Applying Innovative Processes to Improve Governance and Public Administration and Reduce Poverty

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Abstract
This paper explores the problem of getting inventions and innovations in governance and public administration effectively implemented. It addresses the will to implement innovations, how to make appropriate choices among them, and how to implement them effectively so that they will fit, work and endure in the environment into which they are being introduced. Even when there is implementation of innovations, the results tend to bear an uncanny resemblance to what already exists. The problem of effective application of new approaches, processes, and programs to produce real change is the subject of this paper.

Key Words: implementation, public administration, inventions, innovations

Introduction

This paper is not full of specific, new innovations or processes that are recommended to all governments, because there is no innovation[2] that can be recommended to all governments. Likewise, it does not focus on the creation of new ideas; that is a job for people who are closer to the problem. Rather, the paper explores the problem of getting inventions and innovations in governance and public administration effectively implemented. There are plenty of new ideas. What is lacking is the will to implement them. What can also be lacking is the capacity to make appropriate choices among them, and to implement them effectively so that they will fit, work and endure in the environment into which they are being introduced. Even when there is implementation of innovations, the results tend to bear an uncanny resemblance to what already exists. The problem of effective application of new approaches, processes, and programs to produce real improvements in public administration is the subject of this paper.

The implementation of innovation in government is a complex activity that is a partnership among the public, elected officials and public servants. Implementation of innovations is more complicated than other public service functions, because change almost always causes both winners and losers. At the same time, it is more important than other public service functions, because it creates the future. This paper discusses three aspects of the complex problem of implementing innovation: the will to innovate, effective implementation, and dealing with the context for innovation. But first, let us explore an example.

An Example

The city is one of the largest in the world. It also has an unprecedented set of health, social and

[2] The term *innovation* is used in two quite different ways: firstly, as something new, original and unique; secondly, as the adoption or dissemination of existing innovations. This paper uses the term in the first way, as an invention and the first few times it is adopted.

physical management problems. It suffers the problems of growth - crime, destitution, overcrowding and epidemics. Urbanization has brought not only an increase in wealth but also a severe deterioration in the quality of urban life. Death rates have risen by fifty per cent in ten years. Refuse has accumulated, the air has become foul, the water supply is inadequate and tainted. Because the city is a manufacturing centre, the evils are accentuated. The major newspaper proclaims "A great town is a great evil. The poor suffer the most, but the prosperous too cannot escape the consequences of "foul sewerage, bad water, cholera, rising crime and impoverishment, and above all, an almost entirely inadequate machinery of government." (Hall, 1998, p. 658)

Peter Hall could be speaking of Cairo, Delhi, Sao Paulo, Santiago, Johannesburg or many other large cities today. Of where was he speaking? Of London, in 1850. He could also have been describing ancient Rome, or Vienna, Berlin, Paris or New York during periods of great growth and innovation, when they had become the largest cities in the world. All great cities have gone through a similar process. Stories of this nature are not new, they are merely taking place in new locations today.

What did these large cities do about their problems? They dealt with them, sooner or later. Using the technologies, planning strategies and social construction models of their days, they dealt with them–more, or less. Ancient Athens and Rome, Paris and London during the 19th century created huge civic construction projects - water and sewer systems, railways, subways, freeways, telegraph systems, telephone systems, electrification. The core of Paris was reconstructed. All of these projects cost enormous amounts of money and each had immense and sometimes cruel effects, especially on poor people. The projects (e.g. sewage and water systems, highway and train systems in London) created homeless poor, shifted populations from farm to city (by creating jobs in manufacturing), from city core to suburbs (by building subways and highways), from suburbs to near-countryside (by introducing trains).

Why do I describe these examples from the past? First, to make clear that innovation requires will and money; second, to point out that implementation of innovations has consequences; third, to emphasize the importance of the context for innovation in determining which innovations are chosen; and lastly, because I am reluctant to interpret current examples outside my own culture about which I lack information. The message I take from these examples is that solving the problems caused by major social upheavals is not cheap in either financial or human terms, but it has been successfully done.

The Will to Innovate

With the creation of mammoth cities in the west, particularly during the 19th and 20th centuries, the public health and transportation solutions chosen and the innovations needed lay in the domain of public works and infrastructure–publicly owned utilities, public health facilities (the privately owned water system in London was a disaster, the publicly-owned sewer system more safe), transportation and communications systems. Frequently, often deliberately, the poorest lost their homes to these downtown mega-projects. Until cheap transportation systems were created, the poor were trapped in the core of cities, where the work was, because they could not afford to travel long

distances to their (often temporary) work. Afterwards, factories and now large retail outlets, moved outside the city perimeter. The poor without cars followed.

These projects have their parallels today in gigantic World Bank and governmental projects such as those in India today, building a freeway in Jaipur and a subway system in Delhi. Non-government organizations (NGOs) tend to favour, and are better able to afford, smaller, community-scale, family-based solutions. What these examples from history and today have in common is that they have found a way to create the will to act on the problems. Creating the will to act is the first step, and the most important step, in the innovation application process.

The Will to Innovate

Individuals, governments, businesses and NGOs frequently do not act to solve problems. They ignore them, they study them endlessly, they provide inadequate resources when they do act. There are many ways to avoid acting. As a result, the first element in the innovation implementation process is creating the will to act.

The world is full of good and useful ideas. Hardly any of them ever get tested, especially if they require resources, and often even if they are implemented, they slowly disappear. Why is that? Why do our societies, institutions and families have so little interest in trying out new things, in doing things differently, and better? Why do we abandon new ideas that work?

There are the usual answers - the power of institutions, elites and violence; the fear of change, and with reason on the part of those who will be negatively affected; the inability to imagine how to do things differently at a reasonable cost. But the biggest factor is motivation. People, whether acting as individuals, families, groups or institutions get into patterns and don't or won't get out. They do not have the will to change the *status quo*.

The mystery is not that there are patterns to how people behave, this has been known for some time, and has been given a number of names. In particular it is known among individuals as motivation and among groups as societal and organizational *culture.* Patterns affect innovation throughout the innovation process (Glor, 2001a, 2001b). The mystery is how the will to change is created. Peter Hall, referred to earlier, has explored how innovative artistic, economic, technical and planning environments–in a word, innovative milieus–developed in twenty-one of the world's great cities. People of these cities invented new approaches, adopted innovations, experimented with the unproven.

These innovations depended on the combination of individuals with the will to innovate and an environment that was ready to accept what they had to offer. Often the individuals who developed the inventions were outsiders - from elsewhere or from classes that were not in power. Eventually those in power and the group were moved to introduce the innovation on a broader basis, or were superceded by those who were so moved. How did this happen? How was the will to implement innovations created?

Basically, the will to innovate was created in one of two ways. In the first way, the innovations were created or adopted *in reaction* to crises by people who were extrinsically motivated. Reactive innovations were created in response to water shortages in ancient Rome and cholera epidemics in London and Paris. Reactive innovation was also created in reaction to needs, such as the in-home spinning technologies that were created to meet the need for an increased supply of yarn for the cottage industries in the Manchester area of England. These technologies initiated what came to be known as the Industrial Revolution. Likewise, artwork was created in Florence and Paris, and music in Vienna, to supply a new, wealthy business class that created a new kind of market, that of individuals rather than that of the institution of the church.

In a second way of creating will, the inventions and innovations were created *pro-actively*, by intrinsically motivated entrepreneurs, leaders and champions in order to offer something new for sale (for example, the mass-produced automobile, motion pictures, rock'n roll music) or by political efforts, especially of new governments (democracy was often a key element of this approach) or by radical social movements such as Benthamite utilitarianism, Fabian social democracy, and neo-conservatism. The inventors saw a potential before others saw it, and worked toward both creation and fulfilment of the potential economic or political market. The broad social movements (the very first was the anti-slavery movement) succeeded in convincing the group (society) to change.

Sustained commitment was motivated primarily by values. When governments adopted innovations reactively, an important element in this choice was the will to conserve existing structures, dominant values and power relationships. When innovations were created pro-actively, the primary values were often a desire to serve the public good by introducing democracy and transforming existing structures, dominant values and power relationships. A major indicator of motivation by the public good was action on poverty and lack of human rights. Whether pushed by reaction or pulled by pro-action, powerful people individually or in groups eventually took the steps necessary to implementation. In some cases, they were expensive innovations, such as utilitarian jails and work houses. Others were not as expensive, such as new civil service models and independent courts (Glor and Greene, 2002-3). In every case, whether the innovations made a minor difference or were transformational, it was people acting in groups who decided that innovations should be adopted and who did what was necessary to see that the innovations were adopted.

People function in groups in one of two ways: in a top-down, authoritarian, manner or in a bottom-up, democratic fashion. While both approaches can create the will to act, they have quite different effects on the patterns of doing things.

While a commitment or decision to adopt was necessary, it was not sufficient to the effective implementation of innovation. The second requirement for successful innovation was effective implementation.

Effective Implementation of Innovation

The implementation of innovation in the public sector is based on decisions by political officials

and implementation by public servants. Effective and active application of innovation requires excellent public administration and management, including a capacity to pace the innovation appropriately, to keep its friends onside, to communicate effectively with and convince the public about the virtues of the innovation, to identify and provide the technical skills needed, and to measure performance and respond to deficiencies.

In the West, the realization that the public service was inadequate for the job came at the time of the first gigantic utilitarian projects. Numerous commissions of study were appointed in the United Kingdom; in Canada six inquiries into the federal civil service dealt with patronage alone between 1867 and 1918 (Hodgetts et. al., 1972, p. 8), in an attempt to find remedies for this problem.

The answer came in three forms: (1) Increased qualifications for the public service, starting with a literacy test, then moving to introduction of civil service examinations. (2) A new organizational model, bureaucracy. This model was developed originally in the Prussian army, and was a solution to an ineffective miliary structure and decision-making process. (3)Elimination of political interference in hiring. Corruption developed in the British and Canadian political systems and became a major problem after the introduction of Cabinet government in the late 1700s and early 1800s, respectively. Its structural correction was realized through introduction of responsible government (a cabinet is responsible to the legislature) and an enlarged electoral base. This was made possible and was most influenced by political and social movements for good and honest government. These movements elected honest parliamentarians and demanded good government.[2] The techniques used to increase the effectiveness of the public service–standards, new models, and recruiting based on merit–were part of a package of reforms employed to create a competent public service with the will and the capacity to implement the decisions of elected officials and senior public servants, including decisions to adopt innovations. The solutions became the problems, however, as rules multiplied in the areas of purchasing, financial allotment, approval and accounting; recruiting, classification, and diversity of the public service; and accountability (evaluation, monitoring, and auditing of programs). As the public service became more effective and accountabile, it also gradually became more inefficient.

Efficiency is more of an issue in some situations than others. Government can be considered to have three major functions: (1) maintaining programs created in the past with models and strategies from the past, in response to problems and issues of the past; (2) creating new programs with

2 It was less influenced by introduction of highly controlled and complex recruiting and job classification systems. In the Government of Canada the Chicago system was adopted in 1918-19, giving the Civil Service Commission, an independent department reporting to Parliament, power to hire and promote all civil servants, based on identification of and testing for competencies required in positions (Roberts, 1996). This system had been developed in Chicago to deal with endemic civic corruption, but was not an especially effective model for getting rid of corruption in Chicago. By this time corruption had largely been eliminated in the inner public service in Canada. Adoption of the innovation was thus not a particularly appropriate choice for the Canadian environment.

models and strategies of the present, in response to problems of the present (which often have existed for quite some time); (3) inventing new programs, models and strategies to create government and influence the society of the future.

Inefficiency can have its advantages in relation to the first two functions: acting slowly or not at all can save money and maintain power relationships. But failing to deal with problems and failing to create the future we want can be disastrous: for example, because of failure to act, both London and Paris had cholera epidemics during the mid-19th century that killed 20,000 people (Paris had two, and a major tuberculosis epidemic as well). This happened because of a failure to identify precisely the source of the disease, namely drinking water, combined with a twenty-year failure to act on public sanitation problems.[3] Likewise, because of failure to act 25 years ago, we have an AIDS epidemic today that is killing millions of people every year, devastating families, and potentially crippling countries.

Effective innovation comes about, however, not only because people form intent and implement effectively and efficiently. It also happens because there is a good fit between the context and the innovation.

The Importance of the Innovation Context

In order to secure approval for implementation of an innovation, it either must fit with its context or it must have such powerful appeal that it can overcome existing institutional and power structures. In one kind of innovation pattern this would mean that successful innovation conformed to the dominant ideologies and power structures of its society. In this context innovation would contribute to the regulation of society. It would be a quietistic approach to innovation, that would fit well with the reactive mode described earlier. In an environment of radical change, however, a transformational innovation pattern would develop. The kinds of innovations that people look for, and are willing to accept, depend on the environment. This aspect of innovation is almost never discussed, and is often obscured by inappropriate use of terms like *transformational* and *revolutionary*.

Applying innovative processes from within the government context is almost always done using a quietistic approach. Those who are interested in transforming government in a fundamental way either position themselves outside of government or are pushed out of the existing institution. Their

3 Interestingly, the source of cholera was identified incorrectly, although the source identified was related to the cholera. The cause of cholera was thought to be the stench from sewage and garbage collecting in cesspools, streets and homes, when the source was actually the contamination of drinking water by the sewage. Because of this error, the solution to the problem, the building of sewers, especially to overcrowded working class and poverty-stricken neighbourhoods, did not initially get rid of cholera. This happened because some of the new sewers initially drained upstream of water intakes in the rivers. Only when the sewers were rerouted was cholera brought under control.

potential contributions tend to be of interest only in periods of crisis. If government is to become a dynamic, self-transforming institution, it needs to overcome these patterns.

A common strategy was used to overcome these patterns during the 1990s, when downsizing and privatization of government functions were defined by governments as the innovative models. The then-existing patterns were often overcome through introduction of the professional hatchet-man manager. He (or she) was hired to do the cutting, then was gone again when this work was completed. This tactic successfully changed the organizational pattern, but at great cost to staff, who had not necessarily been convinced of the need, and even if they had been, often only temporarily. The chance that such an approach would lead to permanent changes are slim. A more long-lasting model for changing patterns has been the election of governments with fundamental change mandates, combined with a public service that has become convinced of the need for a new direction, through the political process. Three organic ways in which public servants can become committed to change are through changing their minds at the same time as the citizenry changes its mind, through participation in decision-making, or through introduction of a new generation of public servants. On the other hand, attempts by civil services to change their patterns from the top, from within (such as the Government of Canada's Public Service 2000 initiative) have not been as successful.

Some of the strategies that could increase the public service's capacity to understand and potentially change its context include:

- building an awareness of thinking contexts or models. Public services and governments adopt thinking paradigms, but typically are unaware that they have done so. A greater awareness of these models and their implications would help political parties and public services be more flexible.
- increasing awareness of context, by emphasizing history, power and ethics in training and action.
- seeing context as occurring in patterns, and creating greater understanding of the patterns.
- forming a clear intent either to fit within the context within which innovation is occurring (a regulatory approach) or to change the context (a radical change approach) (these categories were developed by Burrell and Morgan, 1979, p. 29).
- focusing on results rather than process, while understanding that the process as well as the result will have an impact on whether the innovation endures. This is not about punishing failure, it is about recognizing and admitting it.
- creating an ongoing capacity to identify and test new ideas. This would enhance the public service's capacity to be ready to innovate with effective innovations that can fit different contexts, and would help to build an innovative environment. To allow these groups to be free to develop and capture new ideas, it is crucial to remove them from political control. The innovation institutes developed in South Africa, Brazil and at Harvard University have some promise in this regard.
- building the capacity to learn. The very public, highly charged, political and ideological environment within which the public service functions makes learning difficult. Learners are not good at what they do, by definition, while the public service is constantly charged by

the public and ministers to *make no mistakes,* especially in public. The only environment in which mistakes can be minimized is the environment of the most familiar, the best known and the most comfortable. The creation of an environment in which some mistakes and learning are permitted would potentially be a small change in context by itself, and would certainly allow for the creation of new contexts.

The quality of thinking models, the knowledge and skills of public servants and elected officials are crucial for successful innovation, especially if the innovations involve mega-projects. The conflicts between those in favour of old and new models have been, are and will be phenomenal. Public servants are not always as lucky as the public health planners in London, when they chose the solution of creating sewers, a solution that was related to the problem of cholera. They did not know that cholera is caused by contaminated drinking water.

Lessons Learned

How, then, can individuals, people formed into organizations and social movements, elected officials and public servants improve their capacity to apply innovative processes to improve governance and public administration performance? Some lessons learned can be identified, according to the key elements of will, implementation and context that have been discussed above (Glor, 2000, first edition, pp. 172-182) .

The Motivation to Innovate

Values and organization are the base upon which intent is built. These must be built to sustain innovators through thick and thin. While reactive innovation patterns are built upon pre-existing and current values and the status quo, transformative innovations are built upon an alternate set of values and a vision of change.

Some of the lessons learned about will in innovative governments include:

- The implementation of innovation requires the agreement and support of the public, elected officials and the public service. This support is expressed most vividly through approval of resources and the creation of the capacity to implement the innovation.
- Securing public acceptance and support are two of the primary roles of political parties and democracy. Democratic systems have a mechanism for creating change without violence, by electing governments with platforms the public supports and reelecting them when the governments are successful.
  •Those who are intrinsically motivated make better new idea generators, while those who are extrinsically motivated make better implementers.
- Being ready is essential. Ideally, readiness means having identified a worthwhile innovation, that has been tested for appropriateness, applicability and effectiveness (pilot projects are ideal for this). The tide can turn quickly, and windows of opportunity can open for short periods of time. When the will to change is formed, the successful innovator is ready with an effective answer.
- Implementing innovation is a complex activity, and extremely important, because it creates the future.

Effective implementation is not solely motivational, however, it is also affected by technique and culture.

Effective Implementation

Often seen as an add-on rather than a core function in the public service, implementation of innovation is most effective when performed by an honest, engaged, empowered, capable, democratic and free public service. An excellent public service is especially needed to implement innovation if projects are large or many innovations are being implemented at the same time. The characteristics of an excellent public service include a professional approach, good leadership, capable people, a supportive working environment, effective processes (planning, management, program development, and implementation), and a focus on results (monitoring results, evaluating outcomes and securing feedback).

Innovative governments:

- engage and empower the public, accept and balance tension, keep the support of interest and client groups, communicate effectively, and create inclusive understanding;
- plan and pilot innovations, are timely with application of their innovations but avoid haste with initiatives that require innovative processes or public input, identify risks, address problems and failures in a timely manner, and use incremental, flexible and pragmatic approaches whenever possible;
- use appropriate, often innovative mechanisms, and allocate adequate resources;
- coordinate effectively, use comprehensive approaches, do evidence-based decision-making and are accountable.

Understanding and Responding to the Innovation Context

Effective implementers of innovation do not ignore the context or culture, but rather work with it. They remember that:

- Reality is not simple: The way things are thought about and done determines what can be done. Open models help.
- What happens in government is largely determined by what happens outside it: The basics drive the society and the government in which innovation is to occur (are people adequately fed and sheltered, do they have safe food and water, are they safe, are public service jobs secure, are public servants respected and valued?). Consulting with, understanding and acting on the public good and what matters to the population is key to successful innovation. It is an important means by which government adapts to its environment. The South African government's requirement for public consultation (with a largely illiterate population), outlined in its constitution, is particularly challenging and innovative (Arko-Cobbah, 2002).
  •Public servants require knowledge of and a feeling for the broader environment. This is one of the reasons that their lives must be properly balanced between home and work, so that they have time to be exposed to the rest of the world;
- Conflict is an inherent part of innovation: public servants, elected officials and the public are often in conflict over innovations.

Conclusion

Perhaps these lessons learned can best be summed up as follows. Successful application of innovative processes to improve governance, public administration performance, and to address poverty is a question of will, effective implementation and circumstance. To be effective in addressing poverty, populations and governments must first commit to addressing it. They must also identify effective strategies and techniques for doing so, and create the mechanisms, develop the skills and imbue the values that will make it happen. Finally, they must choose and implement solutions and processes that fit the environment within which this is to happen, so that the changes will take root and remain in place over the long term.

Above all, we need to remember that there is no one best answer and it is rarely appropriate to transfer innovations intact from one environment to another. Innovation is best thought of as the creation of a unique solution in each environment, perhaps loosely based on ideas generated by others in other environments. This is dissemination of innovation. It can only occur and be effective after extensive consideration, adaptation and testing within the new context.

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