Institutional Frameworks (Governance) : The Canadian E-government Experience

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Presentation Overview

• Canadian system of government
• Evolution of horizontal governance models for service initiatives
• Governance challenges
• Lessons learned
• Success factors
Canadian System of Government

• System of responsible government is based on the Westminster model – “ministerial responsibility”:
  – Ministers are accountable to Parliament, both individually and collectively, for the exercise of authority
  – All accountabilities in Canadian government flow from Ministers’ accountability to Parliament
  – Sanctions associated with ministerial responsibility are political (loss of political stature, fall of the government)
  – Parliament ensures that executive (ministerial) authority is properly exercised
  – Deputy ministers (public servants) are accountable to their Ministers, the Prime Minister, and the Treasury Board for the use of their authority to implement policy and in the area of financial administration
Ministerial Accountability

• Three core features:
  – Well-defined roles and responsibilities
  – Credible process of rendering account
  – Assignment of consequences for performance of responsibilities

• Impact on horizontal initiatives:
  – Different organizations, with different accountabilities, may choose to come together to achieve mutual benefits for themselves and their clients (partnerships are optional, with no legislated governance in place)
  – In these instances, there is no change or transfer of accountability – it is retained by individual Ministers
  – Organizations must agree to manage accountability risks in order to act horizontally / collaboratively
Horizontal Governance: The Evolving Canadian Experience

• Traditional service delivery models:
  – Department-centric, straightforward ministerial accountability and vertical lines of governance and responsibilities
  – Established to achieve department/program-specific outcomes

• Shift to focus on service improvement:
  – Adopted a service-oriented culture – client research to determine needs / expectations of clients and how to meet them, and attempts to drive up service quality

• Move towards whole-of-government approach:
  – Services re-organized to be client-centric rather than department-centric – with whole-of-government targets
Citizen-centric, whole-of-government service...

  - Connected Canadian government to its citizens
  - Brought together federal information and services through clusters and gateways based on client segments and themes

- Service Improvement Initiative (2000):
  - Provided a framework for identifying citizen expectations and priorities for service improvement
  - Led to program of continuous improvement

- Service visions for key client segments (2003)
  - Individuals, businesses, international clients

- Post 2005 – new Service Vision being developed
... Leading to new Governance Approaches

• Interdepartmental steering committees established based on key client groupings
  – Gateways and Clusters: content developed and managed across organizational boundaries
  – Service visions: based on client priorities as determined through research
  – Key projects / initiatives to implement service visions, with interdepartmental governance structures for each

• And senior whole-of-government oversight
  – Ensuring all initiatives add up to a complete strategy
  – Whole-of-government outcomes, targets and reporting
  – Multi-channel management across government
  – External advice: Government On-Line Advisory Panel
Governance Challenges Remain

• Given Ministerial accountability and its vertical nature, attempts to collaborate and integrate can go only so far
  – Integration / horizontal action can lead to sharing of information, managing on behalf of other organizations, new service delivery arrangements (e.g., Service Canada)
  – All of these require legislative basis / authorities which may not be in place

• True transformation / full integration could lead to shared accountabilities – requiring new governance mechanisms
  – More work to be done!
Lessons learned (1)

• Institutional frameworks must be clearly defined at the outset to:
  – Ensure clarity around governance structure, legislative basis and constraints, roles/responsibilities, incentives
  – Drive alignment of vision, strategic plans, policy and infrastructure development, project implementation, information requirements
  – Ensure senior management across departments and agencies can address high-level risks collaboratively
  – Facilitate sound management in a multi-partner environment comprised of different organizational cultures and vertical accountabilities
  – Contend with statutory / legal frameworks, policies, technology standards
  – Provide mechanisms to resolve issues
  – Communicate all elements to partners
Lessons learned (2)

• Without strong governance in place:
  – Tension: blurring of lines of accountability through integration and collaborative efforts
  – Although the intent is to work together to strengthen horizontal management, the result may be a weakening of accountability (i.e. poorer management)
  – Cannot achieve true transformation or integration – poor understanding of what can / can’t do leads to paralysis
  – Sustainability at risk – must plan and put in place structures to support ongoing horizontal efforts
In summary...

- Successful implementation of horizontal initiatives can be achieved by:
  - Establishing clear governance structures at the outset, with the necessary authorities / legislation
  - Defining roles, responsibilities, incentives, and risks (and ways to mitigate them) – and communicating them to all partners
  - Taking a whole-of-government approach to drive alignment and focus on strategic outcomes
  - Focusing on client needs and expectations
  - Soliciting external advice – e.g., private and non-profit sectors