



Horizontal Government: The Next Step

By Donald Lenihan, Director of CCG and Tony Valeri, MP for Stoney Creek

Introduction: Converging on results

Over the last decade and a half, a major change has been under way in how the Government of Canada operates and is organized. It has been described as a shift in focus away from process and onto results, from how policies and programs work to whether they work.

The shift is part of a trend that has swept provincial and municipal governments across the country as well as most members of the Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation. The Treasury Board Secretariat's *Results for Canadians: A Management Framework of the Government of Canada*, launched in 2000, makes the new emphasis on results the cornerstone of government policy for the future. Before its release, significant progress had already been made on three fronts: planning and reporting, policy development and program delivery.

For example, the Canadian government has introduced new approaches to fiscal management and accountability through new requirements to plan for and report on results. A key initiative here is the reform of Part III of the Estimates. Each spring departments must table reports setting out the goals they aim to achieve over a three-year period, and each fall they must table a second report on their progress in achieving them.

Policy coordination is a second area where the effects of the shift are clear. The focus on results has made it plain that many departments share common goals, such as sustainable development or higher productivity rates. This, in turn, has highlighted the need to coordinate policy across government.

Finally, the focus on results also underlines the extent to which other governments, NGOs and members of the business community also share goals with the Government of

Canada and are delivering programs to promote them. As a result, many federal policy-makers now see closer collaboration with the other players as essential if the federal government is to achieve its own goals. The Results for Canadians framework makes collaboration a key strategy for the future.

Recent efforts by the federal government to promote collaboration include the Voluntary Sector Initiative, which establishes a formal partnership between the Government of Canada and the voluntary sector; and the Social Union Framework Agreement, which establishes a basis for intergovernmental collaboration on social policy.

Although the commitment to results has taken different forms on the three levels of planning and reporting, policy development and program delivery, it joins them at the hip. Or, to use another metaphor, their different approaches look more and more like pieces of a single puzzle, which is being assembled in parts. The parts are beginning to fit together to provide a bigger picture of government transformation. As the picture emerges, however, it is increasingly clear that further progress will require some major adjustments to another part of the system—the way resources are allocated in the budget process.

This paper has three main tasks. First, it sketches some of the emerging links between these three key areas, which are a consequence of the shift to results. Second, it identifies what appears to be a critical next step along the path to realizing the results agenda: providing an alternative to traditional program-based funding. Our proposal is that the federal government should develop an alternative approach to funding that would make some funds available on a horizontal basis by tying them more closely to the achievement of results. Finally, the paper briefly discusses some issues and challenges around our proposal.

Transforming budgeting and reporting: From inputs to outputs to outcomes

We begin with a little potted history of the budgeting process in the Government of Canada. The story can be told as one of gradual evolution from input-based to output-based budgeting, from a focus on the resources needed to carry work out, to the things produced by that work.

Before the Lambert Commission in the early 1960s, budgeting was mainly an accounting exercise. It identified the resources that a department needed to get through a fiscal year—so-called "inputs." But this "line-item" approach says little or nothing about what a department plans to do with the resources it seeks. From the point of view, say, of parliamentarians who are supposed to oversee government, or policy-makers who want to know how well a department or program is working, this is a major weakness. It makes it difficult to know whether the money has been well spent.

By the late 1960s budgeting had been modified to provide more information on the things produced or purchased with the resources—so-called "outputs." For example, a line-item or input-based budget for health might identify how much money is needed to pay staff, provide maintenance and purchase equipment to keep a hospital going. By contrast, focusing on outputs would require that the budget state how many operations the hospital expected to perform, how many patients would be admitted, how many beds would be purchased or available or what equipment would be added. That would give parliamentarians and policy-makers useful information to help them assess how well government was using public funds.

Since the 1960s, there has been a gradual evolution toward a greater use of outputs in reporting and in the budgeting process. Experts agree that there is still a long way to go, but progress is being made.

But focusing on outputs has raised a further question for parliamentarians and policy-makers. Although they may know how many operations a hospital performed, it does not tell them if taxpayers received real value for the money spent because it sheds no light on other key questions: Were the operations really needed? Did the right people get them? Would the money have been better spent on some other part of the health system?

Concern over such questions is shifting attention once again, this time from outputs to outcomes. Outcomes are the real effect that the outputs have on the world—the results.

For example, if the goal of a clean needle program in East Vancouver is to lower HIV infection rates, the success of the program cannot be determined from the number of clean needles that were handed out (outputs). The needles may never have been used or may have had no effect on the HIV rate. To do their job, parliamentarians and policy-makers also need to know whether or how far the HIV infection rate actually dropped and how the needle program contributed to it.

The current discussion over outcomes makes clear that, in the final analysis, it is not inputs or outputs that citizens, parliamentarians and policy-makers really care about, but outcomes. Governments make policies and design programs in order to change something in society. Inputs and outputs are only a means to that end. If nothing is known about how effectively they have contributed to bringing about the desired change—the outcome—there is no real basis for assessing the value of the program.

Today, there is much talk in the federal government of aligning or linking resources to outcomes. The idea is simple and sound. Managers should be required to report on and budget for: (1) the resources needed to do a job—inputs; (2) what they purchased with the funds—outputs; and (3) how effectively the use of resources achieves the goals—outcomes. Although the reform of Part III of the Estimates moves reporting in this direction, so far no clear link has been established between such reports and the budgeting process, between the achievement of results and decisions around how to allocate future resources.

Insofar as this is so, transparency around how and why such decisions are made is less than full. In turn, this means that accountability for the decision-making will also be wanting. Although the budget process has become more consultative in recent years, there is still no clear rationale on which final decisions rest. The prerogative belongs largely with the Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister—an arrangement that has attracted criticism from various quarters. As a result, a minister who is seeking funds for a new initiative or to increase the budget for an existing program has no clear basis on which to rest his or her appeal. The decision is a political one.

What if parliamentary committees were more engaged in reviewing budget decisions? Would that result in a more transparent and accountable process? However desirable it may be, closer scrutiny is not enough. Parliamentary review of such decisions must rest on a foundation that leads to a principled assessment and, where appropriate, criticism of the rationality and fairness of choices. A similar point could be made about consultation. No amount of consultation will be enough to render a process transparent unless the basis for

final decisions is clear from the start. In our view, establishing a clearer link between results and resources is a crucial step in establishing such a basis.

Let us be clear, however: we are not suggesting that budget decisions can or should be reduced to an algorithm. Budget decisions will always require trade-offs that involve controversial choices about values and priorities. That is what politics is all about. Our point is that linking resources to results could make the process more transparent, accountable and rational than it presently is—perhaps significantly so. Insofar as this is the case, it is hard to resist the conclusion that it should be done.

Establishing the link between results and resources is a necessary next step in the federal government's plan to become more results oriented. Not only because it may lead to better management of resources and more accountable government, as advocates already argue, but also because it would put the federal government in a position to strengthen its efforts at horizontal coordination. As we will argue over the next few sections, traditional approaches to funding are becoming a major obstacle to further progress at other levels.

Transforming policy: Toward a more holistic approach

There is a parallel between the evolution of the budgeting process and changes under way in how governments understand and make policy, which is also being transformed by a clearer focus on outcomes. Health provides a convenient example. To see the change, we can contrast the old approach to health policy with the new one.

In the old approach, health policy was largely about curing illness. The new view shifts the emphasis away from reacting to illness and onto promoting wellness. It is proactive rather than reactive. Wellness is seen as the outcome or result of good policy.

The basic idea is neither new nor complicated. People have known for centuries that if you want to stay healthy, you should eat well and exercise. As Ben Franklin quipped: an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

But if the idea is simple, the practice is not. Over the last century, researchers have vastly increased our knowledge of the so-called determinants of health—the conditions that contribute to a healthy life. A huge body of knowledge now exists on the effects on health of exercise, diet, stress levels, environmental factors, recreational habits, etc. Policy-makers

want to use it to develop policies that prevent illness by promoting wellness. It requires a new "holistic" view of the health system.

The health system must be integrated with other policy fields. It must extend beyond hospitals, clinics and drug stores to include schools, movie theaters, industrial parks and bicycle paths. Schools and mass media must become tools to educate citizens about nutrition and exercise habits, the environment must be regulated to prevent disease, and parks and recreational facilities must be designed to encourage exercise. In the new view, all of these policies areas are viewed as having an important contribution to make to the overarching goal of wellness, which cuts across them.

This new holistic approach to policy is becoming standard in most areas, including the environment, telecommunications, foreign policy and social policy. For example, many experts on homelessness now agree that traditional approaches, such as more subsidized housing, are only a partial solution. Homelessness is the outcome of a variety of causes, including educational levels, health issues, cultural attitudes and even climate change. A real solution must tackle the issue on all of these levels.

Foreign Affairs Minister Bill Graham toed the same line recently when he explained the need for a new holistic approach to policy-making in his own department: "The role of foreign minister and foreign policy is so linked now to domestic policy...that one does not create an independent foreign policy." He rejects the old view that policy-making is an internal departmental exercise and argues for a collaborative approach that involves a wide range of departments, provincial and municipal governments and NGOs.

The new view of policy reflects the belief that the outcomes policy-makers want to achieve often cut across different areas. To achieve their goals, they must share expertise and information and work together to solve problems. This implies a new emphasis on horizontal collaboration between departments, levels of government and the private and third sectors.

Transforming program delivery: Toward a more collaborative approach

Making government more horizontal is not just a matter of coordinating policy—however important that may be. The policy must be implemented. In our example of the clean needle program, we noted that the goal of lowering the HIV rate involves more than providing clean needles.

It may also require educational programs to inform drug users of the dangers, law enforcement programs to patrol the areas where drugs are sold and used, skills training programs to help get addicts back into the mainstream, and food services to ensure that they are eating well. The federal government is not in a position to deliver all these services. Achieving the goal of a lower HIV infection rate therefore requires collaboration with other governments and service providers.

Over the last decade, Canadian governments have experimented with collaborative approaches to providing services. These are initiatives where a variety of departments, governments, and private- or third-sector organizations find that they share a common goal and agree to work together to achieve it.

Such a multi-sectoral approach can range from high-level intergovernmental agreements, such as the Social Union Framework Accord, to community-based partnerships involving NGOs, associations and private sector groups, as well as other governments. There is no one-size-fits-all model. Nevertheless, one of the most promising approaches for collaboration is at the community level. Past experiments have shown that they can have many benefits.

First, local governments, NGOs and members of the business community are often in a better position than the federal bureaucrats to identify how and where a particular intervention will help. Community networks contain a pool of knowledge and expertise regarding local concerns, issues, opportunities and resources that can be extremely important in solving problems or achieving goals. A community's corporate memory and knowledge is a critical resource for tackling local issues that the federal government should tap.

Second, community approaches can legitimate difficult choices by involving the citizens who are affected. Governments find it increasingly difficult to develop and implement controversial policy choices from the "top-down." In the public's mind, there is a simple but powerful connection between government's willingness to involve citizens directly in decisions and their willingness to accept that a difficult decision or trade-off was necessary. Community-based approaches can help legitimize such decisions precisely because they involve citizens in making the choices.

Third, a strategy to achieve many goals requires that citizens are involved in the implementation. For example, a wellness strategy may require that community members change their diet or exercise regularly. Encouraging citizens to participate

through community-based approaches encourages them to take personal responsibility for success. It gives them a direct stake in the project and thereby puts pressure on them to change their own habits in ways that could make a key contribution to its overall effectiveness.

Finally, the skills needed in modern societies and economies are very different from those of the natural resource and manufacturing economy of the past. For example, to reap the real benefits of the new technology, it is not enough to train Canadians to use it to automate the things that they already do. They must use the tools to create new products and new ways of doing things. The new economy is dependent on the production and creative use of knowledge—that is, on learning and innovation. Community approaches can contribute to them in three ways:

- **Putting experience to work:** Community approaches involve the community in planning and debate in ways that translate the experience of its members into new solutions, so that it is not lost. This, in turn, contributes to an evolving stock of best practices that can be used by other communities to find innovative solutions to their own challenges.
- **Leveraging diversity:** In a knowledge-based society and economy, diversity should be viewed as a major resource. It is a source of new networks and connections to other parts of the world, as well as of knowledge and expertise regarding the needs, practices, habits, customs, beliefs, and opportunities of other people and other countries. Community approaches can help integrate cultural and other communities-of-interest into public debate and decision-making in ways that help tap this resource at the same time that it promotes greater inclusiveness.

Policy, Politics & Governance

Over the last decade, governments in OECD countries have been experimenting with "new tools," ranging from Internet technologies to community partnerships. They could greatly improve government and democracy. But it is increasingly clear that these tools change how modern governments work, what they do and how they make decisions. Learning to use them well will require experimentation and careful analysis from the public service. It will require informed debate, strong leadership and good decision-making from politicians. This series is dedicated to exploring the issues from both points of view.

Centre for Collaborative Government

The Centre for Collaborative Government is a Canadian public interest research organization. Its mission is to promote more effective management of the interdependence between government departments, levels of government or government and the private or third sectors. The Centre advances public dialogue and research on public management and governance through a Canada-wide network of associates. The centre for Collaborative Government is a division of Kaufman, Thomas & Associates, Inc.

- Developing "soft" skills: Interdependence is increasing. As it deepens, companies and governments will adopt more collaborative approaches to doing business. They will seek out individuals with collaborative skills, such as teamwork, relationship-building, tolerance, compromise and communications. A community approach provides excellent opportunities for individuals and organizations to strengthen these soft skills as an important form of human capital.

In summary, efforts to coordinate policy across the federal government are important, but they will be sustainable only if they lead to good results—they must lead to interventions that contribute significantly to the government's overall goals. Because many of these goals are shared with other governments and service providers, a more holistic approach to policy must be linked to and supported by a more collaborative approach to program delivery. They are two sides of the same coin. Shared outcomes are the basic building block of both.

A Major Obstacle to Progress

Program-based funding

We have argued that a more holistic approach to policy is evolving in the federal government, and that it must be supported by collaborative efforts at implementation. As things stand, however, governments are not very good at either. A key reason is that they are still very much in the grip of a system that was designed to separate policy fields into self-contained areas, dominated by a department. Conventional programming is the lynchpin of that system. It may now be the single biggest obstacle to realizing a more collaborative approach.

When resources are allocated in the budget to achieve policy goals, they are usually tied to departmental programs. As a result, the terms and conditions around access to and use of the resources are often highly detailed and restrictive. With respect to collaboration, this means that horizontal goals and priorities must be turned into program goals and priorities, which tend to be too narrow and too focused on departmental interests to support effective partnerships.

For example, efforts to develop a community approach to solve a particular issue, such as homelessness, often require NGOs or members of the business community to access funds piecemeal from a variety of specific programs that are designed to address some part of the issue, such as skills training or drug abuse. This is counter to the spirit of community approaches, which is holistic. It fragments the community's natural integrity—its social capital—with too much process, makes funding unstable by spreading it across a range of departments and programs, and puts organizations

in competition with one another for funds. In addition, it ties up the access to funds in streams of red tape that take months—often years—to complete.

If collaboration is to work, the parties must have the authority to negotiate, plan and work together as a group. Existing arrangements are a serious barrier to this. Where resources are scattered across a variety of related programs and departments, ideally they would be consolidated into a single, more flexible, horizontal fund, whose goals would be broad enough to allow a more holistic approach, while remaining focused enough to ensure federal goals and priorities.

The new Agricultural Policy Framework is one example of a recent effort to create more policy, program and funding flexibility to support collaboration at the intergovernmental level. Through it the partners have set common goals, defined mechanisms for determining initiatives to promote them and established cost-sharing arrangements to fund them.

Aligning funding with results

This returns us to the discussion on budgeting and outcomes. Focusing more attention on the achievement of outcomes as a basis for allocating funds could move the goalposts on collaborative arrangements. At present, the input-output focus of the budgeting process is too limiting. By tying funds to traditional programs, it makes managers accountable for the resources in ways that remain too departmentally-focused.

Linking accountability for the use of resources more directly to the achievement of results—outcomes—would loosen the departmental strings. At the same time, because outcomes are horizontal in nature and are achieved outside a given department, it would create an incentive for parties with common interests to cooperate across organizational boundaries. This would encourage managers from different departments and organizations to build coalitions based on shared goals. In principle, there is no reason that some public funds could not be allocated on this basis.

We therefore propose that the federal government take steps to develop an alternative to traditional program-based funding. It could use the federal budgeting process to establish provisions that would make significant funds available for collaborative initiatives, tying access to them to the pursuit and achievement of key horizontal goals or outcomes.

If the theory and proposal make sense, however, they also raise questions. At least three should be commented on briefly: government's accountability for the use of public

funds, the role of information technology in supporting horizontal government, and the need for adjustments to the governance structure to provide horizontal leadership and accountability.

Accountability

The existing approach is based on the idea of a "chain of command" that runs from the minister, through the deputy minister and down the hierarchy of a department. Each level of command is supposed to delegate some authority to the level below, which, in turn, reports back to it.

The minister's accountability thus is thought to depend on the integrity of this chain. If it is broken at any stage, it is hard to see how the minister could be held accountable meaningfully for what happens beyond the interruption. The chain-of-command model thus sets out clear lines of accountability and responsibility within government.

A collaborative approach challenges this model. It assumes that officials from various departments, levels of government and NGOs or the business community collaborate with one another in ways that may blur the lines of accountability. Responsibility gets shared across boundaries. This has worried ministers who fear that under a collaborative arrangement they may be held to account for the use of funds over which they have little or no control.

In response, advocates of collaborative arrangements have begun to talk about "shared accountability" as a response to the problem. The concept raises questions and more work needs to be done in replying to them. Nevertheless, much progress has been made over the last few years. Chapter 9 of the 2002 report of the Auditor General provides a good example of how far the thinking has progressed. It sketches a basis for developing "accountability frameworks" for collaborative arrangements.

According to the report, such a framework should include a clear statement of the goals of the arrangement, the roles and responsibilities of the partners, the strategies they have devised to achieve the goals, the benchmarks and targets they have set, the performance indicators they will use, and the risk-management frameworks they have developed. The paper also declares that a basic principle of such arrangements is that the parties are not only accountable to governments or the public, but also to one another. Finally, it suggests that collaborative approaches are consistent with the traditions of parliamentary government and ministerial accountability.

Information technology: A critical enabler

Although the federal government's decision to focus on results is a recent one, we have noted that neither the idea of horizontal policy nor the interest in results is really new. Why is the shift in focus happening now?

Part of the answer lies in government's rapidly growing capacity to collect and use information. A century ago, its ability to get reliable information on outcomes was extremely limited. The data was too time consuming, costly and difficult to collect and use. During the 20th century, things began to change. Organizations such as Statistics Canada started collecting and compiling information on a wide range of economic and social trends, ranging from employment and inflation levels to birth rates and levels of education. Such work provides critical support to efforts at horizontal policy-making and results reporting. Nevertheless, the information base is not yet robust enough to support the results agenda that is emerging. There is cause for optimism.

Government's ability to track broader societal trends and to assess the impact of its policies on them is entering a new and promising era. As a result of the astonishing evolution of information and communications technologies, over the next decade sophisticated new data-collection and measurement systems could come online that will allow governments to clear the biggest hurdle to effective results reporting: getting enough of the right information. This new capacity to acquire and use information could allow government to get far better information on outcomes than could be hoped for only a couple of decades ago. In turn, that could make policy-makers far more effective at identifying where policies and programs could be strengthened, adjusted or coordinated to get better results. The same information could be used to make government more accountable.

The technology exists or is within reach to engineer a quantum leap in the information needed to support the results agenda. The challenge for government is to build the "infrastructure"—the information and communications networks and systems to support it. It will require vision, strong political leadership, and closer cooperation between those working on various parts of the results agenda.

Governance

At the end of the day, progress toward horizontal government will require more than a focus on outcomes, a change to how resources are allocated, better accountability, and better information, as important as all these may be. It will also require some structural changes at the governance

level to provide leadership and accountability. This likely requires the creation of a new cadre of political leadership that is tasked with steering the process. More reflection and debate are needed on which governance models would be best. Here we can offer only some starting points for further discussion.

One option would be to assign a new senior minister the responsibility for driving the horizontal agenda, a new Minister for Horizontal Coordination. He or she would not be attached to a line department but instead would be responsible for promoting policy coordination across departments around key government-wide outcomes and the horizontal delivery of programs. The position would include a secretariat and sufficient resources to undertake a series of projects, inside and outside government, strategically designed to move the agenda forward.

A variation on this model would involve a group of such ministers—a horizontal cabinet—with each one assigned to a key horizontal goal. Together, they would form a high-level policy committee with the authority and resources to bring about a greater alignment of departmental objectives and programs. Such a cabinet would be a powerful body charged with promoting change through a realization of the results agenda. Although the model has some resemblance to high-level Cabinet committees that already exist, such as the Economic and Social Policy Committees, there are important differences.

Those committees are made up of ministers who have responsibility for departments. This responsibility makes it difficult for them to be effective leaders of an ambitious horizontal agenda for several reasons. First, shifting government in a horizontal direction will pose challenges to the resources and authority of their own departments, which as ministers they have a responsibility to defend. Second, line ministers are busy people. They have very little time to devote to developing and realizing a horizontal agenda. This means that progress on big issues will be slow and difficult. The change process needs dedicated leadership. Third, "horizontal" committees such as the Social Policy Committee have neither the resources nor the authority to undertake initiatives of their own to bring about change. They are effectively planning committees.

A third, quite different approach to governance reform would look to parliamentary committees for the answer. For example, a number of horizontal standing committees could be created. Each would then be assigned responsibility to oversee the realization of the results agenda in a particular area, such as sustainable development. Such committees would also be given the resources and authority to undertake

strategic initiatives, such as pilot projects, to advance their goals. Moreover, under the new committees rules, the Chairs of such committees would be elected by secret ballot. These Chairs could be made ex-officio members of an overarching horizontal policy committee—a kind of steering committee of the horizontal committees.

The approach has the virtue of giving Parliament a lead role in promoting change and the coordination of policy. Combining that with the fact that committee Chairs would be elected, suggests that such committees would have enormous legitimacy. In addition, it would provide the opposition parties with a real role in governance through their participation in the committees.

The proposal also raises questions, however: Might it create tensions between the Cabinet and the Committees? How would such tensions be managed? Would the prime minister find it acceptable that he or she had no say in choosing the members of the horizontal steering committee?

It is not possible to explore these options and issues in depth here, or propose other ones. Suffice it to say that a satisfactory plan to make government more horizontal must come to terms with the fact that not only the bureaucracy but also the political leadership must be reorganized to reflect the new horizontal direction of government.

Proposal

As this paper indicates, much work has already been done to advance the horizontal agenda on a variety of levels. The task now is to bring the parts closer together, while deepening the work. Pilot projects could be extremely useful here. They could be used to promote learning and integration. Over the next few years, a number of such projects should be launched to help consolidate the gains, increase the learning in key areas and accelerate the momentum for change. Before concluding, we suggest one possibility.

A pilot that would combine horizontal policy development and program delivery could be developed around homelessness. As suggested earlier, the causes of the problem are multiple, including education, cultural factors, housing shortages and crime. A number of departments now have programs that address various aspects of the problem, including HRDC, Corrections Canada, Solicitor General, Health Canada and DIAND. The federal government could examine ways to integrate funds from such programs into a single fund that would then be made available for community-based approaches to solving homelessness.

As a first step, an accountability framework would be designed around the common goals of the participating departments, drawing on the work in the Auditor General's report and other models, such as the Agricultural Policy Framework. A second step would be to identify a community where a pilot project could be launched, then involve community organizations in an effort to draft a community-based strategy to address problems around homelessness.

Conclusion

By now it should be clear that, in our view, horizontal government is not an alternative to vertical government. It is not a question of making a choice between the two. There is much about conventional departmental structures that remains right. The challenge is to build into the existing system a more effective capacity to work horizontally. It will require major change on a number of levels. But we are inclined to view it as an evolutionary rather than a revolutionary process—a staged transformation of the existing system. There is not likely to be a horizontal big bang.

Still, if we are going to invoke the metaphor of evolution, it is worth recalling that the theory has itself evolved since the

days of Charles Darwin. If he was right that natural selection is the main mechanism of biological evolution, he was wrong that it takes millions of years and happens only in tiny increments. We now know that the phylogenetic scale has its moments of cataclysmic upheaval and acceleration—that species can mutate and adjust to a new environment in what, from the viewpoint of biological time, is the blink of an eye.

In our view, Canadian governments are approaching a critical juncture. The momentum for change is building. That much seems clear. How far it will go and how fast is still anyone's guess.

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