

Public Service Reforms In Canada

Posted on September 16, 2019

Similar to other nations, Canada's politicians, academics, and members of the private sector have seriously evaluated the core functions of the government within society and how they can be improved. Similar efforts have been made in the past, and various circumstances have come together to provide greater urgency to the exercise. Factors such as debts, deficits, the changing international environment, new technologies, and high expectations have been at the forefront of pushing the redefinition of the government, making sure it plays its role.

However, this has not been an easy process as principal challenges have been raised as people aim to make the government more effective and efficient. This has resulted in the elimination of government programs, the reduction of the number of public bureaucracies, and the changing of management processes, all in the name of providing services to citizens. Among the numerous sectors the Canadian government has tried to alter, the public service is one of them. The main objective of this paper is to offer a concise discussion of the reforms Canada has experienced over the years as it tries to better its public service. (Government of Canada, n.d.)

Since the 19th century, Canada has witnessed attempts to try and alter the management process as well as the structure of the federal public service. Some of the reforms encountered after the Second World War are still being experienced today. Two post-war exercises that have had a great impact on Canadian public service are the Lambert Commission and the Glasco Commission. These two exercises dealt with the same issues and helped advance a series of important proposals. Currently, the Canadian government has tried to find ways to offer services to citizens outside the previous bureaucratic structures. The privatization of state services has helped offer positive reform. Another solution that the Canadian government adopted was the use of quasi-public and quasi-private entities, which are also identified as SOAs (Special Operating Agencies). SOAs have been seen to embody both the characteristics and drawbacks of federal reform.

Administrative Reforms Since 1962

Constitutional change has not been the only major reform that was seen to emerge in Canada during the post-war period. For the last three decades, the focus of government reform in Canada has always been a continuing search that aims at improving efficiencies as well as reducing costs within the administration of public affairs at the state level. This means creating an administrative government that is answerable for all its actions as it continues to remain flexible and inventive enough to deal with any challenges thrown at it by the pluralistic society. The private sector in Canada has been developing and offering its services efficiently for quite some time. Thus, if the public service could be the same as the private service, then these challenges would be less daunting. Too many reform

attempts have been initiated and erred with the belief that simple analogies can be achieved between the public and private sectors. However, when it comes to the administrative component, the Canadian government works in a complex and nuanced environment, and thus, the creation of conflicting demands makes it hard to achieve the set reforms. The search for attaining and obtaining administrative reforms has taken many forms, including the royal commissions and investigations into public service. It has helped produce a number of alterations to the structure of the public service as well as its procedures. Some of the major administrative reform attempts that have been experienced by the Canadian government since the post-war period include:

The Glassco Commission

This was the first large-scale attempt aimed at bringing about reforms, and it was initiated by Diefenbaker's government back in the 60s. The attempt took the form of the Royal Commission on Government Organization and was chaired by Grant Glassco, thus the name Glassco Commission. The Commission's main aim was to study and offer conclusions as well as recommendations regarding Canadian public administration. The government decided to launch the Royal Commission after a variety of concerns were raised regarding the Public service sector. One of these concerns was the Cabinet's worry that the public service sector was losing control over government expenditure and bureaucratic apparatus. It was decided that a more rational type of organization was to be established on an administrative structure during the post-war and after, and thus, the inspiration to develop a Royal Commission. The commissioners were required to make inquiries as well as report the approaches employed by Canadian governmental agencies and departments. Moreover, they were to offer recommendations of which approach would be the best in promoting efficiency while improving public service in public enterprises.

The Royal Commission was directed to seek alternatives that would help eliminate overlap and duplication of services, thus promoting efficiency through decentralization and improving budgeting procedures. The principle that governed the commissioners was that the government administration must be made in a way that fits the needs and wants of the Canadian citizens. Public servants should have the widest possible opportunities as this will help develop varied capabilities for serving the Canadian public with mature judgment. After a thorough study of the government's public service, it was concluded that Canada's Public Service was not sufficiently adaptable to the emerging challenges brought about by the post-war era. The parties who were at fault, according to the commissioners, were central agencies that enacted regulations that restricted managers from doing their jobs effectively. Moreover, central agencies such as the Treasury Board Secretariat had denied ministers much of their authority, thus corroding the personal accountability of these officials.

The commissioners instructed the remedy to this problem is to let the manager do their work in peace in a given general framework of accountability formulated by new management centres such as the Treasury Board. In an environment where rigid controls are not initiated, performance evaluation would be implemented to ensure accountability among the managers. It was assumed that these

changes would help produce greater efficiencies in the program while restoring accountability and saving taxes. However, despite the implementation of these recommendations, a complete public service reform was not achieved. One of the reasons why it was not achieved was that the commissioners had neglected to indicate how the managers would be held accountable to the state as they were left to do their work.

Lambert Commission

Twenty years after the Glassco Commission report, another commission was formulated as the intended problem had not yet been resolved, which was reforming public service. Government expenditure was still rising, and accountability was deteriorating than before. Under the Trudeau government, a Lambert commission was developed. The commission was given two goals, which included finding alternatives to ascertain financial management and control that was being practised at all levels of public service. Its second objective was to formulate successful administrative accountability of ministers to the government where appropriate. In 1979, the commission released its findings after a careful evaluation of the matter at hand. Its findings were not different from those of its predecessors as it concluded that no breakdown had occurred in the accountability of government officials. (OECD, 2023)

The commission argued that the management of government over the years had become fragmented as haphazard budgeting existed, and there was no accountability within government agencies. According to the commission, the creation of a fiscal plan would help address the loss of financial control and break down accountability. With the presence of such a plan, it will be easy for the government to allocate resources according to priorities and within the set budget. However, the proposal received a lot of criticism, as it was argued that it was unworkable because it focused on the notion that policy and administration could be separated. The commissioners had not taken into consideration the decision-making processes of the government structure; thus, the proposal was bound to fail.

Contemporary Government Reforms

There is no doubt that government reorganization has gradually become an international agenda on a growing scale. Sharing of information using improved technology, as well as interpersonal contacts between administrators in the public sector, has resulted in the creation of uniformity among government officials. The Canadian government has been at the forefront of promoting reforms within its public sector, making sure the services offered to the general population are up to standard. Though these reforms might bear a similar resemblance to previous efforts, current shots to reinvent the government vary in various ways compared to the predecessors. Reform efforts in the contemporary government have been accustomed to significant changes, such as the declining availability of resources that will assist in fulfilling government resolutions. Compared to the past,

governments can now operate despite revenue scarcity and massive deficits. This shows that the way government officials conduct their affairs now is more imperative.

Many people tend to assume that the only way the Canadian government can manage the decline in revenue is by cutting back on services being offered, but government officials are still under pressure to do more. The introduction and production of new technology, as well as changing trading patterns, have left government officials with more tasks of assisting citizens in adjusting to the changing environments. Moreover, the private sector wants the government to assist them in meeting the new challenges. These, together with other factors, have helped teach government sectors that a simple limitation on a service or size of government can bring about more problems than offer solutions. The disintegration of the global trade barriers has resulted in an increase in economic competition among countries, and this has resulted in both the public and private sectors seeking administrative apparatuses for government in various sectors. Economies are not restructuring, a process the Canadian government has embraced as a primary contributor to the GNP. As a result, the public sector has recognized the government as a vital instrument of structural reforms. For many countries, including Canada, an effective element that enables nations to compete in an increasingly controversial international trading environment is public service. When nations compete with each other, their public services also compete, and a nation with effective public service has a strong GNP. With this in mind, the government has tried to improve its public service, making the public regard it as a force in society. The private sector has also come to perceive the government as a constructive partner and is willing to work hand in hand.

According to analysts, the new management philosophy that the Canadian government has incorporated, which focuses on performance, results, and the general impact, is not enough. This is because a change in the attitude and behaviour of public service is needed if it aims to succeed. For others, morale problems have been the biggest hindrance to the Canadian people's receiving efficient services. Thus, the recent alternative for bringing about administrative changes focuses on restoring morale within the public service as well as institutionalizing a new management philosophy. One way morale can be restored is by inculcating a new entrepreneurial spirit among officials and importing positive values from the private sector. What makes recent attempts practical is the fact that they aim at changing the culture of public service through the restoration of morale. (Bright & Cortes, 2019)

In summation, it is clear that Canada has undergone a lot of transformation with regard to public service since the 60s. The nation has tried to initiate programs and initiatives that will help reform and make the public service sector robust, to no avail. Despite the Glassco Commission and the Lambert Commission not being fully able to produce positive results, it's true to say that they did help in bringing the issue to the table. If these initiatives had not been created and failed, then the Canadian public service would not have undergone the tremendous change it has. Though not perfect, the reforms undertaken have enabled Canada to compete with other nations with ease, knowing their people are receiving better services. Thus, the public regards the government as a force in society and looks up to them for inspiration and motivation.

References

Government of Canada. (n.d.). Public service renewal.

<https://www.canada.ca/en/privy-council/services/blueprint-2020.html>

OECD. (2023). *Government at a glance 2023*. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/3d5c5d31-en>

Bright, D. S., & Cortes, A. H.. (2019). *Principles of management*. OpenStax.

<https://openstax.org/books/principles-management/pages/1-introduction>