

The Limits to Defying Gravity

Horizontal Governance and Competing Values in Canada's Westminster System

Chapter Summary

Over the last twenty years in Canada's public sector, there have been many new managerial concepts proposed in response to both internal and external pressures to create a better governance system. In particular, the coordination and structure of the public sector have created many challenges, but senior officials have typically governed with a top-down, hierarchical approach to decision-making. Additionally, other strategies and managerial approaches have advocated for further restructuring initiatives, such as horizontal management, horizontal policy, joined-up or seamless government, collaborative government, holistic government, and whole-of-government approaches. These approaches all fall under the term of horizontal governance and speak to the importance of collaboration and cooperation between and among all the divisions, departments, and agencies in the public sector. Although Sproule-Jones (2000) proposed a "bottom-up" approach to hierarchical challenges, Bakvis and Juillet (2004) suggest that these theories all "pull against the gravity of the Westminster system." The author suggests that what is really required is a "zero gravity" approach to horizontal governance and questions whether this approach is applicable for Canada's public sector.

The author delineates the discussion of horizontal governance into two distinct time periods and also questions why the public sector has acclimatized to this practice. He questions whether the public sector should continue with these strategies in an attempt to modernize Canada's Westminster system. Horizontal governance in the public sector was designed to strengthen interdepartmental policy-making, foster new skills, and identify best practices, but more importantly it focused on the relevance of culture and capacity in the workplace. In the late 1990s, the federal government established the Task Force on Managing Horizontal Policy Issues and recommended a

further focus on leadership to foster this culture of horizontal capabilities, but several concerns were also raised about the lack of assessment and accountability. The author introduces different perspectives on horizontal governance ranging from reports conducted by the Treasury Board and the Auditor General, as well as personally evaluating the relevance and quality of horizontal management. The author acknowledges that since the mid-2000s, there has been less interest in pursuing horizontal governance issues but notes that this strategy still persists among many government departments and agencies.

Annotated Weblinks

- 1) <https://www.canada.ca/en/treasury-board-secretariat/services/audit-evaluation/centre-excellence-evaluation/guidance-governance-management-evaluations-horizontal-initiatives.html>

The Government of Canada published this evaluation of its horizontal initiatives to assess its form, accountability, and transparency requirements.

- 2) <https://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/hidb-bdih/home-accueil-eng.aspx>

The Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat office created a Horizontal Initiatives Database that looks at the financial and non-financial aspects of horizontal governance, as well as a description of these projects and their governance and partners.

- 3) <http://www.nrcan.gc.ca/plans-performance-reports/2012-2013/11556>

The Horizontal Initiative and Major Projects Management Office Initiative is an example of a Natural Resources Canada horizontal governance model in government that includes the description, shared outcomes, and governance model of this specific horizontal projects case.