

## Working through Networks in the Age of Hyper Connectivity

### 7th Annual Meeting of the OECD Network of Schools of Government

#### Meeting highlights

#### Introduction

The OECD's Network of Schools of Government (NSG) met in Gwacheon, Korea, for its 7th Annual Meeting on 31 October-1 November 2019 at the invitation of the National Human Resources Development Institute (NHI) of South Korea, and with support from the Korea Policy Centre of the OECD.

Held under the theme of "Working through Networks in the Age of Complexity", the meeting brought together around 40 representatives of Schools of Government, academic institutions and national civil service bodies from 23 OECD member and partner countries, many from South East Asia. The meeting, which was chaired by Prof. Geert Bouckaert, KU Leuven, Public Governance Institute, and former President of the International Institute of Administrative Sciences (IIAS), also benefitted from the participation of members of the 2019 NHI HR Leaders Forum.

The 7th Annual Meeting provided an opportunity to explore how the public sector can strategically respond to rapidly changing public administration environments, including digital transformations, through co-operation, network building, leadership and the development of public service capabilities. Building on last year's discussion in Helsinki, Finland, the meeting also considered the role of skills and leadership capabilities for implementing the complex Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This is at the heart of the recently launched Global Hub on the Governance for the SDGs, a joint OECD-UNDP initiative.

This year, the NSG meeting was organised in parallel with the NHI Global Public HR Conference on 31 October. The conference aimed at providing a platform for networks to share practices, policies and experience among HR experts, academic professionals, high-profile government officials and practitioners from Korea and abroad. Among the topics discussed were collaborative governance and value creation, the use of platforms, and shared (collaborative) accountability. The conference also highlighted innovative practices in a number of private companies in Korea.

#### Opening Session

The purpose of the session was to provide an update from the **Secretariat** on the recent [Recommendation on Public Service Leadership and Capability \(PSLC\)](#) and the forthcoming Recommendation on Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (PCSD).

The PSLC Recommendation was adopted in January 2019. Its 14 principles on values-driven culture and leadership; skilled and effective public servants; and responsive and adaptive employment systems will help to guide the work of the OECD and adhering countries in the area of public employment and management. This includes areas where schools of government can play active roles, such as in helping to identify and develop needed skills in the public service and developing values-based leaders. Ongoing

activities include the development of an implementation toolkit and data and indicators for Strategic People Management.

The PCSD Recommendation, in turn, is scheduled for adoption by OECD member countries in December 2019. The Recommendation aims at providing a comprehensive instrument to help member and partner countries equip policy makers with the necessary institutional mechanisms and policy tools to support and promote coherent policies for sustainable development. Its eight principles, organised around three main pillars – a strategic vision for implementing the 2030 Agenda; effective institutional and governance mechanisms for addressing policy interactions; and a set of tools for anticipating and assessing policy impacts – can be expected support civil servants to address complex policy challenges of a global and interconnected nature. The Recommendation’s online implementation toolkit will be complemented by more detailed guidance in 2020.

### **Session 1: Networks in the future of work in the public service**

Demographic change, globalisation and technological advances require governments to adopt more collaborative and networked forms of working. The future of work in the public sector will involve closer relationships both within government and beyond with stakeholders such as academia, civil society and the private sector. The session explored ways in which Schools of Government have begun to understand, contextualise and prepare civil servants for a hyper-connected and networked world, including by applying the principles of the PSLC Recommendation.

Speaker and discussants identified various underlying forces for networking and connection, including technical capability (including digital), reforms aiming to facilitate proactive collaboration within government, and contracting out, commissioning and co-production. Yet, senior civil servants still often find themselves in vertical hierarchies with little or no scope for broader networking. More and more, schools such as ANZOG are using teaching formats that require collaborative problem solving by cross-jurisdictional teams.

This includes the need to build digital competence to communicate data. Communicating data in networks can contribute to discovering patterns in unstructured data (e.g. through word tagging) and help to identify influential actors for collaboration and analysis. Korea’s NHI has developed training programmes aimed at supporting public servants to better use and communicate data.

However, networks can also be used to exclude and reinforce old power structures, and in the wrong hands technology-based networks can also be used to destabilise societies, e.g. by manipulating elections or facilitating unlawful surveillance, making it more urgent than ever to ensure that technological systems are being used ethically. Case studies can inform the ethical use of such tools so that they deliver public value. But ethics is also a question of identifying and training the right people to serve, lead and build trust. Ateneo School of Government in the Philippines is placing more emphasis on inclusiveness and “bridging leadership” in order to overcome divisiveness.

The session concluded with a lively discussion that highlighted many of the remaining questions – networking is important but how to measure it? How to know when to use to support inclusion and under what conditions? How can schools support the development of functional networks that span across organisational boundaries and bust silos? How can schools get more from alumni networks to ensure that learnings are applied in their change resistant home environments? Finland’s change makers network and Canada’s digital academies may offer some models to horizontal network building.

### **Session 2: Enhancing communication and connectivity in the public sector**

The session, which focused on Schools’ role as hubs of knowledge and practice networks to improve public governance, offered the dual perspective of HR leaders (who determine the demand for these services) and Schools (who provide the supply to meet that demand). Picking up on themes of the earlier discussion,

delegates spoke framed the demand in terms of the importance of ethical training for leadership (“Leading at the Speed of Trust”), including the need to address unconscious bias: how do we manage diversity of networks to create unity within a community? How can capacity building support social cohesion for creating networks and addressing public service challenges? How can schools help to enhance communication within the government, as well as between the government and society as a whole. And how can schools help policy makers “rethink governance” in face of automation and augmentation of jobs by machines?

Schools responded with many innovative initiatives. A joint initiative with US Office of Personnel Management and the University of Virginia’s Centre of Facilitation and Games offers simulations around global challenges and forces participants to consider the ethical implications of their policy decisions. In Japan, training supports networking, including by providing specific management skills. A recent project at Brazil’s ENAP aims at enabling digital transformation and data analysis and building digital competencies that allow for a more transversal view of ongoing trends and needs. They are also setting up coding bootcamps for civil servants to train in the potential of digital technologies and show them opportunities for platforms and digital solutions.

Finally, some schools challenged the assumption that the Government necessarily defines the demand that schools respond to. In some cases schools are also trying to inform the government of the skills they should be needing, based on their unique positions as both developers and researchers. This is particularly relevant in the face of digital transformation, as schools in some cases find themselves at the front lines of the reskilling revolution that many public sectors face. This is a key question in the future, and aligns to the future of work agenda of the OECD’s Public Employment team.

### Session 3: Leadership and senior civil service

Against a backdrop of a rapidly changing public service context, the relevance of traditional top-down leadership is being challenged by increasingly network-based public sector activities. The session provided an opportunity to reflect on lessons learned from the ongoing multi-country project on public service leadership and other national reviews. It was opened with the Secretariat’s presentation of the Korean case study “Competency assessment as a tool for public service transformation”, followed by more detailed insights from Mr. Shin Inchul of the Ministry of Personnel Management (MPM), Korea.

Delegates commended Korea’s efforts to transition from a seniority-based to a merit-based senior civil service systems, and suggested that Korea may wish to reconsider the long time-frame involved (civil servants must have 20 years of service before being considered for the Senior Civil Service assessment) and the low level of female candidates as key aspects to address in the future. During breakout groups, participants were asked to consider good emerging competency assessment practices in their own countries and how Schools can support the identification of future-oriented leadership competencies. It was argued that leadership assessments should go beyond “snapshots in time” and focus more on self-awareness, behaviours, integrity and values. They also stressed the important of leadership at all levels and supporting emerging leaders, to build the competencies of the next generation.

The session concluded with a brief presentation of the ongoing **Korea-Uzbekistan** Partnership for HRD on Public Service Leadership.

### Session 4: Implementing the Recommendation on Public Service Leadership and Capability

The session invited Schools’ perspectives on how they might help governments implement the PSLC Recommendation, for example through thematic research around specific aspects of the Recommendation or challenges in its implementation, or the development of partnerships across expert groups and government sectors. Delegates warmly welcomed the Recommendation and in particular it’s challenge to

develop a learning culture in the public sector. This is not only a role for Schools of Government but one in which they play a central role.

Some delegates recognised the need to transition from traditional top-down ‘strong leaders’ to accommodate demands for decentralisation and transparency increasingly expected in the future. The alignment of learning institutions’ curricula with the PSLC Recommendation can foster this transition. The school in Dubai offers a comprehensive set of services that appear to support the PSLC recommendation across its three pillars, and provides a neutral learning platform to explore opportunities to achieve these principles.

Others focused on the redefinition and blurring of the public and private sectors following driven in part by technological changes. This suggests a need for Schools to redefine their tasks and functions accordingly. The PSLC Recommendation helps to provide a framework that can support governments to review the role of their schools and the need to reconsider job profiles, gap identification and training and development paths in light of these changes. An action research initiative in Italy is currently exploring these questions, while Thailand is reviewing their leadership competency frameworks in light of these complex challenges.

Others suggested the need to unlearn – stop doing what no longer works, and expand schools’ roles in experimentation, pilot projects, and impact evaluations. Part of building a learning culture is also building a teaching culture – creating the space for civil servants to learn from each other and to bring in voices from academia and other areas.

The OECD **Secretariat**, also shared the vision of the recently launched Global Hub on the Governance for the SDGs – a joint OECD-UNDP initiative that aims at building leadership capacity and skills in support of the SDGs. By drawing on the expertise of relevant OECD policy communities and UNDP country networks, the Hub will serve as a space for countries to share experiences and receive tailored support to address civil service skills and leadership challenges. It can provide a valuable platform for promoting the principles of the PSLC Recommendation worldwide. Participants were invited to engage in this initiative and to take part in the regional consultations planned for next year.

### Closing session

The 7th Annual Meeting concluded that the ability to work in networks will be critical for the public service of the future. In addition to collaboration between both public and private stakeholders, today’s policy challenges require skills and leadership capabilities that transcend traditional silo thinking. This is true not least in the context of the SDGs, which represent an interconnected set of economic, social and environmental global objectives. Civil servants also need to keep abreast of technological developments and ensure that digital tools are used in an ethical and responsible manner that creates public value.

Finally, the Chair reflected on how the Network can contribute to Schools’ upcoming work and encouraged members to continue to engage with each other and the Secretariat beyond the annual meetings. The Network’s online portal can contribute to facilitating such collaboration.

Discussions will continue at the 8th Annual Meeting of the NSG, which will be hosted by Dubai’s Mohammed Bin Rashid School of Government in the fall of 2020, potentially in the margins of the World Government Summit during Expo2020.