

H4 Consulting Brief

Evolving Governance

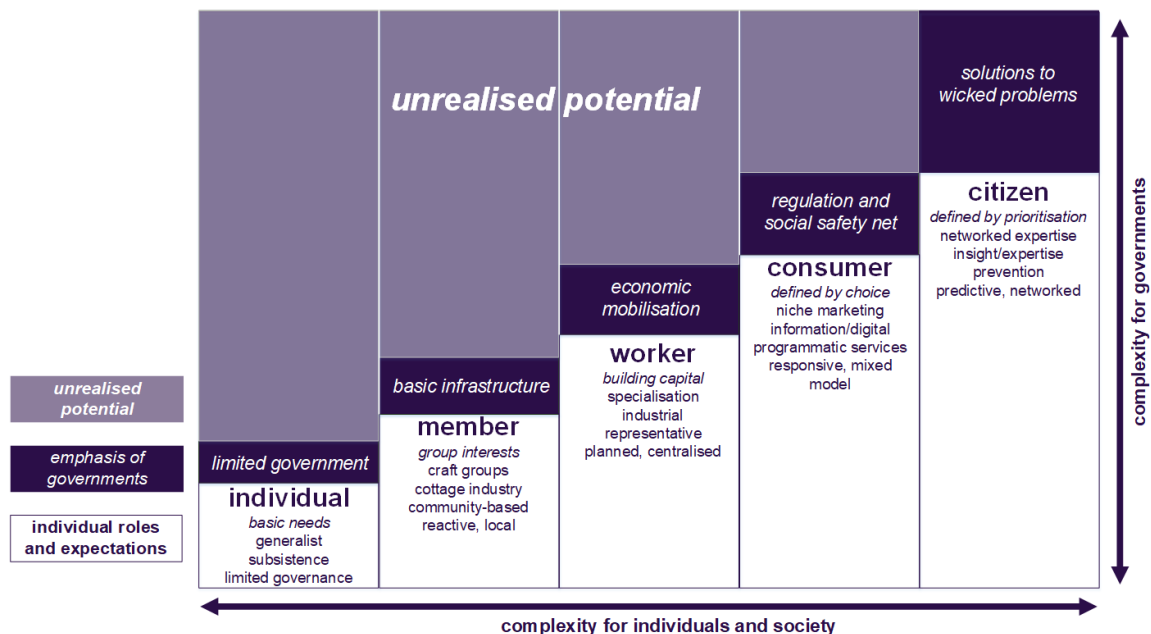
Governance models develop slowly over time, partly in response to increasingly sophisticated social and economic systems. In times of rapid change, governance models can be slow to adjust, lagging behind the needs of societies and unable to solve the problems that governments are called upon to solve. Australia's Westminster system is stable, entrenched, and historically successful – but is it fit to solve current or future challenges?

Modern systems of government did not emerge fully formed. They developed through a mix of deliberate and unintentional adjustments in response to social and economic changes. As societies have grown bigger and more complex, so have systems of governance and collective decision making.

Governance models, by nature, often lag behind the cultural, social, and economic systems that they seek to uphold. While we want systems of governance to be stable and predictable, these systems must also evolve in response to changing circumstances and societal priorities to remain effective.

Our systems of government grew, in part, out of legal models in the 18th and 19th centuries that prioritised rational, judicial, and adversarial decision making. Government services are divided into departments and programs that compete for resources allocated based on which can best articulate and advocate for their importance.

This model supported strong public institutions that deliver standardised and consistent public services. It does not, however, lend itself to collaboratively solving wicked problems that require imaginative whole-of-government, or whole-of-society, solutions.



Twentieth-century governance relied on decisions by elected officials who had representative rather than expert authority. These decisions were implemented by service delivery experts who designed and delivered large-scale, standardised public services.

In the 21st century, expertise is distributed and contested, undermining supply-side dominance. Collaborative and collective decisions are more often made by diverse experts on behalf of, in consultation with, and in the interests of, the public, or publics.

This trend is a governance manifestation of a shift from a consumer society to a citizen society, where insight is valued over information and services are expected to predict, rather than react to, demand.

This new context seems to require a shift away from the advocacy-based models that define our electoral, parliamentary, and bureaucratic systems. The role of elected representatives in citizen-era governance may increasingly be to articulate and prioritise high-level goals, rather than to detail specific policy interventions. Plans to achieve policy priorities can be developed by diverse experts with intersecting interests, who collaborate and negotiate effective solutions to the wicked problems of modern societies, with immediate feedback from a hyperconnected public, or publics.

The future of governance in citizen-oriented societies is still emerging, but advocacy-based models that served us well in the past are becoming both less relevant and, increasingly, counterproductive.

To find out more about how you can use this approach in your organisation, contact us: info@h4consulting.com.au
Find additional resources at www.h4consulting.com.au/resources