

## Ethics in the Public Sector

### From Compliance to Values or Compliance and Values?

#### Chapter Summary

The definition of the word *ethics* is elusive, and can be perceived as synonymous with other related terms of morality, integrity, and trust. However, in government ethics, it becomes important for the public sector to have established standards and guidelines for public sector staff when making decisions in the public interest. The authors suggest that there are several reasons to support the increased dialogue about public sector ethics and actions from the public sector. These factors relate to the tenants of New Public Management (NPM) that have challenged the traditional notions of accountability of responsible government as advocated in the Westminster model of government. There has been a corresponding shift from compliance-based ethics to values-based ethics. There has also been a challenge to the traditional ideas of public governance from citizens and other interest groups in society, which has been realized through the increasing proliferation of the media and social media.

In response to these issues, governments have pursued a variety of compliance-based practices to affect and encourage employees to follow ethical standards of practice. These practices have included ethical codes of conduct, rules, policies, laws, and statutes that identify and outline the prescribed ethical conduct. There are several challenges to these practices, as they infer a top-down approach to respond to ethical issues, offering a symbolic response to ethical concerns while at the same time not necessarily enforcing any different behaviour. Ethics or integrity based ethics approaches also pose several challenges. This approach requires individuals to enact their own ethical standards, without any consistency or uniform standards in the organization.

This chapter identifies three theories for a study of ethics; deontological, teleological, and virtue ethics. Many academics have joined the debate on these theories but have advocated a combined approach to studying and understanding ethics in the public sector. The chapter also

highlights the many positions and offices that have been developed by both the federal and provincial governments in response to the issue of ethical standards. For example, the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner and the Public Service Integrity Commissioner are two positions established to respond to ethical concerns in the federal government. In addition, many provinces have established a “hodgepodge” of rules, standards, and policies to respond to ethical concerns about their employees.

## Annotated Weblinks

- 1) [https://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/pubs\\_pol/hrpubs/tb\\_851/vec-cve-eng.pdf](https://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/pubs_pol/hrpubs/tb_851/vec-cve-eng.pdf)

This manual on the values and ethics code for the public service also outlines the democratic, professional, ethic and people values as advocated by the federal government of Canada.

- 2) <https://lop.parl.ca/content/lop/ResearchPublications/cei-02-e.htm>

A Library of Parliament report by Élise Hurtubise-Loranger and Dara Lithwick on the *Federal Accountability Act* that includes a discussion on the ethics and parliamentary office, current and emerging issues, and also a section on determining the private interest.

- 3) [https://www.psic-ispc.gc.ca/sites/default/files/v\\_and\\_e\\_code\\_e\\_16\\_dec\\_13\\_for\\_web.pdf](https://www.psic-ispc.gc.ca/sites/default/files/v_and_e_code_e_16_dec_13_for_web.pdf)

A report by the Office of the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner of Canada on values and expected values for the public service employees in Canada.