

Stewardship streams in New Zealand public administration

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Stewardship is a concept of increasing importance and centrality to public administration narratives across several countries. It is referenced in the foundational legislation for the public service of New Zealand, Canada, and Australia, and receives significant attention in the UK and US. It is New Zealand that has once again gone further and faster in implementing stewardship provisions, and stewardship forms a central theme of New Zealand's current public service reforms. This echoes New Zealand's previous position having gone further and faster in implementing New Public Management reforms in the 1980s. This paper presents a case study of stewardship in the New Zealand public service, focussing on legislative reforms and the role of three central agencies: Treasury, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, and most importantly the Public Service Commission, in promoting and supporting stewardship across the public service. It uses a sensemaking method and autoethnographic approach to relating theory and praxis. There are various related, overlapping, and sometimes conflicting definitions of stewardship in public administration literature. New Zealand's application of stewardship draws from several of these, while also appearing to be influenced by related concepts informed by indigenous Māori culture. The paper reveals that New Zealand's application of stewardship is complex and multifaceted.

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1. Introduction

Stewardship, as a label, is receiving significant interest in public administration across English-speaking nations: it is now included in the foundational public service legislation of New Zealand, Canada, and Australia, and appears in government documents in the UK and US. It is a central theme of New Zealand's most recent public service reforms. New Zealand's new Public Service Act 2020 ('the Act') mentions stewards and stewardship on 5 separate occasions; and the associated Cabinet Papers that describe the purpose or intention of the Act mention stewards or stewardship 83 times. Several policy instruments are used by central agencies with the intended purpose to improve stewardship.

Normally such a paper would begin with a definition – 'stewardship is...' – but as this paper discusses, stewardship is a contested idea with varied and conflicting definitions. The New Zealand government appears to use stewardship to mean several things, overlapping with several definitions in the public administration literature. In New Zealand, stewardship has been linked to, and sometimes used interchangeably with the Te Reo Māori word 'kaitiakitanga' (Kawharu 2010, Heijden 2013, Jenkins 2018). Te Reo Māori is the indigenous language and an official language of New Zealand and Te Ao Māori refers to a/the world view of the Māori people. Te Ao Māori perspectives are imperative to supporting the partnership between Māori and the Crown and play a major role in New Zealand public and government discourse. In this paper we describe the different ways that kaitiakitanga and stewardship are conceived and described in public administration and related literature, describe stewardship provisions and practices in the New Zealand public service, and try to draw linkages between the two. In conclusion, we draw distinctions between stewardship discourse and stewardship practice, and further call for a 'braided rivers' approach in which New Zealand public administration more consciously engages with Māori knowledge and worldview.

This paper collects a relatively wide range of related theories and interpretations, and links them to contemporary practice. It is likely to be of interest to academic and practitioner audiences interested in New Zealand public service practice and/or stewardship as an organising principle for public administration.

1.1 Methodology

This paper primarily functions as a case study of the different discourses surrounding the notion of stewardship in New Zealand public administration. As an analysis of public administration discourses, literature and praxis are interwoven. Stewardship is central to New Zealand public service reform in a way that is perhaps unmatched around the world, and a significant portion of the literature is either from New Zealand or references New Zealand. Therefore, the literature review and case study are unavoidably braided together.

We conceive of this case study in the overarching theoretical framework of sensemaking. Sensemaking, defined literally as the "making of sense" Weick (1995, p4) is a well-known area of organizational psychology that has been used to explore a range of different research questions. Weick (1993, 1995) has used sensemaking to chart both managerial decisions and organizational restructuring. It has been used as a framework to explore a range of organizational issues (see, for example, Kauer, 2008) as well as a

number of normative perspectives: including ethical decision making (Thiel, et al, 2012); trust building (Fugslang and Jagd, 2015); organizational justice (Lamertz, 2002); and normative concepts in public administration (Scott and Macaulay 2020).

The research began with a close textual analysis of references to *stewards* or *stewardship* in public administration literature, following by a bibliographic search through each text that was uncovered. This identified a diverse and disorganised literature with several competing definitions and usages. In particular, it was notable that much of the literature was not grounded, historically or analytically, in broader theory.

We recognise Te Tiriti o Waitangi / The Treaty of Waitangi as a foundation document of the nation, and therefore seek to include in our exploration of stewardship how Te Ao Māori concepts relate. Formal governance structures have privileged colonial systems and sought to minimise indigenous knowledge and practices. Making sense of the New Zealand government's use and implementation of stewardship concept/s without te ao Māori arguably represents further colonisation (Henderson 2001). Therefore, a second search was conducted for literature relating to the concepts of *kaitiaki* and *kaitiakitanga*. However, thematising Māori concepts as two non-Māori authors is highly problematic and can easily become instances of cultural appropriation. We acknowledge the past and present material and epistemic dispossessions against Māori people, and we acknowledge the severe limitations of our understanding of *kaitiakitanga*. Section two and three of this paper attempts to thematically group literature related to *kaitiakitanga* and stewardship respectively.

The following stage was to document the history of the application of stewardship to the New Zealand public service. This was largely autoethnographic, taking advantage of the authors' positions as embedded researchers and the first author's central role in the current New Zealand public service reforms. In New Zealand, Cabinet papers are drafted by departments on behalf of the responsible Minister; the first author was the principal writer on the Cabinet paper relating to stewardship provisions in the Public Service Act 2020. This is both an advantage, in that it provides ethnographic insights into the decision-making of senior public servants, and a limitation, in that it potentially compromises the objectivity of the study. In section four of this paper, the description of New Zealand government practice relied on a combination of government documents, participant observer field notes, and informal interviews with colleagues. It included a textual analysis of public consultation documents, public statements by ministers and public service leaders, Cabinet papers, and the legislation itself. Finally, the New Zealand practice is compared with and aligned to various streams within the stewardship literature, in an attempt to locate contemporary practice within public administration theory.

2. Kaitiakitanga

Kaitiakitanga is rooted in a worldview that may be unfamiliar to readers; in this section we describe some of the interpretations of *kaitiakitanga* in the literature. *Kaitiakitanga* discourses are embedded in kaupapa Māori research and Mātauranga Māori. In the following, we first expound Kaupapa Māori research and Mātauranga Māori before referring to the significant body of work on *kaitiakitanga* by Māori scholars.

2.1 Kaupapa Māori and Mātauranga Māori

Wilson et al. (2021) describe Kaupapa Māori Theory as offering an alternative ontological and epistemological perspective that normalises te ao Māori. "Ontologically, whakapapa (genealogy)

establishes the genealogical relationships and connections that form the foundations for the organisation of knowledge. [...] Whakapapa also establishes the basis of collective obligations and reciprocity to manaaki (to host and care for other people). Thus, whakapapa signals the collective worldview of Māori that contrasts with the individualist worldview of Euro-Western paradigms” (Wilson et al. 2021, p4-5).

Mātauranga Māori is a body of traditional knowledge. Kukutai et al. (2021) caution against the extraction of Mātauranga while disregarding kaitiakitanga (explored below), mana Motuhake (self-determination/sovereignty) and whakapapa (genealogy – approximate translations only). Further work is required in exploring te ao Māori in public administration, but can only be led by Māori: “this instrumental approach [of viewing Māori concepts in isolation] risks diminishing the mauri (life force) that underpins Māori bodies of knowledge” (Kukutai et al. 2021, p20). Thus we reference kaitiakitanga with humility and try to avoid significant reinterpretation while presenting how kaitiakitanga has been described by Māori.

Kaitiakitanga discourses have strong political dimensions, acting as both a point of contention and strong binding force between Māori and non-Māori (Kawharu 2018, p352) particularly in regard to the foundational Te Tiriti o Waitangi / The Treaty of Waitangi. These political discourses are beyond the scope of this paper that focusses instead on the use of kaitiakitanga by Māori authors to describe notions of guardianship, care, resource management, the connection of past and future, and the connection between spiritual and material. We note also that kaitiakitanga has been associated with stewardship by international and non-Māori authors, but we have excluded these texts from the analysis (McGuinness 2016, Rockström and Gaffney 2021).

2.2 Definitions and perspectives

Marsden (2003) supplies a linguistic definition: “The term *tiaki*, whilst its basic meaning is ‘to guard’, has other closely related meanings depending upon the context. *Tiaki* may also mean to keep, to preserve, to conserve, to foster, to protect, to shelter, to keep watch over. The prefix *kai* with a verb denotes the agent of the act. A *kaitiaki* is a guardian, keeper, preserver, conservator, foster-parent, protector. The suffix *tanga* added to the noun means guardianship, preservation, conservation, fostering, protecting, sheltering” (p54).

Similar to stewardship, kaitiakitanga appears able to hold many concepts. As Kawharu (2018) observes, “kaitiaki are also individuals. They are the kaumatua [elders] who provide guidance on customary values and processes” (p344). Further, “kaitiakitanga may be interpreted differently between kin groups and, indeed, its application may differ among members of the same kin group” (p351). However, Kawharu concludes that “Māori interpretations of kaitiakitanga as guardianship can be far greater than non-Māori interpretations of it” and that “broad interpretations of the term include resource management, resource administration, sustainable development, and so on” (p351).

Kawharu (2018) notes that kaitiakitanga is often defined as guardianship, but this does not fully encompass its meaning. Kaitiaki should be defined to also include resource management – “human, material, and non-material elements are all to be kept in balance [...] Kaitiakitanga cannot be understood without regard to key concepts including mana (rangatiratanga) ‘authority’, mauri ‘spiritual life-principle’, tapu ‘sacredness, set apart’, rahui ‘prohibition or conservation’, manaaki ‘hospitality’ and tuku ‘transfer, gift, release’. [...] it is through a whakapapa ‘genealogical layering’ paradigm, where all elements within the universe are ordered in linear (descent-time) and lateral (kinship-space) layers, that kaitiakitanga finds its rationale” (p349). Kamira et al. 2003 suggests that kaitiakitanga “implies guardianship, stewardship,

governance and responsibility roles.” (p39) and “guardianship, protection, care and vigilance” (p42). Jenkins (2018) suggests *kaitiakitanga* could be directly translated as “resource stewardship” (p37).

Boulton and Brannell (2015) view *kaitiakitanga* as an ethics of care, that also “embraces social protocols associated with hospitality, reciprocity and obligation (*manaaki*, *tuku* and *utu*)” (p76). Similarly, Macfarlane and Macfarlane (2019) view *kaitiakitanga* as a balancing concept that “weaves together ancestral, environmental and social threads of identity, purpose and practice.” Proctor (2013) observes “*kaitiakitanga* is an important principle determining preferred ways of protecting natural resources, exercising guardianship, determining responsibilities and obligations and protecting the interests of future” (p117).

Some authors describe this weaving as including spiritual dimensions, and that distinctions between spiritual and material are not drawn as starkly as in Western perspectives. “All *kaitiaki* are concerned with not only guardianship responsibilities, but also spiritual and physical management. As guardians, protectors, managers and administrators, *kaitiaki* preside over different orders of reality” (Kawharu 2018, p355). Ritchie et al. (2015) similarly note “*wairuatanga* (spiritual interconnectedness) is an integral part of *kaitiakitanga*” (p206).

Kaitiakitanga is described as having a strong temporal dimension, both backwards and forwards in time: “the historical aspect of *kaitiakitanga* can be understood with reference to the aphorism regarding Māori walking backwards into the future [...] The cultural approach of collapsing time is best understood by the genealogical framework called *whakapapa*. [...] *Kaitiakitanga* can be interpreted as sustainable management, but not without reference to *whakapapa* and the time and space mapping paradigm it represents. *Kaitiakitanga* is, therefore, more than managing relations between environmental resources and humans; it also involves managing relationships between people in the past, present and future” (Kawharu, 2018, p352). Tipa and Tierney (2003) observe that “*kaitiaki* are obligated not only to protect the interests of future generations but also stress the importance of ancestors to tribal identity” (p8).

2.3 *Kaitiakitanga and stewardship*

While one is often translated as the other, Marsden (2003) draws a distinction between *kaitiakitanga* and stewardship. “The original English meaning of stewardship is ‘to guard someone else’s property’, apart from having overtones of a master-servant relationship. Ownership of property in the pre-contact period was a foreign concept”, and “the resources of the earth did not belong to man but rather, man belonged to the earth” (p54). Kamira et al. (2003) notes that *tiaki* is a “responsibility or obligation rather than a right due to ownership” (p43), and Mutu (2004) observes that a failure to carry out *kaitiakitanga* results in a loss of *mana* (‘authority, prestige’).

This is not the only way in which stewardship and *kaitiakitanga* can be contrasted. Unlike the one-directional principal-steward relationship imagined by Davis et al. (1997, described later in this paper), *kaitiakitanga* has been associated with a two-way relationship: “the essence of *manaaki* ‘hospitality’ [...] is an important dimension of *kaitiakitanga*. *Manaaki* is a protocol that centres on the ideal of giving in order to maintain (or establish) authority, prestige and status. It is selfish, yet selfless. [...] *Manaaki* is very much a two-way relationship [...]. Both sides benefit according to the level of generosity displayed to the other” (Kawharu 2018, p355).

The association of *manaaki*, sometimes translated as hospitality, is even more closely associated with stewardship by Tapsell and Dews (2018), who suggest that *manaakitanga* is the word best associated with stewardship, and *kaitiakitanga* with protection. Kamira et al. (2003) state that “*kaitiakitanga* was the word used by Māori to define conservation customs and traditions” (p54). As with stewardship, *kaitiakitanga* discourses are particularly prevalent in relation to health management (Kamira et al. 2003, Boulton and Brannelly 2015) and environmental management (Forster 2011, Ritchie 2015).

Stewardship and *kaitiakitanga* appear to be related but distinct concepts, at least as described by the authors cited in this paper. Macfarlane and Macfarlane (2015) propound He Awa Whiria / a braided rivers approach “as two streams of knowledge are able to blend and interact” (p18). In New Zealand, many rivers are “braided”, consisting of a network of river channels separated by small, often temporary, islands. Similarly, New Zealand’s understanding and implementation of the European/Western stewardship and Māori *kaitiakitanga* may provide an opportunity for a braided approach.

3. Stewardship literature

Like many public administration constructs, stewardship discourses can first be located in corporate management contexts, beginning with Davis et al.’s 1997 conception of ‘stewardship theory’. This was then translated to the public sector in 2011 by Hallsworth. Yet, stewardship can be seen as a continuance of public administration discourses that commenced with Carl Friedrich (1940) and Herman Finer (1940) who examined the objectives and the limits of administrative responsiveness; of the New Public Management distinction between ministerial purchase (goods and services) and ownership interests (Gorringe 1987); or calls largely by American academics for a renewed stewardship ethic in public administration (see Kass 1989).

Davis et al. and Hallsworth each frame stewardship as a nascent field of research praxis. These genealogies fail to acknowledge stewardship in fields of environment, ecology, medicine, religion, and ethics. The term stewardship is at times synonymously grasped as or in conjunction with sustainability, management, trusteeship, guardianship, protection, preservation, archiving, curatorship, responsibility, accountability, behavioural change, appropriate use, leadership, (good) governance, ethicality, and morality. Stewardship discourses establish norms regarding the objectives of stewardship, as well as the objects of stewardship. The objects of stewardship range from—what is deemed—material to immaterial resources. The specific meanings of stewardship are context-dependent yet share the notion of forms of selfless management. In the public sector, stewardship is strongly tied to leadership and governance responsibilities.

With the wide variety of definitions and usages, combined with the general absence of theoretical grounding, caution must be exercised that stewardship does not become a ‘magical concept’. Pollitt and Hupe (2011) theorise fundamental propositions in public administration as magical concepts: “magical concepts are very broad, normatively charged, and lay claim to universal or near-universal application” (p643). The varied but generally idealistic conceptions of stewardship risk the possibility that we may not know what stewardship is, but we know that we like it.

3.1 Stewardship as responsible management (a proactive duty of care, curatorship, guardianship)

The term *steward* is generally thought to be derived from the Proto-Germanic *stīg weard*, to refer to a domestic servant (*weard*) who maintains a house or hall (*stīg*) (Hecht et al. 2019). Jeavons (1994)

suggested that even in this original usage, the responsibilities of the *stij weard* combined responsibilities for management, curatorship, and guardianship. It has since been applied in a range of fields, but Hecht et al. (2019, p2) suggest that in modern usage it “retains the focus from its etymology on managing resources and maintaining the standing of an organisation or entity, from a single house to an entire ecosystem.” Similarly, Carlson et al. (2015) define stewards as taking care of resources by ensuring their effective use through informed and carefully management processes, and Heijden (2013) claims “it is safe to say that stewardship broadly implies the careful management of something that belongs to others” (p60).

Various authors take this concept further by aligning stewardship to aspects of fiduciary or managerial responsibility. Kass (1989) links stewardship to the technical expertise, risk management, and use of scientific evidence. Similarly, Hecht et al. (2019, p10) claim “One of the clearest ways that governments can fail to be responsible stewards of public resources is by ignoring scientific consensus and adopting policies that run counter to scientific evidence.” Hecht et al. aim to remove technocratic decision-making from political influence; good stewardship “should be independent and autonomous from political influence, so as to provide unbiased expertise and evaluations.” (Hecht et al., 2019, p8). Boston et al. (2011) contend that technical information is not, in itself, constitutive of stewardship, but that stewardship indeed relies on good information: “good stewardship of resources depends [...] on accurate information, appropriately designed performance measures, reliable, authoritative official statistics” (p16). This aligns with use within the Canadian government, where ‘responsible stewardship’ meant that “a manager’s decisions should bring together integrated financial and non-financial performance information” (Commonwealth Secretariat 2003, p80). We interpret these various definitions as specific focus areas rather than representing conflicting ideas - the different emphases by each author may be analogous to the parable of the blind men and the elephant (Saxe 2016).

In the area of regulatory stewardship, we observe a difference that may be more fundamental. Heijden (2021) describes a much more active approach to stewardship, and adopts the definition put forward by the New Zealand Treasury in 2017: “a responsibility [for] adopting a whole-of-system, lifecycle view of regulation, and taking a proactive, collaborative approach, to the monitoring and care of the regulatory system(s) within which they have policy or operational responsibilities”; noting further that “regulatory agencies are expected to do all this actively without requiring their minister’s explicit direction or permission.” In this definition, stewardship is notably performed by public administrators independent of the explicit permission of a minister (the political principal), and is associated with a proactive duty of care.

3.2 Stewardship as shared goals (stewardship theory)

Davis et al. (1997) conceive of principal-steward relations as an alternative to principal-agent relations. (This was criticised by Armstrong, 1997, for ignoring the heritage of the term stewardship and its association with responsible management, drawing instead from social and psychological theories.) Principal agent relationships are core to many of the dilemmas of public administration: “whenever one individual depends on the action of another, an agency relationship arises” (Pratt and Zeckhauser, 1985, p2). The relationship is subject to exploitation by the individual taking the action (the agent) and the affected party (the principal), due to conflicts of interest, environmental insecurity, and information asymmetry (Eisenhardt 1989). Agency theory assumes maximising behaviour by both parties, and suggests that the agent’s behaviour should be controlled by incentives (Ballwieser et al. 2012). Public

choice theory applies these market-based economic models to the public sector, and New Zealand's interpretation of New Public Management sought to align the incentives of department chief executives (agent) with ministers (principals) (Scott, 2001).

Davis et al.'s 'stewardship theory' emerged as a critique of agency theory, and particularly of the assumption of self-maximisation. Replacing the 'agent' with the 'steward', Davis et al.'s rendering on stewardship is predicated upon the behavioural maxims of self-actualisation, belonging, achievement, further development, responsibility, and collective goals. Information asymmetry notwithstanding, shared objectives remove opportunism on the part of the steward. The steward can be granted autonomy, as the principal does not have to fear the steward's self-interest. "The fundamental difference between agency and stewardship theories [is] the model of man [...] as 'self-actualizing man,'" (Davis et al., 1997). The major distinction is between extrinsic versus intrinsic motivations, with Fogal (2005) describing a steward as someone who acts selflessly as if guided by a higher calling.

Davis et al. describe the principal-steward relationship in the context of a contractual relationship, echoed by Van Slyke (2007) who applies stewardship theory to the relationship between public managers (principals), and nonprofit organisations (stewards) in the context of social services. Van Slyke suggests one implication of stewardship theory is that there is less need for the principal to specify inputs and outputs in such detail, with contractual stability and fewer instances of bid letting, based on a deeper trusting relationship that assumes goal alignment. Stewards are those "whose motives are aligned with the objectives of their principals" (Van Slyke 2007, p164).

Stewardship theory has been criticized by Arthurs and Busentiz (2003, p 2003) as painting "an excessively rosy picture of the steward", and by Cribb (2006) as being insufficient for making organisations accountable for taxpayers' money. Van Thiel and Yesilkagit (2011, p784) sought to broaden the discussion of possible motivations for bureaucrats-as-agents, and moved to the more neutral language of 'the delegation problem' allowing for a variety of motivations: "the delegation problem refers to the uncertainty that politicians face regarding the way in which bureaucrats will execute the policy decisions made by the politicians." The view of stewards proposed by Davis et al. and Van Slyke risks replacing one simplistic view of human motivation (Hobbes – man is bad and self-interested) with another (Rousseau – man is good by nature and altruistic). Albanese et al. (1997) suggest that life is rarely that simple, and that the nature of the principal-agent/steward relationship varies based upon the specifics of a given task, such that "today's agency may be tomorrow's steward" (p611). Herdandez (2012) goes further to suggest that rather than a binary choice, agency and stewardship represent two ends of a continuum from purely extrinsically motivated to purely intrinsically motivated. Chrisman (2019) then explores both the continuum and coexistence of agents and stewards – public administrators have various motivations, simultaneously, although some may be more salient in specific contexts.

Mayer et al. (1995) associate stewardship with a trusting relationship between the principal and steward, noting that trust is the willingness and risk of being vulnerable, on the part of both actors, to the possibility that one actor in the contract may pursue his/her own self-interest to the exclusion of the collectively agreed upon goals. Bernstein et al. (2016) sees a similar risk, and calls simultaneously for more trust and more efforts to reduce information asymmetries (perhaps inspired by the Russian "Доверяй, но проверяй" – 'trust but verify', Shanker 1987).

3.3 Stewardship as connectedness (system stewardship)

Preston et al. (1998) question the simplicity of stewardship theory as described by Davis et al., and seek to expand the concept to include a more sophisticated method of identifying and reconciling the interests of multiple stakeholders. Chrisman (2019) too, suggests that Davis et al.'s original work does not "fully capture the multiple, heterogeneous, and conflicting goals of organizational stakeholders" (p1052). Rarely do public administrators have the luxury of being accountable to only one principal – as Behn (2001, p8) quipped: "to who must the public manager be accountable? The answer is everyone". It may therefore be more apt to describe *principals-steward* relationships.

According to the World Health Organisation ('WHO'), stewardship falls down because of (and is antithetical to) "centralized and hierarchical public bureaucracies [...] fragmented by many vertical programmes which were often run as virtual fiefdoms." (World Health Organisation, 2000, p118). The antidote, they claimed, is a "Sector Wide Approach" (p123) that brings together the different actors within a system. Governments must therefore be stewards of a health 'system'. Travis et al. (2003) extends this concept of system stewardship, and distinguishes between governance, which involves formal decision-making, and stewardship, which involves the careful curatorship of the relationships and interactions between different actors.

Hallsworth (2011) suggests that "central government increasingly needs to see its role as one of system stewardship" (p8). Networked actors, working together, produce emergent outcomes; the role of the system steward is to oversee the ways in which a policy is being adapted and steer the system of actors toward certain outcomes. Hallsworth associates stewardship with goals, rules, feedback, and response, and suggests a kind of adaptive management (Carey and Harris, 2015). Edwards et al. (2012) imagined stewardship as "enabling and leveraging" a system with less active management, and where "responsibility will be broadly shared and full control less apparent" (p237).

Hickford (2017) sees stewardship not as a dyadic relationship between principal and agent/steward, but as an emergent property of a collective: "stewardship is a collective, behaviourally integrative responsibility, engaging all participants, irrespective of department or portfolio commitment or outlook" (p44).

Taking this idea furthest, Block (2013) contrasts stewardship to leadership: leadership is hierarchical and creates a dependent relationship, stewardship "focus[es] on relationships, reciprocity, and participation first", and "stewardship is creating a sustainable connection with people" (p15). Leaders, according to Block, slow genuine reform, and stewards must abandon leadership in favour of partnership, empowerment, and service. Block aligns stewardship with anti-colonialism and anti-patriarchal movements, and argues for maintaining accountability without control or compliance.

3.4 Stewardship as legitimacy (an ethic of stewardship)

Mitchell and Scott (1987) link the decline in public trust in the American government to a skepticism concerning the stewardship of public leaders and administrators. Kass (1988) defined stewardship in this context as "the administrator's willingness and ability to earn the public trust by being an effective and ethical agent in carrying out the republic's business" (p3). Kass argues that failure of stewardship involves acts that are unjust or that demonstrate a lack of care for constituents, even if they are technically and procedurally accurate: "legitimacy resting in stewardship requires that efficiency and effectiveness be informed by, and subordinated to, the ethical norms of justice and beneficence" (p4). Kass's concept of stewardship therefore involves an addition to the principal agent obligation: "the agent must achieve the

principal's interest and welfare and be ethical in the process of doing so" (p5). Kass acknowledges that these criteria are often in conflict with each other, and that being a good steward is therefore difficult to navigate. The WHO align stewardship to the active management of one's own ethical decisions and the also integrity of others: "in turning a blind eye, stewardship is subverted; trusteeship is abandoned and institutional corruption sets in." (World Health Organisation, 2000, p121).

Heijden (2013) aligns stewardship with Enlightenment political and moral philosophy: "for example, the idea of the 'social contract' (that we all sacrifice some of our individual freedom to a ruling institution to look after and ensure our civil freedom) or Kant's 'categorical imperative' (the golden rule of not doing unto others what you do not want others to do to you) can be considered forms of stewardship" (p60, parentheses in original).

Segal (2012) saw in stewardship theory an opportunity to advance neglected aspects of public service values. She criticised New Public Management of focussing on efficiency while "gloss[ing] over integrity" (p826). Segal's version of stewardship saw the retention of formal accountability with a renewed emphasis on normative concepts: "stewardship turns less on delineating the bounds of stewards' responsibilities, than on their having the right motivation and values – such as respect, altruism, self-sacrifice, caring, humility, collaboration, and moral courage" (p827). Stewardship is here seen as a casualty of the Wilsonian divide of politics and administration, which (in her view) rendered administrative ethics a matter of rule compliance. Stewardship is cast as a renaissance of pre-Wilsonian ideals, and Segal argues for incorporating stewardship criteria into existing efficiency/productive evaluation systems.

Hecht et al. (2019) further link stewardship to the idea of transparency, and with clarity on how decisions are made, and programmes are evaluated. They distinguish stewardship from traditional fiduciary governance arrangements, conceived as a principal-agent relationship, in that stewards "remain accountable to the public as a whole."

Caldwell et al. (2008) describe 'ethical stewardship' as a type of leadership, where leaders earn trust and followership by demonstrating their commitment to the steward's duties. The description of ethical stewardship appears to repeat similar existing constructs of values-based leadership and organisational humanism (see Argyris 1957, Golembiewski 1967, Burns 1978, Heifetz 1994). Stout and Love (2021) also offer an uncritical description of ethical stewardship in public administration, but link it to "mutual care, responsibility", "the sanctity of all human beings and all of creation" and "radical democracy that moves sovereignty from an abstract People to each actual person" (p9).

3.5 Stewardship as an intergenerational obligation (inherited from the past, tended for the future)

When the WHO describe good and bad stewardship, one area of distinction was that good stewards plan ahead, whereas bad stewards "often suffer from myopia. [...] in the sense that their vision does not extend far enough into the future" (World Health Organisation, 2000, p119). Armstrong (1997) saw stewardship as providing governance stability over a long period (p3), and Edwards et al. (2012) described the rationale for stewardship as "a response to short-termism" (p52). Van Wart and Hondeghem (2014) identify stewardship with the maintenance of "long-term public values" (p13), but the precise meaning is not clear. Dawes (2010) associate stewardship with "lifecycle" and "end-to-end" management (p382), suggesting a duty of care that cannot be reduced to simply a point-in-time.

More instructive descriptions of the temporal dimension of stewardship can be found in works by New Zealand authors. Hickford (2017) explicitly links stewardship to both the past and the future; stewardship “is inherited from the past which ought to be subject to continuing custodianship. This [...] does not imply stasis, [...] adaptations and departures are potentially contemplated. [...] Finally, [...] stewardship supplies a basis - a statutory marker - with which to discuss and to contest proposed change or adjustments, but also suggests a focus on what it is that might be inherited and present (even if neglected or forgotten), some of which might be less-than-visible or assumed” (p41). Heijden (2013) associates stewardship with “leaving something in better condition for use by future generations” (see also, Mohrman et al. 2017). Foreman (2016) observes “the stewardship responsibility reinforces that chief executives administer their departments on behalf of others, notably current and future Ministers and ultimately all New Zealanders. The responsibility requires chief executives to plan actively and manage for the medium and long-term interests” and “ultimately, a chief executive should leave the department in better shape than when he or she took office” (p2). New Zealand authors regularly associate stewardship with future (and past) generations, more so than can be found in texts by authors from other countries.

3.6 Stewardship culture

While Preston et al. (1998) were critical of stewardship theory as a prescription for contractual management, they conceded the potential value as a rallying call to influence organisational culture. Stewardship is often associated with culture, however this is often done without significant analysis or explanation (see a “stewardship culture” or “culture of stewardship” in: Zahra et al. 2008, Pearson and Marler 2010, Dawes 2010, Dibrell and Moeller 2011, Eddleston et al. 2012, Bacq and Eddleston 2018, Simpkins 2021, Scott and Merton 2021, Hyland-Wood 2021). Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1957, p145) define culture as “a product; is historical; includes ideas, patterns, and values; is selective; is learned; is based on symbols”. Hyland-Wood (2021, p143) describes one function of government leaders as supporting “a culture of stewardship across the (public service) system” (parentheses added). In this view, stewardship does not refer to the actions of an individual steward, but instead an “organizations-level strategic orientation” (Simpkins et al. 2021). Wilkinson et al. (2016) and O’Hara (2016) each call for a stewardship ‘mindset’ that may be similar in meaning to a stewardship culture.

‘Magical concepts’ (Pollitt and Hupe 2011) were derided earlier, but in this case may be being used deliberately by administrators. Positive valence associations may have moral appeal, and may be valuable leadership and management tools as normative concepts (Donaldson and Preston 1995). The flexibility of meaning may be intentionally, allowing stewardship to operate as a ‘boundary object’ (Scott 2017, Endvist et al. 2018) to facilitate universal appeal. Stewardship may be a construct for building a public servant identity (Van Den Abeele 2007, Scott 2019) or an exercise in self-branding (Dahlén 2009).

3.7 Stewardship in related discourses (regulatory, health, and environmental stewardship)

Stewardship is a concept applied in a variety of fields. Of most relevance to public administration, are regulatory stewardship, data stewardship, health stewardship, and environmental stewardship. Hickford (2017), noting changes to New Zealand legislation, describes “legislative stewardship” (p41). Calling for a proactive duty of care, always adapting, for the legislation under a department’s care, Hickford claims: “legislative stewardship, properly construed, ought to be seen as a constant work-in-progress, incomplete and never a subject of either satisfied complacency or comfort” (p56). Heijden (2021) further describes the related “regulatory stewardship”, taking responsibility for both primary legislation and secondary and tertiary regulatory instruments. As described earlier, this involves both a proactive duty of care, and a

responsibility to be performed without a minister's explicit direction or permission. The New Zealand Treasury also describe 'financial stewardship', understood as responsible financial management (e.g., "financial management stewardship.", "the financial stewardship responsibilities of department heads" – Treasury 2018).

Both Dawes (2010) and Loshin (2011) describe public servants tasked with the end-to-end lifecycle management of public data as 'data stewards.' Dawes (2010) argues that government data should be treated as a public good, like clean air and water, and that stewardship involves the careful management of data within organisational, jurisdictional, and societal values across purposes and over time (Dawes 1996). This version of stewardship does not seek to assign single-point responsibility for the management of data, but instead a culture of stewardship where all public officials (data stewards) handle information with "care and integrity" (Dawes 2010, p381). Data stewardship is an ethic or 'mindset' (Dawes, 2010; Wilkinson et al. 2016, O'Hara 2019). The New Zealand Government has appointed a 'Government Chief Data Steward', responsible for supporting data stewardship capability across the public service, and the government's statistical agency, Statistics New Zealand has published a 'Data Stewardship Framework' that describes the structure required for effective data stewardship (Statistics New Zealand 2019).

Within the field of health management, "stewardship refers to the technical processes that inform [decisions reached by political processes]" (Hecht et al., 2019). The WHO has adopted the concept of stewardship to describe the responsible management of their public health system: "governments should be the 'stewards' of their national resources, maintaining and improving them for the benefit of their populations. In health, this means being ultimately responsible for the careful management of their citizens' well-being. Stewardship in health is the very essence of good government" (World Health Organisation, 2000, p117). As mentioned earlier, the WHO also link stewardship to foresight and suggest that poor stewards do not look far enough into the future, and to connectedness where bad stewards run departments as fiefdoms.

Within environmental management, stewardship is linked to ideas of sustainability, resilience, and wise management. Cozens (2010, p164) links stewardship to "wise management" and "sustainable management". Jenkins (2018, p103) defines 'ecosystem stewardship' as "sustainability strategies based on the principals of reducing vulnerability, enhancing adaptive capacity, increasing resilience and enhancing transformability." Rozzi et al. (2015, p7) link environmental and social issues, positing 'earth stewardship' as an approach to the reconciliation of ecological management and social equity, with a need to address "unequal power relationships, exclusionary institutional arrangements, inequitable and unjust economic strategies." Takacs (2008) locates the government's role in environmental stewardship in the management of common pool resources – the government holds these resources in trust for the common good and has a stewardship responsibility in perpetuity. New Zealand's Ministry for the Environment has been a key proponent of the concept of stewardship within the New Zealand public service, stating in 2010 that the goal of their oceans policy was "New Zealanders having confidence in, supporting and participating in the wise management, stewardship and sustainability of New Zealand's oceans." (Ministry for the Environment, 2010, p164).

4. Stewardship streams in New Zealand public administration

The term "stewardship" first appears in the New Zealand statute book via the Conservation Act of 1987, and now appears in 27 Acts of Parliament. Kaitiakitanga appears in 39 Acts. Interpretation clauses for kaitiakitanga usually refer back to both "guardianship" and "the ethic of stewardship", for example:

“Kaitiakitanga means the exercise of guardianship by the tangata whenua of an area in accordance with tikanga Māori in relation to natural and physical resources; and includes the ethic of stewardship” (Resource Management Act 1991, section 2)

“Kaitiakitanga means the exercise of guardianship; and, in relation to any fisheries resources, includes the ethic of stewardship based on the nature of the resources, as exercised by the appropriate tangata whenua in accordance with tikanga Māori” (Fisheries Act 1996, section 2)

Stewardship is described in the foundational legislation for both public service departments (State Sector Act 1988 (2013 amendment), repealed and replaced by the Public Service Act 2020) and arms-length bodies (Crown Entities Act 2004, 2018 amendment).

4.1 The heyday of New Public Management

In 1988, the Parliament of New Zealand passed the revolutionary State Sector Act, still regarded as the most extreme and theoretically coherent implementation of New Public Management (Lodge and Gill 2011). While other Westminster countries (and New Zealand) had traditionally left the relationship between Ministers and department administrative heads (‘chief executives’ in New Zealand) ambiguous, the State Sector Act 1988, and later the Public Finance Act 1989, sought to make this relationship explicit. Ministers were conceived as having two primary roles: purchaser and owner (Scott 2001). The purchaser role involved specifying goods and services to be produced by departments. The ownership role involved acting as a steward of public institutions.

The purchaser role proved problematic. Contractualism formed a key difference between New Zealand’s version of New Public Management and international variations (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011). It was originally imagined that chief executives and ministers would sign “purchase agreements” with each other, specifying at the beginning of each financial year what goods and services would be provided by the department (Boston et al. 1996). This obscured a key contradiction in the reforms: in instances where goods and services could be reasonably well specified in advance, this was used as a rationale to move that function outside the public service and to manage it at arms-length, following OE Williamson’s discriminatory matching principle (Gorringe 1987); therefore, those functions left in public service departments were those where full upfront specification was impossible. Purchase agreements were tried and quickly abandoned (Scott 2016a), as ministers preferred the flexibility to be able to continually respecify their priorities and expectations. The minister-chief executive relationship is therefore operationally more like a hierarchical and relationship-based exchange than a contract model.

The ownership role was even more difficult to reconcile. In 2001, former Environment Minister Simon Upton described the problem: “In New Zealand, a mindbending number of formal accountability documents were generated to which Ministers and Select Committees of Parliament had, in theory, recourse. The reality is that many Ministers weren’t particularly interested in their ‘ownership’ monitoring role and neither were the parliamentary committees that were supposed to keep them honest” (Upton 2001, p9).

In the late 1990s, one Public Service Commissioner proposed a solution: ministers would discharge their purchaser obligations through planning and reporting instruments administered by the Treasury, and they would discharge their ownership interests through the performance management of chief executives by the Public Service Commissioner. In the New Zealand public service, all chief executives are appointed by

the Public Service Commissioner and subject to regular performance assessment. Chief executive performance agreements began to include criteria related to the effective stewardship of public institutions and the people and assets for which chief executives were responsible (Scott 2016b), according with Segal's (2012) recommendation that stewardship performance be evaluated alongside traditional efficiency and effectiveness criteria.

In parallel, stewardship and *kaitiakitanga* were gaining prevalence in the environmental management sector. Both featured prevalently in legislation for resource management, fisheries, and conservation, as well as in policies, programmes, and organisational structures (the first author was at one stage employed in the "Stewardship Directorate" of the Ministry for the Environment).

4.2 Better Public Services

In 2011, the New Zealand Government convened an advisory group of public service, business, and community leaders, to provide advice on improving government (State Services Commission 2011). Among the changes recommended, the State Sector Act 1988 was amended to include explicit instruction for chief executives to support ministers to be better owners. Chief executives were responsible to the appropriate minister for: "the stewardship of the department [...] including of its medium- and long-term sustainability, organisational health, capability, and capacity to offer free and frank advice to successive governments; and the stewardship of: assets and liabilities on behalf of the Crown that are used by or relate to [...] the department; [...] and the legislation administered by the department" (State Sector Act 1988, section 32).

These responsibilities can be viewed in the context of a dyadic structure – responsibility of a chief executive, owed to a minister. In turn, they support ministers to fulfil their responsibilities to Parliament to act as good stewards of the resources they control. The regulatory community (led by the Treasury) took the requirement of chief executives to be good stewards of legislation as a rallying call (Ayto 2014). The ensuing regulatory stewardship programme took the interpretation put forward by Heijdan (2013) that regulatory stewardship involved a proactive duty of care for the quality of regulation to be implemented without explicit direction or permission from Ministers. Thus, the inclusion of stewardship provisions in the State Sector Act provided a communicative function beyond its instrumental function (see van Klink 2016) that served as a justification for significant and ongoing government activity. This communicative function was seen as so important, that the Chief Archivist subsequently lobbied for the 'stewardship of information' to be included in the Public Service Act 2020 (State Services Commission 2020a, appendix 1).

Additionally, in two places references to stewardship were added in a way that suggested stewardship as a property or quality of the collective, in the manner described by Hickford (2017). The purpose of the Act was amended to including promoting and upholding a State sector system that "fosters a culture of stewardship" (State Sector Act 1988, section 1A), and the role of the Public Service Commissioner was expanded to include "promoting a culture of stewardship in the State services" (State Sector Act 1988, section 4A). A culture of stewardship is presumably one in which the emergent property of the State services is one consistent with good stewardship (in accordance with one or more of the usages described earlier).

The Better Public Services Advisory Group also noted a problem of fragmentation. Department chief executives believed that this could be addressed, in part, by building a collective team ethos with their

colleagues (Scott and Macaulay 2020). This group formed themselves into the ‘State Sector Leadership Team’ (now the ‘Public Service Leadership Team’), and regularly attend group retreats together (Hughes and Scott 2021). They formed a charter that identified themselves as the “collective stewards of the public service” (Hampton 2014). Linking this to the earlier literature, adopting this the ‘collective stewards’ mantra likely served two purposes – to orient the group toward an obligation of responsible management and away from a focus on short-termism (as described by Edwards 2012), and association with a positive valence concept that helped strengthen their group identity (as described by Prescott et al. 1998). Chief executives continued to have their performance assessed in large part based on their perceived performance as stewards and then also based on their contribution to the collective (Scott 2016a).

4.3 The Public Service Act 2020

In 2020, the State Sector Act 1988 was repealed and replaced by the Public Service Act 2020. This act strengthened existing stewardship provisions and added new ones. The discourse surrounding the Act heavily featured the concept of stewardship, including in public consultation documents (State Services Commission 2018) and public statements by the Public Services Commissioner (Hughes 2019) and responsible minister (Hipkins 2018, 2019). Notably, the Cabinet papers through which the Government agreed to the contained policies and authorised drafting of the bill, mentioned stewardship 83 times. Cabinet is a committee of senior ministers. At the time, New Zealand was led by a coalition government and Cabinet involved ministers from multiple parties, that then collectively claimed a majority of seats in Parliament. This meant that Cabinet was the vehicle for most major policy debates. Both the Public Service Act 2020 itself, and the Cabinet papers that explain its rationale, are instructive in understanding the government’s intent with regard to stewardship of and by the public service. While the Act itself leaves stewardship undefined, the associated Cabinet papers provide three definitions:

- i. “the convention that chief executives act as stewards or caretakers of their department or departmental agency with respect to: its medium- and long-term sustainability, organisational capability, health, and capacity to offer free and frank advice to successive governments; and assets (including legislation and information) and liabilities on behalf of the Crown” (State Services Commission 2020a, section 27).
- ii. “active planning and management of medium- and long-term interests, along with associated advice” (State Services Commission 2020a, section 88).
- iii. “a proactive duty of care for a resource that belongs to or exists for the benefit of others” (State Services Commission 2020a, appendix 1).

The responsibility of chief executives to support ministers with their stewardship obligations has been retained and clarified. Chief executives are now responsible to the appropriate minister for “supporting that Minister to act as a good steward of the public interest, including by— maintaining public institutions, assets, and liabilities; maintaining the currency of any legislation administered by their agency; and providing advice on the long-term implications of policies” (Public Service Act 2020, section 52). Not only has the role of steward been clarified (to make clear that the chief executive is supporting the minister to discharge the minister’s own stewardship obligations), but the final clause, to provide advice on the long-term implications of policies, once again links New Zealand’s interpretation of stewardship to the long-term public interest.

The previous general goals to promote stewardship as a property of the collective has been given instrument effect. Stewardship is now identified as a principle of the public service (Public Service Act

2020, section 12). Chief executives are responsible to the Public Service Commissioner for upholding the principle of stewardship when carrying out their responsibilities and functions, and for ensuring that the agencies they lead also do so. In turn, the Commissioner will prepare an independent report, at least once every three years, on whether and the extent to which agencies are acting as good stewards, and in particular are managing long-term capability. This report is required to be tabled in Parliament, in effect making it public, and it must be prepared independently of ministers.

This new statutory obligation, on chief executives to be good stewards and promote stewardship in the agencies they lead, and on the Commission to independently report on stewardship, perhaps combine the concept of stewardship as responsible management with an echo of Davis et al.'s stewardship theory. Unelected and politically neutral public servants are thereby given a tutelary obligation (Hood 2002). This could be interpreted as an action by Parliament as a counterweight to a perceived lack of stewardship by the executive, as identified by Upton (2001). By way of counter, the associated Cabinet Paper notes "this duty to promote stewardship is not intended to restrict Ministers' ability to issue lawful instructions nor to lessen the responsibility of public servants to follow these instructions (State Services Commission 2019a, recommendation 13). Alternatively, this obligation could be interpreted as part of a goal alignment (Davis et al. 1997) that sees public servants' stewardship ethic informed by altruism, described by Perry (1997) as 'public service motivation', or in the Public Service Act 2020 as 'a spirit of service to the community' (Public Service Act 2020, section 13; from Gladden, 1945). Stewardship and spirit of service are combined and linked at numerous points through the Cabinet papers (State Services Commission 2019a-c). These Cabinet papers also identify two purposes to imposing an obligation of stewardship on the public service, independently of obligations to ministers:

- i. To "protect and enhance the medium- and long-term capability of the public service to serve successive governments. Because this purpose supports successive governments it is in this respect independent of the Government of the day.
- ii. [And to] "protect the long-term sustainability of New Zealand's system of government, and support public confidence that this occurs. Because this purpose supports public trust and confidence in public institutions it is in this respect independent of the Government of the day" (State Services Commission 2019a, appendix 1).

The distinction between supporting ministers with their stewardship role, and acting independently as stewards, is further emphasised as a justification for the absence of political interference in the appointment of public servants: "Chief executives and the Commissioner are expected to be responsive to the government of the day, but also maintain sufficient independence to serve the long-term interests of the public of New Zealand. This may be realised in different ways by successive governments. Maintaining political neutrality in the appointment of chief executives and the Public Service Commissioner is important for effective system stewardship" (State Services Commission 2019c, paragraph 52).

A new reporting provision was added to the Act, that was intended to provide "strengthened reporting requirements relating to stewardship and sustainability of the public service" (State Services Commission 2019a, paragraph 6). Every chief executive must provide, at least every three years, a long-term insights briefing, to be produced independently of ministers and tabled in Parliament. Here foresight is explicitly linked to stewardship. This does not correspond to any interpretation in the literature, but is by inference linked to the intergenerational obligation interpretation of Heijden (2013) and Foreman (2016) and

Mohrman et al. (2017). Implementation of the Long-Term Insights Briefing is being led by the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, and was explicitly modelled on the Long-term Fiscal Position, a similar requirement in the Public Finance Act 1989, for the chief executive of the treasury to prepare an insights briefing independently of ministers (2004 Amendment, section 26N). The association of stewardship with the tabling of reports in Parliament for public consumption may be linked to Hecht et al.'s (2019) contention that stewards are accountable not only to ministers but to the Public as a whole.

The Public Service Leadership Team was given legislative status, and the corresponding Cabinet paper describes this as for the purpose that “public service chief executives work as a team on the stewardship of the public service as whole” (State Services Commission 2019b, paragraph 46).

Finally, the government links the concept of stewardship to the Public Service Commissioner's role in supporting government formation (State Services Commission 2019c, appendix 1). The Commissioner has a new responsibility for ensuring that all negotiating parties have equal access to the public service as part of coalition negotiations to form a new government. Here stewardship seems to mean any duty performed independently of ministers that maintains public institutions for the long-term.

5. Discussion

Stewardship now permeates the New Zealand public administration system, led by central agencies, and by the collective of chief executives:

- Treasury prepares a long-term fiscal position independently of ministers, and leads a regulatory stewardship community across the public service (with the government regulatory network led from the Ministry of Business, Innovation, and Employment).
- The Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet has responsibility for leading implementation of the Long-Term Insights Briefings to be prepared independently of ministers. They also lead the policy profession, and therefore have overall leadership for implementing the various stewardship obligations on stewardship of policy advice.
- The Public Service Commissioner leads the public service and convenes the Public Service Leadership Team (the collective stewards of the public service). They assess the performance of chief executives and agencies as stewards, and report independently of ministers on the state of stewardship of and by the public service. The Commissioner is also responsible for stewardship of the independence and political neutrality of public service appointments, and supporting the government formation process.

5.1 Fiduciary or independent stewardship

The bifurcation of stewardship responsibilities – where the public service supports ministers with their stewardship obligations, but then has separate and distinct stewardship obligations of their own – provides twin paths for making sense of the history and theory of stewardship. Supporting ministers to act as good stewards (responsible managers – Carlson et al. 2015) can be traced directly to Gorrings' conception of ministers having purchase and ownership interests, and Upton's contention that they need help with the latter.

Independently promoting stewardship appears to recast, or at least make more explicit, the New Zealand public service bargain (Hood 2002). Countless episodes of the popular television comedy 'Yes Minister'

reveal that public servants have long imagined themselves as having a tutelary role. The Public Service Act confirms this, but does so not as a way to thwart ministers. Instead, independent stewardship duties appear to be an affirmation of the role of ethics in public administration, echoing Mitchell and Scott (1987), Kass (1988) and Segal (2012). Stewardship speaks to how the public service should behave *while* implementing the government's agenda.

We cannot help but notice how the literature that links stewardship explicitly to intergenerational or long-term obligations is predominantly from New Zealand, that this literature looks both backwards and forwards through time, and that the new stewardship provisions in the Public Service Act clearly emphasise the temporal elements of stewardship.

5.2 A braided river

With all the previous caveats about the limitations of non-Māori commentary on concepts from te ao Māori, we also note what we perceive as similarities between literature on kaitiakitanga and the New Zealand-specific interpretation of stewardship. In particular, stewardship in New Zealand involves guardianship and responsible management, it draws from the past and acts as a custodian for the future, and that (in the case of independent stewardship obligations) it is seen as an ethical obligation rather than an ownership right. Each of these points has been made of kaitiakitanga, but that does not mean that these individual qualities can be extracted from te ao Māori and applied in a Westminster-derived context. Te ao Māori undoubtedly influences, consciously and unconsciously, public administration practice in New Zealand. This has occurred both through the long history of participation by Māori in contributing to and shaping the public service, and also through the influence of Māori on broader New Zealand society including non-Māori public servants. This remains underexplored in studies of New Zealand society generally, and public administration literature specifically, and offers opportunities for a braided rivers approach to understanding points of overlap or opportunities for learning from the exchange of two world views. The public service has committed to improving its capability to engage with Māori and to understand Māori perspectives (Public Service Act 2020, section 14) and this places responsibility on the public service to grow their knowledge.

5.3 New Public Stewardship?

Stewardship is not unique to New Zealand public service discourse. Stewardship is mentioned in Canadian and Australian literature and legislation (Armstrong 1997, Edwards 2012), and many of the key texts drawn on in this paper come from UK and US contexts. However, the centrality of stewardship to recent New Zealand public service discourse makes it an outlier among nations. We offer three alternative explanations for this outlier status:

- i. Stewardship is part of an emerging trend of public administration. Just like with the New Public Management Reforms, New Zealand moved first and farthest (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011), but within the context of an emerging paradigm ('New Public Stewardship?').
- ii. Stewardship is an anomaly, or a fad. New Zealand has moved further in this direction than other countries at this time, but this linked with key individual leaders; New Zealand's interest in stewardship is therefore likely revert to the mean over time.
- iii. Stewardship is somehow integral to New Zealand culture and worldview. This supports the contention of Welch and Wong (1998) and Dreschler (2015) that public administration best practice is not universal, and like all other social systems, is contextually dependent on the culture

in which it operates. In this paper we identify potential influences and inspiration from te ao Māori.

5.4 Discourse into action?

This paper primarily engages with how the word “stewardship” features in New Zealand discourse and legislation. Pollitt (2002) proposes for layers for analysing administrative reforms: discursive, decisional, practical, results. This paper hints at examples of practice (particularly in regulatory stewardship) and is silent on the notion of results. Regarding the most recent reforms including the Public Service Act 2020, this is to be expected as the changes have not had time to be fully implemented. We contend that there is significant work still to be done around stewardship, to breathe life into the concept/s described in the Act.

6. References

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