

Public Service Delivery

A brief history

During the first half of the last century, two World Wars contributed to significant government intervention and control of all national resources. Later on, public administrations further extended their protective role by gradually intervening in different economic, social, and cultural areas. The role of the «Welfare State» reached its peak in the decades that followed World War II.

By the 1980s, the administrative machinery of Government had become so heavy that its cost led to a progressive and significant indebtedness that forced industrialised nations to undertake major reforms of their public sectors (Aucoin and Savoie, 1998). These reforms consisted of a progressive disengagement of the state from various sectors of activity, such as natural resources management; it then refocused its mission around key sectors such as health, social security, employment and justice (Beauregard, 1994).

There are two main reasons why post-war taxpayers welcomed this change in the role of Government. On the one hand, taxpayers were overtaxed and as they saw their capacity to pay decrease, they pressured Government to shrink and to manage public property more efficiently (Guay, 1997). On the other hand, witnessing the transformation of the world economy due to a significant increase in information and communications technologies (ICTs) and market globalisation, taxpayers rapidly became sophisticated consumers and demanded that Government modernise and improve the quality of its own public service delivery methods (Éthier, 1994). In summary, three main factors have created huge pressure on the administrative machine to undertake in-depth reforms, that constitute a real reinvention of government (Heeks, 1999):

- A significant level of national debt
- IT growth and ensuing market globalisation
- Better informed and more demanding citizens.

Opportunities for Solutions

In response to these factors, several countries undertook to reform their Administrations (Peters and Savoie, 1998; Osborne and Gaebler, 1992). In the early 1980s, Great Britain, being avant-garde, initiated a vast movement of privatisation in order to disengage itself from various activities, in the areas of natural resources, transportation and communications, to name a few. In France, public infrastructure contracts were awarded to private enterprises for the management of natural resources such as water or electricity and the development of major construction projects.

In Canada, as in the United States, the movement towards privatisation was not as dramatic. The offloading of activities traditionally handled by Government rather took on the shape of sub-contracting and outsourcing among private-sector companies that took over partial or total responsibility for delivery of various public services (Donohue, 1989).

More recently, a trend to explore new models of collaboration for public service delivery, particularly public-private partnerships has emerged in both industrialised and developing countries (Heeks, 1999). As a result, governments are relying on private sector expertise, mainly in the field of IT, to design, produce, and operate effective and efficient public services. Several trends can be observed by looking at the solutions implemented by different countries:

A progressive disengagement of Governments in some sectors of activity

- Increased use of the private sector as partners of Government
- Public services largely supported by ITs

Further, these new methods of collaboration are unique not only because of the type of relationship that binds the private sector to the public sector, but also because of the sectors of activity involved. Public administrations are turning to new means of collaboration for activities that were, until quite recently, their sole domain as they lay at the very heart of the Government's mission. Clearly, within this context of diversification of service delivery methods, governments are moved to rethink their way of doing business; they are seeking out ways of being innovative, effective and efficient to provide better services to their "clientele" within many areas of activity (Dobell

and Bernier, 1997).

A research project⁽¹⁾ to be conducted over the next two years will examine these emerging and innovative models of public service delivery and attempt to identify their main critical success factors. This document is an integral part of the research process. It provides an overview of the current knowledge base in order to establish the foundations that should guide this study. The first section below defines the concept of collaboration for public service delivery. The next section introduces a conceptual model which incorporates critical success factors identified in the public administration and management literature. The last section of the report presents a brief overview of experiences in Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia and a few developing countries and newly industrialised economies.

(1) Cefrio research project on the "New methods of collaboration for public service delivery" conducted by the PIVOT research group.