

Institution: The Open University		
Unit of Assessment: C17 Business and Management Studies		
Title of case study: Improving public leadership through political astuteness skills		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2012-2019		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Professor Jean Hartley	Professor of Public Leadership	01/02/2013 – present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2013-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>Since 2013, Professor Hartley has conducted research into the capabilities (skills) of leadership with political astuteness which contribute to effective performance by public leaders and managers. Her research developed a novel and well-evidenced framework now widely used across the UK and internationally, resulting in national and local impact in three countries. In the UK, her research informed national government policy, contributing to improved models of leadership and leadership development for civil servants and other public servants, including the police. In Australia and New Zealand, Hartley's framework is used across all governments at national and state level to define and practice effective public leadership. This research has improved the skills of public servants to work with elected politicians, to work with diverse organizations and stakeholders, and provide better services to the public.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>Political astuteness is a set of leadership skills (capabilities, knowledge and judgements) [O3] concerned with <i>“deploying political skills in situations involving diverse and sometimes competing interests and stakeholders, in order to achieve sufficient alignment of interests and/or consent in order to achieve outcomes”</i> [O6, p.6]. These are the skills of handling both formal politics of the state but also informal politics in and around organizations. Hartley's research has established that political astuteness is an important capability (skill) for public leaders and managers because it enables them to navigate the twin demands of working in public organizations which are inherently political, while remaining impartial, (which is a requirement of public servants in Westminster systems of government and public services).</p> <p>Before the last decade, the requirement to be politically impartial meant that political astuteness was seen to be unnecessary or even dysfunctional in public service leadership. The consensus was that public servants should remain detached from politics, and thus required technical but not political skills. Therefore, the skills of being politically astute without being party political were not discussed in either policy or in practice. However, Hartley's research changed these assumptions in important ways. With a large-scale mixed methods research programme in three countries, her research [O4] showed that political astuteness is a necessary set of skills, particularly for senior and aspiring senior leaders, and that these skills can be used ethically and professionally for constructive public purposes (to create public value).</p> <p>Professor Hartley led three teams of academics in a programme of work to examine these issues. In 2012-2013, the first team used mixed methods research, including a survey of 1,012 public managers and 42 interviews, to examine the concept of leadership with political astuteness and how it might create public value in Australia, New Zealand and UK [O4, O6]. This research tested a framework from earlier UK research (with five dimensions of skill concerned with: personal skills; interpersonal skills; reading people and situations; building alignment and alliances; and strategic direction and scanning) but now applied to public leaders. The research examined public leaders' views and behaviours about political astuteness; including how they perceived politics in the workplace; what the skills of political astuteness are; for what purposes they were used; and how such skills were acquired or enhanced. The research also identified that the boundary between the leadership of public managers and politicians was often a zone of negotiated roles, within</p>		

limits, rather than a rigid line [O2]. Some academic literature proposes the opposition of politics and administration as a dichotomy, but **Hartley's** research demonstrated how and under what circumstances the role negotiation between the two types of leadership functioned as a zone. This research also examined the benefits for society of having politically astute public leaders and managers, through the concept of public value [O4].

The second study, based on qualitative research in 2012-13 [O3], examined the leadership of UK permanent secretaries (civil servants) and chief executives in UK local government. This research confirmed the accuracy of the political astuteness skills framework and examined the leadership exercised by senior managers working closely with the political leadership on a daily basis. It also examined the ethics of political astuteness and showed that political astuteness helped rather than hindered senior managers to work effectively with politicians, because those skills enabled them to understand politicians and other stakeholder objectives while remaining party politically neutral.

The third research team, working in 2016-17, examined leadership with political astuteness in policing [O5], showing how these processes of leadership work at a local level. Police officers deal with inherently public, controversial and hence political matters, but they are expected to act in a fair and politically impartial manner. This research showed that police leadership was enhanced by having the skills of political astuteness because it enabled the police to create public value (benefits for society). The research was a detailed case study of rural crime in Cambridgeshire. Interviews were undertaken with a range of stakeholders, including politicians, senior management, the rural crime police team, rural businesses and residents, and criminals. The research examined how politically astute leadership had an impact on the effectiveness of the police force, through the resultant benefits for local communities in terms of increased confidence in the police and increased sense of safety.

Finally, **Hartley** brought the various strands of research together in a publication which identified the distinctiveness of public leadership and analysed a number of features and processes of public leadership in ten propositions [O1]. These included political astuteness, public value and context. This article also won the best paper award that year for *International Journal of Public Leadership*.

3. References to the research

- O1. Hartley, J.** (2018) Ten propositions about public leadership. *International Journal of Public Leadership*, 14(4), 202-217. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ijpl-09-2018-0048>
- O2. Alford, J., Hartley, J., Yates, S., and Hughes, O.** (2016) Into the Purple Zone: Deconstructing the Politics/Administration Distinction. *American Review of Public Administration*, 47(7), 752–763. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0275074016638481>
- O3. Hartley, J., and Manzie, S.** (2020) "It's every breath we take here": Political astuteness and ethics in civil service leadership development. *Public Money and Management*, 40(8), 569-578. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540962.2020.1777704>
- O4. Hartley, J., Alford, J., Hughes, O., and Yates, S.** (2015) Public value and political astuteness in the work of public managers: The art of the possible. *Public Administration*, 93(1), 195-211. <https://doi.org/10.1111/padm.12125>
- O5. Hartley, J., Parker, S., and Beashel, J.** (2019) Leading and recognizing public value. *Public Administration*, 97(2) 264–278. <https://doi.org/10.1111/padm.12563>
- O6. Hartley, J., Alford, J., Hughes, O., and Yates, S.** (2013) *Leading with political astuteness: A study of public managers in Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom*. Report. Melbourne: Australia and New Zealand School of Government. <https://www.anzsog.edu.au/preview-documents/research-output/5012-leading-with-political-astuteness/file>

4. Details of the impact

Research by Professor **Hartley** led to a significant reframing of leadership and leadership development through identifying the precise skills of political astuteness for public leaders and managers and showing how those skills contribute to ethical professional behaviours which create public value (benefits for society). This research consequently led to impact in both the UK and

in Australia and New Zealand. In the UK, the research was used by a Parliamentary Select Committee and by the Cabinet Office to argue for political astuteness training for civil servants, leading to national policy changes. The research has also been used by a number of police forces to inform leadership frameworks, to improve their decision-making, and to increase community confidence. In Australia and New Zealand, the research led to the recognition of political astuteness as a key ethical and professional skill and informed significant changes to leadership development, professional development, and recruitment policy.

Hartley's research shaped UK national government policy on the skills of public leadership and leadership development

One clear impact of the research is shown in the reports of the House of Commons Select Committee on Public Administration (PASC, later termed PACAC), which quoted the research in its inquiry and Report (2015) to provide evidence for its argument for the need for civil servants to be better trained including being politically astute [C3, p.14 & p.16]. Its Chair asked for a private meeting with Professor **Hartley** and her research team member Dame Stella Manzie to discuss their research so that the argument could be developed into a policy recommendation in the report [C1]. Manzie appeared as a witness at one of the public hearings for this inquiry. The Chair confirmed that the *“research of Professor **Hartley** and her team [...] on leadership with political astuteness, has been very significant in shaping the thinking and policy about leadership skills for UK civil servants [...] I used these concepts about political astuteness, dual leadership, and how these skills are acquired in the final “Developing Civil Service skills” report in 2015”* where it *“directly informed of its two [sic] recommendation”* [C1]. These are recommendation 8 (the need for more conceptual reflective and experimental learning about leadership) and 9 (the importance of dual leadership and therefore the need for leadership with political astuteness) [C1; C3, p.36]. In 2020, Lord Michael Bichard, in his overview of leadership development in the civil service, also noted the value of the **Hartley** research on political astuteness skills in having shaped leadership development [C4, pp.543-545].

In addition, the Cabinet Office's National Leadership Centre commissioned a think-piece from **Professor Hartley** on public leadership, published on the NLC website in October 2020 [C5a]. This has *“helped to refine our key areas of research interest for 2020/21”* and *“our intention is for these provocations to drive transformational change in the way leaders collaborate, and influence how public services are led and delivered”* [C5b]. This has shaped the UK national approach to public leadership and its development, not only for civil servants but across all public services.

Hartley's research established political astuteness as ‘an essential skill’ for public leaders in Australia, resulting in changes to policy, practice and professional development

Professor Hartley was invited by the University of Melbourne and the Australia & New Zealand School of Government (ANZSOG) to become a Visiting Professor at ANZSOG to lead a research project on leadership with political astuteness. The results of the three-country research study [O2, O4, O6] were presented to senior public managers in most of Australia's nine states in 2013-14 by Professor **Hartley**. The findings of this research led to a major shift in the understanding of and approach taken towards leadership development for public leaders. The Director Practitioner Engagement at ANZSOG explains that *“the research led to an increase in knowledge about political astuteness among senior and aspiring leaders and managers across Australia. The framework of five dimensions of skill, in particular, helped public servants think about their leadership in new ways and helped them focus on the public value outcomes”* [C8]. Furthermore it *“contributed to this topic becoming explicit and discussable in a way which had been more difficult previously”* [C8]. As a result, political astuteness is now viewed as *‘an essential skill’* for public servants across a range of professions, particularly at more senior levels, and included in job descriptions across all the states and territories of Australia, which *“demonstrates the pervasive and widespread impact of the **Hartley** research”* [C8]. There are just over 2 million public servants in Australia (2020 figures).

Hartley's political astuteness research has also impacted governmental discourse, through its contribution to key policy documents, indicating its importance in the professional practice and performance of public servants. Referring to the 2018 Coaldrake Report [C10] and the 2018

Woolcott Report [C9], the Director Practitioner Engagement at ANZSOG explains that as a result of **Hartley's** research "*political astuteness is now more understood and valued in governmental discourse and policy and is seen as a key way for both federal and state government to adapt to the many technological and societal challenges which will be demanded of them in the future*" [C8]. Peter Woolcott, the Australian Public Service Commissioner, presented his report on the state of the Australian Public Service 2017-18 to the Australian Government in November 2018. He stressed the need for reform in the APS, writing: "*It is imperative that the APS remains impartial and apolitical. However, the APS also needs to be politically astute. Government works at its best when ministers, their offices and the public service work together in pursuit of an outcome*" [C9, p.4]. This policy focus on political astuteness came directly from the **Hartley** research.

The policy imperative to include political astuteness in leadership is also demonstrated at state level. The Coaldrake report of 2018 was commissioned by the Queensland Government and recommended that political astuteness was added to the framework of skills needed by public servants, especially at senior level. The report noted: "*Just as important as occupational categories will be the various personal skills and qualities which are likely to be in growing demand [...] Political astuteness can be added to that list – certainly for those seeking to lead successfully at the most senior levels*" [C10, p.20]. The source for this statement is referenced (ref 65) to **Hartley's** initial research report [O6]. The Queensland Government formally accepted the Woolcott recommendations in 2018. There are over 217,000 public servants in Queensland (2017 figures). Additionally, in Victoria, Australia's most populous state, the Victorian Public Service Commission (responsible for all state services) worked with the Australia and New Zealand School of Government to commission and print Occasional Paper 25 on leadership with political astuteness from **Hartley** and team. The paper was made available to all 381,000 state public servants [C11].

Hartley's research established political astuteness as an 'essential competency' in New Zealand's Public Service, resulting in impacts on policy, practice and professional development

Research conducted by **Professor Hartley** informed changes to professional development and policy in New Zealand's public service. In 2015, New Zealand Government's Leadership Development Centre reworked their system-wide public service 'Leadership Success Profile' framework, which is used by all central government agencies to define leadership roles in the public service. **Hartley's** research was used to add political astuteness (relabelled as 'leading at the political interface') into this profile. The profile includes a skills toolkit "Leading at the Political Interface", which introduces the research framework as the key way for leaders to understand how to lead at the interface: "*A collaborative study of public managers in Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom (Hartley, Alford, Hughes and Yates, 2013) looked to understand how public sector leaders displayed political astuteness in fulfilling their objectives. The authors' framework outlines the characteristics that make up political astuteness. Use this to help you reflect on the areas you need to work on to increase your political astuteness*" [C14, p.2]. This is the only skills framework in the toolkit. The Interim Director of the Leadership Development Centre states that "*Political astuteness is a critical component of the framework (most explicitly as part of the leadership capability 'Leading at the political interface'). As a key component of the refreshed Leadership Success Profile Professor Hartley's research has helped define the desired shift in leadership approach and capability required for all public service leaders in New Zealand*" [C13].

There are 403,000 public servants in New Zealand (2018). All have access to the leadership toolkit, and all have to assess their performance and promotion against the Leadership Success Profile. Consequently, these changes have resulted in national impact across New Zealand. The value of Professor **Hartley's** impact through her contribution to the 'Leadership Success Profile' framework is also confirmed by New Zealand's current Director-General of Security (formerly Cabinet Secretary). Describing **Hartley's** research as a "*highly relevant and a valuable input to our thinking and action*", they state that "*having the political astuteness framework from Professor Hartley has contributed to this important facet of leadership development by making explicit the skills that are needed*" [C12]. They add that the concept of political astuteness has become an "*essential competency*" which is part of "*formal learning and development of senior officials*" [C12].

New Zealand's interest in political astuteness has led to further impact through its contribution the Public Service Act 2020 – legislation that governs public service in New Zealand. The Director General of Security (formerly Cabinet Secretary) writes that political astuteness and leading at the political interface “*lie behind the thinking about public service values, which forms an important part of the legislation*” [C12]. They conclude by affirming that they are “*in no doubt that Professor Hartley's research has contributed in these and other ways that help New Zealand public servants to work confidently with Ministers' and 'to offer an improved service to New Zealanders*” [C12].

Hartley's research is used by UK police forces to better protect their communities

Hartley's research on political astuteness skills has informed leadership in the UK police service. In 2017, Cambridgeshire Constabulary (CC) invited **Professor Hartley** to undertake research [O5] on leadership with political astuteness to create public value in policing, as they faced a complex problem. The case study focused on tackling rural crime, particularly hare-coursing, which had led to incidents of intimidation and violence, was associated with other serious rural crime, and left residents feeling unsafe. The relevant superintendent of CC stressed that: “*Such crimes place a high financial and mental health burden on the rural community [...] the research itself helped us to understand the public value of high-quality policing of rural crime. Hare coursing and other aspects of rural crime are more important and more significant for local communities than had previously been recognised*” [C6]. Police leadership with various stakeholder groups could not be achieved by solely enforcement of the law but also needed political astuteness to prevent high-harm conflict. The research established the critical role played by the Rural Crime Action Team through linking political astuteness skills to the creation of public value impacts. These findings were later used to successfully argue for the decision to maintain the team despite resource pressures [C6]. The research also improved police confidence in their decision-making and led to Cambridgeshire rural communities feeling safer and more confident. Violence with shotguns (which the police had assessed as likely) was also avoided [C6]. CC shared these insights from the research with other police forces with rural crime problems, including Dorset Police and North Yorkshire Police, and in a professional magazine for all police [C7].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- C1.** Testimonial from MP and Chair, House of Commons Liaison Committee.
- C2.** Testimonial from Director of the UK Cabinet Office's National Leadership Centre.
- C3.** PASC Report. 'Developing Civil Service Skills: A Unified Approach' (2015).
- C4.** Bichard, M. (2020) Editorial: An agenda for civil service change. *Public Money and Management*, 40(8), 541-545. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540962.2020.1816304>
- C5.** National Leadership Centre Think-piece and summary:
 - C5a:** Think-piece commissioned by NLC written by **Hartley**: 'Ten Ideas for new research'.
 - C5b:** Summary of the 17 think-pieces commissioned by the NLC.
- C6.** Testimonial from Superintendent at Cambridgeshire Constabulary, UK.
- C7.** Beashel J, Parker S, Benton N, Sutherland J and **Hartley J.** (2019) Public value and rural policing. *Policing Professional*, February 14th, 20-22.
- C8.** Testimonial from Director of Practitioner Engagement, Australia and New Zealand School of Government (ANZSOG).
- C9.** Woolcott Report: Australian Government, State of the Service Report 2017-18 (2018).
- C10.** Coaldrake Report: Review into Queensland Public Sector Workforce (2018).
- C11.** **Hartley J, Alford J, Hughes O and Yates S.** (2014) Managers and political astuteness: Lessons for the Victorian Public Service. *Occasional Paper 25*. Melbourne: State Government of Victoria, Victoria Public Services Commission and ANZSOG.
- C12.** Testimonial from Director-General of Security, New Zealand Security Intelligence Service.
- C13.** Testimonial from Interim Director, Public Service Commission Leadership Development Centre.
- C14.** New Zealand Public Service Commission Leadership Development Centre Resource: *Toolkit: Leading at the political interface*. **Hartley's** research is referenced in Sources on page 6.