up progresses.

In Figure 3, we provide a heuristic device to assist in the creation of supportive architecture for joined-up government. It outlines dimensions of a “matrix-style” architecture, which features horizontal and vertical dimensions (O’Flynn

et al, 2011, p. 253). The framework synthesizes the dimensions of successful joined-up government, drawn from the investigation of empirical case studies.

As noted at the outset of this article, an evidence-based approach to joined-up government will not necessarily provide all the answers. It can, however, form the basis for conjecture on what may work in the future. We anticipate that the framework presented here will have heuristic value for practitioners, assisting them in planning and designing the supportive architecture for joined-up initiatives, while encouraging responsiveness and flexibility as joining-up progresses.

### CONCLUSION

There is a growing awareness of the need to be discerning in our pursuit of joined-up working, particularly because joined-up government is expensive and carries high opportunity costs (Head, 2014). As such, we need to learn from successes and failures of the past, so that future efforts may be better designed and implemented. In this article, we have aimed to assist this process through a thematic synthesis of case study research on joined-up government. We anticipate that the dimensions of a supportive architecture outlined and the heuristic framework provided in this article will help practitioners and policymakers in future joined-up endeavors.

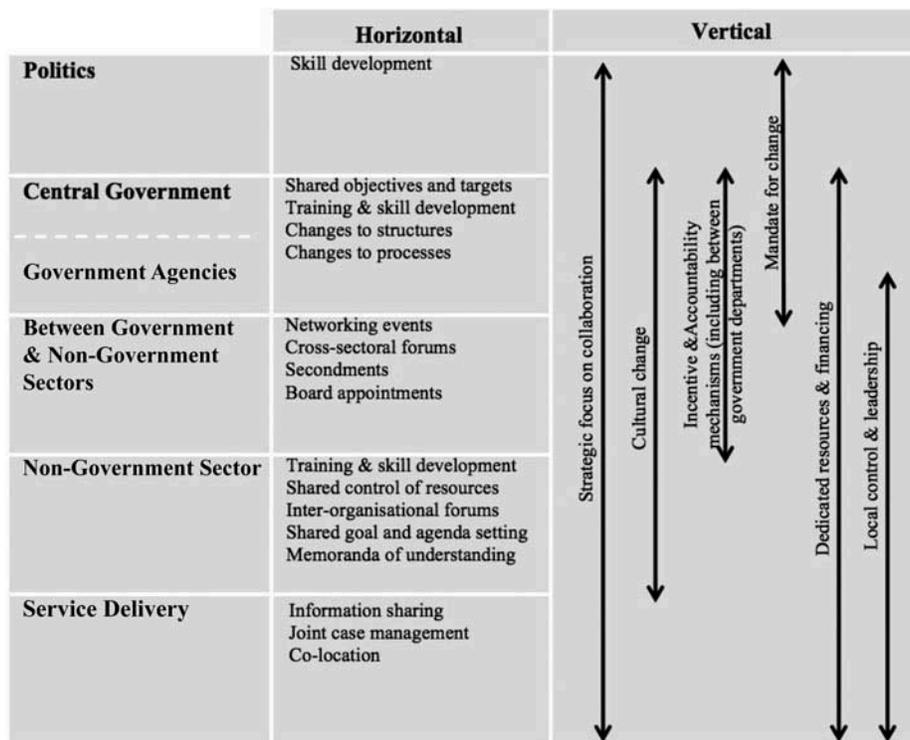


FIGURE 3 Horizontal and vertical integration matrix.

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