

# THE NEW SYNTHESIS YEARS: AN OVERVIEW

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# The New Synthesis Years: An Overview

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# Foreword

I have dedicated my career, over 50 years so far, to the field of public administration both as a practitioner in Canada and abroad and by conducting research.

In 2023, I started to collect my documents for their transfer to and safe keeping by Library and Archives Canada. In the process, I realised that the public records on many issues are lacking a public service perspective, including about events and changes that have shaped the Public Service as an institution over the years. This is due to many factors, including that:

- Canada does not have a tradition of documenting historical events as is the case in Europe, the USA, and many Asian countries.
- Memoirs and biographies focus primarily on political events, leaving unanswered the question of how ideas came about and how they were achieved in practice.
- There is no rigour to the transfer of public records to Library and Archives. In most countries, it is mandatory after 20 years. In Canada, this is left to each organisation. By the time records are transferred, there may not be anyone left with direct knowledge of the context.

Colleagues I consulted argued that the transfer of my documents should be accompanied by a number of essays to guide future readers and researchers. This was a useful suggestion. For instance, many of my papers as Clerk of the Privy Council were not written as detailed agendas or articles. They were speeches, not intended for publication. Speeches are vignettes of an exchange between a speaker and the community it aspires to reach at a given point in time. They were aimed at public servants, people with insider knowledge of the situation prevailing in the public sector at that point in time. Therefore, they do not explain the context but go straight to discussing the challenges ahead to generate a common sense of purpose and encourage convergence across the public service. They made sense for people who were there at the time. But, many years later, readers may be unaware of the context, the aspirations, or the significance of the actions taken at the time.

Putting these records into context grew into a broad research and archival project, an effort to trace ideas and their development, to remember public service history from a public service perspective, and to draw lessons for serving and governing in the 21st century. The PGI team has conducted interviews, gathered and reviewed additional records, and worked to record history. This paper is a product of that work.



The Hon. Jocelyne Bourgon  
President of PGI

# Into the New Synthesis<sup>1</sup>

Bourgon's Braibant Lecture (given in 2006, published in 2007)<sup>2</sup> and its call for a new theory of public administration gained a relatively high amount of attention by the standards of journal articles - a few replies and comments, citations over the years - but attention is not action. In late 2007, Bourgon started organizing a research project aimed at creating a new theory, narrative, synthesis of public administration, one that could bridge the divide between theory and practice and assist practitioners with the problems of the 21st century.

She began by gathering support from the Canada School of Public Service, Canada's Privy Council Office, the Centre for International Governance Innovation, and the University of Waterloo to support initial exploratory research. By 2008, there was enough in place for a small team to start exploring ideas. This exploration led, in the summer, to a shift towards formal literature reviews aimed at producing foundational background papers.<sup>3</sup> The most direct fruits of this effort were published from April 2009 to March 2010: a series of six formal literature scans on topics such as the need for a new synthesis, resilience, and complex adaptive systems theories.<sup>4</sup>

While early research was underway, Bourgon shared ideas of the new synthesis in the making in speeches at several international events. Reactions to each one fed back into the research project and into early drafts of the New Synthesis framework.<sup>5</sup> Even in summer 2008, the core compliance-performance-emergence-resilience diagram was starting to take shape, with some differences in labelling and structure.<sup>6</sup> Feedback each time revealed what scholars and practitioners were interested in and pulled their thoughts into the process of framework development.

Over 2009, the small New Synthesis team started to arrange the stage after literature reviews. Drawing on Bourgon's professional connections, a network of people and organizations from six countries - Australia, Brazil, Canada, the Netherlands, Singapore, and the United Kingdom - was brought together. The NS6 research network was born.<sup>7</sup> Along the way, on February 11th, 2009, Public Governance International (PGI) was officially incorporated, Bourgon at the head. PGI would serve as the centre of the New Synthesis project for years to come. The entire structure, self-run, bringing figures from various governments together separate from government, was, as Bourgon later called it, "an improbable approach."<sup>8</sup> The first publication marked as a PGI publication was the 2010 progress report, *The New Frontiers of Public*

1. A more detailed overview of the early years of the New Synthesis project, up to the project's first book, can be found in the first book – Jocelyne Bourgon, *A New Synthesis of Public Administration: Serving in the 21st Century* (Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011), 247-271. As well, the history of the New Synthesis project through the *Fieldbook*, among many other subjects, will be covered in a manuscript currently under preparation, worked on alongside this paper.
2. Jocelyne Bourgon, "Responsive, responsible and respected government: towards a New Public Administration theory," *International Review of Administrative Sciences* 73, no. 1 (2007), 7-26
3. Bourgon, *Serving in the 21st Century*, 249-251.
4. With the release of the final two, these six reviews were collected into a compilation: Project Leader's Team, *Compilation of Literature Scans* (Ottawa, ON: Public Governance International, 2010).
5. Bourgon, *Serving in the 21st Century*, 250-255.
6. See slides for Jocelyne Bourgon, "The Future of Public Service: A Search for a New Balance" (speech, IPAA National Conference, Sydney, Australia, June 2008).
7. Bourgon, *Serving in the 21st Century*, 255-260.
8. Jocelyne Bourgon, *The New Synthesis of Public Administration Fieldbook* (Copenhagen, Denmark: Dansk Psykologisk Forlag, 2017), 14-17

*Administration*,<sup>9</sup> laying out the project and its findings so far and declaring the next step: a series of roundtables.

There were five international roundtables, each on a key theme, hosted by the local NS6 partners. The hosts led research on the theme, developed case studies, and brought in experts - practitioners and scholars from a wide range of fields and areas.<sup>10</sup> Each roundtable was summarized by rapporteurs, their reports released quickly to help the next roundtable. Also ensuring continuity, Bourgon co-chaired each roundtable after the first, summarizing the findings to date and keeping discussion moving, and each roundtable involved several participants from the previous one.<sup>11</sup> The process was driven by local partners, with Bourgon and her team helping co-ordinate and making sure the conferences hosted a wide range of experts with a wide range of knowledge and experience.

The first roundtable, 24-26 March 2010, was in the Netherlands. The theme: resilience and emergence, each getting a day of its own before a final half-day on integrating findings and preparing for the next roundtable. Over 40 scholars and practitioners, drawing from fields such as complexity science and physics as well as the standard public admin/political science, contributed to the first roundtable.<sup>12</sup> The second, 4-5 May, was in Canada, focused on achieving public results. This roundtable established a number of procedures relating to continuity, as noted above, and took extensive advantage of the case studies provided by partners abroad.<sup>13</sup>

The third, 13-14 July, was in Brazil, and was themed around government authority, collective power, and developments in their relationship.<sup>14</sup> There was no expectation, coming into the roundtable process, that there would be a consensus - in fact, the roundtables were set up such that consensus wasn't the objective. Despite that, despite the range of participants, despite the scale of the topic, by this third session, what Bourgon has called "an improbable consensus" was starting to clearly emerge - a consensus around a new conceptual framework to understand public administration.<sup>15</sup> It continued to develop in the fourth roundtable, 21-22 September, in Singapore. There, the focus turned towards preparation for the future: preparing governments to serve beyond the predictable.<sup>16</sup>

Instead of a roundtable, the Australian partners, including the Australia-New Zealand School of Government (ANZSOG), arranged a series of group discussions and meetings through Australia and New Zealand from 28 September to 14 October. By this point, views had already converged around the macro-level elements of the New Synthesis. The discussions in Australia and New Zealand brought the framework closer to practice, and practice at many levels - from central agencies to sectoral practitioners, from the national to the sub-national and even the local.<sup>17</sup> Finally, for the fifth roundtable, hosted in the United Kingdom, 16-18 November, the focus was on bringing everything together.<sup>18</sup> By the end, interest and enthusiasm were exceptionally

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9. Jocelyne Bourgon and Peter Milley, *The New Frontiers of Public Administration: The New Synthesis Project* (Ottawa, ON: Public Governance International, 2010).

10. Bourgon, *Serving in the 21st Century*, 260-262.

11. *Ibid.*, 264-265.

12. *Ibid.*, 262-264.

13. *Ibid.*, 264-265.

14. *Ibid.*, 266.

15. Bourgon, *The New Synthesis Fieldbook*, 17.

16. Bourgon, *Serving in the 21st Century*, 266-267.

17. *Ibid.*, 267-269.

18. *Ibid.*, 269. See also the roundtable reports: *Resilience and Emergence in Public Administration: The New Synthesis Project – The Netherlands Roundtable Report*, ed. Jocelyne Bourgon. (Ottawa, ON: Public Governance International, 2010); *Achieving Public Results: Societal and Civic: The New Synthesis Project – Canada Roundtable*

high. In the end, the initiative’s participants agreed that the findings so far had to be documented and disseminated - a book was needed. Ten months later, in 2011, McGill-Queen’s University Press published *A New Synthesis of Public Administration: Serving in the Twenty-First Century*.<sup>19</sup>

## From Theory to Practice to Theory - From NS6 to NS World

The first book was not a place to stop. There was a framework, and the roundtables had considered case studies when building it, but it had not been applied. Meanwhile, six countries was a good starting point, but just a starting point. Could the New Synthesis work in practice in a diversity of contexts? The next stage of the project was a turn towards fieldwork, a closely related turn towards teaching, and a turn towards a wider international network - as the back cover of PGI reports of the time put it, “from NS6 to NS World.”

In July 2012, discussions with the president of NS project member Singapore’s Civil Service College raised an idea: the framework could be tested in practice through a laboratory.<sup>20</sup> The resulting Master Class was an early effort to both teach and test the New Synthesis. Held in Singapore in March-May 2013, the Master Class brought senior public officials from across Singapore’s government together to learn the framework and explore how it could reframe their own real-life challenges. Six one-day sessions - positioning, leveraging, engaging, a dynamic and adaptive state, capacity building, and a finale to discuss how the participants’ cases had evolved - took place over twelve weeks, the breaks giving time to think and to digest what was learned.<sup>21</sup> A follow-up meeting in January 2014 indicated that participants found the class helpful and the New Synthesis useful in practice.<sup>22</sup>

PGI handled several labs and workshops past the Master Class. The 2014 NS Workshop for Managers, also run in Singapore, served as a complement for the Master Class.<sup>23</sup> Since then, to today, PGI has run several shorter workshops around the world, including states that were not part of the original NS6, such as Malaysia and Denmark. It has also partnered with the Institute on Governance (IOG) to include New Synthesis exploration sessions in some of IOG’s Executive Leadership Programs - participating in ELP 10 in 2015 and in more from there. Even by the end of 2015 - with many more years of workshops to go - over 1000 practitioners had been exposed to the New Synthesis.<sup>24</sup>

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*Report*, ed. Jocelyne Bourgon (Ottawa, ON: Public Governance International, 2010); *Governance in the 21st Century: Using Government Authority and Collective Power: The New Synthesis Project – Brazil Roundtable Report*, ed. Jocelyne Bourgon (Ottawa, ON: Public Governance International, 2010); *Preparing Government to Serve Beyond the Predictable: The New Synthesis Project – Singapore Roundtable Report*, ed. Jocelyne Bourgon. (Ottawa, ON: Public Governance International, 2010); *A Public Service Renewal Agenda for the 21st Century: The New Synthesis Project – United Kingdom Roundtable Report*, ed. Jocelyne Bourgon (Ottawa, ON: Public Governance International, 2011).

19. See Bourgon, *The New Synthesis Fieldbook*, 17-19.

20. Randall Russell, “The New Synthesis Project: A laboratory for master practitioners,” *Canadian Government Executive*, 2013, <https://canadiangovernmentexecutive.ca/the-new-synthesis-project-a-laboratory-for-master-practitioners/>

21. For more on the Master Class, see *A Summary of Learning of the First NS Master Class Program Held in Singapore in March-May 2013* (Ottawa, ON: Public Governance International, 2013).

22. Jocelyne Bourgon and Rachel Calleja, *The New Synthesis in Action: A Retrospective of the NS Labs Conducted in 2013-2014 Based On Singapore’s Experience* (Ottawa, ON: Public Governance International, 2014), 17.

23. Bourgon and Calleja, *The New Synthesis in Action*, 18-24.

24. Bourgon, *The New Synthesis Fieldbook*, 20.



Labs and workshops, including the Master Class, centred what Bourgon called “live cases” - real challenges being faced by practitioner-participants, real challenges to which the NS framework was applied.<sup>25</sup> These were not strictly retrospective reviews, like traditional case studies, but active - live - cases that the Framework was used on. The focus was “not the solution that was found but the process of discovery leading to a public change process.”<sup>26</sup> These live cases fed into the 2017 *Fieldbook*, the second New Synthesis book, with four given extensive coverage in appendices,<sup>27</sup> and several more were published as separate short reports (particularly in 2017).

With experience gained from the workshops and Master Class, PGI produced multiple guides to using the New Synthesis. The 2013 *Self Help Guide for Practitioners* emerged from the Master Class - a self-contained handbook both to share the findings of the New Synthesis project and Master Class program and to provide readers “with the tools to explore the potential of the NS framework on [their] own.”<sup>28</sup> It promised to “equip you to invent your New Synthesis,”<sup>29</sup> and featured examples and exercises to help readers apply the New Synthesis to their own practical ‘live case.’ The later 2016 *User’s Guide for Practitioners* served a similar purpose while reflecting developments in both theory, the *Fieldbook* research being well underway, and teaching, many workshops past the Master Class having been run.<sup>30</sup>

Much of what was done in the Master Class, developed over further workshops, would become part of the second New Synthesis book, 2017’s *Fieldbook*. Positioning, leveraging, and engaging developed - along with synthesizing - into stages of the NS Exploratory Process, the second part of the book. The Exploratory Process “captures the essential elements of a systematic, dynamic and iterative discovery process aimed at finding a pathway towards a better future.”<sup>31</sup>

## After the Fieldbook: Facing the Challenges of the 21st Century

With the *Fieldbook* complete, Public Governance International continued its research, moving on to a new phase. The framework had been built and released. It had been tested in the field, applied and used in live cases in ways that helped the framework develop further. It would take some time to figure out what to do next. In 2017, the year of the *Fieldbook*’s publication, a third New Synthesis book was already being considered, an early outline of initial concepts suggesting an edited collection but uncertain about the focus.

Public Governance International continued to publish reports on live cases - three in 2018, one in 2019. Meanwhile, in 2018, PGI researchers, including Raynold Alorse and Yasmine Raddassi, prepared drafts on such topics as risk and innovation in the public sector, public sector narrative emergence, and the continuum of possibilities for citizen engagement. Topics were being explored, but a new direction was still to be determined.

2019, a highly productive year marked by a wave of published papers, showed consolidation. One of the driving motivations for the project was the accelerating velocity of change in the 21st century. Could the New Synthesis hold up in the face of emergent challenges? Could it

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25. Ibid., 19.

26. Ibid., 185.

27. Ibid., 21-22.

28. *A Self Help Guide for Practitioners* (Ottawa, ON: Public Governance International, 2013), V.

29. Ibid., 2.

30. Jocelyne Bourgon, *A User’s Guide for Practitioners* (Ottawa, ON: Public Governance International, 2016).

31. Bourgon, *The New Synthesis Fieldbook*, 69.

handle the new challenges of the 21st century? These questions came into focus. An internal research program, organized at the end of 2018/start of 2019, declared the NS Initiative to be in its third phase, one exploring civic results in the context of rapidly accelerating change. In particular, there was an interest in adaptiveness, bio-infotech, demography, climate change, and governing in the digital age.

PGI released several papers on governing in the digital age that year. Some were short literature reviews: covering social and ethical concerns of the digital revolution,<sup>32</sup> government initiatives,<sup>33</sup> and the velocity of change.<sup>34</sup> Marie Blythe-Hallman wrote a pair of deeper working papers released in March and October, respectively covering the general subject of governing in the digital age (commenting on the subjects of the literature reviews) and the impact the digital revolution was having and would have on work.<sup>35</sup> One last paper stands out: Raynold Wonder Alorse's working paper on the digital economy and the green economy, exploring through a New Synthesis lens whether the two agendas were compatible as they were (no) and how they could be brought in line.<sup>36</sup>

There was also a theoretical side to PGI's work in 2019: an expanded focus on systems thinking. This side, spearheaded by Alorse, included another series of short literature reviews - systems thinking,<sup>37</sup> complex adaptive systems,<sup>38</sup> and living systems<sup>39</sup> - as well as a more extensive overview of those approaches<sup>40</sup> and a Christopher Gunter-authored paper on resilience.<sup>41</sup> Similar work filled PGI's backlog of draft papers, all feeding into how the New Synthesis framework was understood.

Then a pandemic fell over the world. Another 21st century challenge emerged. PGI's work was disrupted, as was common - in-person events became less practical, and schedules were thrown off - but COVID-19 was also an opportunity to use its knowledge. Numerous draft papers from 2020 cover aspects of the pandemic, its impacts, and responses to the crisis. This includes a series of 'short story' short papers by Raynold Alorse, each one touching on a different issue - resilience, the welfare state, the urban-rural divide, and more.

COVID was also an example of something PGI was taking an interest in: predictable high-impact events. In January 2020, as COVID was just coming to public attention and before PGI had

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32. Marie Blythe-Hallman, *The Digital Revolution: Social and Ethical Concerns* (Ottawa, ON: Public Governance International, 2019).

33. Raynold Wonder Alorse, *The Digital Revolution: Government-led Initiatives* (Ottawa, ON: Public Governance International, 2019).

34. Marie Blythe-Hallman, *The Digital Revolution: The Promise, Peril and Increasing Velocity of Change* (Ottawa, ON: Public Governance International, 2019).

35. Marie Blythe-Hallman, *Governing in the Digital Age: A PGI Working Paper* (Ottawa, ON: Public Governance International, 2019); Marie Blythe-Hallman, *The Future of Work in the Digital Age: Understanding the Impact of Technological Change on Work* (Ottawa, ON: Public Governance International, 2019).

36. Raynold Wonder Alorse, *The Digital Economy and the Green Economy: Compatible Agendas?* (Ottawa, ON: Public Governance International, 2019).

37. Raynold Wonder Alorse, *Insights from PGI's Literature Review on Systems Thinking and the New Synthesis of Public Administration* (Ottawa, ON: Public Governance International, 2019).

38. Raynold Wonder Alorse, *Insights from PGI's Literature Review on Complex Adaptive Systems and the New Synthesis of Public Administration* (Ottawa, ON: Public Governance International, 2019).

39. Raynold Wonder Alorse, *Insights from PGI's Literature Review on Living Systems and the New Synthesis of Public Administration* (Ottawa, ON: Public Governance International, 2019).

40. Raynold Wonder Alorse, *Thinking and Governing Differently: Old Ideas, New Discoveries and New Ways of Thinking for Governing* (Ottawa, ON: Public Governance International, 2019).

41. Christopher Gunter, *Resilience and the New Synthesis of Public Administration: A PGI Working Paper* (Ottawa, ON: Public Governance International, 2019).

refocused, Bourgon published a think piece on the difficulty of making progress on climate change and the need for cross-cutting, holistic approaches to the problem.<sup>42</sup> COVID very quickly fed into this line of research. In April, a short think piece took the pandemic as a learning moment, an example of the need to address such predictable low-probability catastrophic events and “a foretaste of what a climate crisis may look like.”<sup>43</sup> The lessons of the pandemic, the lessons that could be learned for climate change, the lessons of the importance of taking proactive action and the ability government and society had to adapt quickly - these were things Bourgon spread throughout the year.<sup>44</sup>

The centrepiece of 2021 was somewhat different: the Fit for the Future project. A summer pilot project led by and built on the work of PhD student Nisrine Dandache, the Fit for the Future project took ten indexes to create a matrix identifying Canada’s strengths and weaknesses in its preparedness for a time of accelerating change. The FFF Matrix was made to give a holistic view of change over time across many dimensions, of trends and paths, starting with Canada with the initial intent to examine other New Synthesis initiative member states later on; Canada remains the only application so far. The findings were relatively straightforward: Canada was moving in the right direction in some areas, but had many challenges ahead, and needed to prepare.<sup>45</sup>

## Events and Workshops Post-Fieldbook

While PGI conducted its theoretical research, fieldwork continued - the learning is, as Bourgon likes to say, in the doing. Workshops and other fieldwork continued on a somewhat steady basis, both internationally and within Canada (including IOG Executive Leadership Programs), albeit with disruptions. Records are limited, often speeches associated with workshops and group discussions that are less documented, but there is enough to say a few things. The New Synthesis was brought to new countries, including Bahrain<sup>46</sup> and Oman<sup>47</sup> in 2019. Fieldwork reflected ongoing research, and additional research supported these efforts - for example, in 2018 alone there were three unpublished working papers prepared for an event in Singapore,<sup>48</sup> as well as a substantial amount of more general unpublished work on the fieldwork and teaching process, including early stages of drafting a New Synthesis user’s guide for corporate services, the finalization of a guide for drafting live cases, and research on the use of gamification for New Synthesis workshops.

Over the post-*Fieldbook* years, a few themes emerged or took centre stage in New Synthesis fieldwork and the speeches attached to it. One was health. Already a subject of interest - notably, PGI vice president Michel Bilodeau had drawn on his own experience as former CEO

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42. Jocelyne Bourgon, *Why is it so Difficult to Make Progress on Climate Change?* (Ottawa, ON: Public Governance International, 2020).

43. Jocelyne Bourgon, *Pandemic and Climate Change: Complexity, Resilience and Catastrophic Events* (Ottawa, ON: Public Governance International, 2020), 1.

44. See, e.g., Jocelyne Bourgon, “Learning from the Coronavirus Pandemic: A New Synthesis Perspective” (speech, Association of Municipalities, Vejle, Denmark, August 18th, 2020).

45. *Is Canada Fit for the Future?* (Ottawa, ON: Public Governance International, 2021)

46. Jocelyne Bourgon, “The New Synthesis Initiative ‘Serving in the 21st Century’ – A BIPA Talk” (speech, BIPA, Bahrain, January 22, 2019).

47. Jocelyne Bourgon, “The Future of Human Resources Management in the Government Sector” (speech, Future of Governments Initiative, Oman, October 2019).

48. Jocelyne Bourgon, *A Future-Ready Public Service: A Working Paper for a Roundtable in Singapore* (2018, unpublished); Jocelyne Bourgon, *Health Reforms in Singapore: A Working Paper for an NS Workshop* (2018, unpublished); Jocelyne Bourgon, *Reconceptualising Sustainability: A Working Paper for a Workshop in Singapore* (2018, unpublished).

of the Children’s Hospital of Ontario to contribute to the case series<sup>49</sup> - health and health care came into greater prominence. It was the subject of one of the March 2018 Singapore working papers,<sup>50</sup> and in June 2018, Bourgon contributed a speech and a workshop to a regional event in Aarhus, Denmark, with a major focus on the health sector. Her contribution aligned with the theme.<sup>51</sup> Two years later, the world was engulfed in the COVID-19 pandemic, and just as PGI research refocused, so did (long-distance, remote) fieldwork and teaching. Straightforward overviews of the New Synthesis naturally covered COVID,<sup>52</sup> and learning lessons from the pandemic became part of presentations.<sup>53</sup> By the time Bourgon returned to Aarhus in May 2022 to discuss the NS framework with the health sector again, she had the COVID example to draw from.<sup>54</sup>

COVID accelerated the entry of crisis into New Synthesis workshops and presentations, as it did with the research. Climate change was entering workshop materials by January 2020, the same time that the PGI papers about it were starting to be published.<sup>55</sup> As the pandemic hit, COVID became an example to learn from in preparation for climate change and predictable catastrophic events as a whole<sup>56</sup> - as Bourgon put it at a Danish event in 2020, a lesson “that it is preferable to act proactively than to bear the full impact of other predictable high impact events.”<sup>57</sup> Even when crisis as a general issue was not a focus, as with the May 2022 Aarhus event, it came up: “The capacity for collective problem solving - to unite behind a common cause - is most visible in time of crisis.”<sup>58</sup>

Also standing out in this period are events aimed at municipal governance. In 2020, Bourgon presented at the Future of Municipalities Conference in Norway<sup>59</sup> and to the Association of Municipalities in Denmark.<sup>60</sup> May 2022 featured a workshop for Danish municipal leaders, building on the *Fit for the Future* project and adapting it to their context.<sup>61</sup> While municipality-specific ideas and developments in the New Synthesis are hard to trace in the limited records available, one comment stands out from the 2020 Denmark talk: “I believe that municipalities are the most important platforms to build the capacity for collective problem solving: This is where people and public purpose converge, where public awareness and collective learning

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49. Michel Bilodeau, *NS Live Case Series 2017: The Champlain Complex Care Programme in Canada* (Ottawa, ON: Public Governance International, 2017).

50. Jocelyne Bourgon, *Health Reforms in Singapore: A Working Paper for an NS Workshop* (2018, unpublished).

51. Jocelyne Bourgon, “The New Synthesis Initiative: Serving in the 21st Century” (speech, Aarhus, Denmark, June 17, 2018).

52. E.g. Jocelyne Bourgon, “The New Synthesis Initiative: Serving in the 21st Century” (speech, Future of Municipalities Conference, Norway, June 4, 2020).

53. Jocelyne Bourgon, “Learning from the Coronavirus Pandemic: A New Synthesis Perspective” (speech, Association of Municipalities, Vejle, Denmark, August 18th, 2020).

54. Jocelyne Bourgon, unnamed speech (speech, Leadership Summit 2022, Aarhus, Denmark, May 10, 2022).

55. Jocelyne Bourgon, “The New Synthesis Initiative: Serving in the 21st Century” (PowerPoint, New York, NY, January 30, 2020).

56. E.g. Jocelyne Bourgon, untitled speech (speech, Governance Conference 2021, Oslo, Norway, January 5, 2021).

57. Jocelyne Bourgon, “Learning from the Coronavirus Pandemic: A New Synthesis Perspective” (speech, Association of Municipalities, Vejle, Denmark, August 18, 2020).

58. Jocelyne Bourgon, unnamed speech (speech, Leadership Summit 2022, Aarhus, Denmark, May 10, 2022).

59. Jocelyne Bourgon, “The New Synthesis Initiative: Serving in the 21st Century” (speech, Future of Municipalities Conference, Norway, June 4, 2020).

60. Jocelyne Bourgon, “Learning from the Coronavirus Pandemic: A New Synthesis Perspective” (speech, Association of Municipalities, Vejle, Denmark, August 18, 2020).

61. Jocelyne Bourgon, “An Accelerating Period of Change” (PowerPoint, New York, NY, May 2022).

is most powerful, and where the active engagement of citizens is most meaningful.”<sup>62</sup>

From the Fieldbook to the end of 2022, Jocelyne Bourgon and PGI kept busy, producing research and spreading the New Synthesis around the world. In 2023, Bourgon launched her archive project.

## Influence and Impact

Over the years, even beyond the New Synthesis network and PGI’s direct partnerships, the New Synthesis has informed public administration practice, research and teaching around the world. Every live case - four featured in appendices of the Fieldbook, sixteen published as stand-alone papers from 2017-2019, and many more conducted for various workshops and laboratories - represents an application of the New Synthesis to an active, real situation and its use to navigate through real challenges.

Beyond those workshops, the New Synthesis has garnered attention and found use. Key New Synthesis publications have received, per Google Scholar, hundreds of citations, scholarly and applied. These range from nods in scholarship facing the challenges of the century and in textbooks on policy and public administration<sup>63</sup> to more extensive explanations and applications of the framework. Particular highlights include two reports written for European Commission initiatives that feature full overviews of the New Synthesis framework, bringing it to new and broad audiences.<sup>64</sup> For its contributions to practice and theory, the New Synthesis initiative was recognized by the International Association of Schools and Institutes of Administration (IASIA) as a major reason for granting the Hon. Jocelyne Bourgon the 2023 O.P. Dwivedi Award: the New Synthesis Initiative “has catalyzed public administration scholars and practitioners around the world.”<sup>65</sup>

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62. Jocelyne Bourgon, “Learning from the Coronavirus Pandemic: A New Synthesis Perspective” (speech, Association of Municipalities, Vejle, Denmark, August 18, 2020).

63. E.g. Isi Unikowski and John Wanna, “The Public Sector,” in *Australian Politics and Policy*, 2024 edition, eds. Diana Perche, Nicholas Barry, Alan Fenna, Zareh Ghazarian, and Yvonne Haigh (Sydney, Australia: Sydney University Press, 2024).

64. Benedict Wauters, *Sourcebook on Results Based Management in the European Structural Funds* (Community of Practice on Results Based Management, 2012), 44-48; Leda Stott, *Co-production: Enhancing the role of citizens in governance and service delivery: Technical Dossier no. 4* (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2018), 8.

65. Najat Zarrouk, mail to Jocelyne Bourgon, August 3rd, 2023

# Annex A: What's New About the New Synthesis?

This section is drawn directly from Raynold Wonder Alorse and Jocelyne Bourgon, *Exploring “New Frontiers” in a World of Complex Interdependence: A New Synthesis for 21st Century Governance* (Unpublished, 2019), 3-4, with minor technical corrections and with in-text citations replaced with footnotes.

The NS Framework is an enabling framework. It provides a mental map that is significantly different from conventional thinking. It emphasizes the dynamic interrelationships between government, people and society. More specifically, it explores how systems and practices inherited from a prior time must co-exist with the new capabilities to prepare governments fit for the future. At the heart of the NS framework is the notion that the public interest is “a collective enterprise” that entails a shared responsibility of government and citizens as value creators and co-producers of public results, as well as an expanding number of agents in the economic, civic and other public spheres. This is “turning public administration on its head.”<sup>1</sup>

The NS framework does not aim to provide answers, but it helps practitioners to frame the lines of inquiry that may lead to new and better ways of addressing public challenges. The NS framework also serves as “a tool that can help practitioners examine their assumptions and explore the full range of options at their disposal... [it] help[s] reveal the implications that various choices entail”. It recognizes that decisions about what to do and how to proceed are highly contingent and can only be made in practice, in the context of each mission and in the unique circumstances of each country.”<sup>2</sup> The uniqueness and credibility of the NS framework was generated through large-scale international collaboration between public sector practitioners and leading academics from a diversity of practice and disciplines.

System thinking played a key role in the development of the NS Framework. It remains essential for gaining a heightened appreciation of the possible impact across systems and of the downstream consequences of government actions and decisions. Inventive governments are needed to generate and implement practical solutions that bring about better public results and build the adaptive capacity of society.

The NS framework encourages a systemic, adaptive, and co-evolving approach to governing: “modern governance is a search for balance between the public, private and civil spheres. It entails a search for a delicate balance where the state authority is used to leverage the collective capacity of society to achieve results of higher public value.”<sup>3</sup> As before, governments must be able to govern (compliance), the state apparatus must be able to get things done (performance), but more than ever before government must be able to build the capacity for collective problem solving in order to invent viable solutions to complex issues (emergence) and to build the resilience of society to unforeseen shocks and disturbances (resilience). A New Synthesis balances in real life the need for compliance, performance, emergence and resilience functions of modern government.<sup>4</sup> It explores how government actions and interactions have the potential to create ripple effects at multiple levels across society.

The NS framework promotes an “open, dynamic interactive system of governance where an infinite number of choices and permutations are possible. The challenge is to ensure that the overall balance serves the collective interest, generates solutions, encourages collective

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1. Bourgon, *Serving in the 21st Century*, 15.
  2. Ibid., 33.
  3. Ibid., 58.
  4. Ibid., 95.

problem solving and propels society towards a better future.”<sup>5</sup> This draws from systems theory as it highlights the importance of interrelationships across government and across systems, and that viable solutions to complex issues cannot be contained within the boundaries of a single agency. It also recognizes that the way public sector leaders think about their role and the role of the state has a direct impact on the solutions they will find and the results they will achieve with the help and support of others. This is the “factor-YOU” of public administration - “Public sector leaders are not separate from the transformation processes they lead; they are part of it.”<sup>6</sup>

Overall, the NS framework provides public sector leaders with a systematic approach to articulate and fulfill the public purpose they serve. The NS framework expands the range of options open to governments; improves the likelihood of success of government actions and interventions; brings special attention to enhance society’s resilience and adaptive capacity; and encourages system thinking and collective problem solving.

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5. Bourgon, *The New Synthesis Fieldbook*, 62.

6. *Ibid.*, 135.



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