

Abstract

The development and implementation of a government policy by a single ministry is a greater stimulus to creativity than a collective and inter-ministerial approach. Starting from the principle that creation is an individual act which emanates neither from administrative structures, nor from committees, nor from manuals of instructions, the author affirms that the "Conditions which favour creativity in a public or other administration are precisely those which awaken and increase the creative impulse of the human mind.

In the individual method, the ministry alone formulates the policies which are within its competence. The other ministries affected by them are asked for their views and the possible constraints which may result, but only on a consultative basis. This method has obvious advantages for the ministry in question. The author suggests, *inter alia*, that the ministry be allowed to retain 50 per cent of any economies realized through greater efficiency in the execution of its policies. On the other hand, if civil servants misread ministerial intentions or ignore constraints imposed by other policies, they should pay the price, which may, in the final analysis, involve the dismissal of the minister or his principal policy advisor.

In the collective method, the policy is not worked out by the immediately responsible ministry but rather by a committee including all the interested ministries. The dynamics of such an approach are very different from the individual method. Being more prudent and bureaucratic, it stalemates individual creativity and is prejudicial to innovative thinking. The constraints and the various interests are so well represented within the committee that they tend to dominate the debate and cause the ministry in charge to be on the defensive. In an endless discussion, the other ministries are hoisted with their own petard of counter-arguments, and the proposing ministry cannot put forward the positive advantages of the new policy. The resulting loss of time and energy is harmful to creativity.

At the level of policy execution too, the author favours the individual approach which is both efficient and economical. The ministry in charge of the policy is far better placed to determine its implementation within the constraints which delineate its scope. Here, too, the author reaches the conclusion that creativity is better served than in the collective approach.

Sommaire

Le développement et la mise en application d'une politique gouvernementale par un seul ministère stimulent davantage la créativité qu'une approche collective et interministérielle. Posant comme principe que la création est un acte individuel qui n'émane ni des structures administratives, ni des comités, ni des recueils d'instructions, l'auteur affirme que les conditions qui la favorisent dans une administration publique ou autre sont précisément celles qui éveillent et accroissent les impulsions créatrices de l'esprit humain.

Selon la méthode individuelle, le ministère formule seul les politiques qui relèvent de sa compétence. Les autres ministères affectés par celles-ci sont invités à donner leur avis et à signaler les contraintes possibles mais uniquement à titre consultatif. Cette méthode comporte des avantages certains pour le ministère concerné. L'auteur propose, entre autres, que le ministère conserve 50 pour cent des économies qu'il pourrait réaliser par une efficacité accrue dans les modes d'application de ses politiques. Par contre, si les fonctionnaires se trompent sur les intentions ministérielles ou ne tiennent pas compte des contraintes imposées par d'autres politiques, ils doivent en payer le prix, lequel, en dernière analyse, peut être la destitution du ministre ou de son principal conseiller en politiques.

Suivant la méthode collective, la responsabilité de l'élaboration d'une politique est confiée non pas au ministère immédiatement responsable mais à un comité où sont représentés tous les ministères intéressés. La dynamique d'une telle approche est très différente de la méthode individuelle. Plus prudente et plus bureaucratisée, elle fige la créativité individuelle et nuit à l'esprit d'innovation. Les contraintes et les différents intérêts sont si bien représentés dans le comité qu'ils tendent à dominer le débat et à amener le ministère responsable à prendre une attitude défensive. La discussion s'éternise ; les autres ministères s'enferment dans leurs contre-arguments, ce qui ne permet guère au ministère proposeur d'exposer positivement les avantages de la nouvelle politique. Il en résulte une perte de temps et d'énergie nuisible à la créativité.

Au niveau de l'exécution d'une politique, l'auteur favorise également l'approche individuelle pour des raisons d'efficacité et d'économie. Le ministère chargé de la politique est beaucoup plus en mesure de déterminer comment elle doit être mise en application à l'intérieur des contraintes qui délimitent son champ d'action. Encore là, de conclure l'auteur, la créativité est mieux servie dans l'approche collective.



I have been asked to reflect upon bureaucracy and public policy from my new vantage point: someone who has spent thirty years in the public service, but *is* no longer involved in government; someone who has served in both federal and provincial public services; someone who has served in different fields of public policy - economic, social, and constitutional or federal-provincial; someone who has served both in the central agencies of government and in operating departments or ministries.

I welcome the opportunity, not because it gives me a chance to reminisce - for reminiscences are largely a bore - but because I have found myself reflecting upon the problems and the perplexities of the public service from my new and more detached perspective. And I have indeed been looking for an occasion to try to order my thoughts, and to attempt to articulate them in a coherent way. For I continue to care a great deal about public administration in Canada, however much removed from its practice I may have become.

Where to begin? I suppose with the confession that I have become increasingly concerned about the charges of bureaucracy (in the pejorative sense) that are being levelled against public services and public servants. In some measure, I am sure, this is part of the general revolt against bigness and the impersonal character it brings with it. But there is an even larger reason for concern when public servants themselves join in the cries of bureaucracy being hurled at Canada's public services; when they speak of a developing, even a chronic, malaise in government.

And more and more public servants are doing just that - some privately, some publicly. They have become deeply disturbed, at least so it seems to me, about the capacity, the ability, the potential of the bureaucracy, and of individual bureaucrats, to perform creatively: to develop policy creatively, to put it into effect creatively. I must confess that the longer I worked in the public service, creativity within the context of large-scale organization became a recurring concern.

Why these criticisms? Is it because the critics among the civil servants are simply nostalgic, looking back at some golden age when government was smaller and simpler, more personal and more daring? Or because they are becoming increasingly weary of searching for solutions to seemingly intractable problems, and weary of the facile, even 'scapegoat' criticisms so often levelled at the 'bloody bureaucracy'?

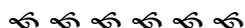
I think not, though I don't dismiss the possibility. Any of us over the age of fifty is given to dreaming of a simpler and more fertile past - at least so I am sometimes told! No: I think it *has* become more difficult in today's bureaucracies to develop policies creatively, and to put them into effect creatively. And I want to give you my own personal analysis as to why I believe this has come to pass. I don't think we can dismiss this phenomenon (if indeed phenomenon it is) by saying we live in a more complicated age, that government has become larger and is doing more, and all the rest. All of this is true and self-evident. But we must reach more deeply into the question than this, I think: we must look to the very meaning of creativity, and to the conditions which cause it to thrive - or to wither.

Creativity in a bureaucracy

To begin with, I start with the proposition that creativity is a personal act; it is the product of creative minds, not of structures or committees or manuals of instruction. So to ask what are the conditions of creativity in government, or anywhere else for that matter, is to ask what are the conditions which unleash, and enlarge, and enhance the creativity of the human mind.

In the arts the answer one most frequently hears is 'freedom' - freedom from constraints. But in government this won't do; for government, like all organized social activity, is very much a matter of seeking solutions to other people's problems, of coping with a multitude of social and economic and cultural objectives. And the more problems there are, the more objectives, the more numerous the constraints. For each problem, each objective acts as a constraint on the resolution of other problems, the realization of other objectives. So by definition one cannot in government be 'free' to pursue one's own goals, to realize or give expression to `self. How long would any government last that tried that, or indeed how long should it last?

No, creativity in government is not a matter of undirected creativity, of personal self-realization. Rather it is a matter of 'directed' or 'channelled' creativity - directed at resolving public policy problems,



at realizing other people's goals. But can there be such a thing as directed creativity if creativity carries with it even the connotation of freedom of the human mind? Indeed there is, and it is creativity of the highest order, in my biased judgment (if the president of the CBC dare utter that damned word "bias"). Channelled creativity calls not only for creative ability in one's field of endeavour, but for insight, perspective, sensitivity, discipline, even selflessness.

But it does at the same time call for optimum freedom – freedom to develop creative policies, or to implement them, *taking into account* all the constraints one confronts in government. I would argue, indeed, that the mere existence of constraints, of problems to be solved, serves as a stimulus to creativity. The issue is the freedom of the policy-maker –and his/her capacity – to identify and take into account all of the elements involved in formulating and applying public policies, including the constraints.

The central question it seems to me, then, is *how* the policy-maker is expected, or is brought, to take these constraints into account – the process by which they are brought to bear in policy-making. Think of a ministry as an individual, if you will, charged with developing a new policy or applying it – ministry meaning the minister of a department and the officials working for him or her. Or think of the senior policy person designated by the minister to develop new policy options, or to apply existing policies. How does the ministry, the senior policy person, come to recognize the constraints, to order them in some scale of importance, to evaluate them, to reconcile them with the policy he is seeking to realize, or to modify the policy so as to minimize the effect of the constraints?

There are, it seems to me, essentially two ways. One is for the ministry itself to identify the constraints – the impact of conflicting objectives, the limitations upon ideal solutions – and freely to seek the best, the most creative public policies within these constraints. In this way one ministry, or one senior policy person designated by the minister, is primarily responsible for evaluating all the variables affecting the public policies being developed or applied, and for determining the interrelationships between those variables. And this person is responsible for finding the best public policies within the dynamic system constituted by these interrelated variables or constraints.

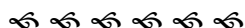
The other way of bringing constraints to bear in policy formulation or execution is to look to different, or special, ministries or agencies to 'represent' each of the major constraints, with each of these ministries participating in the formulation or the application of any particular public policy. Thus each ministry primarily responsible for a particular field of public policy will specialize in that domain, and will have 'represented' to it in the development of its policies, by other specialized ministries or agencies, the other policies or issues which constitute constraints.

These are the two ways, stated in their simplest and baldest form, by which differing constraints may be brought into play in the formulation or execution of any particular policy. The first of these two models I shall call the 'individual approach' to policy formulation, the second the 'representative approach.' Having given these bare bones, let me try to give it flesh and blood – which is to say, reality – by considering first how each of these two models operates in policy formulation, and then secondly how each operates in policy execution.

Policy formulation

Let me take as an illustration the development of new policies or programs in the social policy field. I take this as an illustration in part because I served as Deputy Minister of National Welfare, but the analysis I am about to advance is drawn from my more general experience in treasury boards and operating ministries, both federal and provincial. It is not an analysis of how policy was or might be formulated in the Ministry of National Health and Welfare.

Clearly social policy – the support of incomes, the redistribution of income, the replacement of income for those who are unemployed or who have left the labour force – has an impact on many other fields of policy. If the social policies call for the provision of jobs (earned income instead of government transfer payments) to those in need, then the manpower policies of departments of manpower or labour are involved. If social policies call for a form of negative income tax or guaranteed income the taxation policies of ministries of finance or revenue are affected. If institutional care or rehabilitation is involved, the health policies of ministries of health come into play. And almost all social policies will affect in one way or another economic and federal-provincial policies, which are the responsibility of ministries of finance



and intergovernmental relations. Most clearly of all, social policies affect the size of the public sector and the priorities within it, which are the responsibility of treasury boards and ministries of finance, and, obviously, of the cabinet as a whole.

Each of these areas of policy serves as a constraint upon the freedom of the ministry of social affairs to develop the ideal social policy. Either the social policies will have to be adapted to take account of existing economic, manpower, health, federal-provincial, and overall fiscal policies, or these other policies will have to be modified so as to make possible more effective social policies – without at the same time seriously diminishing the effectiveness of such other policies, given their objectives. These are at least some of the constraints on the social policy-maker.

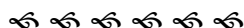
The individual approach. How then to proceed? The individual approach to policy-making would call for the ministry of social affairs to assume full responsibility not only for developing new social policies, but for taking into account, *itself*, the constraints I have just talked about. I emphasize once again that I am speaking of the minister and his or her officials and in particular the leading policy advisor designated by the minister to develop policy options. The ministry would be free to formulate and give shape to its ideal policies, and then to adapt or to modify the ideal to take account of the constraints. Equally, it would be free to develop its case for a modification of the other policies so as to make possible more ideal social policies.

Let me pause to emphasize the importance I attach to starting with the ideal. I believe it is fundamental to creative thinking to start from that point. To start with the constraints, to assume the constraints are inviolable, is to limit one's horizons, one's perspective, even one's capacity to perceive the ultimate goal. More, it is to assume that other existing policies are ideal in any potential mix of policies. This starting point unquestionably limits creative thinking right at the outset. Surely risk-taking in government, if it means anything at all, means at least *looking* at the ideal, in order to provide a standard against which to evaluate the solutions which the constraints might ultimately call for?

So my hypothetical ministry of social affairs would begin by formulating its ideal policies – obviously not *totally* ignoring the most formidable constraints – and then begin to examine the impact upon the ideal of the other policies and objectives and problems of government. How the ministry of social affairs goes about this task would largely be up to it. A sensible ministry, in my judgment, would seek out advice and counsel from the ablest people in the ministries responsible for the other areas of policy concerned: from the ministry of manpower or labour, the ministry of economic policy, the ministry of health, the ministry of intergovernmental affairs, and from the treasury board secretariat. Assuming these agencies are well staffed, they would be the best source of counsel as to the impact of social policy upon other policy areas, and vice versa. More, to *fully* internalize policy development in the ministry of social affairs would be to require the establishment within it of policy experts in these other fields of policy; that would not only be wasteful, bureaucratic duplication, it would almost certainly lead to the employment of more junior and less experienced people than could be found in the other agencies.

But the rules of this game of the individual approach to policy development would have to be observed by the people being consulted in other agencies. They would be *consultants*: they would not be 'representatives' of their respective agencies in the development of social policies, with 'rights' of negotiation, of bargaining for compromise as between policy areas, of veto. More, the ministry of social affairs would not be confined, in its consultations, to discussions with other public servants: if it could find other consultants with different perspectives, or fresh ideas, then it would be free to consult with them.

So the ministry responsible for the development of new social policies would be *fully* responsible for the alternatives it developed. If they were found to be unrealistic, or wanting; if they did not adequately take into account other policies or policy problems; if they did not lend themselves to harmonization with other policy objectives, then it would be the ministry of social affairs which would be held responsible for these failures. For there must come a stage at which the proposals of the ministry are evaluated by the other ministries affected: in the cabinet committee responsible for examining the proposals of the ministry of social affairs, and in any committee of officials established to assist the cabinet committee. Clearly the cabinet itself must be satisfied that the policy proposals do in fact take into account the constraints of other policy objectives – be they economic, manpower, health, federal-provincial, or indeed the scale of the public sector and the priorities within it. And if these social policy proposals do



not take such account, then it will be the ministry of social affairs which will have failed, and be seen to have failed.

The key to this individual approach to policy development is, of course, the freedom afforded to those who are responsible for policy development in any area of government. They are free to search out the ideal, free to search out the constraints and to evaluate them, free to question conventional wisdom both as to social policy and other areas of policy, free to take the risk of proposing apparently daring solutions, free to act as advocates of new approaches to public policy.

But with this freedom goes responsibility and accountability. If the ministry or the people within it miscalculate, if they fail to 'sense' ministerial will as to policies and priorities – even ministerial will to innovate then they must pay the price. If they fail adequately to take into account the constraints imposed by other policies, they must pay the price. If in their anxiety to remove the constraints standing in the way of their new policies, the ministry and the people in it attempt to formulate changes in policies outside their field of competence, rather than trying to persuade the responsible ministries to formulate such changes, then they must pay the price. And price there must be: the price not only of the rejection of one's policy proposals, but ultimately the price of removal of the minister responsible and/or the principal policy advisor.

The representative approach. The alternative to this individual approach to policy development is the very much more cautious, more bureaucratized representative approach. Here the responsibility for the development of social policies is assigned not to the ministry of social affairs but essentially to a committee, albeit a committee in which the ministry is expected to play a leadership role.

Let me elaborate. The ministry of social affairs is asked to develop new approaches to social policy, but it is told that in the doing of it the other ministries whose areas of policy may be affected must be 'involved.' What this really means is that the ministry of social affairs is given the responsibility for developing new approaches to social policy, and the ministries responsible for the policy areas affected by social policy are given the responsibility for ensuring that all the constraints are taken into account, and reflected in the policies being formulated. In effect, the ministry of social affairs 'represents' the social policy objectives, and the ministries of economic, manpower, health, federal-provincial and financial policies 'represent' the constraints or the potential constraints of their respective policy concerns. The social policy proposals are expected to emerge in an interactive way through the process of consultation between these 'representative' agencies. This does not necessarily mean the establishment of a committee: presumably the ministry of social affairs could consult the other ministries as it proceeds, almost as it would under the individual approach I have just described. But the dynamics of the process are different, and they almost inevitably lead to the establishment of committees.

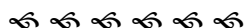
Why? The ministries other than social affairs have the responsibility for ensuring that their policy interests are taken into account: how are they to ensure this is being done except through regular meetings with the ministry of social affairs? Further, there is no one ministry responsible for the continuous weighing of the relative importance of the social policy goal and the other policy goals affected: how else is this to be done except through a committee? More, the process of developing policy is an iterative one, with one hypothesis being tested against objectives and constraints, leading to a modified hypothesis or model which must be

tested again, and so on. How else to achieve this but through a committee, if the constraints as well as the objective are to be represented by different agencies in the development of new policies?

So the case for a committee is a compelling one, given the representative approach to policy development. Moreover, if in the final analysis the policy proposals of the ministry of social affairs will have to be evaluated by other ministries – as in the individual approach to policy development – why not proceed jointly from the beginning?

The problem is that the dynamics of the representative, or committee, approach are so different. And they are generally so hostile to creativity and innovation.

First, it is difficult to begin with the ideal. The constraints are so well and so heavily represented in the committee, that they tend to dominate from the beginning. The result is that daring innovations, sweeping changes in the status quo, more effective but, in political terms, strikingly difficult policies are less likely to be advanced – or to survive.



Public Policy : Creativity and Bureaucracy
A.W. Johnson

Secondly, in a committee representing different interest, or constraints, the person advancing the case for change is constantly put in a defensive position well before he or she has had the opportunity to articulate and elaborate the major policy options being proposed. So attention is diverted to the development of data to defend one's position, rather than to strategic, innovative thinking. Mounds of data will almost always overwhelm, submerge creative thought.

Thirdly, the representative committee approach almost inevitably creates a bargaining situation. Every interest is represented, and must be placated *if* progress is to be made. Sometimes this means the acceptance -4 constraints before the advantages of new policy directions can be measured against possible changes in the constraints; sometimes it means succession of compromises which lead to the lowest common policy denominator. Or both. Only the most stubborn leadership on the part of the ministry responsible for developing new policies, and/or the most venturesome and most detached participation of the other ministry representative will overcome these hazards.

Fourthly, there is a tendency in the representative approach to policy development for ministries representing constraints to represent their own bureaucratic interests rather than the pure policy issues which must be addressed. How often have you heard at committee meetings the phrase 'Speaking for the department of X ...?' This is particularly true if these ministries assign to any committee of officials relatively subordinate or insecure officials – officials who are afraid to commit their ministries even to the possibility of modifying their ministries' policies. The result is stubborn and protracted discussions, all too often on subordinate rather than strategic issues.

Fifthly, the representative approach to policy development places a premium upon effectiveness in the bargaining process, upon being 'a good committee man,' rather than upon sheer creativity. Sometimes one finds both qualities in a single person, but if you do not then the development of policy will be tipped in favour of the policy interests of those committee members who are most articulate, most persuasive, most aggressive, or simply the most stubborn.

Sixthly, there is a hazard that the value of 'coordination (a constant value in bureaucracies) will come to prevail in policy development more than the value of creativity. Coordination there must be, of course, but one must always beware of attaching an absolute value to it; too often coordination captures or contains or even immobilizes innovative talents.

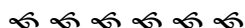
Finally, the representative, the committee approach to policy development takes time and emotional energy. All of the arguments must be heard, all of the possibilities must be examined, all of the data must be explored, all of the compromises must be made. And that takes time and emotional energy away from innovative endeavour, and away from the timely development of policies.

Some conclusions about policy development

My conclusions will be obvious - except perhaps to a committee. Creativity in policy development calls for the assignment, as much as is humanly possible, to individual ministries, and within ministries to individual, creative policy-makers, of responsibility for policy development. It calls for the responsible ministry itself to take into account the constraints in the development of policies, short of arrogating unto itself the development of new policies in all related areas of policy. And it calls for holding the individual ministry responsible both for the innovative and the responsible character of its policy proposals, with sure and swift consequences if the ministry fails.

This proposition is valid, in my judgment, both at the cabinet and the official levels. The very notion of individual ministerial responsibility, indeed, implies the assignment of responsibility by the Prime Minister and his cabinet to individual ministers. And while cabinets must approve, and accept collective responsibility for, the policies developed by individual ministers, they cannot, without courting many of the risks I have explored, make *all* policy decisions collectively.

I quite recognize the hazards, the pitfalls in the generality of my proposition. Is there not a danger that individual ministries will fail to bring a broad enough perspective to their tasks? Is there not a danger that policies will not be sufficiently harmonized, or coordinated? Is there not a danger that leaving the formal evaluation by other ministries of a particular ministry's proposals until they are completed will



lead to a stalemate, to the need for starting all over? Is there not a danger that the overall strategy of a government will be lost sight of in the welter of individual policies, developed by individual ministries?

The answer to all of these questions *is*, yes, of course these dangers exist. There must always be central policy advisors in government to mitigate them, and to ensure that an overall strategy for any government is developed and pursued. But these central ministries and their advisors, with all their perspective and insight, cannot develop *all* government policies. So you are left with the choice between the two approaches to policy formulation I have explored: the individual approach or the representative or committee approach.

To me the hazards of the latter are greater than those of the former. The representative approach courts the twin, and fatal, hazards of poor policy: of the lowest common denominator of policy, and of the paralysis of policy - the difficulty of getting new policies developed at all, or at least timely ones. And these hazards are in my judgment far more serious than the hazards of the individual ministry approach to policy development.

Policy execution

This proposition applies equally to the execution of policy - but in spades. Indeed I could have illustrated it with greater vividness, even luridness, by examining its application to policy execution instead of to policy development. Only a few pages will tell you why - if any public administrator needs to be told.

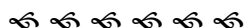
Consider what *is* involved in policy execution. One must hire staff, and determine their rank and pay; one must acquire office space and furnishings; one must lease or buy equipment and the latest advances in technology; one must buy transportation and communication for the public servants; one must provide for the incidental expenses of doing business - public service business. In short, each ministry responsible for administering programs must buy these inputs to execute policy. However, so long as governments are responsible for reasonable economy in the use of the taxpayers' money, and so long as there are no profit and loss statements, there must be some constraints established as to what inputs are bought, and how.

Now consider the two approaches to the execution of policy - the development and application of these constraints in the administration of government programs.

The individual ministry approach would call for the ministry being responsible for, and being held accountable for, the exercise of prudence and probity in the acquisition of the many inputs required. But because prudence and probity call for definition, particularly in the absence of a profit and loss statement, the government and its central agencies must give some guidance as to what it means by these words. This would be done by the provision of guidelines to operating ministries: guidelines as to the manner in which personnel will be recruited and paid; guidelines as to what is regarded as reasonable office accommodation and furnishings; guidelines as to the level of expenses considered to be reasonable for travel and telephone utilization; guidelines as to the acquisition and use of specialized equipment and technology, and the rest. More, the government might decide, in the interests of economy, that certain of the common inputs required across the public service would be acquired by a central agency. Other inputs would be bought by operating ministries, subject to guidelines, even regulations, designed to avoid political or bureaucratic patronage.

Subject to such guidelines (and they would be general, so as to give departments flexibility), the departments would be responsible for determining what inputs are required, and how they should be combined or organized so as to achieve optimum efficiency (for example, the combination of capital and labour). With this responsibility would go accountability to the government for applying the guidelines, and for achieving optimum efficiency through the decisions as to what inputs should be bought, and how they should be combined. To be sure this goal is achieved, the government would require efficiency reviews, or audits, of individual ministries by a special agency created for the purpose.

I would go further, and call for accountability to Parliament or the legislatures themselves for the efficiency and economy with which departments manage their affairs. Deputy ministers themselves would be held accountable, in my ideal model, in order to attach responsibility to the people who *really* are responsible for the purely administrative decisions of government: that is to say, decisions concerning



the acquisition and combination of inputs. And the legislative bodies would be assisted by legislative auditors who would review the results of the efficiency audits conducted by government.

Hand in hand with this responsibility — a very onerous one indeed when one operates in the public domain — would go some incentives. Departments would be authorized by the government to retain, for use in policy and administrative improvements, 50 per cent of any economies they realized through greater efficiency. Traditionally any such economies revert to the treasury, but this, it seems to me, virtually removes any incentive to efficiency in government, particularly given the very real limits to salary incentives in the public sector.

The effect of this approach to policy execution would be to make it possible for departments to manage their affairs creatively and efficiently; to give them an incentive to do so; and to hold them publicly responsible for doing so. But it implies, too, optimum flexibility for departments in acquiring and combining inputs, subject to broad guidelines as to what is meant by probity and economy in the cost and quality of inputs acquired, and as to the manner in which they are acquired.

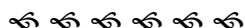
The representative approach. Now compare this with the representative approach to policy execution — the commonest approach in Canada. Central agencies prescribe for the operating ministries, frequently in very precise terms, the quantity and quality of the inputs departments may acquire, how they shall be bought, and how they may be combined, or organized. Thus the central agencies represent the constraints of probity and prudence prescribed by government, with departments being bound to accept the decisions of these central agencies — in this case without even the bargaining process one finds in the case of policy formulation. Personnel are appointed by a public or civil service commission; their rank and pay are determined by a classification division in the commission or the treasury board secretariat; and negotiations with unions over pay and conditions of work are also conducted by central agencies. Even the potential for special rewards for unusual achievement (for example, a 'celebration' in the form of a reception or a dinner) are usually precluded by rules against entertainment expenses being paid by departments. The combination of personnel — that is, the organization of the department, at least at the top level, as well as the number of people at various levels in the senior ranks — may also be controlled by the treasury.

Departments of supply or purchasing agencies not only buy, but frequently prescribe the specifications for, the materials, supplies and equipment required by departments. This usually includes even specialized equipment required by a single department. More, ministries of science and technology may be established to review the use of technology by departments, talents, as one of the inputs involved in the execution of policy. When it comes to supplies commonly required by departments, central purchasing agencies often establish very detailed specifications as to what will be supplied to operating ministries. (I have even seen dots printed on stationery to instruct typists as to where the addressee for letters should be typed.) And this is aside altogether from the regulations which are established governing all agencies as to procurement and contract procedures — regulations designed to avoid political or bureaucratic patronage.

Treasury board secretariats determine, often in great detail, the constraints which shall apply in the provision of office accommodation and equipment. Sometimes the constraints even take the form of rules concerning the standard of desks, the number of chairs, and the size of rugs for personnel of different ranks; and this is aside from any role the departments of public works may come to play in determining, directly or indirectly, the nature of office accommodation made available to departments. Central agencies also make rules as to travel and telephone communication, sometimes to the point of reviewing taxi slips and specifying the number of officials who may attend particular conferences. Even exceptions to the rules will frequently have to be cleared with the central agency which represents these particular constraints.

Some conclusions about policy execution

I am not suggesting that the representative approach is inspired by a penchant for bureaucracy, or purely by the bureaucratic ambitions of central agencies, though this undoubtedly comes into play once central agencies are established to represent the constraints. I think it *is* more the product of the political process itself. Politicians themselves, seeking to economize in public expenditures, always subject to political criticism for even the appearance of extravagance in expenditures on equipment or travel or public service salaries, tend to look to central agencies for detailed controls over operating ministries.



Public Policy : Creativity and Bureaucracy
A.W. Johnson

Thus economy becomes an absolute value, with efficiency, real efficiency, being lost sight of. For efficiency in policy execution is a matter of providing the best service to the public at the lowest possible cost; it is not a mere matter of cutting to the bone, of ferret-like control over, the costs of individual inputs. Put another way, efficiency *is* a matter of minimizing the cost *per unit of public service*. It is not a matter of minimizing the cost *per unit of input* required to provide public services.

Furthermore, if any agency is to be held responsible for minimizing the cost of providing public services, who else but the ministries that provide them? A central agency can be held responsible for negotiating the toughest salary contracts; for bringing travel costs per employee to the lowest possible level; for ensuring that desks are veneer and rugs are small and private offices are scarce. But can they be held responsible for the morale and zeal of employees; for the constant and creative search for better procedures in providing public services; or for caring for the concerns of the public being served? I think not. What is more, if operating ministries are not permitted to make reasonably flexible decisions as to the inputs they buy and how they are combined and organized, they no longer can be held responsible for efficiency in the broader sense: providing the best public services at the lowest possible cost. For they have lost control over the key elements in the management process, and when a ministry realizes this it ceases to try to manage. That's *real* inefficiency.

So I conclude, with even greater passion when I talked about policy execution than about policy development, that the representative approach inhibits creativity in the public service. Now I know I have drawn a caricature of the two approaches to policy execution – that there must be a mix between the representative, or central agency approach, and the individual ministry approach. I know there must be public service commissions to ensure that personnel appointments are made on the basis of merit; I know there must be treasury boards both to propose priorities in the allocation of funds, and to establish guidelines as to what is meant by probity and prudence in the expenditure of public funds; I know there must be purchasing and contract regulations to prevent political and bureaucratic patronage.

But one has to decide in government which *approach* to policy execution will lead to the greatest creativity, and then lean strongly in that direction. I personally have come to have no doubts on that score: I am utterly convinced that creativity, and indeed responsibility, is enhanced and enlarged by greater freedom for the operating ministries. I am equally convinced that the representative, or central agency approach leads inexorably to bureaucracies created to check on bureaucracies, and hence to frustration, resignation and finally stagnation. Put in one sentence, only through putting a premium upon creativity, only by creating conditions which will nourish and support it, will we achieve a more effective, more responsible and more vibrant public service.

