SECTION 3: IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF SERVICES

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3.1 Improving public reporting

A particular initiative in improving public reporting: the Access to Information Act

Both the Access to Information Act and the Privacy Act are based on the premise that the head of each government institution is responsible for ensuring that their institution complies with the Acts, and for making any required decisions.

The Access to Information Act gives Canadian citizens, as well as people and corporations present in Canada, the right to have access to federal government records that are not of a personal nature. The Act complements, but does not replace, other procedures for obtaining government information. It is not intended to limit in any way the access to government information that is normally available to the public upon request. It aims to make the widest possible use of information within the government by ensuring that it is organised to facilitate access by those who require it, subject to legal and policy constraints.

The President of the Treasury Board sponsors government-wide information and communications policies. A comprehensive Communications Policy advocates the principles of "duty to inform" and "service to the public". The Management of Government Information Holdings Policy, the Security Policy and the Federal Identity Programme Policy govern the treatment of information during its life-cycle from collection and creation through its use and disposal while ensuring an appropriate level of protection and promoting a strong federal image.

Canada's Access to Information Act was implemented a decade ago and has met its objectives well. This also applies to The Privacy Act described below.

Formal application may be made under the Access to Information Act. However, some information may be exempt or excluded under the Act.

Exemptions protect certain types of information that could cause harm if released. For example, some information on national security, law enforcement or trade secrets falls into this category.

The Act does not apply to information that is already available publicly, such as publications or material in libraries and museums. Federal Cabinet documents are also excluded. The Act cannot give access to records that are not controlled by the federal government.

Each federal department or agency has an Access Co-ordinator who can help identify the records sought.

An Information Commissioner investigates complaints from members of the public arising from the Access to Information Act.

The Privacy Act gives Canadian citizens and people present in Canada the right to have access to information that is held about them by the federal government. The Act also protects against unauthorised disclosure of personal information. In addition, it strictly controls how the government will collect, use, store, disclose and dispose of any personal information.

A particular initiative in improving public reporting: The Privacy Act

The Act is intended to:

- ensure the effective and consistent application of the provisions of the Privacy Act and the Privacy Regulations by government institutions;

- ensure that data-matching and data linkage of personal information for administrative purposes meet the requirements of that legislation;

- limit collection and use of the Social Insurance Number for administrative purposes to those permitted by specific Acts, regulations and programmes and to establish conditions for its collection.

Some of the programmes and operations of government use personal information about individuals, such as income tax, pension and family allowance payments and the unemployment insurance programme. There is some personal information the federal government may not release under the Privacy Act which relates to other people, national security or law enforcement.

An application may be made for information using the formal request procedures. If it is believed that the information on file is incorrect or misleading, a request can be made to have it changed. Even if the department does not agree to change the information, it must make a note that the request was made and attach it to the file.

The protection of personal information is important. The Acts state how and when the Government can collect, store and dispose of personal information. It also covers specifically why and how the information can be used or given out, as well as who can use or receive it.

The Government can only disclose personal information about a third party if it has that party's permission or when one or more of the criteria in the Privacy Act are met, such as to comply with a subpoena.

The Privacy Commissioner is the representative of the people with the power to investigate complaints. If the Privacy Commissioner recommends that information be given out and the department or agency still refuses, an appeal may be made to the Federal Court.

Supporting Material

(i) Info Source, Privacy Treasury Board of Canada, 1992-93

(ii) Info Source, Access to Information Act, Treasury Board of Canada, 1992-93

(iii) Management of Government Information Holdings, Treasury Board of Canada, 1989

3.2 Introducing a quality management approach

The Canadian Government, like many other governments, is under increasing pressure to improve services to Canadians. This pressure has been compounded by continuing fiscal restraint brought on by a need to reduce the federal debt. Together, the demand to be fiscally responsible while providing quality service has moved the federal government to look for innovative approaches to government operations. For many departments and agencies, quality management has been a vital tool that allows them to be innovative while dealing with the often conflicting objectives of improving services and fiscal restraint.

While there are many definitions and names for quality management, in practical terms, quality can be defined as doing the right things, the right way. Doing the right things means asking your clients what they want and need. Doing it the right way ensures the "right" service is provided in the most cost-effective manner. The two together ensure that clients' needs are met and that a cost-effective, quality service is provided.

The context for change

The quality movement in the federal government has been closely linked to Public Service 2000 (PS2000), an initiative to renew the Public Service of Canada. Launched in 1989, the purpose of PS2000 was to "foster and encourage a Public Service that is ... imbued with a mission of service to the public." While not a "quality management" initiative by name, PS2000 espouses the same principles of quality management, namely: client satisfaction, employee involvement and continuous improvement.

Implementing change

While many departments and agencies are using a quality approach to management, each has developed a customised approach that best suits the individual needs of that particular organisation. For example, some organisations are focusing on service standards, while others are looking at re-engineering processes. The objective remains the same - implementing a strategic action plan for providing quality, cost-effective services. Quality management is helping departments and agencies meet this objective.

Through an Inter-departmental Quality Network chaired by the Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS), over 40 departments and agencies are able to meet and exchange experiences on quality practices. To support further the work of departments, TBS has published a "Guide to Quality Management" which explains the fundamentals of quality. In addition, TBS promotes the exchange of quality practices by publishing a "Service to the Public" Newsletter, a "Quality Exchange" Bulletin and an "Innovations" Bulletin.

In order to keep abreast of initiatives in other levels of government, TBS chairs a National Quality Network that currently represents the federal government (including its regional offices), 10 provinces and six major cities. By learning from the experiences of provinces and municipalities, TBS anticipates that it will be better able to support the federal government's quality initiative.

Supporting Material

The following material is available from the Government Review and Quality Service Division, Administrative Policy Branch, Treasury Board Secretariat:

(i) "Guide to Quality Management"

(ii) "Quality Practices...A String of Pearls"

(iii) "Innovations" Best Practice Notes

(iv) "Quality Exchange" Bulletin

(v) "Service to the Public" Newsletter

3.3 Establishing a customer orientation

A particular initiative in establishing a customer orientation: the Government Telecommunication Agency

One of the three founding members of the newly-created Government Telecommunications and Informatics Services, Canada's Government Telecommunications Agency (GTA) is a prime example of an organisation whose success is based on customer orientation. GTA's customers are other federal departments and agencies seeking cost-effective, efficient and high-quality telecommunications services and products to assist them in delivering government services to Canadians.

There are many companies eager to supply the telecommunications needs of the federal government - the biggest consumer of telecommunications services in Canada. Although its services are non-mandatory, GTA has succeeded in capturing the lion's share of this market by listening to its customers and responding to their requirements with professionalism and insight. In a highly technical and complex field GTA leads the way, because it operates on the fundamental principle that it is people and the relationships between people that matter.

Responding to customer needs
The realisation that customers must be heard before they can be satisfied underlies all GTA actions. As a result, the Agency has introduced a number of mechanisms to promote clear and open communications to ensure that it understands customer needs.

Customers are a vital part of the Agency's decision-making processes. As members of two senior-level *inter-departmental committees*, they provide a direct connection from the government community to GTA.

The *Government Telecommunications Council*, representing the largest users of telecommunications services in the federal government, provides guidance on the efficient management of telecommunications in government. Similar in function to a Board of Directors, the Council is instrumental in identifying telecommunications priorities for the Agency to pursue in its five-year *Business Plan*, which Council members review and endorse.

The *Telecommunications Advisory Panel* focuses on the operational and technical aspects of telecommunications in government. Panel members bring the perspective of individual departments to the Agency and ensure that GTA understands their particular needs. The Panel also provides assessments to the Council on the Agency's progress in achieving its goals.

Customers have enthusiastically embraced the inter-departmental committee structure, introduced three years ago when GTA became a Special Operating Agency (SOA). Through these committees, the Agency provides a focal point where the energies and experience of federal telecommunications experts can be shared and capitalised on to contribute to the evolution of an integrated telecommunications system within the federal government.

Another way customers communicate with GTA is through product focus groups. Chaired by customers, with administrative support provided by the Agency, each focus group concentrates on one particular GTA service. Members have hands-on telecommunications experience and provide meaningful product feedback to the Agency. Not only do the focus groups provide information that allows the Agency to improve its services, they also provide a forum where users can work together for the betterment of the government community. It is through just such a group that over 50 opportunities were identified for the sharing of satellite services - a project that will render significant savings to individual departments and the Government as a whole.

National Account Plans

The Agency has implemented National Account Plans for each of its major customers. To establish and maintain these plans, GTA Account Managers work closely with customers to determine their telecommunications requirements on a national basis. From its portfolio of products and services, the Agency then tailors the appropriate mix of telecommunications services to assist customers to achieve their objectives. The plans encourage close working relationships between GTA and its customers - another avenue of communication and understanding, ensuring that the Agency is aware of customer needs across the country.

Total Quality Management

The Agency's emphasis on continually improving customer satisfaction is reflected in its commitment to Total Quality Management (TQM). A key source of customer information, TQM's launch in GTA was preceded by a cross-country, no-holds-barred customer survey. The survey revealed customers' thinking about the Agency's service, and led to the formal introduction of TQM in GTA to address those areas customers identified as requiring improvement. GTA employees were individually interviewed, so that their first-hand experiences and knowledge could be tapped into for the purpose of delivering enhanced customer service. All Agency staff, including senior management, participated in national TQM awareness sessions.

In the summer of 1993, GTA commissioned a survey of over 500 GTA customers across Canada, with a view to focusing TQM and customer service efforts. The findings of this survey will provide the benchmark against which process improvements will be measured. Under TQM, customer views will be continually sought, with annual surveys planned.

Business Process Improvement Teams

While senior management strongly and publicly supports the TQM concept, it is not a top-down initiative. All employees, including those not on the front lines, realise they have important parts to play in ensuring customer satisfaction. Eight cross-functional Business Improvement Teams, with membership from all parts and levels of the organisation, have been established to review and suggest improvements in internal GTA processes such as new product and service roll-out, internal and external communications, and training and staffing.

Billing Processes

As technology becomes more complex, GTA has endeavoured to ensure that its customer dealings are not similarly complicated. The Agency has therefore strategically invested human and financial resources and dedicated the efforts of a Business Process Improvement Team to improving its billing processes, striving to deliver invoices and statements that provide useful, timely and accurate information.

Customer Assistance Centre

Serving as a central contact point for customer concerns, queries and feedback, GTA's Customer Assistance Centre provides another important communications channel between customers and the Agency. The Centre's highly-motivated staff handle an average of more than 1,300 calls monthly, providing prompt, courteous responses, while analysing recurrent questions with the aim of improving customer service.

Strategic Alliances

In the new fiscal reality, no single organisation has the resources to be all things to all people. GTA has consequently embarked on a number of strategic alliances inside and outside government to maximise the expertise resident in both sectors for the development of responsive new products and services.

RADIAN, the new learning and communications network, is typical of such an arrangement. Providing access to telecommunications services designed to deliver training, meetings and conferences anywhere in Canada, RADIAN was developed in partnership with several federal agencies, and draws upon their wide experience in providing training within the government. The network's video-conferencing and multimedia requirements are met through an innovative GTA-devised consortium of private-sector suppliers. Once again, through working with and listening to customers, the Agency has been able to introduce an efficient, responsive product that conserves resources.

The Agency also enjoys good working relationships with its suppliers, based in part on twice-yearly executive forums that are held with each of its two largest national suppliers. At these events, GTA's senior managers meet with their private sector counterparts to discuss current issues and future developments, and to ensure that there is an active, healthy dialogue between the Agency and its suppliers.

Communications

As a member of the government community itself, the Agency is part of the environment in which departments operate. This experience means that GTA speaks the same language as its customers and shares a recognition of unique public sector telecommunications needs. This understanding is demonstrated in *Major Orientations*, a synopsis of the five-year forecast of planned GTA initiatives described in the Agency's *Business Plan*, which is prepared in response to customer-identified requirements. The Agency also communicates with its customers through the publication of an *Annual Report*, and an external newsletter informing customers of GTA's progress in instituting a government-wide telecommunications network infrastructure.

In seeking to maintain open and effective channels of communications, the Agency is an active participant and sponsor of major Canadian telecommunications exhibitions. The Architect Programme Forum is an annual two-day event, drawing speakers from as far away as the European Community. With over 350 registrants in 1993 representing telecommunications management from across the federal government, the Forum shares with its customers, partners and suppliers the progress that has been made in realising the goal of an integrated, government-wide network infrastructure and the plans for the future. GTA is also an active player in the annual Technology in Government Week.

Human Resources

To succeed as a Special Operating Agency, GTA has had to reinvent itself. No longer a mandatory service provider, the Agency has had to earn the right to supply customers. In endeavouring to do so, it has become a more entrepreneurial, bottom-line focused, customer-driven organisation. Adapting the best private sector practices, such as market-driven pricing, while remaining true to its public service mission, GTA has seen its customers benefit from the lowering of bureaucratic barriers.

Through employee exchanges with both public and private sector organisations, individuals with specific skills are brought into the Agency, with the welcome side-effect of stronger relationships being developed with customers and suppliers. GTA augmented its marketing and corporate management branches through industrial exchanges which have complemented its new business orientation. Though it is already strong on the technical and engineering side, GTA has benefited from strategic exchanges with private sector engineering and development firms.

Positive Results

Among the efficiencies that its customer successes have permitted the Agency to deliver are innovative telecommunications solutions that allow users to communicate electronically, via voice, data and image, between and among departments, to other governments, and beyond to private networks. The ease of use, speed and transparency of new inter-networking services, the reduction and eventual elimination of paper transactions, and the ability to operate across time zones and around the world will result in reduced demand on resources.

Another positive result of the Agency's customer focus is the leadership role it has assumed in the government community. As one of Canada's first Special Operating Agencies, GTA's successes have validated the SOA concept, and provided a practical example for others to follow. Satisfied customers are repeat customers. The better GTA does its job, the more customers it wins, and the greater potential there is for achieving economies of scale. By satisfying its customers, the Agency is able to secure the services they require at the most cost-effective prices, and GTA satisfies its customers by adding value to every service it procures on their behalf.

Satisfying its customers means that the Agency also acts as an engine of growth for the domestic telecommunications industry. The volume of GTA's business, plus the incentive it provides for the development of new services, or the combining of products in new ways, has benefited Canadian suppliers, large and small. The Agency's Government Video-conferencing Service is a case in point. GTA formed alliances with every major Canadian video-conferencing vendor for the provision of the components of the service. By doing so, it stimulated the growth of the domestic video-conferencing industry, while ensuring low rates for its customers.

The Future for GTA

Honouring its commitment to listen to people is a critical component of GTA's success. Associated with that commitment is the realisation that striving for continuous improvement is just as vital. The demands of the 21st century will not permit the Agency to lie back and bask in its past successes. To continue to succeed, it must grow and evolve. It must continue to seek the advice of its customers, and to learn from them. By listening and learning, improving processes, enhancing communications and responding to customers' needs, working with its colleagues and private and public partners, the Agency confidently looks to the future, secure in the knowledge that, when all else changes, the one constant is the human factor. As long as that remains the basis of GTA's operations, success will surely follow.

A particular initiative in establishing a customer orientation: The Canada Post Corporation

Canada Post Corporation was established as a Crown corporation on 16 October, 1981 to provide postal services that were formerly the responsibility of the Post Office, which was a department of government. The Canada Post Corporation Act was supported by all three parties in the House of Commons, and was welcomed by organised labour, business and consumer groups.

Declining Standards

As a department of government, the Post Office had become increasingly unreliable. Postal strikes denied Canadians their postal service for periods as long as 42 days. There was no nation-wide control of operations.

The Post Office's reputation for reliability had fallen drastically over the years. Next-day delivery for the price of a stamp had become a myth by the 1970s. That service standard was impossible to meet due to increasing volumes and the limited capabilities of the system. There was insufficient capital investment to update operations. Competition in the form of courier companies, facsimile machines, direct funds transfer and telecommunications firms sprang up to take away the premium parts of the postal business.

A service that had shown surpluses for most of the first half of the 20th century was recording annual deficits that had grown to $600 million by 1981-82, and threatened to reach the billion-dollar mark. This was an unacceptable burden for Canadian taxpayers.

The turnaround

In 1987, Canada Post Corporation recorded its first of three successive profits. Although the Corporation declared a loss at the end of its 1991-92 fiscal year, Canada Post rebounded and recorded a fourth profit following its 1992-93 fiscal year.

This turnaround, called "one of the greatest turnarounds in Canadian corporate history", resulted from a concentrated effort on the part of the senior managers of the Corporation to run Canada's postal service as a business.

Today's Canada Post Corporation is a fully-featured, market-oriented and profitable distribution business that meets the communications, advertising and physical distribution needs of Canadian and international consumers, businesses and other organisations.

Every business day, Canada Post Corporation collects and processes on average 40 million pieces of mail for delivery to nearly twelve million business and household addresses.

The Corporation has a retail network of nearly 19,000 points of sale, more than three-quarters of which are operated by private business.

Canada Post's workforce includes over 52,000 full- and part-time employees. The Corporation operates a network of 22 major mail processing plants, a fleet of 5,600 vehicles and contracts for the services of over 6,100 air and surface transportation contractors to move the mail. Canada Post's business generates annual revenues of close to four billion dollars.

Measures of success

In 1987, Canada Post became the first postal administration in the world to hire independent auditors to measure its delivery performance against published standards and publish quarterly reports. Today, the Corporation consistently attains performance levels in the 97 to 99 per cent range. Priority Courier delivery is on time 99.5 per cent of the time.

Customer confidence is reflected in volume growth. Canada Post now handles 57 per cent more mail than in its first complete year after incorporation in 1981 — with 17 per cent fewer employees.

Because it has become both efficient and financially self- sufficient, Canada Post Corporation is able to invest in the future of the Canadian postal service *without* government funding. All customers benefit — at $0.43, the cost of a basic letter is the second lowest in the western industrialised world in terms of the time it takes an average manufacturing worker to earn the price of a stamp.

Customer service
Canada Post has improved accessibility through co-operation with private retailers, who operate postal retail outlets. Retailers benefit from increased customer traffic and sales. Customers have access to postal products and services at convenient hours and in locations where they do other shopping and can find parking.

The Corporation opened its first postal franchise in March, 1987. Today there are more than 1,100 franchises in urban areas and over 1,300 retail postal outlets in rural communities across Canada.

Technology and partnership
Canada Post is a leader in postal technology. One example of the Corporation's technological leadership is the National Control Centre, located at Canada Post's head office in Ottawa. Electronic systems at the Centre provide real-time information on various aspects of mail operations and alert operators of potential system deviations. Control Centre staff can keep an eye on everything from surface and air shipments to machine down-time and adverse weather conditions. Staff monitor the movement of mail 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The Centre has satellite links with major trucking firms. Staff can react quickly to problems via interactive state-of-the-art graphic information systems. Maps of major cities are available at the push of a button. These innovations allow the Corporation to be increasingly pro-active in ensuring efficient delivery of the mail.

Canada Post also works in co-operation with foreign postal administrations. This benefits Canadians by paving the way toward more efficient global mail services. Since June of 1990, the Corporation has been marketing its technology and expertise to other nations through its wholly-owned subsidiary, Canada Post Systems Management Limited.

In July 1991, Canada Post announced it would be entering into a partnership agreement with the postal administrations of Germany, France, The Netherlands and Sweden, and the Australia-based transportation company, TNT Ltd. This partnership, which operates under the name "GD Express Worldwide," allows Canada Post to provide its customers with a time-certain international courier service to nearly 200 countries. The service provides end-to-end tracking of all shipments to ensure on-time delivery.

In November, 1991, Canada Post signed an agreement to begin using Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) internationally through a system called EMS-GEIS Mailbox, which is operated by the International Post Corporation (IPC). This system, similar in function to the Priority Courier Track and Trace system, is used to expedite the movement of international mail between Canada and selected postal administrations in the 22-nation IPC.

Through the EMS-GEIS Mailbox, senders can relay postal control messages through a postal organisation's EDI network at the fastest possible speed. Its use provides increased control in planning and scheduling, and lower operating costs for mail travelling between participating countries.

Canada Post has been in the message transfer business for 300 years. For most of those years, messages moved in hard-copy format by ship, by rail, by road and, in this century, by air. Today, the Corporation also move messages electronically.

Canada Post offers two volume electronic mail products: Lettermail Plus and Admail Plus. In 1994, the Corporation will launch OmniPost which will allow even comparatively low volume mailers to send mail directly from a personal computer to a few or many addresses simultaneously.

OmniPost is a computer-based service that will enable Canada Post to take a customer's mail that starts in electronic form and deliver it electronically, send it to a fax machine or convert it to hard copy and deliver it with the rest of the mail.

In developing its electronic network, Canada Post is working to ensure an effective linkage between high- and low-tech users. In bridging the gap between high-tech and low-tech users, Canada Post is continuing its unique role as the nation's universal and cost-effective information transfer and distribution system.

The future for Canada Post

The success of Canada Post Corporation can be attributed to a commitment to business values. Canada Post has introduced the concept of putting the customer first in an operation that once believed it had a comfortable monopoly. Senior managers have transformed a department that was once a burden on taxpayers into a business that pays its shareholder a dividend, in addition to financing its own capital needs. The private sector has contributed to the Corporation's success, providing value-added services in support of Canada Post's business activities.

Canada Post Corporation sees its mandate as continuing to support Canadian businesses and individuals with a reliable and cost-effective distribution and information transfer system, and providing its shareholder with a satisfactory return on investment. That's how successful businesses are judged, and Canada Post is prepared to be measured by the same yardstick.

A particular initiative in establishing a customer orientation: the single business registration number

The pressure for change

In the February 1992 Budget the Minister of Finance announced several initiatives to make government services more "client-oriented." In Canada these measures built on other efforts to improve the services offered to the public, including the "PS2000 Task Force on Service to the Public". These efforts are driven by the same imperatives that caused the United Kingdom to proclaim a "Citizen's Charter" and the Clinton Administration in the United States of America to seek to "reinvent government".

One measure was the announcement of a Single Business Registration Number (SBRN). The Budget papers noted that multiple registration numbers, and the corresponding multiple contacts required with government, meant "more work for business, more cost for government and inevitably poorer service." Revenue Canada was chosen to put the SBRN in place because it deals most frequently with businesses operating in Canada. Revenue Canada can therefore realise the greatest benefits for clients and the administration of government.

Advances in information technology

The SBRN is driven by the demand for client-oriented service, but it is made possible by advances in computer hardware and software. Until recently, most new service "lines of business" were developed by creating a new organisation, which then designed and put in place the necessary computer system to support programme delivery. This approach resulted in a "programme-oriented" structure. Each new programme had its own offices, its own expert staff and its own computer system. This approach was common to governments, for example Canada's Goods and Services Tax (GST) and the United Kingdom's Value Added Tax (VAT), and the private sector, where for example, most financial institutions handled savings accounts through a different organisation than mortgages. Organisations evaluated their managers on the contribution of their particular programme to the organisation's goals, not on their ability to produce improvements across the organisation.

The desire to make each new system perform more functions than its predecessor and the rapid advances in computer hardware that made this possible meant that most computer programmes were written from scratch. The distinct organisational structure and the rewards for performance, encouraged this approach. Computer programmers' natural desire to work as creative virtuosi rather than technicians compounded the problem. As systems have grown in complexity, the risks of starting from scratch have multiplied rapidly.

In the private sector, the competition for customers has increased the pressure to improve supporting computer systems. The political imperative for better client service in the public sector has had a similar effect. At the same time, the capabilities of computer hardware have increased dramatically in terms of speed and capacity. Today's personal computers have the capability of the mainframes of the 1970s and mainframes now have staggering storage capacity and power.

The weak link in making progress has been computer programming. Until recently, the re-use of software was almost non-existent. Where there was re-use, it was because individual programmers re-used ideas from previous projects. It was said that the most effective programmers were those with the best filing system. Large mainframe programmes were still written as they had been when the COBOL language was first developed three decades ago - line-by-line. Software engineering was an oxymoron. The risks involved in putting a new system in place grew as users demanded more capabilities. For large financial systems where the integrity of the information is critical, the risks were further magnified.

From programme-orientation to client-orientation

Programme-oriented organisational structures, and their supporting stand-alone computer systems, were adaptations to the markets and technology of their time. The pressure to become client-oriented and improve service requires computer systems to be even more complex and reliable. In a client-oriented environment all the information on a given client must be brought together. This requires either an enormous integrated system or some way in which the various programmes can be linked. In either case, it demands computer software that is more complex but has fewer errors. In the client-oriented environment, all the software eggs are in one basket.

The client-oriented environment demands a fundamental change in the way computer software is developed - from creative art to an engineering discipline. Re-use of software will reduce the development risk for any large computer system. In the case of software to support client-oriented services, where the demands for quality, system availability, data integrity and responsiveness are particularly exacting, re-use becomes a virtual necessity. "No civil engineer would dream of designing a bridge from scratch (and few would cross it if it were)". The computer systems that support client-oriented service delivery must be engineered not created. Re-use can also reduce development times and costs significantly. Short development times are important for client-oriented systems, since a rapid response to changing markets is essential. Business managers should require re-use for client-oriented services.

The Single Business Registration Number (SBRN)

The SBRN is a numbering scheme that can be applied to all Canadian Government programmes for businesses. It is designed so that the root of the number uniquely identifies each business client and is thus the key to the provision of client-oriented service. The number itself is therefore a strategic investment for the federal government that will allow the simplification and integration of business transactions with all government departments.

SBRN will allow many businesses to reduce their compliance costs - their cost of doing business with the government - through Revenue Canada's provision of single-window and tailored services. Options under consideration include a monthly consolidation of accounts, of particular interest to small and medium-sized businesses.

SBRN is also the necessary first step towards restructuring Revenue Canada to make the administration of business taxes more efficient. SBRN will allow the contacts with a client to be integrated. For example, in most circumstances one auditor will be able to audit a business for all taxes efficiently. When a business is in default, one officer will have immediate access to all the client's accounts, which will enable the collection of the net debt due to the Receiver General in one step.

Implementing the SBRN

The project will begin with the four major Revenue Canada business accounts: the Goods and Services Tax (GST), the tax deductions employers make from their employees through their payrolls (Payroll source deductions), the Corporate Income Tax, and the Customs commercial system. Businesses registering for the first time with Revenue Canada will register for these four programmes with one phone call or at one location. Revenue Canada will also offer all SBRN clients a single inquiry window for the department's programmes. Existing clients of these four programmes can choose over the course of two years when to convert their existing numbers to the SBRN.

SBRN uses a nine-digit registration number (the GST registration number for existing businesses) to identify the legal entity, the principle being "one-number, one-business." A two-letter suffix is added to identify the type of tax or programme, so that other programmes can be quickly added to the numbering scheme. For most businesses that have only one account of each type, this is all that is required. The most common case is a business that has a GST account and a Payroll account, whose account numbers would be 123456789RT and 123456789RP. The 123456789 uniquely identifies the business, while all GST accounts are labelled "RT" and all Payroll accounts "RP". A four-digit suffix is added, when necessary, for larger companies that have multiple accounts of the same type. This respects the principle that the number be "tailored", being simple for small businesses, but able to adapt to the most complex situations of large businesses.

The project will be put in place in three phases. Phase one is a pilot which commenced on 2 May 1994 in eight reasonably self-contained markets - smaller cities across Canada chosen to represent different combinations of circumstances and Revenue Canada offices. The aim of the pilot is to improve the national programme by testing and evaluating the registration of new businesses and the conversion of existing businesses at manageable volumes. It is testing the delivery of integrated inquiries and services such as address changes. In addition, training and operating procedures are being assessed and service standards established. A detailed evaluation will seek the views of clients, stakeholders and employees.

In phase two, SBRN will be offered nationally on 2 January 1995. It will be available for the voluntary conversion of existing businesses until the new numbering system becomes mandatory on 1 January 1997. Phase three of the project will begin to make a menu of options available in 1996 to businesses that have converted.

The timetable is an attempt to allow business the maximum flexibility in their adoption of SBRN. Consultations with business organisations produced a strong consensus that there should be a mandatory end date to the conversion. For larger companies the changes to their systems are more expensive if made outside their normal cycle of system upgrading. The schedule gives companies more than three years' notice and a two-year window in which to make the conversion. Each business can choose its own conversion date in this period and pre-register for this date several months in advance. A company will convert all its accounts simultaneously. The conversion process will be simplified by only requiring businesses to confirm their account numbers, rather than having to re-register, and by providing toll-free telephone numbers for assistance.

Some technical background

The SBRN computer software was constructed using a new re-use approach known as Bassett Frame Technology. Bassett frames contain a standard definition of data and functions, as well as engineering change commands. A frame thus contains information that can be re-used without change - "the same as before" commands - but allows the addition of differences - "except for" commands. These "except for" commands allow for the "modification" and "deletion" of features at any level of detail, as well as the "addition" of features that is common with other re-use techniques. Bassett frames combine the flexibility of software with the stability and risk minimisation of re-usable components. Bassett Frame Technology is available commercially as Netron/CAP software. The SBRN system has a client-server architecture and, together with the four programmes it serves, runs in Revenue Canada's two large computer centres.

Supporting material

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(ii) "The Citizen's Charter: Raising the Standard" (1991) (London: HMSO) Cm 1599

(iii) David Osborne and Ted Gaebler (1992) "Reinventing government: How the entrepreneurial spirit is transforming the Public Sector" (Plume, Penguin Books: New York)

(iv) Vice President Al Gore (September 7, 1993) "From Red Tape to Results: Creating a government that works better and costs less" (Report of the National Performance Review: Washington D.C.)

(v) Mike Smith (1992) "The Clean Launch", (Government of Canada: Ottawa)

(vi) Dorothy Johnstone (1975) "A Tax shall be charged", (Civil Service Studies No. 1) (London: HMSO)

(vii) James Martin (1991) "Rapid Application Development" (Collier Macmillan: New York), p. 296

(viii) Ibid, pp. 296 - 313

3.4 Ensuring a right of redress

A particular initiative in ensuring a right of redress: transparency of procurement

The Government of Canada has been steadfast it its promotion of integrity in the undertaking of procurement within the Public Service. This approach addresses the provision of information on opportunities and awards and the right of redress when fairness is questioned. The new Department of Public Works and Government Services Canada (PWGSC) will continue to be subject to extensive review mechanisms. It has a firm mandate to ensure that any supplier, whether from within or without Canada, may lodge both formal and informal complaints in the event they have reason to believe that they have been dealt with unfairly.

Equality of opportunity is one of the basic principles of the Department's mandate. The foundation of a sound procurement process is a level of transparency that ensures integrity and fairness.

The mandate of The Canadian International Trade Tribunal, an independent body which had been formed to resolve bilateral disputes, was amended pursuant to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), in order to receive and decide upon complaints pertaining to the conduct of procurement at all stages up to and including the award of a contract. The Tribunal is charged with determining whether or not the requirements of NAFTA, as well as any relevant procedural requirements, have been complied with respect of procurements that become subject to a complaint.

Upon notice of a complaint, the Tribunal has the power to stop the subject contract award and undertake a complete investigation. A Superior Court of Record issues subpoenas, swears in witnesses and takes relevant testimony. Depending upon the findings of the Tribunal, various remedies can be undertaken. Rulings may require that bids be re-evaluated, solicitations be re-issued, or, if a contract has been awarded, that it be terminated and/or due compensation made.

Procurements subject to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) are also subject to rules for multilateral dispute settlement. However, signatory countries are urged to make every endeavour to resolve disputes bilaterally.

The right of redress is also an element of value-added service to clients. With such a process clients are assured that the potential for an alternate source of supply has not been subject to any form of unfair exclusion.

There are many built-in processes along the way that suppliers can utilise to confront and solve problem issues, perhaps averting the necessity of appealing to a tribunal of this nature. The process is such that most matters can be resolved between the purchasing authority and the supplier concerned. The key is commonality of information for all suppliers and fairness in addressing issues and concerns.

The elements of costs to be addressed involve the amount of increased time afforded to procurements that come under the review of the Tribunal as well as any resulting awards of compensation. Costs are directly commensurate with these factors. Past experience and statistics regarding complaints indicate that increased concern over cost has not been warranted. In 1991, there were 4,198 contracts awarded under the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the United States with a value of $328 million. Complaints were received about only 33 contracts, or 0.8 per cent. During the entire period from 1989 to 1993, 130 complaints were filed and 30 were upheld. Payments made pursuant to these judgements were less than $52,000 in total.

Continuous scrutiny of the procurement process and the pursuit of best practices therein afford the basis for a fine attention to the handling of complaints. Elements of diplomacy and tact are built into core procurement courses provided to employees in the Department's procurement training continuum. The use of real scenarios and 'lessons learned' provide the opportunity to develop basic principles and augment staff capability to handle complaints effectively.

Canada's first tribunal was fully functional within six months of the signing of the Free Trade Agreement Between Canada and the United States. Time factors relate to how long it takes to inform and ensure that the public knows and understands the mandate and the process to be utilised in dealing with such a tribunal. With the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement Between Canada, the United States and Mexico, a transition to the Canadian International Trade Tribunal was implemented in time to meet the legislative requirements. The United States and Mexico have addressed and established similar mechanisms as required by the NAFTA legislation.

Supporting material

(i) North American Free Trade Agreement

(ii) Free Trade Agreement Between Canada and the United States

(iii) General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade

3.5 Establishing and publishing service standards

In its February 1994 Budget, the Government announced that standards for service would be established and published for each department and that a declaration of quality service delivery will be issued. This commitment provided new emphasis and focus to efforts already underway to develop service standards. The Treasury Board Secretariat has been supporting the initiative by establishing general guidelines and monitoring departmental progress.

Departments and agencies are to establish service standards through consultation, publish them, and make them available to their clients at the points of service. Departments and agencies are also required to publish measured performance against their service standards.

Service standards are performance objectives for the delivery of government products and services to the public. They specify the quality, including timeliness, accessibility and accuracy of services Canadians can expect to receive. They include five elements:

- service description;
- service quality pledges or principles;
- delivery targets;
- service delivery costs;
- complaint and redress mechanisms.

Complaint and redress mechanisms already exist for any services offered by the Canadian Government. This is particularly true in the regulatory area where such mechanisms are generally provided for in legislation. Departments are now expected to make existing complaint and redress mechanisms more visible to clients and establish a strategy for adequately dealing with complaints.

Consulting with Canadians and letting them express any concerns about the services they receive provides credibility to all initiatives aimed at improving the quality of services. To a certain extent it can also change general public perceptions about the Public Service.

The context for change

Ultimately, a higher level of satisfaction toward government services will emerge from two factors:

- meaningful service standards; and

- service delivery that meets those standards.

The development of service standards will focus departments and agencies on services that are really important to Canadians. The initiative will also make Canadians more aware of the costs of services they are receiving from their Government.

The establishment of service standards is part of the reform of the public service which began with the Public Service 2000 (PS2000) Initiative. PS 2000 aims to improve the quality of services to Canadians and to streamline the public service. Other related elements of reform include additional flexibilities for frontline managers in both financial and human resource management, a major undertaking to make the maximum use of information technology in providing better and more affordable services, extensive review of regulation to have a more responsive regulatory regime, a focus on quality management and continuous learning, and the development of Special Operating Agencies to bring a more businesslike approach to government organisations where appropriate.

Communicating standards of service to the public is a new way of doing business for federal institutions. Managing to service standards involves a complete change of culture, and needs a strong commitment from senior management to be successful.

There are many stakeholders in this initiative: Canadians in general, service clients, employees and their managers, and senior departmental managers. Commitment and involvement from all is needed for success. Other conditions for success include:

- effective consultations with clients in order to know their expectations;

- regular measurement of client satisfaction, service delivery performance and the costs of services;

- provision of quality service training to front line employees and management;

- empowerment of employees to give them a certain control over service delivery; and

- reports to clients on the performance achieved against service standards.

Implementing change

The Treasury Board Secretariat provided general guidelines and milestones to departments and agencies. The milestones provided are generic, each department having considerable flexibility in determining the scope of the services and the related standards being adopted and published. The February 1994 Budget provided a 1995 date for having service standards in place. The Treasury Board Secretariat monitors departmental progress through its ongoing relations with departments and more formally through periodic reporting back to the Secretariat or the Board.

An inter-departmental committee of Assistant Deputy Ministers is used to provide the Secretariat with advice on the implementation of the initiative.

Inter-departmental networks have also been set up to exchange best practices and to find solutions to commons problems. The focus of these networks is on specific types of services such as regulatory services, application processing, and information and advice. There is also a network on the costing and communicating of costs of services. The networks will help to promote a certain level of consistency between departments.

Seminars and workshops are provided as further vehicles for exchanging experiences and gaining more understanding of the problems and issues surrounding service standards.

By the end of the 1994-1995 fiscal year, service standards should be available for all major services of the federal government. But it will require more time to really change the culture of departments. Setting service standards is an ongoing process; standards that are valid today should be reviewed and modified on a regular basis, according to the changing needs of the population and the financial capacity of the country.

3.6 Improving policy presentation

This entry deals with communications policy.

To encourage the free flow of information between the government and the public, the following policy has been set:

- to give the public information about policies, programmes and services that is accurate, complete, objective, timely, relevant and understandable;
- to find out the concerns and views of the public in order to help set priorities, develop policies, carry out programmes and provide services;
- to ensure that the government is visible, accessible and answerable to the public.

The context for change

The objective of this policy is to ensure the effective management of government communications.

Good communications is fundamental to the achievement of government objectives. Communications planning, co-ordination and execution are an integral part of the management process of government.

Future direction in government communications will likely see greater direct access to government information through electronic services and a greater reliance on priced information products.

There have been recent initiatives to provide alternative formats to the sensory disabled. A guide and a brochure have been developed and employees are currently being trained on how to provide the alternative formats.

Implementing change

It should be noted that each department is responsible for putting in place its own communications group and for ensuring good communications with its public. In addition, some co-ordination on communications issues is provided by a Communications Consultation Secretariat within the Privy Council Office. Policy guidance is provided through an Information, Communications and Security Division within the Treasury Board Secretariat.

Communications is a shared management responsibility, carried out with the help of communications specialists, that must be integrated into the corporate management process. Its main components are: researching and analysing the public environment, including the impact of programmes and projects; advising Ministers and management; planning corporate and programme communications; managing communications; and carrying out communications activities.

Communications include public relations, public opinion research, advertising, publishing, expositions and the Federal Identity Programme. The Federal Identity Programme is intended to achieve clear and consistent identification of its institutions and to assist the public in recognising and gaining access to federal programmes and services.

As well, Communications activities must meet Treasury Board guidelines on "no frills" publishing which were provided to reinforce the February 1992 Budget. "No frills" calls for the streamlining of government publishing and the creation of a uniform "look" for news releases, information kit folders and government report covers. There is no single formula to implement "no frills" publishing practices. Rather, they encourage sound planning to achieve information products that are economical, well-designed, environmentally sound and that communicate effectively. Each institution will adapt these guidelines to its particular needs.

Supporting Material

(i) The Manager's Deskbook, Third Edition, February 1993, Treasury Board of Canada

(ii) Treasury Board Manual, Communications Volume, available from Supply and Services Canada

(iii) Alternative formats: Access for All, Government of Canada, December 1993

(iv) A Guide to Good Communications Management, Treasury Board Secretariat, March 1992

(v) Planning Information Products: effective, no-frills publishing practices, Treasury Board Secretariat, November 1993