Public Services:

Inter-Agency Risk

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About this Report

The 'Public Services: Inter-Agency Risk' is a project for the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority (VMIA) to:

- Identify the extent of gaps within the management of interagency and/or statewide risks.

- Consider how risk management processes need to be developed, redeveloped, enhanced and/or maintained as a result of these gaps; and

- Assist VMIA in delivering appropriate risk management services in response to these gaps at both the client and Whole-of-Victorian-Government levels.

The outcomes capture the following:

- *A review of interagency frameworks for risk management in the government/public sector.* This report comprises an environmental scan and literature review of international, national and some statewide perspectives of interagency risks and risk management.

- *Better practice for interagency risk frameworks.* The report identifies examples, evidence, and key elements of better practice in developing a robust interagency risk management framework.

- *Understanding of the need for further research.* Further proposed research scoping may be required to provide more in-depth information and analysis about how inter-agency risks are currently being managed, including gaps and opportunities. Such research would be based on surveys and/or interviews of public sector employees.

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List of Abbreviations

AGC	Auditor General of Canada
ANAO	Australian National Audit Office
APS	Australian Public Service
CCMD	Canadian Centre for Management Development
CSOW	Centre for Sustainable Organisations and Work
DHS	Department of Human Services
FRAME	Framework for Risk Assessment, Management and Evaluation
KM	Knowledge Management
MAC	Management Advisory Committee
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RFQR	Risk Framework Quality Reviews
RMA	Risk Management Authority Scotland
RMIA	Risk Management Institute of Australia
VMIA	Victorian Managed Insurance Agency
VSSA	Victorian State Services Authority
WADCP	Western Australian Department of Child Protection
WG	Whole-of-Government
WoVG	Whole-of-Victorian-Government

Executive Summary

1. The Victorian Managed Insurance Authority (VMIA) has been providing risk management services to the Victorian Public Sector through the Risk Framework Quality Reviews (RFQR). One focus is on inter-agency/department risk.

2. This report, prepared by the Centre for Sustainable Organisations and Work (CSOW) team, aims to provide a review of the RFQR approach in relation to interagency risk, based on a critical analysis of current research. Considerations for current practices are identified and advice is presented. This report is a preliminary statement on the subject.

3. The RFQR is underpinned by a knowledge management (KM) framework. A brief introduction to the concepts of KM, and the importance of effective KM strategies for the information-rich domain of risk management are discussed.

4. The analysis addresses a 'wicked' problem: how to achieve the connected relationships that allow events and issues to be addressed in the round. While it is beyond the remit of this report (or for that matter the VMIA's responsibilities) to suggest frameworks and approaches for achieving effective connected inter-agency relationships, it is through such frameworks and an understanding of the context and nature of work that effective risk management protocols can be developed.

5. A core focus of these subjects is the process known as joined up government, a process of increased integration, cooperation and collaboration between public sector organisations and between tiers of government. The argument is that such arrangements are important for dealing with 'wicked' problems, which do not sit easily within the remit of just one organisation, department or agency.

6. In its existing form the RFQR in relation to inter-agency concerns addresses the question of risk. In this context risk takes a number of forms: interagency, whole of government or state-wide. The former impacts on the operations of one or more agencies and for the latter the impact may be on the society at large. Much attention has been given to distinguishing between different types of risk, a dimension of critical

importance for the VMIA. In this review, three points should be noted: first, information sharing is crucial for effectiveness; tensions may arise because different organisations have different cultures, functions and practices; and a 'common' language in relation to risk enables accountability and responsibility in practice.

7. Much can be learnt from practices in specific departments as well as from other public services. Two sets of cases are considered, the first in relation to the Victorian government and the other in relation to the Scottish public service. The Victorian example focuses on 'Family Violence' and the adopted common risk assessment framework, which rests on a common language of risk and related processes to deal with the subject. In the case of Scotland, it is important to note that this is a country, which following devolved power in the late 1990s, organised government service delivery by national outcome areas, rather than departments. A case study illustrates the distinctiveness of the Scottish example in relation to coordination and communication.

8. For the interagency risk assessment in relation to the VMIA, consideration should be given to organizational culture; accountability; and the oversight procedures that are invoked in relation to inter-agency practice. On the basis of this review the following recommendations are made:

   a. **The VMIA should review its approach and resource, with a view to strengthening current practice.**

   b. **The VMIA should consider a set of questions in addition to those already asked in the RFQR in relation to inter-agency work.**

   c. **The VMIA should consider reformulating the questions for use by the risk consultants as part of a revised RFQR.**

   d. **The VMIA should review the RFQR process so as to expand its coverage and to locate it within an appropriate institutional context.**

   e. **The VMIA should commission an evaluative research project of the Victorian Government experience with Family Violence.**

f.   **The VMIA should commission research on the comparative experience of inter-agency partnerships and collaboration.**

g.   **The VMIA should consider the development of a toolkit approach to risk management in relation to inter-department processes.**

Chapter One: Background

1.1 The Project

Since 2006-07, the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority (VMIA) has been providing risk management services to the Victorian Public Sector through the Risk Framework Quality Reviews (RFQR). The RFQR provides a platform for clients to assess their risk maturity through seven risk management elements, including inter/intra agency risk. The results of the RFQR assessments into this element identified a general lack of maturity in relation to inter-department risk. Further analysis is required to:

- Identify the extent of gaps within the management of interagency and/or state-wide risks;

- Consider how risk management processes need to be developed, redeveloped, enhanced and/or maintained as a result of these gaps; and

- Assist VMIA in delivering more effective risk management services as a response to these gaps at both individual agency and at the Whole-of-Victorian-Government (WoVG) levels.

The Victorian Government Risk Management Framework does not currently provide an adequate means for departments to manage interagency risks. Public policy in this space is neither fully understood nor effectively managed.

VMIA rightly believes that it has a role to play in enhancing the State's interagency risk management framework. The outcomes from this research will contribute towards delivering improved risk advice on interagency risk management and supporting WoVG risk planning.

1.2 This Report

In this report, we present a way of considering the RFQR approach. This methodology is driven by a Knowledge Management (KM) framework for understanding inter-department work. Following an introduction of RFQR, we outline the way such approaches raise questions about KM, which we argue is central to effective inter-agency collaboration. This is followed by a review of the elements that comprise the RFQR approach. In the report, we draw upon KM to explain how it underpins the current RFQR framework. Further, we present a brief literature review focused on risk in relation to joined up government and interagency collaboration. In chapter two we provide an account of joined up government, and in chapter three consider interagency risk. In chapter four, we present two case studies to illustrate some of the complexity of interagency risk management. Finally, in chapter five, we identify future directions, accompanied by a set of recommendations for consideration by VMIA.

1.3   Risk Framework Quality Reviews

The focus of the report is on risk management as it relates to inter-agency approaches to government. Central to the current VMIA approach is the RFQR. This framework is the instrument/tool used by risk consultants to assess the current state of play in departments. The following section outlines the composition of the framework. The RFQR framework in the area of inter-agency risk is presented in the following diagram:

Inter-Organisational Risk Management Statement, VMIA Risk Framework Quality Review

	Developing	Integrating	Effective	Advanced
Summary	The organisation is networking with other organisations and agencies through informal relationships	The organisation is coordinating with other organisations and agencies through some formal relationships with minimal sharing of risks, rewards and responsibilities	The organisation is cooperating with other organisations and agencies through formal relationships with some sharing of risks, rewards and responsibilities	The organisation is collaborating with other organisations and agencies through formal relationships to share risks, rewards and responsibilities to achieve a common purpose
Statement	*The organisation has a process in place to identify and manage inter-organisational, inter-agency and state-wide risks*			
Description	Identification and management of inter-organisational, inter-agency and state-wide risks risk is an informal and implicit process.	Some relationships have been developed to identify and manage inter-organisational, inter-agency and state-wide risks.	Relationships have been developed and are understood to identify and manage inter-organisational, inter-agency and state-wide risks that impact the organisation. Formal mechanisms exist to regularly consult with other organisations on the identification and management of risks and rewards. An approach to the evaluation and treatment of inter-organisational risk is documented in the risk management policy, plan and/or framework.	The organisation takes a lead role in co-ordinating with other organisations and agencies to evaluate and treat inter-organisational risks. Ongoing interaction between senior management of the respective organisations occurs to manage key risks. Mechanisms exist to escalate critical shared or inter-dependent risks at a Ministerial level for treatment. Formalised plans and agreements exist between organisations sharing or impacting material risks. The organisation can demonstrate its plans are realigned to address emerging inter-organisational risks. Independent specialists are engaged in the identification of inter-organisational risks (ie pandemic, climate change, terrorism etc).
Scoring	Some	Most	All	Some	Most	All	Some	Most	All	Some	Most	All

3

Presently, the RFQR contains seven elements, one of which is inter-agency risk. Here, there is one statement focused on how departments collaborate, and on risk cultures, whereas for the other elements many more statements are proposed. We suggest that this imbalance may be due to the relative infancy of joined-up government principles and practices. There is a lack of cohesive tools to facilitate effective inter-agency collaboration and accompanying research investigating best-practices in this complex context.

While the questions in the RFQR relate to different aspects of department organisation and activity (e.g. functional roles and priorities and values), the way these elements interact to mitigate risk is unclear. Further, the present framework does not make it clear how to assess multiple levels of inter-agency relationships. The Victorian Fire Services Commissioner, for example, is driving a Multi-Agency, Multi-Hazards approach to information and warning dissemination to the Victorian public. If presented with the current RFQR framework, agencies, such as the Victorian Country Fire Authority, might cooperate/collaborate with the Department of Sustainability and Environment at a range of points, both horizontally and vertically, when compared with the Victorian State Emergency Service. How the RFQR caters for more complex relations such as this is unclear.

The RFQR is currently used to classify risk. More could be made of the framework. It would, for instance, be a considerable advantage, and add value to the way departments organise and operate in relation to risk management, if the toolkit had the capacity to stimulate a KM process. In this respect, conscious strategies are developed to assess and address risk. Hence, the starting point in the analysis is a consideration of the way departments can, and do work together, to address the challenges that face them as service providers and enablers in society.

The question, a so-called 'wicked' problem, is how to achieve the connected relationships that allow events and issues to be addressed. Connected

relationships between agencies vary significantly. Several classifications have been proposed in order to conceptualise and gauge the strength of such relationships. Himmelman (2001) presents a continuum of relationships ranging from networking (information exchange for mutual benefit), to coordinating (altering activities for a common purpose), to cooperating (sharing of resources and significant turf), to collaborating (sharing risks, responsibilities, and rewards with considerable trust, time investment, and extensive sharing of turf).

Cross-boundary relationships involve different levels of engagement. Joined up activities imply linkages that sit towards the collaborative end of this spectrum.

> The extent to which goals, power, resources, risks, successes and accountabilities are shared across the continuum varies. Joined up government approaches require collaborative relationships as depicted at the further end of the continuum where common goals, recognised interdependencies, high levels of commitment, and shared responsibilities and rewards are established (Victorian State Services Authority 2007: 5).

This relationship continuum drawn from Himmelman (2001) is currently employed in the VMIA Risk Framework Quality Review (RFQR). It forms the basis for categories used to assess the degree to which agencies engage with interagency risks (See Table 1). These categories are expanded upon in the RFQR in order to capture further complexities of trust, time and turf (Himmelman 2001). With a move towards collaboration, higher levels of trust, time and access to turf are involved. O'Flynn (2009: 115) sets the direction for researchers as urging the need to find examples of actual collaboration; 'to see what is really going on and cast a critical eye over the rhetoric of collaboration'.

Table 1: RFQR Relationship Continuum drawn from Himmelman (2001)

The organisation is networking with other organisations and agencies through informal relationships	The organisation is coordinating with other organisations and agencies through some formal relationships with minimal sharing of risks, rewards and responsibilities	The organisation is cooperating with other organisations and agencies through formal relationships with some sharing of risks, rewards and responsibilities	The organisation is collaborating with other organisations and agencies through formal relationships to share risks, rewards and responsibilities to achieve a common purpose

Another detailed account of inter-organisational relationships is presented by Donahue (2004), who notes eight potential dimensions along which collaboration can be categorised. Although Donahue addresses instances of 'collaborative governance' (which focusses on collaboration with non-governmental actors such as the private sector and non-governmental organisations), this taxonomy can equally be applied to joined up initiatives. These dimensions include:

- Formality: from tacit understandings to formal contracts

- Duration: from *ad hoc* to permanent

- Focus: from a single shared challenge to a range of common concerns

- Institutional Diversity: the diversity of participants

- Valence: the number of participants and the links among them

- Stability versus Volatility: from divergent interests to common views of success

- Initiative: considers which organisations initiated the collaboration and how goals are determined, results assessed, and adjustments

prompted

- Problem-driven versus Opportunity-driven: designed to defend against a common threat or to pursue a common opportunity, and therefore whether seeking to maintain or improve upon the *status quo*.

1.4 Knowledge Management Framework

A knowledge management framework can support the development of effective risk management. KM includes a set of theories and practices that can assist departments and agencies to identify requirements to address risk in relation to inter-agency activity. KM is a 'conscious strategy of getting the right knowledge to the right people at the right time; it also helps people share and put information into action in ways that strive to improve organisational performance' (O'Dell & Grayson 1998: 6). KM is therefore important for government departments and agencies, where policies, operational procedures and service models change frequently in response to complex political, environmental and societal challenges, and where departments work together.

Among the many benefits of KM are:

- An improved focus on core organisational knowledge;

- Identification of gaps in organisational knowledge;

- Enhanced ability to manage key knowledge-based resources;

- Ability to obtain a higher return on human capital;

- Enabling personnel to learn more efficiently and effectively;

- Increased employee and client satisfaction;

- Cost savings;

- Improved organisational efficiencies;

- Improved organisational effectiveness.

KM has a central role in supporting effective risk management, as information and knowledge are important risk constructs (Smallman 1999). Indeed often the barriers to effective risk management relate to problems with the knowledge management environment. The perceived quality of risk knowledge sharing and communication among groups, for example, has been found to be positively associated with the perceived value of the enterprise risk management implementation (Edwards 2009). Importantly, KM encompasses a broader range of activities and concerns than merely collecting and updating information into repositories (Alavi and Leidner 2001). It recognises the diverse forms (such as tacit, explicit) and sources (people, process, technology) of knowledge-based resources within and across complex organisational and problem contexts (such as inter-agency risk management). An effective KM environment considers operational, technological and cultural issues (Bhatt 2001) and employs top-down and bottom-up approaches. Therefore, while the RFQR framework provides a potentially useful risk management tool, from a KM perspective such a tool cannot be divorced from the wider problem context, and needs to start with human-based processes (Walsham 2001).

It is beyond the remit of this report (or for that matter the VMIA's responsibilities) to suggest frameworks and approaches for achieving effective connected inter-agency relationships. However, it is through such frameworks and an understanding of the context and nature of work that effective risk management protocols can be developed. We therefore suggest that further work be undertaken to identify the current state of risk management within and between agencies. Joined up Government is explored next.

Chapter Two: Joined Up Government

The term 'joined up government' describes increased integration, cooperation and collaboration between public sector organisations and between tiers of government. This represents a shift from purely vertical structures, in which policy formulation and service delivery are concentrated within departments. While these vertical structures 'provide efficiency, clear lines of accountability and concentration of specialist knowledge… [they] are not well equipped to deal with many contemporary public policy issues which require cross portfolio action' (VSSA 2007: 3).

2.1 'Wicked' Problems and their Resolution

Many such issues possess characteristics of 'wicked problems' - those that are complex, unpredictable, open ended, or intractable (Head and Alford 2013). Such problems are difficult to define, and have no clear solutions. Moreover, wicked problems 'hardly ever sit conveniently within the responsibility of any one organisation' (Briggs 2007: 2). Instead, they straddle the boundaries of public sector organizations, administrative levels, and policy areas (Richards and Smith 2006). Such policy issues include, for example, climate change, land degradation, public health (e.g. obesity), poverty, family violence, and drug abuse (VSSA 2007: 1; Efficiency Unit 2009: ii; Halligan, Buick and O'Flynn 2012: 79; Briggs 2007: 1-2).

The debate on 'wicked problems' raises challenging questions. Head and Alford (2013: 2) argue that there are degrees of 'wickedness' and contend that 'while conclusive "solutions" are very rare, it is possible to frame partial, provisional courses of action against wicked problems'. Nonetheless, in an earlier piece

Roberts (2000) identifies three coping strategies available to public officials and managers in tackling wicked problems. These are: authoritative, competitive, and collaborative strategies.

Joined up initiatives represent forms of the collaborative approach. Through integrated policy and programmes, these initiatives seek to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of policy implementation and service delivery (Briggs 2005, as cited in Halligan et al. 2012: 76).

> As a result of the complex and inter-dependent nature of wicked problems, traditional hierarchical and bureaucratic systems are unable to cope with the informational demands of ambiguity, complexity and uncertainty. Since wicked problems permeate large systems, their solutions require the coordinated efforts of many agencies and departments (Jackson and Stainsby 2000). Accordingly, many governments have identified approaches that centre on more integrated, coordinated or collaborative approaches (Halligan et al. 2012: 79).

Increased recognition of the cross-cutting nature of some policy issues forms part of the impetus for more collaborative approaches[1]. This step is often coupled with changing expectations regarding service delivery. Citizens in developed countries have come to expect integrated services, 'one-stop-shops', and accessibility through popular technology. As observed by the Victorian Auditor-General's Office:

> Public sector organisations are likely to continue to work across boundaries in collaborative ways to develop policies and deliver services. Increasingly, demanding citizens, new technology, pressure on governments to do 'more with less', a greater recognition of the complexity of social problems and of the limits of attempting to solve them at a single

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[1] For a more extensive discussion of the drivers and justifications for collaborative working, see O'Flynn (2014).

department or agency level, are all encouraging public sector organisations to collaborate (Victorian Auditor-General 2007: 32).

While there is an increasing emphasis on collaboration the question is how should this be achieved?

2.2 Origins of Joined Up Government

The concept of joined up government was introduced in 1997 by the incoming U.K. Labour government. This was one of the pillars of the Party's 'modernising government' agenda, outlined in a 1999 White Paper. The term sought to encapsulate public sector reform aimed at 'joined up working between different parts of government', using:

> policies and programmes, local and national, [to] tackle the issues facing society like crime, drugs, housing and the environment in a joined up way (Cabinet Office 1999).

In practice this amounted to 'cross-departmental policy development and delivery units within the Cabinet Office, research into how the civil service could better manage cross-cutting issues, and the allocation of cross-cutting portfolios to ministers' (Efficiency Unit 2009: 3). Nonetheless, it should be noted that calls for greater inter-agency cooperation and collaboration had been made for several decades (Schemerhom 1975; Perri 6 1997; Pollitt 2003: 36). This 1999 White Paper, however, represented the first time that a government had explicitly adopted such a strategy for public sector reform.

Since this time, joined up government initiatives have been pursued in a number of developed countries, including Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the U.S., and several northern European nations. Different terminology has often been used to describe these national reforms. Examples include 'whole of government' in Australia (MAC 2004: 4), 'collaborative public management' in the U.S. (McGuire

2006; O'Leary et al. 2006), 'horizontal management' in Canada (Bakvis and Juillet 2004) and 'integrated government' in New Zealand (Fitzpatrick 2000; Shergold 2005; Christensen and Laegreid 2007).

One particularly high profile 'joined up' initiative by the Australian Federal Government tackled Indigenous disadvantage (O'Flynn et al. 2011). Indigenous disadvantage in Australia is a wicked problem that was viewed as primed for a joined up solution. This involved the dismantling of previous departmental structures (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission) and the creation of shared service delivery via Indigenous Coordination Centres (ICCs). Further, it comprised horizontal governance structures, involving Ministers and Departmental Secretaries, to develop and become accountable for policy development and implementation. O'Flynn and colleagues (2011) investigated the success of this test in operationalizing joined up government. They found that too much faith was placed in physical co-location and not enough attention was given to supportive architecture including authority relationships, incentive structures, building long-term trusting-behaviours, and both recognizing and rewarding cooperative behaviours. In essence, structures and incentives did not support the behaviours espoused. These authors also highlight the under-investment in training and skill development for staff to enable them to operate in this new environment. Again, this finding highlights the need for more research on effective KM structures that facilitate collaborative interagency work.

Like O'Flynn and colleagues (2011), Head and Alford (2013) also believe that wicked problems have important implications for leadership and structure. O'Flynn and colleagues (2011) comment on craftsmanship leadership style that encourages collaboration, trust, shared responsibility, inclusiveness, and high quality communication as enabling joined up approaches. More specifically, Head and Alford (2013) believe that there is less of a place for transformational leadership (top-down framing of a vision with others inspired to follow), and that adaptive and collaborative leadership styles are required in public agencies to tackle wicked problems. For them, collaborative leadership involves forms of

governance without the levers of control or monetary incentives normally available in hierarchy or managerial command. Adaptive modes require leading organisational members and/or stakeholders to undertake the collective work of grappling with the problem (Heifetz 1994, as cited in Head and Alford 2013). Both adaptive and collaborative leadership offer means of eliciting collaborative contributions without having formal authority.

Joined up government does have implications for structure with matrix (comprising horizontal and vertical elements) and flexible structures seemingly preferred. Interestingly, the devolved Scottish Government has structured all of its activities around six broad objectives (Scottish National Government 2012) and it is the Scottish context from which some of the most developed case examples on inter-agency risk are drawn (see the section titled *Interagency Risk Management – Case Studies*). The Dutch civil service has also two well-funded program ministries responsible for broad outcomes (for example, integration of immigrants) that draw on other ministries to achieve their outcomes (Karre, van Twist, Alford and van der Stein 2012).

Further important structural elements and processes include flexible budgeting and financial systems, performance measurement, and human resource management (Head and Alford 2013; O'Flynn *et al.* 2011). These joined up working arrangements must often be done whilst undertaking 'business as usual' operations, and require broad managerial capabilities that can take time to develop.

Chapter Three: Interagency Risk

The joined up initiatives described above require new approaches to risk management.

Definitions:

> **Whole-of-government or statewide** risks are those risks that will affect the Victorian Community at large. They may be beyond the boundary of one agency to respond to and require a collective, central agency or whole of government response.

> **Interagency** risks are those risks affecting the operations of one or more departments or agencies and which may impact the service delivery of other departments or agencies.

> Risks that impact more than one agency and cannot be managed by one agency or at interagency level such as the impact of an ageing population or climate change may require central government coordination of policy initiatives and implementation strategies (VMIA 2010: 14-15).

In 2005, the then-Australian Auditor-General Pat Barrett gave the opening address to the Risk Management Institution of Australasia (RMIA) ACT Chapter Conference (Barrett 2005). Barrett observes that joined up government initiatives:

> place additional demands on the capacity of agencies to maintain an appropriate level of corporate governance, including managing 'shared' risks (Barrett 2005).

He notes that:

> 'Joined-up' government inevitably involves at least dual accountability of

participants both for their individual organisations and for the 'joined-up' arrangements. Robust governance and risk management arrangements are required to facilitate the management and successful acquittal of those accountability obligations. In particular, in situations where a number of agencies contribute to an outcome, sufficient attention must be paid to identifying and managing the risks in delivering these whole of government programs (Barrett 2005).

In 2007, the Victorian Auditor-General's Office published the results of an audit of the risk management practices of departments and selected agencies in the public sector. The report discusses interagency risk related to joined-up government, noting that:

joined-up government initiatives pose a new kind of inter-agency risk and warrant a risk management approach (Victorian Auditor-General 2007: 31).

A key finding with regard to interagency risks was that:

Organisations have identified some of their inter-agency risks associated with joined-up government, but none of the risk management policy and frameworks supplied by departments and agencies provided guidance on dealing with joined up government risks (Victorian Auditor-General 2007: 31).

The audit:

examined whether departments and agencies identified, treated and reported inter-agency risks and inter-departmental risks associated with managing shared policy objectives(Victorian Auditor-General 2007: 33) .

It found that:

some departments have conducted risk assessments for joined-up government initiatives, such as sharing joint building facilities, one-stop

shops and shared information and communication technology facilities. One department provided some guidance to staff on how to identify possible risks when dealing with other departments or agencies. However, none of the risk management policy and frameworks supplied by departments and agencies provided guidance on dealing with joined-up government risks (Victorian Auditor-General 2007: 32-33).

Reporting risk and a preoccupation with detecting errors is an important consideration. It is possible that some lessons may be learned from safety critical industries such as aviation and medicine. These industries have had to create organisational cultures that encourage incident reporting and a preoccupation with failures in order to mitigate risk.

With regard to whole of government or statewide risks, the audit found that:

> while organisations have identified some of their key risks, some organisations did not have mechanisms to identify and manage statewide risks with an impact beyond their organisation. One explanation for this is the absence of statewide risk management guidelines which are yet to be developed.

> The current audit also found that departments had not developed clear policies or portfolio-wide structures or communication strategies to ensure that all portfolio agencies were aware of all statewide risks and adequately deal with those risks. This is partly because portfolio agencies operate as independent bodies that are solely accountable to their minister for their performance and compliance requirements. The absence of a clear policy and guidelines for public sector organisations on how to identify and manage statewide risks is also contributing to this situation (Victorian Auditor-General 2007: 38).

The report notes the development by the Department of Treasury and Finance of a Victorian Government Risk Management Framework as part of a Statewide

Risk Management Project, which sought to 'address identified gaps and strengthen risk management processes across the public sector' (Victorian Auditor-General 2007: 39; see also Victorian Department of Treasury and Finance 2011: 14-15).

The Auditor General report, however, observes that this framework would be improved by more detailed guidelines that fully address the findings of the 2003 and 2007 audits. In order to achieve this objective, guidelines within the framework would need to:

• provide guidance for identifying, assessing and managing the 3 levels of statewide risks (agency-level, inter-agency and whole-of-government risks)

• clarify responsibilities for escalating statewide risks

• ensure that reporting of statewide risks is explicit and is in line with the risk management standard (AS/NZS 4360:2004)

• explain how to make portfolio-wide arrangements to deal with statewide risks

• explain how to identify, manage and report on risks associated with joined-up government and whole-of-government policy outcomes.

International examples help to illustrate important considerations in developing interagency risk management. In order to guide approaches to social work in Scotland, Barry (2007) reviewed approaches to risk management and assessment in community care, criminal justice, and child protection ('documentation primarily in the UK, North America, Australia and New Zealand'). Distinctions are drawn between the importance of inter-agency sharing of information and inter-agency effectiveness. This author also considers some of the formal outcomes associated with disagreement (Barry 2007: 14). Additional factors are introduced by Francis, McGhee and Mordaunt (2006) who note that

there are both structural and cultural barriers to improving joint working, including:

> different geographical boundaries; different organisational arrangements; and different priorities, cultures and languages (2006: 9).

Organisational approaches and practices, often designated in terms of 'culture', are an important consideration in relation to inter-agency collaboration. In one study of the tensions that can arise between organisations in relation to purpose, capacity and approach, Bell (1999) illustrates this point in the case of child protection, with possible friction between the fields of policing and social work (Barry 2007: 30).

The evidence is overwhelming that in relation to inter-agency collaboration there must be a common language of risk. Moreover, attention also needs to be given to accountability, namely who or which department is held responsible for what. One consequence of these different features and the ways they play out is risk minimisation rather than risk taking, paradoxically in relation to risk assessment (Barry 2007: 36).

Chapter Four: Interagency Risk Management - Case Studies

As noted, joined-up initiatives require new approaches to risk management. A greater understanding of challenges and possibilities relating to interagency risk can be gained from government experiences in formulating, implementing, and evaluating projects tackling such risks.

In this section, the risk assessment and management policies of several public sector collaborative initiatives are outlined. In addition to a case study from Victoria, recent developments in Scotland are also discussed. Scotland is an example of a country, which has structured its public service differently. Following devolved power in the late 1990s, government service delivery has been organised by 'national outcome' areas, rather than departments.

Victoria

In 2002, the Victorian government established a State-wide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence. This committee was tasked with developing a multi-agency and integrated response (Victorian Government 2007: 5). One of the committee's key recommendations was that:

> a risk assessment and risk management framework be developed for use across the whole family violence service system (Victorian Government 2007: 5).

In 2007 Victoria's Family Violence Risk Assessment and Risk Management Plan was published. This formed part of the State's Action Plan to Address Violence against Women and Children.

Reflecting its priority status across government, our plan reflects a whole-of-government approach, linked to other government agendas and strategies. It will be led by ministers across a range of portfolio areas (Victorian Government 2012: 4).

The plan comprises a range of initiatives to address family violence through prevention, early intervention, and response. As part of the early intervention strategy, the Action Plan includes a risk assessment and risk management framework. This represents:

a standardised, transparent approach and tools to identify family violence and manage risk to improve the safety of women and their children. Recently extended into mainstream community service organisations and sectors as well as to a broad range of other specialist services (Victorian Government 2012: 12).

The framework was informed by an extensive consultation process with:

more than 500 members of family violence service providers, and with staff from the Magistrates' Courts, community legal services, Victoria Police and the allied services sector (Victorian Government 2007: 5-6).

A draft framework was developed, and then piloted and evaluated in two Department of Human Services (DHS) regions (Victorian Government 2007: 5-6).

The risk assessment and risk management framework was developed to be used by a range of professionals who may encounter people who experience family violence, including service providers, the police and the courts. These represent different avenues through which people can enter the family violence system. The framework is intended to facilitate appropriate referrals if family violence is detected or suspected, and therefore for coherent and consistent processes regardless of where victims and perpetrators enter the system (Victorian Government 2007: 7). To this end, the framework establishes:

a common language, risk assessment, risk management, data collection methods and quality assurance processes' (Victorian Government 2007: 19).

This common risk assessment and risk management framework has also been adapted for use in Western Australia (WADCP 2011: 6).

The framework consists of a number of key components (Victorian Government 2007: 20). While several of these are specific to the field of family violence, others are applicable to interagency risk management across other fields, and are therefore noted here. These include:

- A shared understanding of risk. This includes all agencies using a common language.

- A standardised approach to recognising and assessing risk.

- Appropriate referral pathways and (efficient and effective) information sharing.

- Consistent data collection and analysis to ensure the system is able to respond to changing priorities.

Such an arrangement means that multi-agency features in relation to family violence are in place. In practice, this lays the foundation for an integrated approach to this subject.

Scotland

Risk management policies have been implemented for a range of interagency programs in Scotland. In particular, frameworks have been developed for the criminal justice and social welfare fields. These frameworks have been informed by extensive field-specific literature reviews on effective collaboration and

effective risk assessment and management practices.

In 2011, the Risk Management Authority (RMA) of Scotland released a Framework for risk assessment, management and evaluation (FRAME).[2] This was developed in collaboration with criminal justice agencies and the Scottish government[3]. This multi-agency approach:

> is underpinned by a shared understanding of the language, principles and processes of risk practice (RMA Scotland 2011: 6).

This approach is intended to provide 'a consistent, evidence-based framework for risk assessment and management that is grounded in first principles and is applicable across agencies and offender groups.' (RMA Scotland 2011: 6).

The project was formulated on the basis of an earlier publication consisting of a literature review and qualitative research on the topic of violent offenders (Barry, Loucks & Kemshall 2007). This earlier research:

> identified confusion within and between agencies on fundamental issues of understanding, assessing and communicating risk (RMA Scotland 2011: 6).

The solution referred to language:

> Without a common language of risk, several problems arise: the reduced quality of communication and differing perceptions of risk conveyed by the same terms. A consensus has developed in Scotland about the desirability of having a meaningful way of expressing risk that is shared between agencies and across the country (RMA Scotland 2011: 16)

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[2] 'The RMA is a Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB), established in 2005 by the *Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 2003*. Our duties focus on protecting the public by ensuring that robust and effective risk assessment and risk management practices are in place to reduce the risk of serious harm posed by violent and sexual offenders' (RMA Scotland 2013)

[3] The Working Group membership comprised the Scottish Government, Risk Management Authority, Social Work Inspection Agency, Association of Chief Police Officers, Association of Directors of Social Work, Scottish Prison Service, Chief Officer's Group, NHS Scotland, Skills for Justice Scotland and CJA Training and Development (RMA Scotland 2011: 4)

A crucial component of interagency risk management is therefore communication strategies. Such approaches should take into account the diversity of the intended audience. It is important that the language used has clear and consistent meaning for all parties (RMA Scotland 2011: 17). To this end, the RMA report provides a list of definitions for key terms as 'a starting point for the development of a shared language of risk' (RMA Scotland 2011: 19).

This framework is also intended to be:

> a dynamic and developmental project, continually revised and updated in the light of research developments, national evaluations and learning gained from implementation and practice. (RMA Scotland 2011: 9)

The principles underlying the framework are:

> The fundamental concept of the emerging framework is that applied proportionately and appropriately, there is a common foundation of knowledge and practice which, if embraced nationally, could allow for meaningful shared risk practice.... The framework will be drawn from the research literature, allowing for the adoption of new developments as they emerge, and will be grounded in practice standards, and supported by layers of resource material. (RMA Scotland 2011: 6)

Within the framework, relationships are grouped based on how closely the agencies are involved with one another. This continuum includes the following categories:

> Communication

> Routine communication within teams and between agencies, onward referral and monitoring of progress will reflect an *awareness* of risk. An understanding of other agencies' roles will be shown when incorporating their information into risk assessments, communicating risk, or when making referrals on the basis of assessments.

Co-ordination

Effective inter-agency working is co-ordinated by a case manager with overall responsibility for ensuring the contribution of other agencies and services. Mutual understanding between professionals of their respective responsibilities in the case is required. Such co-ordination is appropriate to the individual and the nature of the case, and is conducted with due *attention* to risk.

Collaboration

Collaboration is a multi-agency and strategic activity at this level. Risk assessments, decisions, and management plans should involve a range of people from different disciplines and agencies, who work together as a team that is *actively alert* to risk.149 These people will be appropriately qualified and skilled, and should be empowered to make decisions regarding resources for risk management. (RMA Scotland 2011: 79)

This framework has also been applied to the related field of youth offenders (Scottish Government 2011). It should also be noted that extensive literature reviews have been carried out on risk assessment and management with regard to violent and youth offenders in Scotland in the years prior to the implementation of this framework (Burman et al. 2007; Barry et al. 2007).

These reports and initiatives, together with research and interagency risk frameworks for other Scottish government programs[4], and from other countries[5], provide content for future research and the means for comparative analysis with the Victorian experience. A specific finding from this preliminary review of Scottish joined up government initiatives is the importance of language with

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[4] Examples include 'getting it right for every child', a multi-agency approach to child well-being (incorporating action on health, education, social work, youth justice, and poverty), implemented as part of the Scottish governments reforms for children's services (Algate and Rose 2008; NESCP 2008).
[5] For example, some agencies in the Netherlands are tasked with crossing boundaries within government and focussing on addressing wicked problems.

regard to how interagency risks are communicated.

Chapter Five: Future Directions

There are a range of aspects to consider as VMIA moves forward in relation to inter-agency risk assessment.

5.1   Organisational Culture

Organisational culture has been found to be a barrier to successful collaboration in a number of countries. This feature has implications for interagency risk management. In Canada, for example, Batvis and Juillet (2004) found that:

> The predominant culture of the public service as well as the accountability framework in place does not provide an organizational environment that is conducive to extensive inter departmental coordination and collaboration (Batvis and Juillet 2004: 52).

Likewise, research in England has concluded that:

> cultural differences and tensions – real or perceived – remain a barrier to effective partnership working (Audit Commission 2005: 38).

The literature therefore suggests that structural change is not enough to achieve effective collaboration. This initiative must be coupled with attention to cultural change. In this sense, successful joined up reforms take time. As noted by Christensen and Lægreid (2007: 1063):

> New skills, changes in organizational culture, and the building of mutual trust relations need patience.

A 2004 report by the Management Advisory Committee (MAC) observes that whole of government initiatives require a supportive culture. Such a culture would encourage interaction across organisational boundaries, value innovation and a diversity of perspectives (MAC 2004: 14). According to this report, the Australian

Public Service (APS):

> should be striving to create a 'culture of collaboration' that aids informal sharing of research, experience and expertise in addressing intractable problems' (MAC 2004: 10).

Features of such a horizontal culture include:

- readiness to think and act across agency boundaries; effective teamwork; organisational flexibility;

- openness to innovation and creativity;

- the ability to capitalise on windows of opportunity, tolerate mistakes and manage risk;

- the capacity to build strategic alliances, collaboration and trust; adaptability to changing circumstances;

- persistence;

- encouragement of the expression of diverse views, and awareness of different cultures and appreciation of their strengths;

- a capacity to balance the tension between short-term and long-term goals, and; effective knowledge management (MAC 2004: 46).

A 2007 Australian federal government report, titled 'Tackling Wicked Problems', identifies the issue of culture as central to effective collaboration. One of the key messages presented is the importance of APS agencies developing:

> a supportive culture and skills base. Portfolio secretaries and higher-ranking Senior Executive Service (SES) staff have a key role to play in influencing the behaviour and attitudes of the APS towards collaboration across organisational boundaries. They can model best practice collegiate

behaviour and ensure there is practical support for those involved in whole of government activities. These practical supports include developing systems and procedures to support authorisation for appropriate local decision-making and learning opportunities for middle and senior managers in skills relevant to whole of government activities, such as communication and influencing skills and relationship management. (Briggs 2007: 18).

These concerns are complemented by a consideration of accountability in relation to risk assessment.

5.2   Accountability

In considering inter-agency risk assessment, questions arise in relation to accountability. This dimension takes a number of forms: vertical, horizontal and mutually reciprocal forms of accountability (Christensen and Lægreid 2007: 1063). As noted:

> A major Australian report on tackling wicked problems (Australian Public Service Commission 2007) questioned whether there was a lack of compatibility between the existing accountability framework – structured around delivering on tightly specified program outputs and outcomes – and a model which seeks to work across boundaries (O'Flynn et al. 2010: 16).

In view of these dimensions of uncertainty in relation to accountability, consideration has been given to ways of resolving such complexity. Some emphasise the importance of formal agreements (Kouwenhoven 1993) and the desirability of agreeing procedures in the event of disagreement or a clash between different organisations, or in this case departments and agencies. Nonetheless, there is also evidence that formal agreements are not sufficient to

achieve collaboration and routinized processes of working together, organisationally. Considine (2002) makes the point that promotion of vertical accountability, whereby staff assume responsibility for promoting collaboration and cooperation, may also require increased emphasis on horizontal accountability.

5.3   Oversight

One further dimension that should be taken into consideration in relation to risk assessment is the role and place of external oversight. These may involve audit bodies, inspectorates and legislatures. The question is how do these bodies also address the realities of joined-up government, or in the current case inter-agency collaboration (Cabinet Office 2000a, paragraphs 10.13–10.23; Pollitt 2003: 43). Such concerns are evident elsewhere, as noted:

> In Canada, public service leaders have focused primarily on cultural change as the way forward, while the auditor-general has focused on tighter structures and control to overcome increased risk (CCMD 2002). Partnering arrangements, management flexibility and focusing on results challenge traditional accountability arrangements. The Canadian Auditor-General outlines key principles to shift the emphasis from blame towards improved scrutiny of performance expectations against actual performance (AGC 2002).

In Australia, at the Commonwealth level:

> The Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) wants to provide value-added products, such as better practice guides and benchmarking (Barrett 2002 and 2003; ANAO 2003). The ANAO (2003) highlights a number of case studies that have successfully established accountability processes of whole of government initiatives.

These broader concerns are also evident elsewhere:

> The OECD and Britain have produced major reports in the last 12 months about managing risk in a coordinated and collaborative manner to achieve results for complex problems. The overall aim is to have fewer surprises, higher levels of safety, fewer direct costs, a better understanding of risks and trade-offs, partnerships between sectors and a strengthening of international cooperation (Cabinet Office 2002; OECD 2003b).

Hence, inter-agency risk assessment is a complex and difficult process.

5.4 Recommendations

A number of considerations have been taken into account in developing the recommendations. First, a literature review allows current practice to be considered in an adaptive and hence incremental way. Key features relating to inter-agency collaboration may be considered and expanded, for example with the formulation of a wider array of questions that inform the RFQR framework around inter-agency risk management. However, the problem with this approach is that it does not allow an interrogation of the texture and relationships that underpin departmental collaboration and risk management. Further, a more extensive review would consider not just the content of the framework itself but the processes around the framework. Second, a knowledge elicitation process, based on KM, would provide a richer set of information focusing on the quality of collaborative processes from the perspective of the involved actors. These two points should be kept in mind when considering the recommendations.

Current Arrangements

1. **The VMIA should review its approach and resource, with a view to strengthening current practice.** The type of leadership the VMIA is taking with respect to its RFQR appears to be in line with ideas of collaborative and adaptive leadership as espoused by Head and Alford (2013)

2. **The VMIA should consider a set of questions in addition to those already asked in relation to the RFQR in relation to inter-agency work.** One of the key outcomes of the project is to expand the statements focused on this element. The feedback from the Victoria Auditor General suggests that this topic is timely.

3. **The VMIA should consider reformulating the questions for use by the risk consultants as part of a revised RFQR.** This reassessment should take into account the themes addressed by Donahue (2004) and O'Flynn (2009). This consideration could be informed by further research, relating to their implementation and outcomes.

4. **The VMIA should consider reviewing the processes around implementation and synthesis of data derived from the RFQR.** Such a process would enrich the knowledge generated form the RFQR given the complexities of joined up government. The interagency risk management process may be framed as an exercise in knowledge elicitation. How/when the information is collected and synthesised, and by whom, is as important a consideration as the content of an expanded RFQR.

Further Research

This report has focused on outlining the current capabilities of RFQR and provided preliminary analysis of material with respect to effective risk management principles.

1. **The VMIA should commission an evaluative research project of the Victorian Government experience with Family Violence.** There is a limited amount of academic research on inter-agency risk. Further, the implementation and the seeming success of the family violence initiative, suggest that this provides a rich case warranting further research.

2. **The VMIA should commission research on the comparative experience of inter-agency partnerships and collaboration.** There are suggestions from Scottish approaches to risk that may be valid in the Victorian context (for example, analysis of language and communication around interagency risk).

3. **The VMIA should consider the development of a toolkit approach to risk management in relation to inter-department processes.** There is quite a bit of material on joined up government and collaborative government but not much that focuses on risk. From that literature there appear to be some important lessons and considerations of (for example, structure, culture, leadership and accountability).

4. **The VMIA should consider an ethnographic type study of the on-going capability standards of the RFQR, with a view to considering alternative and improved frameworks.** The study would be about developing new sets of questions, as well as alternative frameworks, if appropriate. Such a study would enable the development of appropriate questions for a revised RFQR on inter-agency relations, as well as consider improved processes around the use of the framework.

RMIT University would be happy to discuss the contents of this report further and to consult on further efforts in regards to the insights provided in this report.

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Public Services:
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