

*Summary:*

Horizontal Management: Understanding Changes in Policy Formation and Implementation through Ontario's Member's of Provincial Parliament

While it is not uncommon for governments to establish consultations with stakeholders when formulating a policy, this tendency is taking on a new level of significance for both the public and the public sector. Not only has the public developed a sense of expectation when it comes to consultations, the public sector has additionally been adjusting to increasing levels of collaboration and partnerships, according to Members of Provincial Parliament (MPPs) and senior public sector officials.

Horizontal management, a term not unknown to academia, is one that is scarcely used, if at all, amongst Members of Provincial Parliament (MPPs). While the concept is generally familiar, the fact that the term itself nearly always requires further explanation is very symbolic. The difference in the language being used between the public sector and the political side was echoed throughout each interview; there is a disconnect between MPPs and the bureaucracy in nearly every facet of their relationship. Moreover, the public who is becoming increasingly involved in the political is trying to participate more actively yet often lacking the tools to do so. Horizontal initiatives, at the policy, political and front-line levels, challenge traditional methods of organization and accountability. It is clear however, that MPPs are generally aware of this trend. They recognize the changing circumstances and relationships that this style of management and organization fosters between the Ontario Public Service (OPS) and the public.

After having conducted fifteen interviews with MPPs from all three parties as well as the current and former Cabinet Secretary and Head of the OPS, it became clear that both sides are attempting to address and respond to increasing levels of horizontality, but are doing so in a way that is often detached from one another. This feeling of 'not knowing' and of disconnection was discussed in virtually every interview.

Each interview was comprised of six questions, which were based on some of the literature currently available on the topics of horizontal management, accountability, consultation and the bureaucracy. This paper therefore, begins with an examination of the literature and compares them with some of the answers that were given in the interviews with MPPs and OPS officials. While trends can be seen in their answers it would appear as though the only factors that somewhat influenced their answers were if they had previously held a municipal position and the length of time that they had been elected. The answers were often not consistent by party or portfolio and each provided a unique perspective on the issue. The last section of the paper includes suggestions for the future of horizontal management based on a cross examination of the literature and the interviews.

The literature describes horizontal management as the "... manage[ment] [of] programs that are delivered by more than one organization" (Sproule-Jones, 93). In this paper, this is understood as being applied at all levels (front line, bureaucratic and political). An essential feature of this concept is "breaking down Ministry and departmental walls" (Tony Dean, 2006), which both the OPS and the MPPs alike recognized as an increasing feature of government operations.

Two major themes that are discussed in both the literature and the interviews are accountability and consultation. The issue of consultation is often discussed as it applies to the various policy levels: creation, implementation and service delivery. Moreover, there is the issue of whether one can 'over-consult' as well as the increasing expectations of society to be consulted with. While some MPPs felt that over-consulting causes inaction and delays, others felt that it was the best way to ensure that a program or policy is representative citizens needs and concerns. This is an issue that was often discussed with regards to how it relates to the concept of accountability.

One important facet of accountability is whether horizontal management can provide the same type of accountability measures as traditional, hierarchical methods. Many authors believe that the concept of 'ministerial responsibility' ought to be applied to horizontal approaches. Sproule-Jones claims that this can be achieved within a horizontal system that is either managed by a structured organization or by consensus of the members involved (99). Consensus-based decision-making, while potentially capable of being highly representative, can also create difficulties in reaching a consensus, particularly if the amount of partners and collaborators is large and varied. Alternatively, a structured or central core system may run more efficiently in the sense of being able to make decisions more rapidly, though may suffer from becoming overly hierarchical, unrepresentative, and thus unable to provide the various opinions and views of the partners involved in the collaborative network. Nearly all MPPs felt that there should always be a central core, generally a ministry, in charge as opposed to a consensus. There was a belief by some however, that the central core needs to be closer to the service providers as opposed to the traditional ministerial framework which was seen as being too far detached. This line of thinking is consistent with the argument that there are too many levels between policy creation and service delivery and that it is difficult to measure the work and performance of the bureaucracy as intermediary in this relationship.

The role of the bureaucracy in the policy process is very significant to horizontal management approaches. In the articles written on this issue, authors often point to the difference between what the bureaucracy has been or is 'supposed to be' and the way in which it has dramatically changed over the years. Some MPPs described truly not knowing what happened between the creation of a policy and the delivery of a service and many described the need for better management and measurement of their performance. There is a feeling that too much power is the hands of unelected ministry staff and that there needs to either be better coordination and management of their work. Alternatively, some felt that the best way too address this would be to give more responsibility to local municipalities and front line staff.

Another interesting issue is the role of citizens in horizontal approaches, specifically with regards to helping government dollars stretch as far as possible. When members were asked if they felt that it was a good or bad thing that citizens were often taking initiative and solving problems within their communities without the help of formal political institutions (Carlsson, 533), many MPPs felt that this was a good thing. They argued that citizens should not be relying so heavily on the

government and that citizens needed to take on greater leadership roles if the provincial debt is to be erased. Others, however, felt that it was a failure on behalf of the government if they were not part of these initiatives and that the government should always be part of the solution. In the context of horizontal management, this question spoke to the challenges facing both the government and the public in understanding their changing roles.

The final section of this paper is a summary of the major trends in the interviews and suggestions for the future of horizontal management. The first major trend is that a significant disconnect exists between the political, the bureaucratic and the front line levels. Based on interviews with both the OPS and MPPs, it is obvious that both sides feel that performance measurement is lacking and that there needs to be better mechanisms in place to manage the implementation of a given policy. Both, however, are addressing this gap in different ways with limited knowledge of what the other is doing. What is needed to address this gap is a major transformation; the way in which the policy process is viewed as well as the way in which the government and OPS view themselves require a major shift. The policy process has in many ways been seen as a multi-level, top-down process between the creation, implementation and delivery. For horizontal management to be successful, policy needs to be understood as *across* groups and sectors, which allows for all parties involved to have power in the decision-making process. This also requires a shift in the way the government sees itself; it can no longer function as isolated silos and departments, as OPS and political. Rather, it should perceive itself in the same way the public generally does, as one single organization.

An important step in accomplishing this task is to foster greater dialogue between all groups and ensure that the proper technology and methods are in place to foster open communication. MPPs used a number of terms, “breaking the silos”, “matrix management”, “four corners management”, etc... to describe horizontal management. In order to start bridging the language gap an important step is to synthesize the definition of horizontal management within the government and OPS and what term is going to be used. Additionally, without delving into some of the more contentious private sector practices, such as contracting out, there is a role for the private sector practices in horizontal management. These include team-management strategies, front-line knowledge and performance management, all of which could further help to ease the transition to a horizontal style of management.

While there are many other suggestions made within the paper itself, another important area that is examined is that of accountability. Based on the interviews and other research, the best way to incorporate accountability within horizontal structures is to establish a central organizing agency that is directly involved with the front line. A good example of this is the way in which Cancer Care Ontario is organized; a central core is responsible for the research, policies, advocacy, etc... and works directly with the delivering agencies and in this case, hospitals. This requires new partnerships, open public transparency and public reporting and a great deal of leadership on behalf of these organizations. Each organization needs to work with the government to set goals and create an outline of measureable outcomes, all of which is discussed at length in the paper. There are many positive examples of horizontal management within the government already

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but after conducting the interviews and writing this paper, it is clear that much work remains to be done on this important public sector issue.

Works Cited

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