

# What is Public Management

## A.W. Johnson

### *A Word From CCMD:*

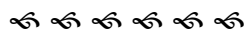
In the search for new approaches to governance, public managers have much to learn from the management practices and innovations of the private sector. (The reverse is no doubt also true, though little acknowledged today.) Yet many public servants sense intuitively —without always being able to say why — that what they do differs in important ways from what managers do in the world of private business.

This essay by A.W. Johnson, one of Canada's most distinguished public servants, is an elegant statement of some of the important distinctions between public and private management. It argues that the essence of public management is to be found above all in the reality conveyed by the adjective "public," with all that it implies about values and the public interest, about the difficult balance to be maintained across a range of goals and interests, and about the complex way in which values and measures of effectiveness combine to shape so many of the decisions taken by public managers.

The Canadian Centre for Management Development would have had difficulty finding anyone more qualified than A.W. Johnson to write this paper. His extensive career as a senior public servant at both the provincial and federal levels, his term as President of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, and his experience as a professor of public policy at Queen's University and the University of Toronto and as a Senior Fellow of CCMD all place Mr. Johnson in an excellent position to offer this personal statement on the essential characteristics of public management and the environment in which senior public servants carry out their responsibilities.

This study represents an important addition to the research publications series through which CCMD is dedicated to developing an awareness in Canada of issues related to the theory and practice of public sector management.

*Ralph Heintzman*  
*Vice-Principal, Research*



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### HIGHLIGHTS

The character and quality of public service management in Canada is shaped by three families of determinants:

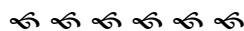
- the role of government in contemporary society;
- the institutions of governance; and
- the environments in which governments function.

The *role of government in contemporary society* comprises the objects and purposes of government, the functions of government, and the instruments of governance. The *institutions of governance* include the parliamentary system, the cabinet system, and the federal system. The *environments in which governments function* encompass the country's geopolitical character, the societal environment, the external environment of exogenous forces, the political environment, and the government environment.

A stand-alone determinant, the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, also helps shape what managers in the public service do and how they do it.

The nature and effects of these families of determinants differ substantially from those shaping business decisions and business behaviour. Consequently, what a public manager does in government must *be expected* to differ from what a business manager does in business.

Particular agencies led by particular kinds of professionals with particular perspectives tend to view and assess the many external forces to which they are exposed in different ways — and thus tend to come to different policy and management conclusions. It therefore follows that concentrating decision-making power in this kind of agency or that will lead to particular and more or less predictable results in public policy and administration.

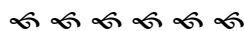


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# What is Public Management

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### I

#### INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

My purpose in this paper is to try to answer the question "What is public management?" — in Canada at least. I begin with the simple proposition that the character of public management is more likely to be found in the adjective "public" than in the noun "management." By definition, the word "management" is generic, which is to say that its meaning has been abstracted from the experience of conducting or directing many different kinds of organizations; which in turn means — equally by definition — that the generic noun "management" cannot be expected to give meaning to one particular kind of management. It is to the adjective "public," therefore, that one must turn to find the meaning of public management.

To advance this proposition, I observe, is not to scorn the study of generic management. Studies of leadership, organization, strategic planning, human resources, communications and command, and accountability form one of the disciplines that public managers must master.

To master this subject matter, however, without considering how these elements of management are given shape and meaning in government — indeed are made suitable to it — is not to discover what public management is. That can be achieved only by examining what there is about government and the public sector that determines the unique character and qualities of management in the public service. One must discover, in short, the determinants of public management.

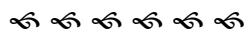
Before embarking on this venture, however, I feel compelled to point out that senior management in government — that is, management by the ministers, deputy ministers, and other senior officials involved in departmental advice and decision making — consists of two main ingredients: the development of public policy, and the delivery of the public services that are the product of this policy.<sup>1</sup> It follows that in searching for the determinants of public management, one must look for the forces that shape both policy and administration — to use the classical vocabulary of the political scientist.

My quest for these determinants has taken a particular course, or form. I have tried, on the basis of my own experience, to identify the phenomena of government that are unique to it. In particular, I have sought to identify those phenomena having the greatest influence on what a senior manager does and how he or she does it.

Three families of determinants have emerged from this analysis:

- the role of government in contemporary society;
- the institutions of governance; and
- the environments in which governments function.

The following sections describe in detail each of these families of determinants, including the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. Also discussed are the implications of each for management in the Canadian public service.



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### II

#### THE FIRST FAMILY OF DETERMINANTS: THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

The *role of government in contemporary society* refers simply to what the Canadian government does, and why, and how. I have three determinants in mind:

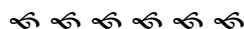
- the objects and purposes of government;
- the functions of government; and
- the instruments of policy by which government achieves its ends.

#### THE OBJECTS AND PURPOSES OF GOVERNMENT

The objects and purposes of government can be stated in various ways. My own way of describing them is this:

- the preservation and inspiration of nationhood and of the integral collectivities within it;
- the protection of individual rights and freedoms;
- the maintenance of the rule of law and the system of justice based upon it;
- the enhancement of the opportunities of individual Canadians to realize their optimum potential and, where that is unnaturally limited, the assurance that they will be able to live decently and in dignity;
- the creation of the legal and institutional frameworks within which the several systems of society can function effectively and vigorously — the economic system, the social system(s), the environmental system, and the many cultural systems (or manifestations) in society; and
- the representation of Canada's interests and concerns abroad and, in turn, the reflection to Canadians of the concerns and interests of other nations and international collectivities.

These objects and purposes of government are a reflection and, indeed, a collective expression of the values of Canadian society. As such, these objects and purposes represent the values by which the public manager is expected to live and be moved. There is, of course, a good deal of room for political differences as to how these objects and purposes should be realized, ranging from the approach of economic liberals, on the right, through to the approach of social liberals, on the left. So the appointed public manager is not being asked to take a political position when he or she is called upon to espouse and be guided by society's value system. Nor is there, in this expectation of public service managers, any suggestion of conformity to the established order of things: it is simply a matter of the public servant in a democratic society being moved by society's values, not by his or her personal interests, in seeking the public interest. This, in a transcending sort of way, is the first "public" in public management.



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It is in this public service value system that one of the fundamental differences between government and business is found: in business, by definition, the value system has to do with private rights and interests. It follows that the underlying perspectives and orientations of public and private managers are inherently different.

### THE FUNCTIONS OF GOVERNMENT

By functions of government, I mean the following:

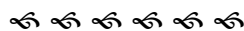
- the economic function, including macro and micro/sectoral economic policies;
- the function of promoting research and technological progress;
- the function(s) of assuring the education and health and well-being of the individual citizen, in both the economic and the social interest;
- the function of protecting the environment;
- the function of promoting cultural expressions as a means of defining and animating the society;
- the function of enforcing the collective will within an independent but open system of justice; and
- the function of preserving and representing the nation.

These functions flow from the objects and purposes of government and in a very broad way *are* the policy expressions of those objects and purposes. It could be said, alternatively, that to fulfil the functions of government and their constituent policies is to realize governments' objects and purposes.

The significance of these functions to public management is not only that they define what public servants or managers do but also that they represent the bottom lines of government. There is an *economic bottom line* (stable economic growth) that can be measured by a variety of statistical yardsticks; there is a *social bottom line* that could be — and increasingly is being — measured by an aggregation of indices; there is an *environmental bottom line* that is already easier to measure than it is to realize; and so on.

In government, in short, there is a heterogeneity of bottom lines: one for each of the major functions of government and one for each of the constituent policies and programs within these several aggregate functions. This fact, that there can be no single bottom line in government — as there is in business — is another fundamental attribute of public management.

This heterogeneity in government imparts to public management two additional, unique characteristics. The first is the imperative of perceiving the interrelationships among each of the many functions, or bottom lines, of government and then of shaping and managing each function in a way that takes account of the others. Here is the first, and necessary, introduction of ambiguities into the management of each and every function. The second feature of this heterogeneity is the imperative of ranking each function and policy in accordance with the policy and political priorities of the government of the day and, taking into account the relative effectiveness of the several policies that make up each function, deciding how the public's resources should be allocated between them. The hard decisions of government, namely, the allocative decisions, are value decisions *mixed with but not dominated by* pure effectiveness decisions (to the extent, indeed, that effectiveness can be measured). By definition, therefore, the really difficult decisions of government cannot be reduced or simplified, as they generally can be in business, to a single numerical measure.



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### THE INSTRUMENTS OF POLICY

The range of the instruments of policy by which or through which public policy objectives are achieved (the governing instruments, as the political scientists would call them) is well known:

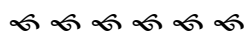
- the expenditure of public funds to provide public services and pay fiscal transfers to citizens, organizations, and provincial governments;
- taxation;
- the provision of tax credits or allowances to individuals and businesses;
- the laws of Parliament, and the regulations by which ministers and regulatory agencies allocate and limit rights;
- the Crown corporations that are used to marry certain public objectives to what would otherwise be a purely commercial operation;
- and
- the policy development processes by which new policies and programs are devised and old ones altered or terminated.

What is uncommon about these governing instruments is that they differ so fundamentally from the instrumentalities employed by other organizations, in particular, those employed by business. I have in mind, for example, the product development and differentiation that one finds in business, the marketing and sales, the processes of production, and the financial function. What a public manager does in government, therefore, must *be expected* to be different from what a business manager does in business; similarly, what a public manager does as a manager is bound to have a more than considerable effect on how he or she does it.

What is common about these instrumentalities of government, within government, is their public purpose. For each and every one of them, the underlying goal, the underlying ethos, is to serve the public interest, just as the underlying ethos in business is to serve the private interests of the shareholders. In short, every act of public management — whether in the delivery of public services, the regulation of citizens or corporations, or even the production and delivery of cheques — is driven by this same fundamental end.

There are some who ridicule this proposition, who argue that it is personal interest that drives people engaged in the political and policy process just as much as it is personal interest that drives people engaged in business. My difficulty with this view is that it does not accord with reality: neither with the reality of the accumulated public policies to be found in Canada (*all* the product of personal or political interest?) nor with the realities of ideology, societal influences, and substantive goals as dominant influences in the making of public policy. This is not to deny the impact of political interests and political pressures on policy decisions (I come to this later). Rather, it is simply to observe that the policy-making equation, made up as it is of the public interest (inherent in the policy) and the political interest (inherent in the timing and sometimes in the design of the policy), is in the longer run more heavily influenced by the public interest than by the personal interests of the "deciders."

It remains to say one thing more about how the governing instruments influence the character of public management. These instruments differ from one another in what they do and how, which means that the demands they individually place on public managers also differ. It follows that the character of management differs among these different management roles — and quite considerably. I can attest to that: managing as the secretary of a treasury board is materially different from managing as the deputy minister of an operating department, and managing as the president of a Crown corporation is greatly



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different again. All of these managements, however, are guided by that common ethos, the public interest.

These are but *some* of the effects on public management that flow from the first family of determinants. Taken together, these determinants distinguish in fundamental ways the character of public management from that of management in other organizations.

### III

#### THE SECOND FAMILY OF DETERMINANTS: THE INSTITUTIONS OF GOVERNANCE

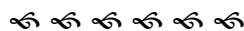
The *institutions of governance* within which public managers work and from which they derive their roles, authority, and responsibility include the following:

- the parliamentary system and representative democracy;
- the cabinet system within the parliamentary system; and
- the federal system within which both the parliamentary and the cabinet system function.<sup>2</sup>
- While not an institution in the foregoing sense, there is another now prominent feature of the Constitution which has come similarly to have an impact on public management and which is included in this chapter:
- the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

#### THE PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM

This system is in a sense the universe within which the public manager finds his or her place. It is to public management what the market economy is to business management: it sets the rules and the essential dynamics of the game. The electorate is supreme, at one end of the system; the Prime Minister and Cabinet are supreme, for four- or five-year periods, at the other end of the system; and in between is the parliamentary system, which keeps the government conscious, during these four or five years, of the ultimate supremacy of the electorate.

How the parliamentary system is supposed to do this is well known. The people choose the members of Parliament; the government is chosen from among the members of Parliament; the government must maintain its majority in Parliament, and instrumentalities have been devised to achieve that end (the caucus of the governing party being the most important of them); the government may not act without Parliament's statutory authority and without annual appropriations by which to finance its acts; the government is accountable to Parliament for everything it does, annually, by way of a review of its accounts by a parliamentary committee and by way of a review of its expenditure estimates for the forthcoming year by other committees of Parliament; and the members of Parliament who keep the government in harness are kept conscious through the whole of their term of office of their need to be re-elected at the end of that day.



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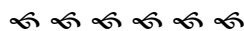
All this control over governments, however, is qualified by the existence in Parliament of a party of MPs that virtually always supports the actions of the Prime Minister and by the presence in the Prime Minister's hands of levers of power to keep it that way. The consequence is that in parliamentary government it is essentially influence — the influence of public opinion, party opinion, and parliamentary opinion — that keeps the leaders democratically controlled between elections. That, plus a deep respect for the traditions and customs of the parliamentary system which keep Parliament supreme.

The roles and the responsibilities of public managers in Canada all flow from this system. One way of tracing the impact of the parliamentary system on public management is to trace the hierarchies of influence and power that determine these roles. Another, more illuminating way is to look to the four main *characteristics* of this system that impinge on public managers and public management.

The first characteristic is the importance of the ever-so-fragile parliamentary traditions and customs to the democratic functioning of the system. It is therefore the public manager's first charge — even though it is entirely implicit — to respect and protect these traditions and practices. Given the transitoriness of elected public managers, this charge is all the more important for the appointed, the "permanent," managers. It is to these appointed public servants that the public looks to uphold the tradition, for example, that no tax may be imposed before it has been approved by Parliament; or that every act of government must be approved twice by Parliament, once in the enabling statute, and once (annually) in the Appropriation Act; or that Parliament must receive all the information it requires to hold the government accountable for both policy and administration. This public trust extends so far, indeed, that if ministers are tempted to violate these traditions, whether out of ignorance or out of fits of impatience with a fractious House of Commons, it is up to the deputy ministers to resist that violation — even, in the extreme, to the point of resignation.

The second characteristic of the parliamentary system that impinges on public managers and public management is the great power the system concentrates in the hands of the Prime Minister and the extent of the power that may be entrusted to individual ministers. For all its ultimate limits, this power is inherently so great that it creates for deputy ministers a kind of public trust role — a role rarely understood outside government. To illustrate: even given their constitutional obligation to serve their ministers, deputy ministers have an obligation, on occasion, to speak out for the longer view of governance, with all of its policy implications, and against the shorter term political concerns that tend to preoccupy ministers *even though so doing may incur ministerial displeasure*. Deputy ministers have an obligation, too, though happily less frequently, to speak out against the use of powers that would verge on misuse or abuse and in the doing to somehow reconcile their action with their constitutional obligation to serve and respond to the minister. Here is another truly unique characteristic of public management.

A third characteristic of the parliamentary and political system that imposes imperatives on the most senior of the appointed public managers is the publicness of the system. One small example will make my point. It is the deputy minister's obligation to help the minister cope with the obligations of publicness that contribute to the minister's visibility and reputation, such as preparing for Question Period or meeting with interest groups. However, the deputy must also ensure that the minister devotes enough time to longer-term policy matters that are of much greater import to the nation — the doing of which, of course, is less visible and less immediately rewarding politically. What is more, in the performance of this balancing act, the deputy minister must, in the first half of it, avoid becoming so caught up in the business of responding to publicness imperatives in support of or on behalf of the minister that he or she becomes a partisan with the minister in policy and political problems. In the second part of it, the deputy minister must eschew the pleasures and powers that come from monopolizing the minister and his or her thinking. Again, a uniqueness of function.



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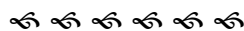
A fourth characteristic of the parliamentary and political system that has a material bearing on the role of the appointed senior manager is its politicalness. This has been implicit in what I have been saying about power and publicness, but a special word is warranted. Because government is about politics as well as about policies, ministerial decision making tends, as I have said, to revolve around two central factors, or influences: the public interest that the policy will serve and the political consequences that will flow from that policy. It is the deputy minister's responsibility as a non-partisan and independent public servant to represent and to argue for the public interest side of this equation. At the same time, however, the deputy must take political consequences into account, lest his or her advice appear to be — or be — quite simply unrealistic.

How to resolve this dilemma? There are easy ways out, of course. One is to leave it to the minister to attach political qualifications to policy recommendations after they have been formulated — an approach that ministers find distinctly unhelpful. Another is for the deputy minister to try to read the minister's ideological and political mind and develop only policy options that will accord with his or her thinking — a course that both deprives the minister of policy options he or she may initially oppose but subsequently come to accept and substitutes the deputy's reading of the minister's judgments for those of the minister. The correct course, but the more delicate one, is for the deputy minister to take into account in policy development an assessment of the policy *and* political consequences of each policy option. This does indeed put the deputy in the position of making political assessments; but they are explicit ones the minister may accept or reject, and they are applied to the full range of policy options, all of which are put to the minister. In short, no idea is snuffed out at birth as being politically unrealistic, nor is the minister confronted with what he or she might regard as theoretical advice.

### THE CABINET SYSTEM

If the parliamentary system is the universe in which the public manager finds his or her place, the cabinet system is the solar system within which the public manager finds his or her role. This, of course, is the primary impact of the cabinet system on public managers: it sets their roles and the relationship among these roles. On the face of it, the organization of government, which gives expression to the cabinet system, is not unusual. It distinguishes between the line functions of government, which are assigned to individual ministers (and where, traditionally, individual ministerial responsibility applies) and the collective functions of government, which are assigned to central agency ministers such as the Minister of Finance and the President of the Treasury Board (where, with the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister's office, concrete expression is given to the tradition of collective ministerial responsibility). Nothing very unusual in this organizational structure.

It is only when one describes the cabinet system in private sector terms that its uniqueness stands out. First and foremost, the cabinet system is essentially a conglomerate of different enterprises (departments and functions) run by a single firm (the Prime Minister and the inner Cabinet). This is so despite the very substantial differences among the functions of government assigned to the several ministers. A single board of directors (the Cabinet) collectively makes all of the policy and many of the operational decisions, with the chairperson (the Prime Minister) and the executive committee (the inner Cabinet) playing the central role. The constituent elements of the conglomerate (departments) are directed and at the highest level managed by individual members of the board (the ministers), not by appointed vice-presidents (that comes at the deputy minister level). Equally singular is that individual directors or vice-presidents (ministers) are accountable for their constituent elements of the conglomerate not only to the board in



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general and the chairperson in particular but also — and almost daily — directly to a body of shareholder representatives (the House) from which they, the directors, were chosen. More than that, *all* members of the board are collectively responsible to the same body and to the public generally for the performance of every other member of the board. Yet in the face of all of this, the employees of the ministers, who make up the public service of Canada, are independent of them (except for the deputy ministers, who are appointed by the Prime Minister).

Compare this with the way in which a large conglomerate would be operated by private enterprise!

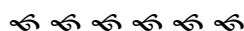
In an institutional system such as this, the potential for autonomy of individual departments is, almost by definition, limited. The reason: all policy decisions of significance must be taken at the centre (the Prime Minister and the inner Cabinet), and accountability for the efficiency of program administration, plus the probity and prudence with which public funds are used, rests finally with the collectivity. In the final analysis, the government is held responsible. This making of policy at the cabinet level gives rise to a tendency to use powerful central agencies to assist — agencies that come to dominate the policy development scene (a tendency buttressed by the need for fiscal responsibility). Similarly, in the area of program management, the government's responsibility for efficiency and economy in administration, plus the fact that accountability reviews of efficiency and economy take place in political forums, gives rise to a strong propensity to employ visible administrative controls — person-year controls, controls over travel, and the rest — as a means of proving efficiency and fiscal prudence. This is in contrast to the development of measures of economy and efficiency by which more autonomous departments could be judged.

The consequence of this highly centralized organizational form is a strong propensity to rely on central decision making and central controls, accompanied by heavy control bureaucracies, rather than on more autonomous departments governed by a common ethos *and* a strong accountability system that measures their efficiency and effectiveness in doing the job the Prime Minister has given them to do.<sup>3</sup>

The second feature of the cabinet system that significantly affects the character of public management is, as I have suggested, the twin parliamentary conventions of individual ministerial responsibility and collective ministerial responsibility. These two conventions are almost polar opposites in their effect on the machinery of government. The first — that all ministers must support the decisions of the collectivity *and* the performance of individual ministers — leads in the direction just described. The second — that individual ministers are responsible *directly* to Parliament and to the public for their department's policies and administration — leads in the opposite direction. That is, ministers and departments that are being held accountable tend to argue that their responsibility for running a department should be as great as their accountability for it. Moreover, ministers of operating departments, particularly strong ones, tend to argue that central agencies' domination of policy making and program management via central controls means that they are forced to defend what is imposed on them from the centre, not what they would do if they were given full responsibility. This is the counterpoise that should tend, in the longer run, to attenuate the propensity of the cabinet system to centralization.

### THE FEDERAL SYSTEM

On the face of it, the federal system has quite a different effect on senior public managers: it limits their powers, rather than empowering them, and it renders their roles rather more ambiguous at the margins. It does this in two ways. First, it divides the powers of governance between two orders of government, the federal and the provincial. Second, it creates — within the national legislative body in the



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classical federal system, or, where "executive federalism" is practised between federal and provincial first ministers — a body that represents regional and provincial interests to the national government and, in so doing, once again attenuates or renders more ambiguous the exercise of that government's powers.

That the distribution of powers limits the powers of each order of government is obvious. That it leaves those limits, or boundaries, on powers unclear and uncertain is equally obvious, particularly to the citizens of a federal state. What is less evident, except to public managers, is the full effect of these phenomena. One of the greatest difficulties or frustrations public managers confront is the constant obligation to take account of or try to harmonize with some related or even competitive provincial or federal policy or program. Furthermore, one of the most difficult ambiguities public managers face in policy formulation and program administration is the constant uncertainty, given the continuing contests for power at federal-provincial conferences, as to the limits of their freedom to plan and to look ahead. All of which is layered on top of their already difficult and, for other reasons, ambiguous jobs.

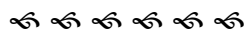
The problem, to put it briefly, is not so much the limits on power that the federal system imposes. Rather, the problem is the uncertainty that is born of the lack of clarity in those limits and the nagging and apparently never-ending federal-provincial differences about how to remedy that lack of clarity.

In the classical federal system, the second feature of federalism — regional/state representation in the national government — takes the form of a second chamber of Parliament. This chamber is chosen on a state or provincial basis, and its purpose is to counterbalance the simple majority rule that prevails in the representation-by-population lower House. In short, the effect and the intent of this institution of federalism is to limit or attenuate the powers of majority government.

In Canada, this effect is *not* achieved by the Senate, since the members of that body are chosen by the Prime Minister. In its place, another institution has developed to assume these functions, if in a different way: the federal-provincial conference. It is the premiers of the provincial governments who have come to assume the role of representatives of provincial interests regarding national matters, and the vehicle they have used to make their representations is the federal-provincial conference — usually televised. Which attenuates the powers of senior managers in a very political and public way.

To be more concrete about it, federal-provincial conferences have had two effects on government and public management. First, because its members, the premiers, have neither any responsibility for national matters nor any accountability to the Canadian electorate for what they propose should be done about them, their regional representations have tended to take the form of free-for-all criticisms of the national government. Second, because the premiers are protagonists for more provincial powers *and* representatives of regional/provincial interests and because the Prime Minister, as the chairperson, is a protagonist for federal powers *and* the representative of national interests, federal-provincial conferences have tended to become a forum for continuing disputes over where the boundaries between the powers of the provinces and those of the national government should lie. This institutionalization of federal-provincial contests certainly has, at the margin, rendered even more uncertain and clearly more difficult the roles of federal and provincial public managers. In addition, this institutionalization has spawned a huge federal-provincial bureaucracy at both levels of government that cuts across all functional lines and serves as yet another central agency in controlling operating ministries and their managers.

On the other side of the coin, I have to add that federal-provincial conferences have been enormously useful when used for their original purpose, namely, to consult and to consort on the impact of federal policies on provincial ones and vice versa and on the harmonization of governmental



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actions at the jurisdictional boundaries. This is particularly so when the conferences are held to the non-political level, which is to say non-televized conferences of ministers and in-camera meetings of appointed officials. But the contrary effects of the federal-provincial conference as a forum for regional/provincial representations have come to so predominate that the inherent problems of this institution of federalism tend to dominate in any study of public management.

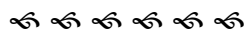
### THE CHARTER OF RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

The *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* limits the powers of governments by way of the guarantees in the Constitution of individual rights and freedoms that cannot be trampled upon by governments. These include the fundamental freedoms, democratic rights, mobility rights, legal rights, equality rights, and language rights. Again, boundaries are drawn, constitutionally, as with the distribution of powers, beyond which governments may not go, and the courts of the land are responsible for clarifying and delineating these boundaries over time.

Beyond the rights and freedoms of individuals guaranteed by the *Charter* are two sections that emphasize its application to certain collectivities of Canada: one emphasizing that the rights of women as well as of men are equally guaranteed and another calling for the *Charter* to be interpreted in a manner consistent with the preservation and enhancement of Canada's multicultural heritage.

Outside the *Charter*, another part of the Constitution touches on the rights of a designated collectivity, namely, the sections that recognize and affirm the rights of aboriginal peoples. The constitutional recognition of these collectivities is generally taken by them and by others as conferring on them a particular status in matters of public policy and administration.

The impact of the *Charter* on public management has not yet been fully felt — it is just over ten years since the *Charter* went into effect —but already its effect can be seen. This is so in a particular and visible way with respect to the rights of the collectivities, reflected as they are in the public service's equal opportunities policies on behalf of women, aboriginals, people of visible ethnic origins, and people with a disability. Beyond these administrative policies, which have had a material impact on public management practices, the *Charter* more generally is having a significant impact on the development of public policies. This is perhaps best exemplified in the new vocabulary of policy makers: "But is it [the policy being considered] *Charter-proof*?" As with the distribution of powers, the roles and powers of public managers are again being rendered rather more ambiguous for reasons of the public interest.



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### IV

#### THE THIRD FAMILY OF DETERMINANTS: THE ENVIRONMENTS IN WHICH GOVERNMENTS FUNCTION

The environments in which governments function include the following:

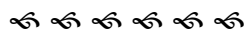
- the geopolitical character of Canada;
- the societal environment;
- the external environment of forces exogenous to the political and governmental systems;
- the political environment; and
- the government environment.

I should parenthetically recognize that business and other organizations also live in the first three of these environments. However, their responses to these environments and the nature of their obligation to respond are entirely different from those of government. To take the example most relevant here, business generally accepts the geopolitical and societal environments as given and reacts to them — sometimes without protest over policies that emerge from those environments, sometimes with. But at a certain point, for instance, when costs or taxes or both rise too high, the willingness or even the capacity of business to respond reaches a limit, and it may decide to leave for more hospitable countries. As for the external environment of exogenous forces, business responds to them, too, by way of adjustments and adaptations and by way of taking advantage of the opportunities that change presents. However, where business is unable to adapt, its recourse once again is to disappear, whether by selling to another enterprise that can adapt (possibly a foreign one) or by going out of business. Government, for its part, has a different set of responsibilities: it cannot simply "go away"! It must respond in ways that will serve the *public* interest and in ways that accord with the values and attitudes and the essential character of Canada and Canadians. In the final analysis, it is the government's responsibility to assist or enable the country to adapt to change and thus preserve its integrity and vitality.

#### THE GEOPOLITICAL CHARACTER OF CANADA

The geopolitical character of Canada refers to the nation's geography and its land mass; its climate; its demography; the spread of its population in a thin line along the 5,000 kilometres of its southern borders; and its geographic, economic and cultural regions. This character also refers to Canada's position in the world: a small country but a middle power, a nation richly endowed with resources but also highly developed in world terms, and a country that neighbours upon the richest and most powerful nation in the world — one that, more than parenthetically, speaks the same language as do three quarters of all Canadians.

In many respects, the geopolitics of Canada are taken by senior public managers as given in policy development and program administration, as something everyone knows. However, geopolitical forces have constituted and continue to constitute a signal and powerful influence in public policy, and public managers must constantly be mindful of that fact. It was, after all, the geopolitics of Canada that led to the nation's preoccupation with railways and with transportation generally; that led to the creation of the



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Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and other national cultural agencies; that led to the debate over free trade and free investment arrangements with the United States; that have in the past generated and will in the future generate deep political differences over the exploitation and exportation of natural resources (petroleum exports in the past, for example, and water exports in the future); and much more.

To speak metaphorically, geopolitical forces might indeed be called the magnetic fields of the Canadian society and polity. Understanding them, therefore, and thinking in geopolitical terms are as important to senior managers in government as understanding the society they are governing — which surely is the most fundamental requirement of all.

### THE SOCIETAL ENVIRONMENT

The societal environment is an amalgam of the characteristics of the peoples of Canada and Canadian society as a whole; of their history and heritage, which often differ in different parts of the country; and of the economic, social, and ecological systems through which and by which the society functions.

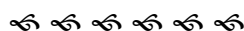
What I mean by the characteristics of the peoples of Canada is the values and the beliefs individual Canadians share, their attitudes and perspectives, and the things they hold dear in their loyalties, mythologies, and symbols. For Canadian society as a whole, what I mean is the attributes and the identities that characterize the country: the two linguistic groups, the aboriginal peoples, the differing ethnic groups, the regional character of the country, and all the other collectivities of Canada.

As for the systems that characterize Canadian society, it generally is taken for granted in public management circles that senior managers understand the systems through which the society operates. They know, in one measure or another, what Canada's economic system is and how it functions. They know, at least generally, what the ecological system is and how it may be conserved or consumed. And they have some sense of the social systems across the whole of the country, usually in terms of larger social identities such as regions or linguistic and cultural groups but often in terms of more day-to-day social groupings such as the family, associations of the workplace, professional and occupational associations, churches, community centres, and the rest.

What is important about the societal environment in which senior managers serve is that it *not* be taken as a given. Rather, the public manager's knowledge of Canadian society and of the economic and social systems by which it works should be thought about and verified against every major policy or program-delivery question that arises. For to govern a society well or to participate intelligently and sensitively in such governance is to understand the society well. And to know and understand the whole of Canadian society in this vast and varied land is an immense and never-ending challenge.

But how, in practical terms, does the societal environment affect governance and hence public management? In my view, there are three principal ways.

First, the societal environment provides what might be called the frame of legitimacy within which government must work. A government may push against the boundaries of what society believes acceptable or appropriate, for example, by pressing for more or less government intervention in the economy or for more or less accessibility for the public, through government auspices, to health and education and social services. But if the government presses too hard or too far, to the point of appearing to violate the fundamental values of Canadians or the social and economic systems in which they believe, that government will be imperilled.



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This is not simply a political question, though that is the ultimate manifestation of the phenomenon of which I speak; rather, it is the broader question as to what is consonant with society's senses. And it is the job of the public manager to make that assessment in respect of every policy and every administrative practice. For a policy or a practice that may logically seem the most effective way of achieving a particular goal becomes a bad policy if it offends or — in the extreme — violates the Canadian sense of what is fitting or not fitting, what is right or wrong.

What society believes, of course, is constantly changing; and indeed there are governments that try to change society's beliefs, for example, by persuasion or by the changing of policies in which these beliefs are manifested. But the ideologies of governments, whether of the right or the left, have no business violating society's sense of itself and what it stands for. It is the society, not governments, that should — and in the final analysis will — determine the role of the state in contemporary society.

Second, the societal environment sometimes acts as an active policy force. Examples abound:

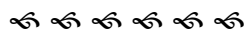
- the introduction of official bilingualism in the 1970s, responding to one kind of societal force (where in the 1950s it was seen to be enough to print dollar bills in French as well as in English);
- the introduction of a measure to equalize all provincial revenues in the 1960s, responding to another emerging societal force (where in the 1930s it took a severe depression to bring the Government of Canada to make even emergency grants to the poorest of the provinces); and
- the introduction in the 1950s and 1960s of federal grants for universities and colleges to ensure full accessibility of young people to higher education, despite the near-religious belief on the part of certain provincial governments that federal intervention of any kind in this field was a gross violation of the Constitution (policies that, interestingly, have since been reversed).

In all these cases, it was an emerging recognition of some fundamental or latent value in society's value system that led to these changes (the sharing and caring value, as it is sometimes called, is the most common example of these social values). Social and religious and political leadership have undoubtedly been involved in the development or articulation of these national insights and values. But if one looks at the evolution of public policy, there is not the slightest doubt that the values are and were there and that they are and were causal forces in policy development.

Third, the societal environment can pose perils for public management. One can all too easily act on the assumption that one's knowledge of the country and of its economic and social systems is sufficient in regard to certain questions. Similarly, one can act on the implicit assumption that all of Canada is more or less like the part of Canada one knows. That there is a peril in so doing, however, has been <sup>em</sup>barrasingly discovered even by some of Canada's Prime Ministers. I have in mind, in more recent years, the effect in the West of Prime Minister Trudeau's question to Manitoba farmers, "Why should I sell your wheat?" and the effect, again in the West, of Prime Minister Mulroney's decision to let the CF-18 contract to a Montreal firm rather than to the lowest bidder, in Winnipeg. Both of these illustrations and many more reveal how essential it is to be mindful of the history and mythologies of different parts of Canada not only in one's policies but even in one's vocabulary.

### THE EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT OF EXOGENOUS FORCES

This environment refers to economic change, <sup>tec</sup>hnological change, social and demographic



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change, and — though not exogenous to the political system — major political events and changes. Whether of domestic or international origin, all of these changes have an impact on society. And when that impact is substantial and pervasive enough, the government of that society will be drawn, one way or another, into action.

Examples of these impacts abound:

- the impact of economic recessions and depressions on society and hence on public policy;
- the impact of technological change on what the world's economies produce, and how, and its consequential impact on domestic employment and income and thence on public policy;
- the impact on society and thence on public policy of the shift, in three or four generations, from the extended family to the nuclear family to the unstable family; and the impact of demographic change and social mobility on urbanization and the stability and cohesiveness of Canadian society.

Probably the most striking example of all these effects, however, was the invention of the birth control pill and its chain of consequences. There was, first, the immediate impact on family size and thence on the nation's demography. This was followed by the impact of family size, among other things, on the participation of females in the labour force and thence on social issues such as the provision of child-care facilities. Then, much later, occurred the secondary effects of the changes in demography on the projected increase in the numbers of people over 65 years of age relative to the number of people in the labour force. (This impact was, however, mitigated by the increased participation of females in the labour force.) This *dependency ratio* is estimated to grow to a peak in the year 2030 or so, with serious consequences for the whole of society unless the active labour force grows correspondingly by one means or another.

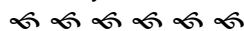
The effect of these several exogenous forces on public policy may seem so obvious as to make any further words on the subject superfluous. In fact, however, governments are generally slow to perceive the potential effects of exogenous forces and slow to react to them when they do. Again, my single illustration makes the point: governments have yet to fashion policies that will deliberately contribute to increases in the labour force in the future, such as increasing female participation in the labour force still further or lowering the average age of immigrants.<sup>4</sup>

Scanning the exogenous environment is peculiarly the job of appointed senior managers and, paradoxically, of visionary politicians. I say paradoxically since generally the job of looking into the future is thought to require — and does require — a lot of broad reading, data gathering, and policy analysis. Which take time and insight. But visionaries, too, look into the future, in their own remarkable and intuitive way. And the two skills taken together — studying and dreaming, so to speak — are what is called for if one is to read well the exogenous environment and the social changes it portends. This, indeed, is perhaps the highest art in the public policy part of public management.

### THE POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

I have already spoken of the *roles* in the political system that are created by the parliamentary system and of the inherent power, publicness, and politicalness of these roles. I have not, however, spoken of the dynamics of the political process or of the pervasiveness of its impact on public management.

When the classical political system held sway — until into the 1960s, I would say — the political



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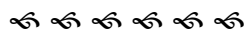
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system consisted largely of the electoral system, the members of Parliament, the caucuses of government and opposition Mps and senators, the House of Commons and the Senate and their committees, the Cabinet and Cabinet committees, and, at the apex, the Prime Minister. This was the chain of the political system and of political responsibility and influence, with the political party serving as the spinal cord of this chain. There were, of course, a few large and influential interest groups at work, and they had their force, which varied over time. For the most part, however, the real influence on public policy and public management was felt *through* this chain and at particular points in it. Moreover, the influences within this classical political system, as they bore in on public management, were more or less known, more or less understood, and even more or less predictable. Furthermore, these influences were forced by the system to be more or less responsible since all of them, from the constituency party to the caucus and through to the Cabinet, were responsible for the whole range of public policy. At least *some* choices had to be made by them all.

In short, the classical political system consisted of powerful leadership roles (the Prime Minister and the Cabinet) and of relatively structured influential roles. The challenge and the imperative for the public manager was to know who the real power figures — the deciders — and who the real influencers were within that structure. The challenge, too, was to be able to read the shifts and the changes in the dynamics of that system. This was not, as some academic writers suggest, for the purpose of forming alliances with the powerful to get policy advice accepted, though that could happen. Nor was it purely for the purpose of being able to read the potential political consequences of this or that policy or administrative change, though it was that, too. Rather, it was more a matter of trying to read and assess the political forces that were likely to enter into the decision-making mix *and* to read, to the extent that these forces were representative of society at large, the public will and the societal forces and pressures behind that will.

This relatively straightforward political system (more straightforward in the telling than in the reality, I know) has, however, given way to a much more complex one. Television, polls, and the development of a plethora of single-issue interest groups have together transformed the political system:

- Polls, instead of members of Parliament, have increasingly become the conduits of information on public opinion.
- Television, rather than political parties or even Parliament, has become the medium of political information and political attachment; the more thoughtful, and slower, print medium has given way in no inconsiderable measure to the immediacy and the bite-sized information of television.
- Vast numbers of interest groups have formed themselves around single issues — social, environmental, and economic — and, using the instrumentality of television, have almost displaced political parties as the prime vehicles of political influence.
- The policy and leadership conventions of political parties have been transformed into television performances with a view to reaching public opinion, and politicians, especially political leaders, have seized upon television and political ads as the prime instrumentality by which to influence the electorate.
- Even Parliament has sought to reassert its influence by televising its proceedings (badly, I might say); MPs have sought to increase their influence by increasing the powers of House of Commons committees — and, they hope, televising the proceedings.
- The representation of regional and provincial interests has been substantially shifted from Parliament to the television screens by way of televised federal-provincial conferences (see page 17).



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This parallel political system — parallel to the classical political system — has multiplied by many times the points of influence and pressure in the political system. It has increased the publicness and the decibels of that publicness in the political process and rendered politicians more vulnerable and more reactive than they were. It has reduced the responsibility quotient in politics as single-issue interest groups, with only their one priority to consider, have come to hold sway. In short, virtually the whole of the job of ranking policy choices, of choosing and reconciling, now falls effectively on government and, to a lesser extent, on the political party. Even Parliament has been organized around particular policy areas, in the more active and involved House of Commons committees, and they too exert their pressures on particular and selected issues.

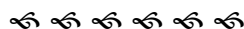
The impact of all of this on politicians and senior public servants has been enormous. First, it has increased the competition for their time, their attention, and their energies. For example, they must now meet with the stakeholders or interest groups before proposing policy or administrative changes, appear more frequently before parliamentary committees to account to them, and monitor their television sets (I speak now of ministers) to prepare themselves for their encounters in Parliament and with the media. Second, this increase in the pluralism of the political process has in a certain sense diverted the attention of public managers from public affairs, in the largest sense of the term, to public pressures. For many people, this is seen as a positive development, for it empowers representatives of the public outside political parties (the interest-group leaders) *and* increases the sensitivity of politicians to public opinion (on the issues the interest groups are focusing on). To the extent that interest-group leaders do represent the public at large and to the extent that, taken together, they represent the public's concerns in a balanced way, this is entirely true. Participatory democracy has unquestionably been increased.

Having said this, the question for representative democracy is how representative the parallel political system is and how balanced it is in its reflection of public opinion. The question for public management, on the other hand, has little to do with the rights and the wrongs of the increase in pluralism; it has rather to do with how to cope with it. This is a significant part of what public management is today: how to listen to, pay attention to, and balance the larger range of influences and influencers on public policy; how to discharge the greater accountability to Parliament now called for; and how to take into account the greater "immediacy" that television has introduced into all current affairs. And to do all this without losing touch with the primal and primary forces talked about earlier and without losing one's longer view of public issues and of governance generally.

### THE GOVERNMENT ENVIRONMENT

The government environment is the place within which all the other forces I have been talking about converge and are brought to bear —wisely or not so wisely, sensitively or not so sensitively — on policy development and program administration. In short, the ministers and senior public servants are the conduits and the interpreters through which these many forces and influences are communicated to the decision-making table. What is more, they are also the advisors and deciders who weigh and balance these forces and influences in reaching public policy and administrative decisions.

Two questions beg to be asked about the people who exercise such power. First, who are they, how much do they know, and how good are they (in both senses of that word)? Second, are they subject to particular influences — governmental or otherwise — that tend to cause them to take a



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particular view of the many forces bearing in on government and thus to make decisions weighted in particular directions?

While the answer to the first question can scarcely be given analytically, the importance of who makes the decisions and who runs the government *can* be acknowledged. The second question, however, more clearly lends itself to the kind of analysis I am engaged in here.

My own answer to that question is yes, there are such forces in government. Particular agencies led by particular kinds of professionals with particular perspectives tend to view and to assess the many external forces to which they are all exposed in different ways and thus tend to come to different policy and management conclusions. It follows that to concentrate decision-making power in this kind of agency or that will lead to particular and more or less predictable results in public policy and administration.

I advance three propositions in support of this conclusion, and the balance of this section discusses these propositions in detail. The three propositions are as follows:

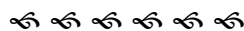
- *Proposition 1:* The forces that bear in on government are so diverse and so lend themselves to judgment in their relative weighting and assessment that different managers with different backgrounds and different roles are bound to respond differently to the same forces.
- *Proposition 2:* Different kinds of managers in government and different classes of agencies can be expected to tend in different policy and management directions.
- *Proposition 3:* Unless balance is deliberately sought in policy making among the different forces bearing in on government and among the different perspectives of those forces, policy will tend to be moulded by a particular and, by definition, more or less limited perspective.

### *Proposition 1*

This proposition states that the forces that bear in on government are so diverse and so lend themselves to judgment in their relative weighting and assessment that different managers with different backgrounds and different roles are bound to respond differently to the same forces. Simply to look at the diversity of these forces is to make the point.

There are three sets of forces that bear in on government:

- those that condition and impel public managers as they develop policy options or manage the programs for which they are responsible;
- those that circumscribe or constrain public managers in the course of their work; and
- those that motivate public managers in their day-to-day work, in particular, the factors that motivate ministers at the point of decision making.



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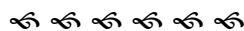
What conditions and impels public managers is *all* that I have said before about the forces that shape public management (what I have called to this point the *determinants* of public management):

- the social values by which public managers are moved and that are manifested in the objects and purposes of government;
- the bottom lines by which public servants are governed, which flow from the functions government is performing;
- the public interest ethos that is common to all the instruments of governance;
- the general character of the roles public managers are given under the cabinet system of government and to the relationships among them;
- the political and public character of the parliamentary system within which public managers function;
- the limits on the powers of public managers that are inherent in the federal system and in the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (and indeed in the parliamentary system itself);
- the forces external to the political system to which public managers must respond, such as the magnetic fields of public policy inherent in Canada's geopolitical position, the frame of legitimacy and the explicit policy forces that flow from the societal environment, and the policy issues that are generated by the impact of exogenous forces on society; and
- the multiplicity of forces that are brought to bear on government by the classical and parallel political systems, including the sea changes in the direction of government brought about by major political changes and events.

These are the forces that condition and impel public managers as they shape public policy and public administration. How public managers differ in their respective roles — and indeed individually — is in the lenses through which they see and interpret these forces and in the alchemy of knowledge, values, perspectives, and intuition by which they balance and weigh these forces in reaching decisions. These differences in outlook and perspectives are the beginning of a recognition that the locus and focus of power in the hands of particular officials will lead to particular kinds of results in public policy and administration. But that comes later.

The second set of forces that move public managers are the *constraints* they confront. There is a wide range of them, some of which I have already mentioned:

- the constitutional limits on the powers of government, which are not always crystal clear in their outlines;
- the fiscal and balance-of-payments constraints, now truly the most troublesome of all the more tangible constraints;
- the point in the government's electoral cycle and the strength or fragility of the government's position in the House, the polls, and the party;
- the stock of policies or practices that must be contended with, given that one rarely starts with a clean slate in government;
- the imaginativeness of the policy and administrative options that have been forged;
- the time constraints of those who must weigh options and make decisions; and



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- the confluence of events, problems, and issues that confront policy makers at decision-making time.

Once again, the weight attached to these constraints relative to the impelling forces — and indeed the relative weighting of the constraints themselves — depends on the lenses through which they are being seen. The same applies to the alchemy of decision making I referred to a moment ago.

The third set of forces that affect public managers in their functions and ministers when they are making public policy decisions are the *motivations* by which they are moved. There are, in my experience, essentially four of them, two of which I have already mentioned:

- First, there is the desire to serve the public interest well by developing the best policies possible.
- Second, there is the desire to protect the government's political interests, as they may be affected by the policies or even by the desire to advance the government's political interests *by way of* the policies being fashioned.
- Third, there is the consideration as to how the policy will affect the nationhood interest — whether it will in the long run contribute to the bonds of nationhood.
- Fourth — and underlying all the other motivations — there are the ideology and values that move and guide the government of the day.

If I am right about these being the four motivations by which ministers are moved as they make public policy, then who makes decisions and who influences them are critical to governance.

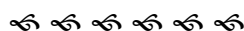
These are the three sets of forces — *determinants*, *constraints* and *motivations* — by which public managers are moved. Given their scope and diversity, it is *to be expected* that different managers in different roles with different backgrounds will tend to perceive, weigh, and react to these forces in different ways.

### *Proposition 2*

Proposition 1 leads naturally to certain generalizations *and* to Proposition 2, namely, that different kinds of managers in government and different classes of agencies can be expected to tend in different policy and management directions. Herewith a sample of the generalizations following from Proposition 1:

- Elected public managers tend to respond differently than do appointed ones to the same forces.
- Public managers in central agencies, who serve the collectivity of ministers and the aggregate of government functions, tend to react differently than do managers in operating agencies, who serve a single minister and a single function.
- Public managers serving one kind of function in one kind of operating agency tend to respond differently than do public managers serving another function in another operating agency.

I would advance similar, related generalizations concerning public managers coming from different professions and from differing backgrounds and training — related in the sense that one *tends* to find people with particular backgrounds and training in particular kinds of government departments. Economists respond differently than social workers, for example; managers with backgrounds in the



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arts and the humanities tend to respond differently than engineers; financial managers tend to respond differently than environmentalists; and so on.

The operative question, given these generalizations, is how these differing responses to the forces that impel and constrain public managers manifest themselves in the public policy and management decisions that such managers and agencies take. I look first at ministers as opposed to appointed senior officials to illustrate the conclusions I draw:

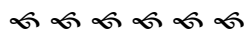
- Ministers tend to attach more importance to the political side of the decision-making equation than do appointed public managers. Indeed, it is the job of the latter managers to counter this propensity of ministers by attaching greater weight to the public interest/ public policy side of the equation.
- Ministers tend more to make their judgments on the basis of a shorter time frame than do permanent public managers. Indeed, it is the job of these managers to press for the longer view in policy making.
- Ministers — or at least the newer and more ideologically inclined ones — tend to base their judgments rather more on their beliefs or even their preconceptions than on hard data and rigorous analysis. It is the job of appointed managers, on the other hand, to put to the minister and to press such data and analysis both as to the origins and the character of the issue at hand and as to the possible policy options and their likely consequences.
- Ministers tend to listen more to the public's view of particular issues — an "earthier" view — while appointed public managers tend to take a more intellectual and sometimes more out-of-touch view. Which is why it behooves these managers to listen hard to the minister's expressions of the person-in-the-street reaction to public issues even when those expressions come wrapped in seemingly half-baked prescriptions about how to handle the issues.
- Finally, ministers tend to see public issues through the lenses of their province or even their region. By contrast, appointed officials tend to take an Ottawa view mixed, subconsciously, with the view of their native province *unless they deliberately seek out, as it is their responsibility to do, a more pan-Canadian perspective.*

### *Proposition 3*

My third proposition begins to emerge from this example: unless balance is deliberately sought in policy making among the different forces bearing in on government and among the different perspectives of those forces, policy will tend to be moulded by a particular and, by definition, more or less limited perspective. Which is a hazardous way to make public policy.

To see this, consider a second example of the second proposition that has to do with the differences between central agencies and operating departments. I have little doubt that the perspectives and the propensities of the central agencies tend them toward policy and administrative conclusions that differ in character or in degree from those that operating departments tend to reach on the basis of *their* perspectives and propensities.

I take as my exemplar of central agencies the Department of Finance, and as my exemplar of operating departments Health and Welfare Canada — in both of which departments I once worked.



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And I take as an illustrative policy issue the problem of unemployment.

The Department of Finance, responsible as it is for macroeconomic policy and staffed as it is largely by economists, tends to look on unemployment either as the natural outcome of a monetary policy designed to constrain economic activity and thus to constrain wage and price demands or as the product of an economy that for one structural reason or another is growing too slowly. In either case, unemployment is the consequence — and in some cases the necessary consequence — of certain causal forces. It is these causal forces that are of interest and concern to the Department of Finance and to the economists in it. Theirs is the *macro view* and the *economist's view*.

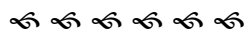
Health and Welfare Canada, on the other hand, responsible as it is for social policy and staffed as it generally is by people with backgrounds in the social or the health sciences, takes a quite different view. It looks upon unemployment in terms of the individuals and families who are unemployed: the innocent victims of a cyclical recession or of an economy afflicted by structural problems. The focus of their concern, therefore, is how to support the incomes of the unemployed or, better still, how to find some kind of employment for them until the underlying economic problems have been overcome — even, indeed, as part of their resolution. Theirs, in short, is a *micro view* and a *social view*.

Given these differences between Finance and Health and Welfare, it stands to reason that their respective prescriptions regarding unemployment are almost bound to be different. The Department of Finance will be oriented toward the market economy and the ways it can be enabled to solve this problem of unemployment. By contrast, Health and Welfare Canada will be oriented toward mellowing the functioning of the market economy by assisting those to whom the riches of the market economy do not flow. Such different perspectives, flowing from differences in role and in professional preoccupations, are bound, as I have said, to produce different economic policy and different social policy prescriptions.

A second difference in the perspectives of central agencies and operating departments has to do with the closeness or the remoteness of their respective contact with the public they commonly serve. The operating department, in much closer touch with the public than the central agency by virtue of its role in delivering public services, will tend to have one view of the world. On the other hand, the central agency, virtually isolated from any direct contact with the public — its only contact being third hand, so to speak, with national business and labour and other leaders — will tend to have another view of the world. Which means that the perceptions of the real forces at work in society — all the societal and exogenous and political forces I have been talking about — and the weighting of the relative importance of those different forces will differ substantially between these two classes of agency.

The effect of these differences on policy direction can readily be imagined. The image that comes to mind is the kind of military strategy that might be envisaged by a remote-weapons commander as opposed to a ground-forces commander. To be more specific about it, the tendency of the central agency will be toward more general and aggregate measures whether in fighting inflation or seeking to ensure economy and efficiency in government operations. By contrast, the tendency of the operating agency will be toward more specific, targeted program or management measures. There will be — and have, in my experience, been — exceptions, but this is the general tendency.

A third difference in the approach that central agencies take to public policy and administration, compared with that taken by operating departments, is to be found in the responsibilities of the Department of Finance and, to a lesser extent, the Treasury Board for aggregate fiscal measures such



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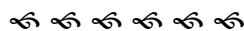
as expenditure limits and the allocation of funds among competing functions of government. Responsibility for making ends meet and for proposing the allocation of limited funds or expenditure cuts among different government departments gives one quite a different view of the world than that found in an operating department, which has no such responsibilities. Central agencies tend, by the very nature of their roles, to attach higher importance to the *constraining* forces, as I have called them, and less to the *impelling* forces. On the other hand, by the very nature of their role of advocate for their function or programs, operating departments tend to do the reverse.

This is not to suggest that operating departments are uninterested in efficiency and economy or in improved effectiveness for their programs: they generally are, even given the disincentives of central controls and the proclivity of government to arbitrary expenditure decisions. Nor is my generalization meant to suggest the reverse, that central agencies, by reason of their more global and more responsible view, are more likely than operating agencies to take a broader and a longer range view of public policy or management. This is not necessarily so. Central agencies can, indeed, become so preoccupied with fiscal constraint that they lose sight of the dynamics of investment and growth and of the potential for certain public expenditures or new approaches to public or federal-provincial policy to contribute to economic growth. The same is true with respect to central administrative controls, as contrasted with the development, by operating departments, of efficiency/performance measures.

In short, my conclusion about the propensities of operating departments and central agencies is not meant to exalt the one or diminish the other. Rather, it is simply to recognize that there is inherent in the differences in the roles and the responsibilities of the two a tendency for each to develop different policy directions and different policy prescriptions in the face of similar issues or forces.

What flows from this third proposition has already been suggested. If a preponderance of decision-making power is given to the central agencies of government, the tilt in public policy and in public administration will tend in one direction; conversely, a preponderance of decision-making power in the hands of operating departments will tend to tilt public policy and administration in another direction. What is called for on the part of senior public managers, both elected and appointed, is an understanding of this dynamic in government. What is further called for if the government *wants* to receive a balanced reading of the forces at play regarding public policy and *wants* to receive balanced options regarding policy issues is the establishment of a *balance* between the powers of central agencies and operating departments.

This set of forces within government is, in my view, the most important of the many forces at work within the government environment. There are many other forces, of course, and some have received much more attention in the literature of public administration. There is, for example, the much-touted territorial imperative of public managers, the career-advancing imperative, or the mystique effect of the more arcane disciplines in policy making (I have economics in mind). But for sheer magnitude and force, the *perspectives* effect is the most significant of all of the forces in government that affect policy development and program management.



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### V

#### A SUMMING UP AND A LOOK AHEAD

This completes my exploration of the determinants of public management: of what there is about government and governance that makes public management unique and of what there is about the "public" in public management that determines the character of public management.

The thesis I have developed may be summed up as follows. The character of public management is determined in every country by what government does and is expected to do in that country and how it does it; by the institutions of governance that establish and limit the leadership roles within the nation's political and governmental systems; and by the several environments within which public managers serve and to which they must respond — the geopolitical environment, the societal environment, the environment of forces that are external to governance, and the political and government environments. The dynamic of this model of the "public" in public management may also be summed up. The geopolitical, societal, and external environments bring to bear on the political and governmental systems the real, or primary, forces with which government must cope and to which it must respond. Guided by their particular beliefs and interests, the participants in the political system interpret, choose among, and reinforce the forces impinging on them — sometimes generating their own forces — and press upon governments positions and policies that will respond to the forces. Government, responding in differing measure to the political forces being brought to bear upon it, to its own interpretation of the primary forces, *and* to the professional advice of its public service, develops policies and programs that will address the issues that have emerged directly and indirectly from the primary forces.

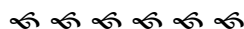
The leadership roles *open* to participants in the political system are an important ingredient in the dynamics I have been describing. These roles are determined by the institutional systems provided for in the nation's constitution and by the potential for using the instruments of communication available — notably, television, advertising, and polls — to bring pressure to bear upon governments. The leadership roles within government, in turn, are also determined by the institutions of governance provided for in the nation's constitution and by the mutations in these roles brought about by time and the government of the day. The effectiveness with which the political and governmental roles are used and exploited depends individually and, in a certain sense, collectively on the personalities that fill them.

This is the "public" in public management, as I see it.

The operative question, as I have said before, is just how this "public" in public management actually affects the acts and functions of management in the public sector. In fact there are two questions. First, how does this "public" in public management affect *what* public managers do? Second, how does it affect *how* they do it?

I have attempted in this monograph to answer the first question. For each of the three families of determinants I have identified, I have sought to illustrate how that family systemically affects *what* a public manager does and *what* he or she must take into account in the doing of it. I have been able to give only a few examples of the impact of these determinants, but I hope I have left some sense of their magnitude and importance in shaping public management.

As for the second question, it involves examining each function or process of management — leadership, planning, organizing, staffing, communicating, directing and animating, maintaining accountability, and the rest — and determining how each is affected by the public determinants



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identified in this monograph. This analysis, important and interesting as it is, has *not* been attempted in this monograph. In short, the question of *how* one performs these management functions in the kind of public sector environment I have been describing must await a second monograph.

### NOTES

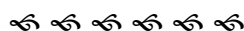
1. It should come as no surprise that I include ministers as senior public managers: once the term public management rather than public administration is used, it becomes necessary to extend one's thinking to the top of the hierarchy of policy making and accountability for program management.
2. It is noteworthy that all of these institutions find their origins in the Constitution of Canada (though what is meant by parliamentary and cabinet government is not there detailed), as do the limits on legislative and government power. These latter are found in the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and in the division of powers between federal and provincial governments.
3. To say propensity is not to say ineluctability: there are, after all, other organizational forms and other administrative instruments that would be consonant with the cabinet system.
4. Statistics Canada's *Canadian Social Trends* tells us that "in 1986, 17% of immigrants, compared with 9% of non-immigrants, were aged 65 and over. The situation was reversed at the other end of the age scale where only 5% of immigrants, but 25% of non-immigrants, were younger than age 15" (Autumn 1989, page 4).
5. There is a fifth motivation — pure ego — by which ministers and bureaucrats are sometimes moved and that has been much written about in some of the public policy literature. For two reasons, I have not included it among the major motivations of public managers. First, in my experience, I did not see it as a significant or a systemic force; rather, it was confined to a particular, usually unsuccessful, kind of person. Second, the conflict between pure ego and the public interest as motivations is so manifest that I tend to classify pure ego as a deformation rather than a motivation.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A.W. Johnson has had a long and distinguished career in the Canadian public service, spending nineteen years in provincial government, eleven in federal government, and seven as president of a major Crown corporation. At the more senior levels of government, Mr. Johnson was Deputy Provincial Treasurer of Saskatchewan (1952-64), Assistant Deputy Minister of Finance in the Government of Canada (1964-68), Economic Advisor to the Prime Minister on the Constitution (1968-70), Secretary of the Treasury Board of Canada (1971-73), and Deputy Minister of National Health and Welfare (1973-75).

Mr. Johnson was President of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation for seven years (1975-82). Following this, he taught public policy at Queen's University, where he was Skelton-Clark Fellow in 1982-83, and at the University of Toronto, where he was Professor of Political Science from 1983 to 1989.

Mr. Johnson was a Senior Research Fellow of CCMD between 1989 and 1991. It was during this period that he wrote *What is Public Management? An Autobiographical View*.



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