

**Quality Management and Organizational  
Innovation in Canada\***

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\*The author wishes to thank for their very useful comments Maria Barrados, Robert Segsworth  
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Paper prepared for the International Conference on Public Management in North America  
at El Colegio de Mexico, October 27-28, 2005

**Abstract**

In the federal public service, quality was first sought through efficient people. After five decades of predominant attention to processes, the rise of management thinking and program budgeting in the late 1960s led to concern with results. Since the early 1990s, the idea of results-based accountability facilitated the search for alternative forms of service delivery within our parliamentary system. The current Management Accountability Framework enlarges the notion of results to include the quality of personnel management, service to citizens, risk management and stewardship concerning public resources. The Auditor General finds progress to be very slow, but Citizens First 3 finds a big improvement in opinion ratings of federal services. Current ideals are unattainable, but they are changing the way the public service operates and learning will occur.

Key Words: quality, results, innovation, agencies, accountability.

## **Quality management and Organizational Innovation in Canada**

This subject, like much of public administration, would be stupefyingly boring if it were not so interesting. Or better, it requires a certain amount of persistence to break through the sometimes tedious detail to the fascinating issues it raises. While organizational innovation may have many objectives, achieving high quality services at lowest possible cost is at the heart of today's public management reforms. These institutional reforms are, in turn, a major reason for the adoption of results-based management, to which the Canadian government is committed.

This is the link between my two subjects. I will proceed in four stages. First, some contextual background to recent reforms is necessary. Second, recent organizational innovations are sketched, with special attention to more or less autonomous agencies to implement some government policies. Third, policies and activities to improve quality of service are outlined, with results-based management given pride of place. Fourth, there is evaluation of these reforms as the current version of rational action.

My conclusion will be that despite a sense of déjà vu, there are new and important innovations occurring. They will not work out just as planned, but they will change the way public servants work and the way citizens experience government services. Among the reasons that they will not work as planned is that objectives of government action are not always specified and understood, current reforms politicize administration in ways that may be dangerous in a parliamentary system, fully rational decision making is impossible even if we could afford it, and the theoretical underpinning (the logic model in today's jargon) has not been given systematic attention. Fortunately, higher public servants are used to living in ambiguity and they will do their best to make current reforms work.

## **Introduction**

Canada has a Westminster or parliamentary type of government. This means that the government, or cabinet, are all members of the legislature, almost always of the House of Commons, and that they must have the confidence of the House to govern. Ministers are collectively and individually responsible to the House; while they may survive occasional defeats in the legislature, if they lose a vote of confidence (as they did in November, 2005) or a vote on a major legislative proposal (especially a budgetary proposal), the Prime Minister must resign, and his government with him.

While elections must be held at least every five years, the timing of elections is up to the Prime Minister, and they occur more frequently than the five year interval (the modern record being six months later, in 1980. This has occasionally produced a coalition government as during World War I, but it has usually produced majority governments or, in some recent cases (like the present), minority governments that survive only as long as the House lets them. By virtue of his or her control of the selection of ministers and of senior appointments to government and public sector positions<sup>1</sup>, of the organization of government and of the government's agenda, the Prime Minister has long been considered first among equals regarding cabinet ministers. In recent years, he has been recognized as the dominant figure in government (Savoie 1999 ,Simpson 2001). Thus the House of Commons has a strong control over the Prime Minister and the government, which is only used occasionally, but the Prime Minister has the active direction of his colleagues and the administration.

Several exceptions to the Westminster model are features of the Canadian political system. From its beginning in 1867, Canada has been a federation, which has two important

consequences for the federal government: first, the division of powers between the federal government and the provinces has been a source of conflict and frequent court cases; second, the provinces have become increasingly powerful and are far from being dominated partners of the federal government. They are responsible for the major services that put governments in contact with citizens: health, education, labour and welfare. The federal government still uses its power to raise and spend taxes to intervene in many areas of provincial competence, but the federal system is a major constraint it must deal with.

The second exception is more recent. In 1982, during the controversial repatriation of the constitution from Britain, the constitution was amended to include a Charter of Rights and Freedoms. While legislation may exceptionally override the Charter, it is not often done, and must be justified by the government concerned. Here is a second constraint that the federal government must deal with. The Supreme Court is the arbiter of the legality of laws and has dealt with many challenges to legislation under the Charter.

A third exception to the Westminster model come from the tradition of two languages, which goes back to the Quebec Act of 1774. Since 1969, the federal government is officially bilingual in all its dealings from headquarters and in areas where the numbers justify offering service in the minority language. Bilingualism is enshrined in the 1982 constitution, as are the status of Indian and Inuit peoples as numerous small nations within the Canadian state. Some governments of the French speaking Province of Quebec have claimed nation status also, but such status is not in the present constitution. Instead, the federal government has faced two referenda on the accession of Quebec to sovereignty, the most recent of which was defeated by the narrowest of margins (50.6 per cent versus 49.4 per cent).

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<sup>1</sup> The Prime Minister chooses deputy ministers, ambassadors and heads and members of autonomous corporations, agencies, boards and commissions. All but the most senior appointments to the public service proper (i.e. all but

So we have a system of parliamentary government derived from Britain, but parliament is far from supreme. It is limited by federalism, Charter rights and language and ethnic constraints. Aside from the cabinet or government and parliament, the key actors in our story are two central agencies<sup>2</sup> and two independent control agencies. The two central agencies are the Privy Council Office, whose permanent head, the Clerk of the Privy Council, is the head of the public service, and the Treasury Board, which is both the management committee of the cabinet, and a secretariat that works for the management committee. One independent agent is the Auditor General, who audits the public accounts and management practices in the name of Parliament, without direction from the government. The other is the Public Service Commission, whose functions are to manage recruitment to the public service and to oversee the proper working of the merit system in appointments.

Further relevant contextual information can be gleaned from the history of administrative reform in Canada. Seen from the angle of quality, the first big reforms of the twentieth century were the introduction of the merit system in two steps, 1908 and 1918, a regime of competitive staffing of the entire public service under the direction of the Civil Service Commission (CSC). Here quality was sought in candidates who were best qualified for available jobs. To align this reform with the Scientific Management movement then in full bloom in the United States, the CSC, after a massive study by a Chicago firm of management consultants, introduced a position classification system based on the specific requirements of each job, rather than on the overall qualifications of the candidate (Hodgetts et al., 1973, 67-69, Roberts 1996). At this stage, efficiency was the leading value being sought, an inward looking form of quality.

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deputy ministers) are appointed by competition.

<sup>2</sup>. Since 2003, there is a new central agency, the Public Service Human Resources Management Agency, with functions previously held by the Treasury Board Secretariat and the Public Service Commission, but it plays no part in our story.

In the early 1930s financial administration was reformed to allow the government to have greater control of budget forecasting and expenditures. The value sought here was conformity to law, regulations and government policies. This cycle was completed by the adoption of the Financial Administration Act in 1951.

Inspired by the Hoover Commission in the United States, the Glassco Commission on Government Organization (1962-64) recommended organizational reforms aimed at freeing up public services from what it found to be stifling central controls. The Canadian administration was soon after caught up in the wave of rational budgeting. Here, the search for quality shifted to identification of the goals that services were trying to achieve and the linking of proposed spending to these goals. A form of Planning, Programming and Budgeting System (PPBS) was introduced in 1969. A direct consequence was that in the 1970s, the Operations Performance Measurement System (OPMS) was introduced, to see if money was being well spent.

Efficiency was still paramount. The OPMS measured things like unit cost of output, not the overall effectiveness of government programs. Program evaluation was also born at that time, to deal with this more difficult task. In 1977, the Auditor General, who claimed that government spending was out of control, obtained a wider mandate that allowed his office not only to audit legality and conformity of spending to government regulations and politics, but also effectiveness, or “value for money”. A Royal Commission appointed at that time found that management had been neglected by the federal administration, in favour of policy development. Like the Auditor General, it recommended ways to make public servants, and top managers especially, more accountable to ministers, to parliament and to the public.

As we will see below, the Total Quality movement had some impact in Canada in the 1980s, although there are few direct references to it today. From this very brief overview, we may see that most previous reforms of the twentieth century were seeking to improve quality, but

the prime focus evolved over time: from an emphasis primarily on the best qualified people, to control over spending, to organization change for better management, to rational planning, decision-making and evaluation and accountability. The search for better services was there, but it paid little attention to the citizens as clients, an approach that is the hallmark of the Total Quality movement.

### **Organizational Innovation Aimed at Quality Improvement: Alternative Service delivery**

In some ways, the Canadian public service has been living with constant and important reforms for forty years. Changes in the 1960s were important enough that a senior public servant wrote in 1971 of a "saturation psychosis" that had set in among his colleagues (Laframboise 1971). In the 1970s, the Liberal governments of Pierre Trudeau introduced elaborate planning systems for policy development (French 1980), but after the petroleum crises and attendant galloping inflation, there was increasing concern over good management and accountability (Lambert Commission 1979).

The return to power of the Conservative Party in 1984, under Prime Minister Brian Mulroney brought with it a moderate version of the conservative approach then in power in London and Washington. His government showed little interest in its first term for improving public management, but it tried to downsize the federal government. Some deregulation occurred, a moderate amount of privatization of public corporations, widespread recourse to contracting out and a sustained attempt to reduce discretionary expenditures and control the deficit (Bernier and Gow 1994). In its second term, during which the most important policy changes were the North American Free Trade Agreement and the introduction of a federal sales tax, the Mulroney government did launch an important reform study called Public Service 2000. While it led to



greater flexibility in personnel management, the study's humanistic vision of public management values was overwhelmed by difficult financial conditions in the early 1990s, and time was running out on the unpopular Mulroney government. In her few months in office in 1993, his successor, Kim Campbell, drastically reduced the number of federal departments from 32 to 24.

The Liberal government of Jean Chrétien was both a downsizing and a reform government. Beginning in 1994, two cycles of what was called Program Review dramatically reduced both the federal expenditures and eliminated the deficit (with a period of surpluses beginning in 1998 and still going on). The size of the public service diminished by about 40%. At the same time, strong and persistent concern for reform of the remaining government services has been evident.

Some of these reforms included streamlining and strengthening the capacity of central administrative agencies to control the policy process. Others, which have been grouped under the heading of Alternative Service Delivery (ASD), are of direct concern to my subject.

Some attempts at decentralization of service delivery had begun in the late 1980s. A program called "Increased Ministerial Authority and Accountability" proposed to delegate some managerial functions to certain departments or units, in return for a strict rendering of accounts. While this program had limited success, it introduced the idea of contractual arrangements between departments and the government's management agency, the Treasury Board, and that of accountability according to results achieved.

Under the combined influences of the Next Steps policy in Britain, the agency system adopted in New Zealand and the popular American management book *Reinventing Government* (Osborne and Gaebler 1993), Alternative Service Delivery (ASD) has been an important arm of the present government's reform policy since 1993.

The diagnosis underlying the creation of the Next Steps agencies in Britain was apparently shared in Canada.<sup>3</sup> The Ibbs report (1988) argued that: (1) the Civil Service was too large to manage as a single organization; (2) "ministerial overload diverted attention from management"; (3) the freedom and responsibility of mid-level managers was hampered by too many hierarchical controls; and (4) not enough attention was being paid to results obtained (as cited by Jenkins and Gray 1993, 73). The stated aims of the Canadian ASD policy are to improve service to citizens, to save money, to change organization culture and to place the point at which implementation decisions are made closer to the point of delivery of services (Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS) 2002a).

**Table 1. Degrees of Autonomy in Alternative Service Delivery**

Type of Organization	Autonomous legal status?	Bound by PSEA?	Separate employer?	Ministerial direction?	TB over
Special Operating Agencies	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Legislated Agencies	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Departmental Service Org.	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Partnerships	Possible	No	Possible	No	No (ind
Employee takeovers	Yes, private	No	Yes	No	Contract
Crown Corporations	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Foundations	Yes, private	No	Yes	No	No

Sources: Treasury Board of Canada, *Scope of ASD*, Ottawa, 2002; Aucoin 2003.

<sup>3</sup>. This point was made by the then president of the Institute for the Reform of Public Policy, Monique Jérôme-Forget (Seidle 1993, 17). Since 2003, Mme. Jérôme-Forget is President of the Treasury Board of Québec, where she has

The variety of types of ASD is apparent in table 1. Some of these forms are not reforms so much as privatizations (contracting out, foundations and employee takeovers). Others have been around a very long time: Crown or public corporations and administrative tribunals. In fact, for as far back as modern statistics go, a larger number of federal government employees has been outside the civil or public service than fell under the full range of central financial and personnel controls.

So the forms that interest us are the new service agencies and partnerships. Even these are not new; we find both in the pre-Confederation pioneer public service (Hodgetts 1955, Heintzman 1997). What is new today is the context and the precise forms that these organizations take.

#### *Service Agencies*

In the case of service agencies, there are two kinds that matter: Special Operating Agencies (SOAs) and Legislated Service Agencies. SOAs were the first response to the United Kingdom's Next Steps Agencies, but they have been far more timid than the original models. Created within departments, they have limited, negotiated autonomy that is revocable. It often includes freedom from having to turn to centralized common government services (Zussman 2002, 58). With very few exceptions, their employees fall under the Public Service Employment Act (TBS 2000a). While a number of them operate with a revolving fund on a cost recovery basis, they still fall under government-wide or department-wide policies (TBS 1998, Rogers, 1996). They are small units within departments (typically no more than a few hundred employees) given some managerial autonomy in return for more business-like management and results-based accountability. Examples are the Passport Office, the Translation Bureau and the Canadian Intellectual Property Office.

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been an active promoter of ASD in general, and Public-Private Partnerships in particular.

Legislated Service Agencies are more like the original UK and New Zealand models. As their name suggests, they are created by law and enjoy the status of Crown corporations. They are separate employers and neither their personnel nor financial administration is subject to control by central agencies (the TBS or the Public Service Commission). In place of these traditional controls is the obligation to produce a business plan and to report on results achieved in light of this plan. They are not free of all government policy controls, however. The enabling statutes require them to respect the Official Languages Act, the Privacy Act, Access to Information and the Federal Identity Program.<sup>4</sup>

These legislated agencies are few in number, but they have many more employees than the SOAs. At present, there are three: the Canadian Food Inspection Agency ( created in 1997, with 5700 employees today); Parks Canada (1998, 4000 employees today ), Canada Revenue Agency (1999, 43,400 employees today). Taken together, they employ about 53,000 employees, which is the equivalent to 31 per cent of the public service ( down from 35 percent in 2001, Glor 2001).

The most recent Canadian agency illustrates the confusion raised by loose use of administrative language in Canada. The Canada Border Services Agency (CSBA) was created by executive order (Order-in-Council) in December, 2003; it is in the process of being ratified by an act of Parliament. The new agency brought together units from the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency , and the Canada Food Inspection Agency. However, although the last two components came from legislated service agencies, the CSBA has none of their attributes. Its president, who is appointed for a five year term, has the status of a deputy minister and manages the agency “subject to the direction of the responsible

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<sup>4</sup>. The Federal Identity Program reveals something of the contemporary plight of the federal government, in that it requires departments and agencies to make sure that citizens know that their programs are being delivered by the

minister”, the Solicitor General. Its personnel fall under the Public Service Employment Act and its funds are voted annually by parliament.

The CSBA is therefore more like a Special Operating Agency than a legislated service agency, but it is bigger (with 10,400 employees) and has more sensitive powers than most SOAs. The casual use of language is apparent when one considers the list of six “agencies” that fall within the Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Portfolio. In addition to the CBSA, they are: the Canada Firearms Centre, the Canadian Security and Intelligence service, Correctional Service Canada, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the National Parole Board.

#### *Partnerships and Collaborative Arrangements*

Partnerships and collaborative arrangements do not fit into neat categories. Some are legal partnerships, many are simply collaborations that depend on the continued support of the participating organizations. These collaborations occur between departments and agencies (Bakvis and Juillet 2004 , Bourgault 2002), with provincial and municipal governments, with private and with non-profit organizations. They involve more than a contractual arrangement for the procurement or the delivery of goods and services. Some sharing of responsibility and risk is involved (Zussman 2002). Examples are the Confederation Bridge between Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick, TERANET, an electronic land registry service, the Institute for citizen-Centred Services, and Canada Business centres, by which thirty five members from governments at all levels, business organizations and academic institutions provide single window services to small and medium sized businesses ( Zussman 2002, 1998). There are far too many of them to be noted in some census or survey, but they are an important part of the contemporary management scene in Canada.

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federal government.

Currently under way is an experiment in internal collaborative management that will be a major innovation in both the structure and the operation of the federal government. A department to be called Service Canada is being created, that will be a single window for access by citizens and businesses to federal government services. At present, 21,500 employees working for the embryonic organization, are distributing pension and employment insurance cheques and operating the government's telephone information system (1-800-O Canada) (Castonguay 2005, TBS 2005). When this change is completed in 2008, Service Canada will employ from 25 000 to 30 000 people. This seems to be a major experiment in horizontal management, aimed at overcoming the barriers that traditional vertical structures put in the way of seamless service to citizens. It is not, as the other structural changes outlined here are, a form of decentralization, but rather a regrouping makes use of other contemporary tools of management, such as information technology.

Many of those involved swear by partnerships (Peach and Rasmussen 2005, Téléscope 2005). Sceptics note that the risk is usually more carried by the government than by the private partner (Whorley 2001, Rouillard et al., 2004, Rouillard and Burlone 2005), and that ambiguities occur when private partners carry out public missions. In one of the few systematic studies of the federal government, the Auditor General (November 1999) identified 77 new collaborative and delegated arrangements involving more than \$ 5 billion (Cdn) annual expenditure. He considered that these new arrangements put accountability at risk: there was "limited reporting of performance, many weak accounting mechanisms and inadequate attention to transparency and protection of the public trust". According to Barrados et al., (2000, 507), of ten delegated arrangements audited by the Office of the Auditor General, only one had any provision for ending the arrangement should one of the parties not fulfil its commitments.

The basic problem, according to the Auditor General, was that the government had no consistent and general accountability framework. At the heart of the question was the federal government's responsibility: "In our view, the federal government remains accountable to Parliament for the use of federal tax dollars, assets and authority no matter what tools it uses or arrangements it puts in place with partners to achieve its public objectives".

What is clear about ASD arrangements is that they go beyond questions of efficient and effective management to raise issues of the public interest. In its most recent document on ASD policy, the TBS (2002a) gives a number of questions that help to determine whether any particular ASD proposal meets the test of the public interest. The nineteen questions (see appendix 1), show that the government wants to encourage innovation and service to citizens, while at the same time protecting the interests of ministers and members of parliament, traditional public service values and ethics, official bilingualism and the Public Service "as a coherent national institution".

In what seems to be the best Canadian tradition of extreme moderation, our government has embraced ASD in a cautious, experimental manner, not as committed ideologues (Aucoin 1995, 2002, Borins 2002, Zussman 2002, Pal 2004). Glor (2001) and Gow (2004) argue that the ideology may have been lacking, but the results are radical enough. The downsizing of the public service and the achievement of a series of budgetary surpluses that is unique in developed countries have shown that pragmatism can be quite ruthless at times.

What all the forms of ASD point to is the importance of results based management and accountability. For all of these forms, the key to success is the ability to formulate clear goals and subsequently to measure degrees of success or failure in the achievement of them. Without such a guarantee, ASD, either through delegation of managerial responsibility or through shared responsibility with outside partners may deviate far from public policy purposes or values.

Successful ASD depends on being able to hold them to account for what they have done with the powers and resources granted to them.

### **Results Based Management**

As I mentioned previously, there was some interest in the Total Quality movement within the Canadian administration during the 1980s. The radical version of Deming did not catch on. but there was a lot of interest in a more pragmatic version of the search for quality. The Office of the Auditor General had a surprise best-seller when it published an extract of its 1988 report to parliament as a pamphlet called *Characteristics of Well Performing Organizations* . Based on the study of organizations that had the reputation of being high performers, it was the moral equivalent of Peters and Waterman's *In Search of Excellence*, a qualitative study of great interest to practitioners. A rigorous approach of searching for chances to improve system performance with little attention to differences in personal accomplishments held little appeal in Canada, or in the United States, for that matter (Bowman 1994). What has remained, however, are two ideas dear to TQM, the "constant rhetorical emphasis on the need to improve service quality and an equally relentless emphasis on customer satisfaction" (Connor 1997).

One could say that a type of quality control is at work in the current Expenditure Review, as it was in the Program Reviews of the 1990s. Public servants are being asked to identify programs or activities that could be cut or reduced in order to free up money for more important or urgent expenditures. However, this is not the sense in which the idea of quality is generally used and I will stick to that sense, which has to do with the quality of the results produced by administrative action.

There are three parts to this summary: they deal in turn with the present version of government policy, A. *Results for Canadians*; B. the Results-based Management Accountability



Framework; and C. the Service Quality Initiative, and associated measures to link client satisfaction to quality improvement.

### *A Results for Canadians*

The government of Canada has had since 1995 an overall policy of reporting to citizens and to parliament a synthesis of results achieved by the actions of government services. It gave rise to an annual performance report by the President of the Treasury Board. In 2000, the government issued a new policy statement, *Results for Canadians* (Treasury Board 2000a). It announced a quality policy with focus in four areas: focus on citizens, clear public service values, managing for results and a modern comptrollership program to ensure responsible spending. Two innovative dimensions of this document deserve mention here. First, this was not only a businesslike approach with eyes only for the bottom line. The document said that the accent on results had to include public interest considerations of fairness and equity to citizens and stewardship in defence of taxpayers. The second innovation was an annual report called *Canada's Performance*, in which the President of the Treasury Board gives a synthetic view of Canada's progress or decline in the principal categories of social indicators. The fourth annual report (2004) claims that Canada is "one of only a few countries in the world that publishes this kind of report". Already in 1999 in *Managing for Results*, the Treasury Board spoke of a "stupendous effort" to bring together information for all government departments and agencies to provide one synthesis. The result is thus a costly study, and one that risks exposing areas of problems and weakness, which can only give aid and comfort to opposition parties and other opponents of the government. In these early reports the good news well outnumbers the bad, but there is surely room for argument about which are the most appropriate indicators and the relevant time frames for measurement (they tend to vary from one area to another).

*B. Results-based Management Accountability Framework (RMAF)*

A year after the announcement of *Results for Canadians*, the Treasury Board introduced the Results-Based Accountability Framework (TBS, 2001). It appears to be the framework that the Auditor General called for in his 1999 report already cited, in order to protect accountability in the new collaborative arrangements. Indeed, it is not too different from the framework that his successor proposed in her report in 2002. At the same time, the RMAF is clearly the outcome of evolving government and administration ideas on evaluation and performance measurement.

The RMAF was intended as a self administered framework for departments or agencies bringing forward policies, programs or initiatives, but has so far been conducted by the Treasury Board Secretariat, with reaction from departments and agencies. The framework is intended to cover all the steps: what is the governance structure, or the division of roles and responsibilities; the logic model, or the links between resources used and outcomes sought after; performance measurement strategy, with a view to improving management; the evaluation work to be done “to explain why results were or were not achieved”; and reporting on outcomes.

One of the most striking aspects of this new framework is the way it tries to broaden the idea of results. True, the results and performance that are evaluated at the end of the process are concerned with outputs and outcomes, but these are defined to include internal and service activities as well as programs. In the process, six areas are retained for attention, only one of which is citizen-centred service. The others are policy and programs capacity, human potential, risk management, stewardship or control of the use of resources, and accountability. All of these areas are considered within the values of the public service and a tradition of organizational learning and innovation. In 2003, TBS published the *Public Service of Canada Code of Values and Ethics*, which includes the four types of values referred to earlier: political, professional, ethical and people values.

### *C. Service Improvement Initiative*

One component of the results-based management system is the improvement of service delivery. We have already seen the direction taken with Service Canada, the single window structure now being put in place. Another part of this aim is represented by IT or information technology. The third branch of this policy is called the *Service Improvement Initiative (SII)*(TBS 2000, 2001, Marson and Schmidt 2001).

The SII has a simple aim. It wants all departments and agencies over the years 2000-2005 to measure client satisfaction and to improve their ratings by 10%. An interesting part of this operation is the collaborative arrangement in which the federal government in partnership with other government and non governmental organizations, has worked to develop a Common Measurementc Tool, or standard questionnaire, in order to sample client satisfaction (ICCS 2003). The Institute for Citizen Centred Services offers this questionnaire to public organizations. It provides a core list of questions supplemented by optional additions. These core questions cover satisfaction, performance (fairness, effort, competence, appeal, privacy etc.) and outcome. The ICCS recognizes that an unsatisfactory rating may be legitimate if it is the result of existing policy or some failure to qualify, but considers it questionable if it results from poor service. The latter is what they want to correct.

The ICCS and the Institute of Public Administration of Canada have taken up the organization of citizen surveys of which the third was published in January 2003. Results of a new survey are to be published this fall. The 2003 survey, *Citizens first 3*, continuing the trend found in the earlier two, arrives at five drivers that account for 87 per cent of client satisfaction: timeliness, fairness, courtesy, competence and outcome. Timeliness, has the lowest score of all the drivers (51%) and yet it has the strongest impact on client satisfaction.

#### *Early results*

These initiatives are relatively new, although results-based management has more than a decade of experience in one form or another. There are some results nonetheless concerning both departmental performance reports and the SII .

Successive Auditors General have been following the quality of performance reporting of government departments for years. In her most recent report dealing with three departments (April 2005), the current Auditor General found that progress is very slow. While most reports present quite well the context and the planned results, “outputs and outcomes are not widely reported”. The information they do give is not always credible: “Balanced reporting, that is, admitting to shortcomings as well as successes, is apparently not yet part of the culture of government”. Moreover, performance information does not appear to be used often to improve management. Performance reporting is not a high priority, nor is there much incentive to adopt good practices in reporting. At the rate that things are improving, achieving performance-based reporting “may take decades rather than just a few years”.

My own examination of six departmental performance reports supports these conclusions. Most do not even attempt to measure outcomes, much less compare them to goals set. Perhaps the real information is in documents not available to members of parliament and the public. On the other hand, the Auditor General (2002, 5.15) cites a 2001 report of the Public Accounts Committee of the House of Commons that, of the random audits that they did of performance reports, “the information contained in these reports is a fair representation of accomplishments against goals and objectives”.

The picture is much brighter with respect to public satisfaction with government services. as revealed by *Citizens First 3* (Erin Research 2003). The five drivers of citizens’ satisfaction were confirmed in this study, with timeliness and extra effort (“extra mile”) being the ones that most needed attention.

The good news for governments was that all had improved their overall service reputations. The federal government, which had been behind provinces and municipalities in the two previous studies, had the biggest improvement, rising from 47% in 1998 to 56% in 2002. Municipalities still have the best service reputation (59% in 2002).

The most important new contribution of *Citizens First 3* is the finding that 56% of respondents agreed with the statement “My view of government is shaped to a large extent by the quality of service that governments provide”. They see this as an indication that efforts spent in improvements to public services may help stem the decline of trust and confidence in government that has been observed in democratic countries in recent years.

### **Quality Through Results -Based Management: Discussion**

A person who had gone to sleep in the early 1990s might think, on waking today that the same old problems are here and the same exhortations are being made to public servants to run things smarter and with ever greater service to citizen at lower cost. Compare, for instance, the headings of a talk by the then secretary of the Treasury Board (Clark 1993, also Treasury board 1996) with remarks on current reforms by his successor today (TBS 2005). Then, it was "Getting government right", now it is "Smart government", but the values to be maximized are the same: service to citizens, efficiency, transparency, accountability. Nevertheless, there are new activities that were not being done then and new ways to do some of the others. The annual *Canada's Performance Report*, the Results-Based Management Accountability Framework, the Common Measurements Tool and the *Citizens First* surveys are all real innovations, although they may tend to get lost in the flood of reports and policy statements that accompany them

What I wish to do here is take a step back from all the detail and ask what we are doing. There are six main topics.

*Rationality*

Are these new arrangements rational? Can they be? At what cost? First, the MAF is in perfect continuity with past efforts at rational management. It looks very much like the model of rational decision-making that was put forward by the Economic Council of Canada in 1971, which, in turn, looked very similar to that originally presented by Herbert Simon in *Administrative Behaviour* (Gow 2003). It follows the same logic chain as PPBS.

Now it is difficult to be against rationality. Just as merit is better than favouritism or patronage as a basis for appointment to the public service, so some logic in government programs is better than waste and corruption.<sup>5</sup> Even so, as we know from anti-corruption activities, the cost is greater than the advantage gained if we try to eliminate all defects

Looked at closely, the models proposed are not fully numerical expressions of perfect logic. The stakeholders are identified as public servants and sometimes outsiders, but never ministers and members of parliament. The government has backed away from trying to get what Kamensky (2002) calls a scorecards approach. By avoiding any kind of citizens' charter, it makes it more difficult for citizens to know what are departmental or agency goals and how well they are being met.<sup>6</sup> Rather, the TBS examines the reports on each policy, program or initiative in light of the activity's objectives and results obtained. Also, what is required of logic models is simply plausible connection between activities and results. It is an ad hoc approach, that has neither the rigour of programme evaluation, nor the transparency and simplicity of a citizen's charter.

The following reservations are well-known but, taken together, they present a serious challenge to rational reforms. First, rationality requires clear and stable objectives and measuring

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<sup>5</sup>. A striking example of an irrational program enthusiastically pursued was that of land settlement or colonization in Québec, which was long presented and supported as the work of Christian civilization, while few looked closely to see how the policy was working (Gow 1986, 312)

<sup>6</sup> This point was made to me by Robert Segsworth.

systems. Yet most government policies have more than one objective (for example efficient, effective services that also take into account regional development) and many political objectives are not expressly stated. As Kenneth Arrow pointed out, “if the assumption of transitivity is relaxed, then a general welfare function is an impossibility...if a problem has more than two dimensions, it would be unlikely that a solution would be satisfactory to all parties” (cited in Halachmi and Montgomery 2000, 393). Most politically derived objectives are compromises, and thus there is no one value to be maximized. In all of these official documents, there is no recognition that beyond or behind administrative rationality there is a political rationality that has to do with gaining and keeping power (Gow 2001).

On the technical front, to be useful, data must be collected on a consistent and stable basis but governments and their administrations re constantly changing the names of programs, their objectives and their presentation. The need apparently felt by each new government or minister to leave their mark on public policies is at odds with this requirement (Lindquist 1998, 175). British agencies have frequently changed or dropped key performance indicators. (Pollitt 2000).

Reporting systems like the MAF are a huge amount of work and costly to maintain. They are part of the "regulatory boom" identified in Britain, in the wake of the Next Steps policy. As Braybrooke and Lindblom pointed out long ago, there is no rational way to limit the number of stakeholders whose interests will be considered in the adoption of policies and programs nor to arrive at a rational time frame for consideration of the consequences (Sutherland 2005). The Citizens First and similar surveys of customer satisfaction are valuable, but little is done to test the desires of respondents against the cost of meeting them (say numbers of points of service or speed in answering the telephone).

### *Purpose*

A second series of questions concerns the purposes of these reforms. Are they meant to improve the operation of government services or are they meant to improve the public image of these services? The answer is probably both, and Citizens First 3 brought the welcome news that a majority of respondents said that their concrete experience of receiving public services influenced their overall impression of the public service and the government. Perhaps, but previous research has suggested otherwise (Goodsell 1985 , Zussman 1982). There is not much of a constituency following reforms and successes of the public service (Pollitt 2000), while the media and the public follow scandals that are easy to understand and generalize from them.<sup>7</sup>

The same point must be made concerning a smaller group, who should be interested in these reforms, members of parliament. To date, they have shown little interest in using the voluminous new reports for informing public debate (Lindquist 1998). Some specialists consider that there is a contradiction between preparing results based reports for parliament and doing it in order to improve management (Carroll and Dewar 2002). Certainly, the needs and the interests of the two audiences are not the same, nor is the atmosphere in which their examination takes place.

### *Shift in values*

A third subject for reflection is the shift in values that these reforms reflect. Everybody wants better government services but at what cost to traditional values? As we saw, Canadian governments tend to add to the list of values to be respected without acknowledging that some of the new ones may be promoted at the expense of older values drawn from democratic politics. Research elsewhere suggests that values other than mission-based values tend to be neglected by

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<sup>7</sup>. D. Good (2003, 64) describes how the media got hold of the idea of a "million dollar boondoggle" in the scandal at Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) and never retracted that label although the real amount of money misused turned out to be \$85 000. Similarly, the sponsorships scandal being examined at present by the Gomery



those responsible (Haque 2000, Piotrowski and Rosenbloom 2002, Roberts 2000). Such a phenomenon in New Zealand led to the adoption of a code of public service values to remind managers that non mission-based values were still relevant (Roberts 1997, Kernaghan 2000, 99). In Canada, both the Auditor General, parliament's watchdog, and the Head of the Public Service have recognized that enthusiasm for public management reforms may have led to neglect of traditional values in financial management. (Auditor General 2000, Himmelfarb 2004). There are consequences for this in the work environment also. The government's advisory committee on senior level compensation said recently that "inadequate attention and weight are being given to how executives are achieving results and how they are managing people and priorities" (cited in Working Group on Disclosure 2004, section 5).

New Public Management reforms were designed to bring into public administration what were considered to be the virtues of business practice and competition. In order to protect cherished traditional values like equity, honesty, respect for law, democratic government and accountability, and more recent values like access to information, representative bureaucracy, and official bilingualism, either these values must be made part of the shared public service culture or they must be added to contractual agreements between ASD units and central agencies. The Management Accountability Framework seeks to restore these other democratic political and ethical values to their proper place, but it remains to be seen if those responsible can keep all these balls in the air.

### *Politicization*

A fourth concern comes from the politicization of management. Operations like Program Review and Alternative Systems Delivery require public servants to pose political judgements

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Commission, while it involved a lot more money than the HRDC scandal, was a relatively small program run on the margins of regular government services.

about the public interest needs being met by them, but this is nothing new. What is new is that public managers are being pulled into the limelight to justify what they do. The idea behind agencies and customer surveys is that implementation can be separated from policy. Our British friends have found that this is far from complete with the Next Steps Agencies (Rhodes 1997, 18-19). Not only do they have to give policy advice, but they have to make political choices in establishing their business plans and in presenting their results. As mentioned, governments have felt compelled to remind public servants in agencies of their obligations to other democratic and political values, not always relevant to the search for results.

Two examples illustrate this political drift affecting execution, one from the United states, one from Canada: first, although NASA was by far the best performing agency in Washington, in a study by Brewer and Coleman (2000), the agency has succumbed to the requirements of its political agenda in deciding to launch the last two Challenger missions without solving technical safety problems; second, in their Citizens First 3 survey, the Institute of Public Administration of Canada and the Institute for Citizen-Centred Service mixed questions concerning governments with others about satisfaction with public services that make an unhealthy confusion of the two (some questions asked opinions about the statements “I believe governments do a good job”, “governments are responsive to the needs of citizens”, “governments in this country conduct their business in an open and accountable manner”).

### *Democratic accountability*

Both ASD and results-based accountability create problems for democratic accountability (Aucoin and Heintzman 2000, Thomas 2002). ASD causes these problems because of the complexity it introduces into public organization (Barrados et al., 2000, Thomas 2002) and because the networks it creates are based in part on the self-interest of the participants (Rasmussen 2001). The effect of the new results based management is to create a triangular

relationship between elected ministers, public servants and the public. Surveys of citizen satisfaction aim to discover what citizens want, but they do not place these desires in the broader context of trade-offs and compromise that governments are bound to make. Elected representatives are supposed to do that. Frequently today the rhetoric of reform outruns the reality and suggests that the first and only purpose of the public service is to serve citizens. However, their first duty is still to serve the government of the day within the framework of the law. Recent federal documents have, fortunately, made clear this variety of roles.<sup>8</sup> Canada has a tradition of ministers being involved in administration (Bourgon 1998, Mayne and Ulrich 1998, 9) and has tended to avoid a rigorous contract model, that would require a hands-off approach once the contract was set (Aucoin 2002, 40).

Reporting on results is an effort in persuasion. In addressing the purpose of Management for Results, the President of the Treasury Board in 1996 said that it was so that the “we can answer for our actions” (Mayne and Ulrich 1998, 10). However, we have good reasons to believe that governments do not want to take responsibility for what went wrong when there are mishaps. Cohn (1997) has noted that one of the advantages of New Public Management doctrines for politicians is that they allow for shifting blame to managers. In our major scandals since 1990, we have seen determined and sometimes ferocious efforts by politicians to avoid blame. In a comparative look at anti-corruption campaigns, Maor (2004) advances the hypothesis that governments want to appear to be acting vigorously to combat corruption, but that if the investigation gets too close, they will do what they can to discredit the investigators.

This series of concerns was nicely summed up in 1991 by J.E. Hodgetts, historian of the Canadian public service and dean of the academic public administration community:

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<sup>8</sup> For example, the Budget 2005 document says “ One of the most important tasks of government is to serve citizens well”. The Federal Public Service Code of Values and Ethics (2003) also adds to professional values, democratic,

Perhaps I am wrong in seeing an inevitable drift of public management into the political realm of governance itself. However, I do not think I am wrong in concluding that such a fusion – however unwitting – would create a real dilemma for those still hoping to preserve a permanent career service; to preserve, that is, the vulnerable demarcation line separating elected politicians and permanent administrators. If, indeed this is to be the path of the future, then we must be prepared to see senior managers assume the role of scapegoats for the failure of others who, in our system of responsible cabinet government, have hitherto been elected to bear that direct responsibility.

As if to prove Hodgetts right, a few weeks after this public lecture at the Canadian Centre for Management Development, the Canadian government had a major scandal involving apparent preferential treatment of a foreign diplomat, in which ministers tried to blame public servants (Sutherland 1991).

#### *Unexpressed theory*

Finally, one has to ask what unexpressed theory lies behind all these words. It seems that, true to the public service tradition, the causal links between the reforms taking place and the results hoped for are based on experience, not theory. The document on the Results-Based Accounting Framework merely requires a plausible link among the elements of the strategic plan and the goals professed in it. In adopting the ideas of competition, performance-based rewards, personal and agency responsibility, political and administrative leaders appear to have decided that rational, individualistic choices are what drive public servants. At the same time, and this distinguishes Canada from the United States and Britain, governments and administrative leaders have maintained a strong discourse based on traditional public service values of justice, equity, and public interest. Concerted efforts are being maintained to foster and preserve a corporate culture, as the Values and Ethics Code of 2003 attests.

Ultimately, it looks as though those responsible for current reforms believe that the best way to obtain optimum results from public servants is to open the range of pressures to which

they must respond. This conclusion would explain many of the imperfections in the rationalistic model discussed above. You respond to those pressures that you have to respond to. The requirement to do citizen surveys means that you have to respond to relatively clear information about the preferences of your clients. The requirement to report on results will direct your attention to results. You will not be able to respond to all of the preferences of all interested parties, which are frequently at odds with each other (e.g., working conditions vs. funds available for services, needs revealed by surveys and party programs). The ever longer list of values to be respected will be dealt with pragmatically; you do what you can.

So, despite the rational model behind it, there is bound to be a lot of pragmatic groping around within the new, powerful framework for accountability. Canadian public servants have a fair degree of tolerance for ambiguity: in addition to frequent changes of minister and party in power, they must deal with the constraints of federalism, the Charter of rights and freedoms, bilingualism, the risk of Quebec secession, the rights of native peoples, representative bureaucracy, access to information, public sector unions, international treaties and others. They will adapt, as they always have, and I suspect that they will respond to the idealistic element of the current reforms. But they are realists also, and we must hope that these same reforms will not undermine the tradition of the career public service. The constant pressure to change and meet ever higher standards of performance, the deep budget and personnel cuts of the 1990s, and recent political and administrative scandals have taken their toll in terms of morale, and a certain disillusion has set in (Martin 2005, Bourgon 1998, Rouillard 1999).

## **Conclusion**

Although it already had a very good reputation in the world, the public service of Canada has been very active in reforming itself in the last fifteen years. Many of these reforms have been inspired by the experience of the New Public Management in the Commonwealth countries and

by the reinvention movement in the United States. In search of innovations in organization and procedure in the federal government, I have concentrated on two major trends, alternative service delivery (ASD) arrangements and management by results.

In the area of ASD, the new agencies, Special Operating Agencies and legislative agencies were examined. While SOAs have little of the autonomy of their counterparts in Britain or New Zealand, the new legislative agencies are much more autonomous. Few in number but relatively large in size. they are a new kind of public corporation that operates on the basis of a business plan and accountability by results. The other type of ASD organization reviewed was the collaborative arrangement or partnership. We saw that both agencies and collaborative arrangements pose problems of accountability and control.

In response to criticisms by the Auditor General on this topic, the government strengthened its policy of management by results and introduced a new accountability framework. The *Results for Canadians* policy has led to the unusual publication of an annual report concerning progress or lack of it on key social and economic indicators, a kind of government report card. The Results-based Management and Accountability Framework (RMAF) is a very complete tool to let departments and agencies know what is expected of them. It emerges that they are not only to be productive, but that they are to respect the democratic political process, public service values, the career public service and sound stewardship of public resources. To this is added the Service Canada organization, now being created, and the Service Improvement Initiative, the latter creating an obligation for departments and agencies to survey clients and improve their ratings by ten per cent. This work involves the government in a collaborative institution called the Institute for Citizen Centred Service.

By way of commentary, I found all of this activity impressive; there is no lack of energy in the upper echelons of the Canadian public service. On the other hand, these documents

represent an ideal that will not and cannot be attained for both technical and political reasons. They also run the risk of further politicizing the public service and exposing it to pressures and criticisms that it is not equipped to meet. Public servants are tenacious and used to working in less than perfectly clear conditions. They will implement these new policies as faithfully as they can, there will be learning and progress on the way as long as we do not ask too much of them.

### **About the Author**

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## Appendix 1. Public interest test questions for the creation of ASD forms

The following are key issues in determining whether ASD initiatives are in the public interest.

### **Governance**

- Does the new arrangement provide an appropriate decision-making role for ministers?
- Does the relationship with the proponent ensure appropriate links between policy and operations?
- Are the arrangements appropriate for reporting results and other relevant performance information to ministers, Parliament and citizens?
- Does the arrangement represent an appropriate balance between the flexibility required for high organizational performance and sound governance?

### **Official Language Requirements**

- Have appropriate provisions been made for respecting Canada's official languages...?

### **Results for Canadians**

- Does the analysis of costs, risks and benefits provide a compelling business case for the initiative?
- Is the impact on service consistent with the needs, expectations and priorities of Canadians?
- Will the new arrangement increase organizational effectiveness?

### **Citizen-centred Service**

- Does the relationship between co-deliverers ensure ease of access for Canadians to a wide range of government services?
- Will all those interested or potentially affected be informed of the initiative? Is a consultation process required? How will this be undertaken?
- Is there a communication plan to make sure that key stakeholders and citizens in general receive complete and timely information about proposed changes?
- Are measures in place to ensure continuous measurement and improvement of citizen and client satisfaction over time?
- Is there appropriate provision for access to information, preservation of government memory and the privacy of Canadian citizens?

### **Responsible Spending**

- Will a framework be in place to guarantee that Canadian citizens receive value for money and that accountability for the expenditure of public funds and responsibility to Parliament be preserved?

### **Values**

- Will the proposed arrangement promote the values and an organizational culture that are consistent with public sector values and ethics?
- Is there confidence that the expected organizational culture (including a framework of values and ethics) will materialise?
- Have human resource issues been thoroughly considered, including public servant mobility, union considerations, successor rights, continued employment offers, recall rights (in the event that employees are terminated) compensation and pension?
- Will the initiative contribute to federal government identity and visibility?
- What will be the impact on the Public Service of Canada as a coherent national institution?

Source: Treasury Board Secretariat 2002a.



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