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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The concept of “stewardship” is increasingly being looked to as a driver of contemporary public service practice in Australia, and elsewhere. The diversity of contexts in which stewardship has arisen suggests a concept that is capable of broad application to achieve many outcomes. But, an alternative reading could sound warning bells, suggesting a concept that is being applied beyond its logical and theoretical constraints.

In this Issues Paper we review the evidence relating to stewardship to explore what the existing literature tells us in terms of what stewardship is, how to steward effectively and the types of outcomes a stewardship approach is capable of producing. In doing so we find a limited evidence base for a universal concept that can be meaningfully applied across disciplines. Although much has been written about stewardship and its importance, rather less is available in terms of agreement about what this concept is and how it operates, and a solid evidence base that clearly demonstrates the outcomes of stewardship practice is largely absent. In this review we integrate what evidence exists to explore this important concept but note that further research is required to fully articulate what stewardship is and how it could most effectively operate in practice in different contexts.

We identify that no single meaning of stewardship can be found and its definitions vary across disciplines and policy fields. Although it is applied in a diverse range of ways, the concept does have a set of universal features: all stewardship models involve taking responsibility for something, within a context of constrained

INTRODUCTION

The concept of “stewardship” has recently risen to prominence and is considered an important driver of contemporary public service practice in Australia and internationally. The Productivity Commission considers it core to the reform and delivery of human services in Australia (Productivity Commission, 2017); the Commonwealth Superannuation Corporation identifies it as the crux of the trust relationship with its members (Commonwealth Superannuation Corporation, 2017); the Australian Future Fund has adopted it to guide its long-term asset strategy (Future Fund, 2017); and the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet describes its entire role in stewardship terms (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2017). Although stewardship might seem like a new term in a public service context, it is, in fact, one that has been around for some time and has been applied in a number of ways over the years. The diversity of contexts in which stewardship is central suggests the concept is capable of broad application across an array of outcomes. But, an alternative reading of this situation could sound warning bells, suggesting a concept that is being applied beyond its logical and theoretical constraints.

Part of the attraction of the term might be that it exhibits strongly normative dimensions, as a seemingly positive and desirable state. On a first read, “stewardship” connotes benevolent behaviour, working for a higher purpose and even self-sacrifice (Worrell and Appleby, 2000; Hernandez, 2012). Stewards accept responsibility for generating beneficial outcomes for a broader class, often in the absence of personal reward. As a term, stewardship has its linguistic roots in medieval times, and arguably predates these as a practice of First Nations people (Worrell and Appleby, 2000). Despite, or possibly because of, this extended history we see a lack of consensus regarding the range of activities that stewardship comprises, who should undertake these activities in different contexts, what it should achieve and how it should operate. If stewardship is to play a central role in the design, delivery and oversight of our public services, it is important that we understand this concept, have a sense of the tools available to support these processes and insight into the evidence base surrounding it. From our review of the literature we discover that not all stewardship practices are equal and develop a typology of stewardship approaches that can help inform the practice of stewardship in contemporary public services.

In this Issues Paper, we aim to advance the concept and utility of stewardship in contemporary public sector practice. We do so by reviewing the literature (see Appendix 1 for details on the method used for the review) to explore what stewardship is, what is being stewarded and by whom and how stewardship is achieved. Having identified different ways of thinking about stewardship, but a lack of an integrated model to bring these different theoretical perspectives together, we set out four stewardship putewardar pur (oC37e or poss

On the supply side, service delivery systems have become more disaggregated with an increasingly significant role for third party providers (Alford and O'Flynn, 2012). Governments have moved from being predominantly a provider of services into a context where, although they may still have some aspect of provision, they increasingly have the role of contracting with providers to deliver the majority of public services. This role is sometimes also known as commissioning and involves governments establishing the outcomes that they are aiming to deliver, determining the best ways to deliver those services and then working with partners to ensure that the services are delivered (Dickinson, 2015). Given the number of different providers within a system, an important role of stewards is to ensure continuity across different actors so that those accessing services experience them in a seamless way. Such a role not only involves working closely with providers who have been contracted, but also in managing a market of providers who are competing to deliver services. As the Productivity Commission (2017, p. 85) describes:

WHAT IS STEWARDSHIP?

Thankfully, within the literature, examples of clarity exist in terms of the application of the concept, suggesting something more to this than hollow platitudes or ‘feel-good’ marketing phrases. In medicine, the application of a stewardship approach has been reported as effective in the control of antibiotic resistant bacteria (see Box 1). In the environmental domain, a stewardship approach has been repeatedly demonstrated to deliver improvements in land use and conservation across Australia. These improvements have been achieved despite the inherent challenge of generating public goods on private land from (largely) voluntary actions (see Box 2).

Box 1 – Application of stewardship to avoid mankind's greatest threat

Lawes et al. (2015) report on the success of applying a stewardship model to combat meticillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) in Scotland through its first National Antibiotic Stewardship Plan. The urgency of combating antibiotic resistance has recently been compared to climate change in terms of the scale of the adverse effect on human survival if resistance rates are not arrested (Ayukekbong et al., 2017). This plan integrated responsibility for the problem across a broad range of Scotland's NHS-funded health care professionals, including clinicians, regional management teams, pharmacists and infectious disease specialists. Nathwani et al. (2011) reported that the crux of the stewardship plan was fostering more efficient working across all stakeholders, aligning strategic and operational goals and responsibilities under an overarching umbrella of patient safety. Since inception of the plan in 2008, Lawes et al. (2015) report a 47% reduction in use of key antibiotics in hospitals and 27% reduction in the community and for the same period MRSA prevalence has declined by 54% in hospitals and 37% in the community. The authors attributed the results to a combination of improveing s10 \$i[o/rolgoals am improviv 17 (k)28 (e)10 (y antib0 (lg s10 \$MRSsumaece has)]]TJET

Box 2 – Measuring the benefits of environmental stewardship in rural landscapes

By identifying when and how a stewardship approach has successfully delivered public policy, we can avoid the danger of casting “magic” spells to create an illusion of success. In the next section, we further explore the many potential meanings of stewardship, revealing universal components that apply across disciplines and different policy fields.

Who is stewarding?

As outlined above, one of the universal features of stewardship concepts is that a steward is taking some form of responsibility, but how does this feature of stewardship assist in identifying exactly who is stewarding? In the context of public services, typically we think of public organisations and public servants as those 'doing' stewardship. For example, departments of education take responsibility for marshalling public and private resources with the intention of ensuring their target population is educated and equipped in line with a set of expectations and standards. The Australian Public Service (APS) is charged with stewardship of the public service so that it has the capacity to serve successive governments, being efficient, able to manage effectively and trusted by a range of stakeholders (Edwards et al 2012). In health care, Primary Health Networks stewarding their local geographical area are charged with increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of medical services for patients [...] and to improve coordination of care to ensure patients receive the right care in the right place at the right time (Department of Health, 2015).

The idea that organisations or other public agencies act as stewards is fairly simple and straightforward in one sense. Yet, when we dig deeper we find this idea is more challenging; organisations do not have individual agency. They are not a single identifiable individual, but a collection of people working towards what may or may not be a shared set of goals, potentially underpinned by similar beliefs. In the context of public services, a steward is not generally a specific individual, although we note that for some forms of stewardship, particularly environmental stewardship, individuals are often identified as having a steward role (e.g. Cooke and Moon, 2015). Stewardship is not something that is done just by leaders of organisations, but represents the collection of activity that is undertaken by a particular entity. It is here where things get tricky though, because stewardship activities are typically comprised of a number of different 'levels' (Seitzinger et al., 2012). Stewardship may be carried out at the local level to promote and/or coordinate community programs say, for example, by local governments. As the Productivity Commission (2017) notes, major national policies also require stewardship such as the National Disability Insurance Scheme. Here, stewardship is shared across different levels of government (Commonwealth and State) and different agencies – requiring considerable collaboration and coordination (which is itself a challenge). Stewardship also crosses national borders, for example the World Health Organisation arguably plays a stewardship role in coordination transnational responses to infectious disease (World Health Organisation, 2017).

What is being stewarded?

Given the range of different layers that stewardship takes place over and the many policy areas that it covers, we observed a range of elements within a system that might be stewarded. Firstly, we observed a distinction between the outputs and outcomes of stewardship. Stewardship outputs are actions driven by a need or desire to achieve an outcome that might need to endure beyond, or operate independently, from a defined policy goal. Stewardship outcomes comprise measurable change/s in at least one of the three universal stewardship components as a result of the stewardship outputs:

- $R \downarrow$: constraints on a resource are measurably reduced or eliminated
- $B \uparrow$: measurable increase in benefits to beneficiaries
- $R \downarrow$:

We can also think of these changes to outcomes across different timeframes. Long-term stewardship benefits are long-term results that can be attributed to achieving stewardship outcomes.

These benefits include:

- *Beneficiary*: defined beneficiaries experience benefits independent from, or beyond the life of a particular policy or reform process
- *Resource*: stewardship contributes to or causes a permanent change in the behaviour or nature of the steward that has positive consequences for the resource

As we start to explore these longer-term benefits, we can observe feedback loops for some processes, which increase outputs or reinforce processes. The long-term stewardship benefit of 'responsibility' contributes to ongoing benefits to resource constraints, which feeds back to the long-term benefit of 'responsibility' and thereby has consequences for beneficiaries. Considering stewardship in this way also draws us to a distinction in terms of stewardship as a process and stewardship as an outcome.

We say more about how stewardship is done in the next section, but the distinction relating to the processes of stewardship is an important one. When we are looking to make long-term and sustainable changes then, typically, it is not just a matter of delivering particular programs or processes, but changing the behaviours and mindsets of a range of individuals that a steward may or may not have direct control over (Charan et al., 2001). Senge argues that stewardship is 'almost solely a matter of attitude' (1990, pg. 12). One of the aims of many stewardship approaches is to influence agents into particular forms of activity that might fall outside of their direct and immediate benefit. Stewardship approaches could involve attempting to influence individuals to trade off convenience and price in exchange for more expensive but healthier food, for example. Or asking landholders to engage in particular practices that go against their immediate benefit, but produce more effective environmental outcomes for all species over the longer term.

In their role as stewards, public agencies may find their behaviours and ways of working are scrutinised.

HOW IS STEWARDSHIP ACHIEVED?

Given the breadth of stewardship applications, it was unsurprising to come across a great diversity of mechanisms and levers used in pursuit of stewardship outcomes. As the Productivity Commission (2016, p. 5) outlines, 'Stewardship encompasses almost every aspect of system design, including identifying policy priorities and intended outcomes, designing models of service provision and ensuring that services meet standards of quality, accessibility and suitability for users'. In practice, no single routine or set of practices are associated with a stewardship process in any distinctive sense. Many of the kinds of activities that we find related to stewardship can also be observed in traditional approaches to the design and delivery of public services.

A significant literature that deals with the various policy instruments is available to governments in attempting to influence and shape the activities of stakeholders. Bemelmans-Videc et al. (1998) provide an overview of these instruments in their edited collection 'Carrots, sticks and sermons' that categorises policy instruments as either regulatory, economic or informational. The choice of instrument will depend on, among other factors, different power bases, making certain instruments more or less effective within a particular context. The job of the policymaker is to identify when and where it is most appropriate to use different instruments, or pull on particular levers, to achieve stated policy goals. Table 1 sets out a number of different scenarios and the different forms of power that stewards might consider.

Table 1: A cross-disciplinary analysis of alternative incentive systems (adapted from Uphoff and Langholz, 1998).

Although many of the types of mechanisms for operating stewardship might be the same, the balance of how and when they will be used is different. Earlier we identified that one of the drivers of the stewardship agenda is the range of different agencies and actors that play a role in contemporary public services. As a number of commentators have argued, across many Western liberal democracies we see somewhat of a crisis of legitimacy and the dispersal of power across a range of different terrains (e.g Matthews, 2012). Those charged with a stewardship role have expressed concern over the fact that they need to influence a range of different actors but have at their disposal only 'rubber levers of power' (Diamond, 2013). That is, stewards have found in recent years that they lack direct power over actors to compel them into particular courses of action and instead have to find ways to influence through appeals to beliefs and values (see Table 1). Block (1993) argues that stewardship is not just about serving a particular group, but is related to the ways in which power is held and used. In other words, it is not just about telling people what to do but about finding a way to influence and to guide. Stewardship is, therefore, a way of empowering actors so that they take responsibility and accountability in delivering a set of outcomes (Rodin, 2010). **Under such an**

Table 2: Different stewardship contexts, stewarded resources and processes being stewarded

WHAT **COMPETENCIES AND SKILLS** DOES THE STEWARDSHIP WORKFORCE NEED?

As outlined above, different processes and levers are used in adopting a stewardship approach, so it may come as no surprise that an agreed upon set of competencies and skills that stewards require is not available. Many of the types of existing skills and competencies that are present in traditional organisations will be required in stewardship organisations, although the mix of these will be what is distinctive. As outlined above, given the levers of power available to stewardship organisations, a significant amount of interest has emerged around intrinsic motivators, particularly those associated with behavioural economics approaches (e.g. "nudge") (Thaler and Cass, 2008; Pollitt and Shaorshadze, 2011; Lunn, 2014). Within the stewardship literature, however, we find a distinct lack of evidence concerning what competencies and skills are necessary or useful in moving towards a stewardship approach. This lack of evidence is in need of urgent attention from researchers.

A number of debates are taking place in terms of what competencies and skills stewardship organisations need (see Dickinson and Sullivan, 2014 for a more detailed discussion). One of the more prominent

DEVELOPING A TYPOLOGY OF STEWARDSHIP APPROACHES

It is now clear that stewardship is applied across a number of different domains. As a consequence, a range of theories has been used to help make sense of the concept. Yet these theories often derive from quite different disciplines of study. For example, agency theory (Davis et al., 1997) is principally informed by economics and focuses on the use of resources, while stewardship psychology (Hernandez, 2012) focuses on the inner workings of those within systems of stewardship. Similarly, Ostrom (1990) developed critical insights into governing common-pool resources (finite public resources that are accessible by many) to avoid a 'tragedy of the commons' (Hardin 1968). To do this, she defined common-pool resources as complex adaptive systems (i.e. systems that have many interdependent moving parts and whose behaviour is unpredictable) – seeking to identify methods to manage resources. Despite the fact that stewardship has been used in an array of different contexts – or possibly because of this - a common theory that brings together these various contributions cannot be found. In fact, Hernandez (2012) goes so far to describe as “conspicuously absent” the theoretical development of the stewardship construct.

In this section we do not seek to offer a new theory of stewardship to add to an already congested terrain. Instead, we have built on the purposes, beneficiaries and levers of stewardship set out above to develop a typology of stewardship approaches, comprising four composites, each viewing the role and means of stewardship in different ways. As mentioned above, stewardship in the public service context is most often done by collectives – whether that be organisations, parts of government or across levels of government. Thus, these types are not intended to be understood as individuals, although they could be individuals within some domains (e.g. environmental stewardship, see Appendix, Table A2), but rather are collections of individuals who share beliefs about the purposes and activities of stewardship approaches. As we will go on to describe below in further detail, it is possible that a number of these different types might be present within one particular stewardship setting. We now move on to set out each type in more detail before considering the similarities and differences between them.

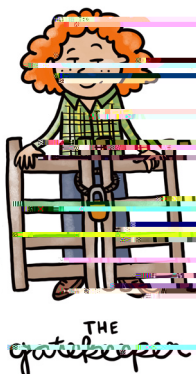
The Guide approach to stewardship

Remains responsible for the resource on behalf of the beneficiary

The dominant characteristic of the Guide stewardship approach is the occupation of a position of responsibility in relation to constrained resources that inevitably means making decisions of compromise.

The Gatekeeper approach to stewardship

Grants access to privately held or controlled resource



The dominant characteristic of the Gatekeeper approach is that the steward will not typically be involved in policy-making processes, but will have direct control over a resource. Engagement with these actors is necessary to meet policy objectives. Those operating within a Gatekeeper approach include landholders engaged in environmental conservation agendas, but could also include a private company that controls a publically important resource (such as a social media company) or a hospital with good community relationships. Governments would seek to work with these kinds of stewards to gain access to these resources, but would often not seek to hold the resource directly. A Gatekeeper approach often operates on local scales and observes success over shorter timescales

The Giver approach to stewardship

Makes a sacrifice for the 'greater good' that increases the value or abundance of a resource



The dominant characteristic of the Giver approach is that action is motivated by a desire to make a contribution by means other than financial or direct reward. In contrast to the Gatekeeper approach, 'the Giver' actively seeks to sacrifice individual benefit for that of the collective. Through such a sacrifice, they can effectively extend the resource base, for example, by augmenting payments made (e.g. a health worker that delivers a higher quality service beyond the value of their wages) or by making land or labour available at no cost. As with Gatekeepers, the Giver approach typically operates on a local scale, although the giving may be towards a globally significant goal. Such a perspective is likely to favour short-term goals, where efforts can be seen to make a positive contribution but can also lead to longer term collective goals. It is possible that the Giver and Gatekeeper approaches are adopted concurrently.

The Maximiser approach to stewardship

Distributes resources for maximum efficiency, utility and benefit of the collective



The dominant characteristic of the Maximiser approach is the goal of creating 'collective benefits' outside of any concept of ethics, volunteerism or sacrifice. According to such a view, stewardship is a means of avoiding the pitfalls of narrow-minded self-interest to improve the overall outcome to all beneficiaries. This approach might involve processes to help improve the efficiency of allocating resources within a system, attempting to reduce duplication or overlap between public and private resources to achieve greater 'bang for buck'. For example, this type of approach might be used to achieve conservation biodiversity and primary production outcomes at the same time, through improved soil condition. It could also be used to generate multiple community health benefits by designing health education programs that simultaneously appeal to different sectors. Such a perspective also seeks to identify co-benefits by strategic allocation of resources. In doing so, a Maximiser perspective is not wedded to a particular temporal or spatial scale, but works according to context.

Articulating different types of approaches to stewardship in this way can be helpful in the sense that it sets out different ways of thinking about stewardship and the functions it can fulfil. In reality, these types do not exist as mutually exclusive models, but will have a degree of overlap. Some stewardship functions have aspects of all four types, although they might sit within different parts of an organisation or context. When challenges are encountered in enacting stewardship, it might be because different understandings of what stewardship is and what it should achieve come into contact with one another. As the descriptions of these types also demonstrate, ‘stewards’ are likely to draw on different types of levers according to their aims and power base. Where stewards attempt to draw on levers that do not fit their particular type they could experience a sense of jarring, to the extent that these actions do not necessarily fit with the overall aims and aspirations of a particular approach. For example, if a Giver approach to stewardship attempts to draw on legal or coercive forms of levers, they will likely misfire. This outcome in turn is likely to undermine overall stewarding efforts, making it more difficult to achieve goals. Some of the challenge in achieving complex aims may reside in the fact that many different perspectives of stewardship sit alongside each other and operate over different spatial and temporal scales. Table 3 compares the different types to one another in terms of their major characteristics.

We suggest that this typology can be a helpful tool in identifying the purposes, beneficiaries and levers of stewardship when developing such an approach. They can be a helpful resource to use with stakeholders to discuss the aims and objectives of any stewardship approach and help to identify where potential challenges might arise in terms of different stewardship initiatives encountering one another during implementation processes (e.g. Moon and Adams, 2016).

Table 3: Summary of the strengths and weakness of stewardship approaches as well as the dominant object of stewarding and dominant levers

	The Guide	The Gatekeeper	The Giver	The Maximiser
Strengths	Overarching, powerful	Controls the resource	Strongly motivated by social levers	Fiscally responsible
Weaknesses	Politically sensitive, changeable, high level	Competing priorities	No direct resource access	Motivated to externalise costs
Dominant object of stewarding	Outcome (change) Process	Output (action)	Output (action)	Outcome (change)
Dominant levers*	Administrative	Social	Social	Economic

* Refer back to Table 1

WHERE NEXT FOR STEWARDSHIP?

It is evident from our review that both an extensive literature on stewardship and a wide appetite for it exists within the public sector. At present, however, clarity is lacking in both these areas. We have developed this

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APPENDIX

Methods

The stewardship literature can be found across disciplines and within both the academic and the grey literatures. As such, we used a scoping review to underpin this paper, the general aim of which is to “map rapidly the key concepts underpinning a research area and the main sources and types of evidence available”; scoping reviews are useful methods “especially where an area is complex or has not been reviewed comprehensively before” (Mays et al., 2001, p. 194, italics in original). More specifically, our aim was to summarise and disseminate research findings (Arksey and O’Malley, 2005). This kind of scoping study aims to “describe in more detail the findings and range of research in particular areas

Stewardship type	Definition/application	Dominant discipline	Source
HEALTH/ MEDICAL			
Health care	"A function of a government responsible for the welfare of the population and concerned about the trust and legitimacy with which its activities are viewed by the citizenry."	Public administration	World Health Organisation, 2002, Chapter 7
	The limited natural resources used daily to run the health care delivery system must be managed in a manner that is environmentally, economically and socially responsible for those in need of health care services today (and for the generations ... that follow).	Public administration	Block, 2016, page 20
Medical - death	"Preventing the overtreatment and overtesting of modern medicine's approach to the dying...addressed openly through collaborative work, institutional policies on limitation of treatment, and support building among physicians and other caregivers."	Public administration	McCue , 1995, page 1039
Antimicrobial	A systematic approach to optimising the use of antimicrobials ... to reduce inappropriate antimicrobial use, improve patient outcomes and reduce adverse consequences of antimicrobial use (including antimicrobial resistance, toxicity and unnecessary costs).	Public administration	Duguid and Cruickshank, 2010, page xiii
	Optimal selection, dose and duration of an antibiotic, resulting in the cure of an infection with minimal toxicity to the patient and minimal impact on selective pressure.	Public administration	Paskovaty et al., 2005. p. 2
MARKETS			
Market	Oversight actions of government that fully support the functioning of public service markets. This includes active support for innovation and diffusion of best practice, protecting against 'thin' markets and market failure in order to ensure equity of choice and control.	Public administration	Carey et al., 2017 p. 3
Market place	All the things that government has to do to make sure that services are provided properly by private companies and charities. Markets also sometimes include government (i.e. state or local government actors)	Public administration	Gash, 2015
Theory of management	"Situations in which managers are not motivated by individual goals, but rather are stewards whose motives are aligned with the objectives of their principals... Given a choice between		

Corporate governance	Making sure that companies' operational processes and policies are robust and responsible.... [and to] take more responsibility for the way in which goods are produced, services are provided and resources are used.	Organisational development	Standard Life Investments, 2017.
	Promoting the long term success of companies in such a way that the ultimate providers of capital also prosper. Effective stewardship benefits companies, investors and the economy as a whole.	Organisational development	UK Financial Reporting Council, 2012, p. 1

DATA AND SYSTEMS

Systems	The nature and outcomes of a policy are often adapted by many different actors working together in a system; system stewardship involves policy makers overseeing the ways in which the policy is being adapted, and attempting to steer the system towards certain outcomes, if appropriate.	Organisational development	Hallsworth, 2011, p. 8
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Information/ Data

Acknowledgements:

(pg 16-17) Illustrations By:

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