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Work, boundaries and the accomplishment of governing

Introduction

This article is a contribution to a continuing discussion about the changing patterns of work, conducted largely by sociologists who are accustomed to seeing "work" as a relatively clear phenomenon, practised by people called workers, who make up the workforce. I am coming at it from a different direction, being primarily concerned with how we are governed, with the practices through which this is accomplished, and with the ways in which the concepts of "work" and "boundary" help us to make sense of the process of governing.

We can start with two relatively clear pictures. One is of work, whose characteristics are broadly agreed on, although it is not easy to demarcate the boundary between work and "not work" (there seems to be no single counterfactual). Work is seen as an activity which is directed, instrumental, skilled, located in a workplace, and usually remunerated, though Pahl (1988, 1) stresses the need not to conflate "work" with "employment". But "unpaid work" is usually seen as the exception to the rule, and calling for an explanation.

Similarly, "governing" is a term that is understood, though the more detailed the picture, the less the agreement. Broadly speaking, governing is seen as being done by the government (or "the state"), which consists of a small cluster of authoritative leaders and a large array of subordinate officials, who address problems in our collective existence and by mobilising the coercive power of the state take action to deal with them. The work of governing, then, consists of recognising problems, deciding on action, and carrying it out. This is done by the leaders and their subordinate officials, so we can envisage a clear boundary between "government" and "not-government", between the rulers and the ruled.

To depict "work" and "government" in this way is not to set them up as straw men, for later demolition, because these perceptions are very real elements in the working knowledge of everyday life, and this reality is not negated by the closer

scrutiny to which they will be subjected in this paper. But it means that this scrutiny is to throw light on the part that these shared perceptions play in the construction of governing.

The problem being addressed here is that both the social practice of work and the understanding and significance of this practice are changing, and the frameworks and concepts used in the analysis of this dimension of our collective life are no longer adequate, and that we need to re-think how we go about analysing work and its meaning. There is a parallel argument going on in political science about the changes in the nature of governing, and the practices through which it is accomplished, and in many ways this is an argument about the work of governing, so it seemed appropriate to bring these two discourses together in this article.

Changing work, changing governing

The discourse about the changing nature of work sees the "modern" perception of work as directed, obligatory, skilled, located, etc., creating people who are identified (and identify themselves) as "workers" in a way that defines much of their life experience as being challenged by the fragmentation and discontinuity of productive activity. There are questions about how well the modernist assumptions apply to the work of farming, for instance, or the care for children, or even academic practice, but we can accept it as a broad-brush characterisation of the mainstream of productive activity.

The parallel argument in political science is that the dominant position of "the state" in governing has been undermined by organisational fragmentation and the greater complexity of the task, with modern states moving from "government" by authoritative direction to "governance" by negotiation among self-organising networks (Rhodes 1997).

Here, we have to address the different ways in which people give accounts of governing. Certainly, seeing governing as rule — the work of "the government" — is a story that makes sense: it seems to explain what people are doing, and how we get "government" as the outcome. Whether it is a good guide to the process is another question. Practitioners find that what they learn from involvement in the process challenges this image of governing as authoritative problem-solving, in a number of ways (Adams 2005). One is the trajectory of the action. It is an account of authoritative choice, and presented as top-down ("the government has decided …") but practitioners find that often the initiative has come from below, perhaps from outside government, and "government" turns out to be an array of different organisations with distinct and possibly conflicting agendas. There is a limited scope for any of these bodies to impose its preferences on then others by the exercise of authority, so an important part of the practice of governing is managing relationships with other organised interests, inside and outside of

government. This means that the action is as likely to be lateral — negotiation among participants — as to be the vertical imposition of an authoritative rule. In fact, authority figures ask for assurance that these negotiations have taken place before a decision is made, and the "decision" seems to be more an act of approval than a choice. So practitioners are sensitive to the presence and preferences of the other players, and work to a different discourse, which we could call s t r u c t u r e d i n t e r a c t i o n : it is about the participants, concerns, experiences and the "rules of engagement" — how to "get things done" in a crowded and contested world.

But we can also identify a third discourse, focused on the basic question: "what is all this *for*?". What it is that are we trying to govern? What is normal and what is problematic? If situations are problems, what do we know about them, what would be an appropriate way to respond to them, and who should be addressing these problems? This could be called a discourse of p r o b l e m a t i s a t i o n . Practitioners know that policy concerns are usually not self-propelled: they arrive on the table because someone is pushing them. Advocates identify situations and define them as problems, and mobilise knowledge to support their claims (which may be challenged by knowledge mobilised in support of counter-claims). This helps us to understand one of the puzzles about expert knowledge noticed by practitioners: research may be commissioned but not used, or commissioned after the decision has been taken; reports are demanded but not read; evaluations are ordered but not used as the basis for future allocations. We can see that discourse about problems and solutions is more part of the process of contending for attention and commitment than scientific way of determining the outcome.

Both practitioners and analysts draw on all of these accounts — at different times and in various ways — in "making sense" of governing. Each of them gives a distinct perspective on the work of governing: What is it that people do, and to what extent can their practice be understood as "work"?

The work of governing

It seems easy to pinpoint the work of governing in the authoritative choice account: there are authoritative leaders who make decisions — the "policy makers" — and there are subordinate officials to carry them out. This is extended to give these subordinate officials a place in the lead-up to decision-making: they can be called "policy advisers". All of them have official positions, workplaces, evident tasks, usually under direction, and are remunerated; clearly, they are "the workers" whose activity creates governing.

But the "structured interaction" account suggests that "governing" is less a single activity than the outcome of a range of practices governing different activities, or governing the same activity in different ways, and these workers are not in a single structure, but spread in a number of organisations, most functionally-specific,

some more specifically addressed to governing, and much of the work of governing involves finding discourses and programs of activity which are compatible with the agendas of the different organisations involved in the issue — "making sense together", as Hoppe (1999) puts it.

Some of this search involves discussions among state officials, but it usually also involves "outsiders" — sometimes organised, from business, professional associations, local organisations or "cause" groups, sometimes individual applicants or disorderly protesters. These discussions may be ongoing, with relationships stabilising and shared ways of talking about the problem developing, and the pattern of action being given a name, such as "policy community" (Richardson and Jordan 1979), or "issue network" (Heclo 1978). Offering entry to the "outsiders" could be ad hoc and perfunctory, and not lead to a significant change in the work pattern (van der Arend and Behagel 2011), but in many cases, the non-officials might become integral parts of the pattern of governing, with their participation institutionalised in advisory or coordinating bodies. In other words, when we look at governing in terms of the "structured interaction" account, we see a wide range of types of involvement. We will come back to what this means for the concepts of "work" and "boundary" in the analysis of governing.

And as Heclo (1974) noted, making policy is not simply about exercising power, but it is also a sort of "collective puzzling" about what needs to be governed and how this might be done, and who gets to do it, and this is the focus of the "problematisation" account. Governments may employ knowledge specialists, or hire them as consultants; clearly these are workers. But often, policy issues are propelled onto official agendas by advocacy groups, who seek to generate public awareness of the policy concern, and to develop detailed knowledge about it. This "public puzzling" is likely to involve voices far from the centre of government: activists, researchers, professional associations, churches, international networks, etc. Haas (1992) attributes the success of the global movement to ban the use of fluorocarbons in refrigerators to the existence of an "epistemic community" who understood the science and could persuade political leaders.

Again, this raises questions about how we understand the work of governing and who is doing it. Former US vice-president Al Gore retired from politics and spent his time promoting public awareness of climate change. After he won the Nobel Peace prize for this work, there were calls for him to return to politics as the Democratic presidential candidate, but he refused to respond. One observer commented:

> He's also come to believe that even a US president is powerless to act on climate change unless public opinion has moved, that acting as a teacher and advocate can have a greater political impact. (Freedland 2007)

So we can identify several distinct aspects of the accomplishment of governing — the application of authority, the negotiation of consensus, and the framing of the concern — and see that there are many participants involved, contributing in different

ways to this complex and continuing process, and that there can be great variation in the extent to which their activities match the attributes of work which we identified earlier. Most of them are paid, but some quite significant ones are not. Most of the paid ones are subject to direction, but some (e.g. academic researchers) are relatively autonomous. Many of the non-officials are driven by moral commitment and sentiments of solidarity rather than hierarchical direction. There have been a number of reform movements, from Lasswell (1951) to the UK Cabinet Office (1999) aimed at professionalising governing and making it more "work-like", but at the same time, pressure to increase participation by "the public". All of this calls for care in how we use the concepts of "work" and "boundary" in the analysis of governing.

Let me illustrate this with a real-life (but anonymous) example. A young Australian economics graduate (let us call her A.) was working as a policy officer in a government department, but contracted breast cancer. She had the good fortune to recover, and wrote an article about her experiences in a leading newspaper, and the article generated a large response from readers, particularly from other women who had survived breast cancer. She called a meeting of cancer survivors, which was well-attended, and which decided to form an organisation to support victims of cancer and to press for better treatment. The new organisation found that its voice was welcomed by health officials, who appointed representatives of the organisation to a number of committees concerned with standards of care, and offered to fund the organisation to prepare a manual to guide health care workers in the care of cancer patients. The members of the new organisation discussed how they should respond to this welcome, and decided that while they might hire staff to put the manual together, the organisation should remain a group of unpaid, committed activists, bound together by their shared experience of surviving the cancer. But the group linked up with other support groups around the country and with the semi-official Cancer Councils to establish a national network of information and support, and A. was recently named one of the 100 most influential women in Australia.

What does this story tell us about work and governing? At the beginning of the story, A's contribution to governing would be classified as "work" in the suggested at the beginning of this piece way: skilled, directed, and remunerated. But writing an article for the paper was her choice, and drew on her personal experience, not her training; she may have received a small payment, but the writing was not part of a structured, directed, obligatory activity. Sitting on these official committees would have been "work-like" for the women concerned (and would have been "work" for the other people around the table), and A's creation of the organisation and leading its expanding reach would be seen as work, whether it was paid or not. But the members of the organisation were concerned to ensure that it remained the voice of those who had experienced cancer, rather than a professionalised part of the health care system. And yet they clearly play a significant part in the governing of health care.

The multiplicity of discourses

Practitioners (and many observers) find no problem with the existence of multiple discourses of governing. They can see the utility of having both an "official" account of their action — constitutional, systemic, functional — and an "operational" account, to be used in private. The distinction is recognised in a number of paired opposites: formal/informal, theory/practice, sacred/profane, "front-stage" and "back stage" (Goffman 1959; Degeling et al. 1993; de Vries et al. 2010). Practitioners find that different sorts of discourse "make sense" in different situations, and try to tailor the presentation to the context. In some situations, the most important figure will be the political leader, the embodiment of authority. In others, the important thing will be the cumulative acceptance by the "stakeholders" which has come out of the continuing interaction. Sometimes, it will be the recognised experts (or the attentive media), reflecting their salience in the discourse of problematisation.

Most often, it will be some combination of these, as practitioners seek to construct a "good account" of the exercise in governing. There are devices to facilitate linkage between different discourses. For instance, in a number of Australian jurisdictions, the formal requirements for cabinet approval (authoritative choice) include a statement identifying other agencies or significant non-government bodies with an interest in the question, and their views about the proposal (structured interaction). As we saw in A's case, pressure from advocacy groups may lead to a widening of the gaze of official bodies (problematisation). Different sorts of work may be mobilised in the construction of governing — but this may create problems of recognition and management. The interplay of professionalism and participation, of expert skill and experiential knowledge, poses a challenge to traditional conceptions of work. The amateurs are invited to the official table, but those who come are not familiar with the discourses and practices and timetables of the professionals (van der Arend and Behagel 2011), and facilitating their participation becomes a professional specialisation (Escobar 2015). In some fields officials seek to transfer problematic aspects of their work to non-officials. Hyatt argues that in UK public housing, these moves

> …have spawned an entirely new industry … consisting of tenant participation trainers and consultants, publications, "how to" manuals, courses and awards. While one "class of experts", employees of the welfare state bureaucracy — such as housing officers, rent collectors and social workers — are being discredited and gradually eliminated in the move towards "advanced liberalism", a whole new group of paid professionals has been created to work alongside the mostly volunteer tenant-activists. These new professionals are experts in the arts of empowerment and self-help, whose job it is to inculcate within tenants a sense of their own autonomy and agency by encouraging them to take on challenges such as self management. (1997, 33)

As the nature of demands on public authority change, the sorts of practice which will be an adequate response to these demands are likely to change too, and

new forms of worker may emerge. They may be paid, like Escobar's participation facilitators, or unpaid, like Hyatt's self-managers. They may be extensively trained, like volunteer fire-fighters, or rely on their own experiential knowledge, like A's breast cancer survivors. It does differ significantly from the Weberian ideal type bureaucracy — but this is an analytic construct, not an empirical category.

"Putting together" the practices of governing

What we are seeing here is that the work of governing is inherently fluid, and always "under construction", so that mapping it in terms of sectors divided by boundaries may be difficult. The idea of boundaries is an analytic device rather than an empirical sorting-frame, though it is still useful with this qualification, not least because of its impact on the way that participants in governing see their activity, and it can help us to analyse developments in the work of governing.

We noted the distinction between rulers and ruled, and the way that this presented the work of governing in terms of authoritative leaders making decisions, and subordinates carrying them out, so the whole structure of state activity was seen as being in some way the implementation of decisions by leaders. In the second half of the 20th century, this was subject to challenge from a number of directions. Leaders who felt that the bureaucratic structure was not subject to sufficient control looked to principal-agent theory and market models to re-shape the structure of work, turning bureaucratic subordinates into competing contractors, inside or outside government, committed to the delivery of specified outcomes. This has led to the increasing reliance on quantitative indicators (usually of outputs, sometimes of outcomes, rarely of process) as evidence of the quality of work on government, and consequently, of the perception that the most important element of the work is to produce good indicators.

But not all structural change has been about increasing central control. There have also been pressures to democratise state bureaucratic activity through public participation in the decision process, and in the detailed implementation of programmes, as we saw in the account of A. and her breast cancer survivors group. There have also been initiatives to develop collaborative ways of working which would enable official concerns to reach further into the life-world, such as the Australian "LandCare" groups, which brought together state officials, farmers and environmental activists to construct local regimes governing land use, which in many cases are more far-reaching and have a greater impact than could have been achieved with traditional state regulation.

Some of these innovations come from public managers, looking for savings from the use of IT (e.g. in routine renewal of licences), or for ways to spread responsibility for the operation of programmes, such as the tenant self-management described by Hyatt. But at the same time, managers may want to claim credit

for outcomes. Boxelaar et al. (2006) describe a case of agricultural extension workers inducing farmers to develop new models of good harvesting practice which would reduce the risk of fire; the extension workers reported this as collective self-management by farmers, but departmental managers demanded that it be re-written as a story of the department delivering "services" to its "clients".

So there are different ways of giving an account of governing, and different projects for accomplishing it. As Rose and Miller put it

> … government is intrinsically linked to the activities of expertise whose role is not weaving an all-pervasive web of "social control", but of enacting assorted attempts at the calculated administration of diverse acts of conduct through countless, often competing, local tactics of education, persuasion, inducement, management, incitement, motivation and encouragement. (1992, 175)

The work of governing is "put together" by different hands in varied and changing circumstances; it is not determined by a logic of late capitalism, and need not follow a single model. The tendency for work to become more fragmented and insecure has had some impact on the work of governing, though perhaps more in the practices of contractors than in government itself. What has perhaps been more significant has been the mobilisation of the non-officials — both organisations and individuals — in the work of governing, though whether this represents a major change in practice or more the recognition of long-established practice has not been adequately explored.

What lessons can we draw about work and boundaries?

One of the problems with analysing the work of governing is that discourse about the process is part of the work of governing — and this includes the discourse of academic researchers. The authoritative choice discourse is less an account of how governing happens than it is a validation of the outcome: if this is how we are governed, then it must be because this is the way that those with the authority to do so decided that we should be governed. Or alternatively, if those in authority did not decide that this is how we should be governed, there must have been a systemic failure: poor advice by policy advisers, sloth or inattention by subordinates, or suborning of the regulators by vested interests. The clear division between governors and governed — the institutions of governing and the rest of society — is assumed. The governing that takes place is attributed to the collective intentions of the political leaders — "the Rudd government" or "the Blair government".

That governing is also about negotiation among organised interests — the structured interaction discourse — keeps creeping into academic analysis, but (at least until recently) as a side issue, and the evident sites of the collective managing of problematic issues were tagged with a succession of cute

metaphors: "whirlpools of special social interest and problems" (Griffith 1939), participants "camped permanently around each source of problems" (Davies 1964), "issue networks" (Heclo 1978), "policy communities" (Richardson and Jordan 1979), "policy networks" (van Waarden 1992), and "epistemic communities" (Haas 1992). Rhodes' (1997) initial hypothesis about "governance" appeared to be bringing the collective and interactive dimension back to the front of the stage, but governance soon became an "empty construct" (Offe 2008, 2009). With the notable exception of Heclo and Wildavsky's *The Private Government of Public Money* (1974), there has been relatively little interest in examining the governing of aspects of social life as examples of the collective managing of the problematic through structured interaction. As Foucault (1986) said, "In our political and social thought, we have not yet cut off the king's head". Political scientists seem to need "the government" as a focus for their attention.

Work, boundaries and continuing change

Thinking about changes in practice usually is a sort of backward mapping — how did we do it then, how do we do it now? — so it might be fruitful to think about work and boundaries and governing in a forward trajectory: How might we expect the work of governing to develop in the foreseeable future? Let us take one emerging issue — the governing of caring for the aged — and address what sort of work might be needed and how it might be organised.

Governing this issue has not been seen as a major concern until recently, because (a) it was seen as being largely handled by non-government actors (the family and community organisations), and (b) most people did not live long enough to qualify. When I was born, the usual retirement age for men in Australia was 65; that was when men were eligible for the (means-tested) aged pension. But male life expectancy was only 67 years; in other words, not many men lived long enough for their care to be a major public problem. And it was expected that those needing care would receive it from the family — spouses or children — or from institutions run by community (often religious) bodies, who would be assisted by modest government grants and favourable tax treatment.

The situation now is very different. People live much longer: people over 64 years now constitute 14 per cent of the Australian population; by the middle of the century they will constitute 24 per cent; the proportion over 84 years will rise from 1.8 per cent to 5 per cent. It is expected that less care will be available from family, friends and neighbours (who now provide 80 per cent of all forms of care). Institutional care is becoming increasingly expensive as regulation drives up standards and costs, and it is estimated that by the middle of the century, government spending on the care of the aged will have risen from 0.8 per cent of GDP

to 1.8 per cent. And increasingly, old people would prefer to receive care in their own homes rather than institutions.

So there has been a lot of "collective puzzling" about the sort of care that is needed, how it should be provided, and how it should be paid for and managed. There are questions about what sort of work is involved. For instance, one early form of home-based care was the delivery of a cooked meal to old people living alone in their own homes. Initially, the meals were delivered by volunteers, but as the service became more organised, these were replaced by paid workers. There were then reports that the old people felt that the service had deteriorated, because the volunteers would not just deliver the meal and leave, but would be willing to stay and chat, perhaps change a light bulb or help in understanding an official letter. It might be the only conversation that the old person had that day. But for the paid deliverers, and their managers, this was a job, each meal to be delivered promptly and the day's schedule to be completed on time. This raised questions about the nature of the work, what sort of people should do it, and how they should be organised. One response has been that government should fund community bodies, churches, etc. to provide the service, in the hope that the deliverers recruited in this way would be more friendly and responsive to the old people, but the experience of these arrangements has been that government officials tend to demand that these charitable organisations sign extremely detailed contracts, and then use the terms of the contract to micro-manage the service.

There is also the question of where the carers would come from, given that the workforce itself will be shrinking as the baby-boomers retire. The over-65s will be healthier than those of ten or twenty years ago, and it may be that carers could come from these age cohorts, but they may be reluctant to re-enter the full-time work force. Perhaps the body that might be best fitted to do this work would look more like a corps of volunteers, organised and supplied by officials, with labour being contributed "from each according to his [or her] ability". This is, after all, the way that fire protection is organised outside the urban areas: the New South Wales Rural Fire Service is composed of 700 civil servants and 70,000 volunteers, who despite being amateurs, are highly trained and expert.

This example takes us back to Pahl's warning (1988, 1) that we should not conflate work and employment. "Work" is a way of framing activity, highlighting the aspects which give it a particular character: that it is obligatory, skilled, directed, remunerated, etc. Not all productive activity counts as work, and the question in any particular case may be how "work-like" the activity is considered by the people engaged in it. Changes in the organisation of the economy mean that the old assumptions about a core of full-time employees supporting a fringe of dependants no longer holds — hence the concern about the "precariat". But it is also true that social and demographic change has produced a large number of still-healthy and competent ex-employees, many of whom "work" as volunteers in a range of workplaces. And technological development, particularly in IT, has broken down the

barriers between knowledgeable insiders and the public "outside". All of these call for us to re-think our assumptions about the work of governing.

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Work, boundaries and the accomplishment of governing

Abstract

This article addresses the practices of governing, and the way in which the concepts of "work" and "social boundary" can be applied to make sense of them. It shows how a constitutional/normative account depicts the work of governing, and the social boundaries within which it is carried out, and shows the significance of specialisation, clustering and involvement in the work of governing. It examines the range of activities in governing, the extent to which they become "work-like", and the tension between involvement and professionalisation. It explores the significance of the concept of boundaries and alternative theorisations of the existence of multiple social formations with accompanying framings of practice. In conclusion, it discusses the significance of multiple accounts in the framing and validation of practice in governing, the way in which collective accomplishments are attributed to the practices of particular actors, and the place of the concepts of "work" and "boundary" in this process.

Praca i jej granice a praktyki rządzenia

Abstrakt

Niniejszy artykuł podejmuje problem praktyk rządzenia oraz sposobu wykorzystania pojęć „praca" i „granica społeczna" w celu ich zrozumienia. Artykuł ukazuje, w jaki sposób praca związana z rządzeniem, a także jej społeczne granice, prezentowane są w wyjaśnieniach konstytucjonalistycznych/normatywnych, wskazując na znaczenie specjalizacji, koncentracji i zaangażowania w tak rozumianą pracę. Przeanalizowane zostaje wiele działań związanych z rządzeniem, zakres, w jakim stają się one „podobne do pracy", a także napięcie między zaangażowaniem i profesjonalizacją. Zbadane zostają również znaczenie pojęcia granic oraz alternatywne ujęcia teoretyczne różnorodnych formacji społecznych oraz towarzyszących im podejść do badania praktyk. Na zakończenie w artykule poddane zostają dyskusji znaczenie wielorakich podejść, które służą analizie i uzasadnianiu praktyk rządzenia, sposoby przypisywania zbiorowych osiągnięć praktykom poszczególnych aktorów, jak również miejsce pojęć „praca" i „granica" w opisywanych procesach.