

# in-touch

## Newsletter



## Transforming Government in a VUCA World: Embracing innovation and collaboration

*Mark Hollingworth, PAI Workshop Director for "Innovating in the Public Sector"*

In today's rapidly changing world, the acronym VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous) has become a common term in discussions about the challenges we face. But how have governments adapted to this new reality compared with the times when things were more stable, certain, simple and clear (SCSC)? Regrettably, the answer is quite straightforward: governments have changed very little. In general, they continue to operate with



*Participants in PAI's innovation workshop in September*

the same structures, culture, processes and management styles as they did fifty years ago. While there are occasional pockets of innovation within specific ministries or departments, these seldom lead to lasting changes in programmes, services or work methodologies. Governments often lag behind the corporate, NGO and para-government sectors in terms of innovation, and there seems to be a lack of real effort to catch up.

To thrive in the VUCA world, governments must encourage politicians and public servants to embrace change, take risks, challenge the status quo and shift away from the top-down approach that assumes "we have all the answers." Instead, a collaborative, multi-stakeholder approach to problem-solving and a design-thinking mindset should take precedence. Long-term plans and projects should be built on the assumption that the world can change abruptly. What was once considered a "sure thing" may now be just one of many possibilities. Nobody can accurately predict what lies ahead. Yet, as politicians and public servants, it is our duty to prepare our nations for success and sustainability in this uncertain future.

How can we expect career public servants, who have faithfully adhered to established rules throughout their careers, to step forward suddenly and challenge those rules? Nevertheless, this is one of the big challenges confronting governments today. What concrete steps can governments take to address this challenge?

1. **Revise protocols and policies:** Governments need to update and adapt protocols, procedures and policies that were designed for the SCSC era. These should align better with a VUCA world.
2. **Embrace design and systems thinking:** Solutions should be developed with design- and systems-thinking viewpoints in mind. This means a focus on holistic, innovative approaches to problem-solving.
3. **Promote multi-stakeholder collaboration:** Governments should become hosts and facilitators of multi-stakeholder decision-making and policy-making processes.
4. **Enhance transparency:** Governments should increase transparency in their decision-making processes and work diligently to fight corruption.
5. **Adapt to VUCA:** Accept the volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous nature of the world and adjust strategies and actions accordingly.

Only by making these changes can governments establish an effective pipeline and portfolio of ongoing initiatives that encompass all four types of innovation recommended by the OECD:

- **Mission-oriented innovation:** Tackling society's most significant challenges, such as eliminating diseases, ensuring access to clean water or creating resilient infrastructure.
- **Anticipatory innovation:** Scenario planning and considering long-term implications, especially in view of factors such as climate change or shifting economic and political global dynamics.
- **Adaptive innovation:** Evaluating the impact of emerging technologies and adapting social programmes to promote equality.
- **Enhancement innovation:** Improving processes, such as tax collection or reducing power outages, to enhance public services.

On an individual level, how can you contribute to this transformation? What will it take for you to shift from merely following the rules to challenging them, from being risk-averse to embracing change, and from assuming you have all the answers to seeking the right questions? It means joining and actively participating in work and meetings differently. It means changing how you think, how you speak and how you behave. Every politician and public servant must acknowledge that VUCA is not just an acronym but a stark reality. We all need to become innovators, starting with changing ourselves before we embark on changing the world.

At PAI, we are here to support all government staff who aspire to make this transformation. Together, we can navigate the challenges of the VUCA world and build a more resilient and innovative future.

## New consultancy projects won

*Claire Cameron and Slava Gromlyuk, PAI Directors*

The last few months have been lively for our consultancy work and we're working on four new assignments.

In Albania, in a consortium led by Ecorys, we are implementing an EC-funded Good Governance project that is expected to contribute to a more capable and responsive public sector, oriented towards citizens' and business needs, as well as to advance and respond to the requirements of EU integration processes. Our services will include capacity building of Government Ministries, Agencies and Departments in policy making and implementation, including integrated and efficient planning, budgeting and coordination of policies; public internal financial control policy; support to improve EU-related governance and delivery of public services by central agencies and municipalities; support to improve participatory governance and civic dialogue, including public consultation and support to improve transparency and accountability for reform implementation.



In Ethiopia we are providing technical support to the Federal Civil Service Commission in establishing the Civil Servants' Competency Assessment and Certification Service, which is expected to support the implementation a competency-based HR management system across all civil service institutions. This initiative is intended to develop competent, effective and efficient civil servants and familiarise them with the knowledge, skills and behaviours to serve the public interest impartially, ethically and professionally. The project is funded by UNDP.



*Barbados*

We're very pleased to be working with the Integrity Commission in Jamaica to support them in developing a National Anti-Corruption Strategy. Our team of two consultants, one from Canada and the other from Jamaica, will be conducting research into the integrity environment in Jamaica, exploring strategies in other comparable countries, assisting the Integrity Commission in carrying out consultation exercises with a wide range of stakeholders, including of course with Jamaican citizens. They will then draft the Strategy, together with an implementation plan. The assignment is funded by the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund, UK Government.

We have begun a second project in Barbados. Our team of international and Barbadian consultants are conducting Functional Reviews of six Government Ministries - Health and Wellness;

Industry, Innovation, Science and Technology; Transport, Works and Water Resources; Education, Technological and Vocational Training; Home Affairs and the Office of the Attorney-General. The project is part of the Government of Barbados Public Sector Modernisation Programme and is funded by the Inter-American Development Bank.

And, last but not least, we have recently signed a new two-year Framework Agreement with the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office for projects under the Lot 1 of the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF). Projects will focus on the following themes - preventing, managing and reducing violence; strengthening and protecting inclusive politics and civic accountability mechanisms; stabilisation and state resilience; human security provision and security actor reform; access to formal, traditional and transitional justice; women, peace and security; climate change, biodiversity loss and climate security; serious organised crime, environmental crime, illicit finance and corruption; media development and outreach. If you have relevant experience and are interested in opportunities arising from the CSSF, please contact Claire Cameron at [claire.cameron@public-admin.co.uk](mailto:claire.cameron@public-admin.co.uk)

## Global population trends – essential reading, but not for the faint-hearted!

*Professor Gavin Drewry, PAI Workshop Director*

From what little I can remember of it, 15 November 2022 looked in most respects pretty much like any other day. But, according to a recent UN Report, it turns out to have been something of a landmark for the human race, this being the date on which the global population is reckoned to have reached a total of eight billion. It was eleven years previously that we crossed the seven billion threshold; the nine billion mark will apparently be reached (barring a global catastrophe) in 2037.

And this is by no means the only recent demographic landmark. There has, for instance, been an interesting change at the very top of the global population league table. China has long been the most populous country in the world, with India running a close second; together, these two countries, both with populations of about 1.4 billion, account for more a third of the world's population. But at some point in the middle of 2023 India edged into the gold medal position – and the gap is widening.

The main source of such demographic wisdom is the Population Division of the UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs. Since 1950, it has been compiling and analysing global population records and publishing its findings in a series of detailed reports, the 27th volume of which, *World Population Prospects 2022*, appeared in print and online in November 2022. There is plenty of appetising material here for expert demographers, but a lot of the detailed technical analysis is probably not for the faint-hearted, particularly for those of us whose minds may sometimes tend to go blank when confronted with vast arrays of complex statistics! Happily, the 2022 Report boils down a mass of technically complex material to a digestible fifty or so pages – from which is derived a user-friendly, one-page checklist of 'Ten Key Messages'. They are:



- **The world's population continues to grow, but the pace of growth is slowing down.** In 2020, the rate of growth of the global population fell below 1 per cent per annum for the first time since 1950.
- **Policies aimed at reducing fertility would have little immediate impact on the pace of global growth.** However, the Report suggests that sustaining such policies might make a significant impact in the second half of this century.
- **Rapid population growth is both a cause and a consequence of slow progress in development.** The Report flags the continuing importance in this context of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, particularly those relating to health, education and gender.
- **While life expectancy continues to increase globally, huge disparities remain.** The Report notes, among other things, that in 2021 life expectancy for the least developed countries lagged seven years behind the global average.
- **A rising share of the population of working age can help boost economic growth per capita.** The Report says that 'in most countries of sub-Saharan Africa, as well as in parts of Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean, the share of population at working ages [25-64 years] has been increasing thanks to recent reductions in fertility'. This, it suggests, offers an opportunity for enhanced economic growth that should be accelerated by increased investment in human capital.

- **The population of older persons is increasing both in numbers and as a share of the total.** The share of global population at ages 65 and above is projected to rise from 10 per cent in 2022 to 16 per cent in 2050. This will inevitably require increased investment in health, social care and pensions.
- **More and more countries have begun to experience population decline.** ‘The populations of 61 countries or areas are projected to decrease by 1 per cent or more between 2022 and 2050, owing to sustained low levels of fertility and, in some cases, elevated rates of emigration.’
- **International migration is having important impacts on population trends for some countries.** Over the coming decades, inward migration will be the sole driver of population growth in high-income countries; but low- and middle-income countries will continue to experience an excess of births over deaths. All countries need to prioritise the development of orderly and responsible migration policies.
- **The COVID-19 pandemic has affected all three components of population change.** Those components being life expectancy, fertility levels and international migration.
- **Population data provide critical information for use in development planning.** The collection of data been disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic and countries need to prioritise the ongoing conduct of population censuses.

Data about population distributions and trends are hugely important to governments everywhere, rich and poor. They can have a major impact upon many key areas of public policy. But of course, the nature and extent of such impact is very uneven from one country to another, and some of the lessons flagged up in the UN’s Report are uncomfortable ones and raise controversial practical issues of achievability and affordability. Moreover, given wide variance in the frequency, methodology and reliability of censuses in different countries, ‘hard’ data may not always be as hard as some analysts might claim (that 15 November ‘landmark’, mentioned above, can only be a guesstimate). Nevertheless, such caveats notwithstanding, there can be little doubt that this UN Report is essential, if difficult and sobering, reading for us all in this uncertain and rapidly changing world.

## A flavour of our workshops this year

*Denise Smart, PAI Relationship Manager*

During this year, we have been busy with both our professional development workshops and tailor-made programmes. Many of the tailor-made programmes are based on our scheduled workshops. They were held in London, in our clients’ home countries, virtually and through a blend of both face-to-face and virtual learning.

In January, we welcomed back Board Members from the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency for a retreat focussing on governance and effective leadership.

In the northern part of Cyprus, we ran seminars on Case Management of Criminal Cases for judges and lawyers. We welcomed a high-level group of change managers from the Government of Bangladesh for a study programme on change management in the public sector and how governments can improve their relationships and engagement with civil society. We also ran a very successful Legislative Drafting workshop for a National Assembly. This was a mixture of face-to-face training held in Tanzania, followed by a week of online learning. Showcasing PAI’s versatility and working with our partners, HRM Consultants International, we designed a programme on Optimisation of the Trade Monitoring System for a Central Bank. And, finally, we delivered a workshop on Oil and Gas Security for the oil and gas sector in Nigeria. Participants attended this workshop in person in London with others joining remotely.



Our schedule of workshops for 2024 is available on our website at <https://www.public-admin.co.uk/workshops/>. For enquiries about tailor-made programmes, please contact [denise.smart@public-admin.co.uk](mailto:denise.smart@public-admin.co.uk)