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Building Momentum for Results-based Management

A study about Managing for Results in British Columbia

Background
April 5, 2005

What is results-based management?

Managing for results, or results-based management, is about ensuring that organizational effort is focused where it matters: on the results an organization wants to achieve. Over the last decade or more, governments in many jurisdictions have adopted, or are striving to adopt, this approach. They are shifting their focus away from inputs, processes and activities to give greater emphasis to the outputs and the outcomes that will benefit citizens.

What are the essential ingredients of results-based management?

This approach relies on formal processes of planning, monitoring and reporting. It asks organizations to plan and identify resources to achieve results, and to use performance information to monitor, evaluate and adjust strategies to meet targets. And when it comes to public reporting, managing for results allows governments to show the public what has been achieved and at what cost. This is a departure from public sector organizations that focus on using rules, regulations and prescriptions to direct resources and actions in a particular way.

Results-based management depends on leaders who incorporate the formal processes of this approach into their day-to-day management. Leaders can publicly plan and report without necessarily tying these activities to the internal operations of their organization. In such cases, the benefits of this approach are diminished, the reports may not be meaningful to the organization and what the public and legislators see – in those reports – may be form over substance.

Managing for results also requires organizations to commit resources to building the systems, practices and culture of performance management. It demands that public servants focus on managing risks to achieve a result rather than being risk averse. And it asks rule-makers to balance compliance with flexibility, all the time ensuring that business is conducted in a responsible manner. In essence, it requires a change in government's systems and processes and a change in culture.

Is results-based management 'new' to the British Columbia public service?

The Office of the Auditor General has encouraged for several years now the implementation of this management approach across British Columbia's ministries. In the mid-1990s in collaboration with the Deputy Ministers Council, the Office released three reports encouraging government to adopt a results-based approach. During this same period, the Public Accounts Committee – an all-party committee of the Legislative Assembly –

supported this initiative and made recommendations to see this approach implemented.

Subsequent to these recommendations, in 1999 the Budget Process Review Panel, chaired by Douglas Enns, released its report, “Credibility, Transparency and Accountability – Improving British Columbia’s Budget Process.” Among other things, the panel made recommendations for changes in legislation to commit the government to the public reporting of results. These recommendations are now reflected in the Budget Transparency and Accountability Act passed in 2000.

Prior to the passage of the Budget Transparency and Accountability Act, some ministries were striving to adopt a results-based management approach. These organizations had leaders who saw the value of focusing on results, recognizing that it was simply good management practice and anticipating its importance in the future. In some cases, they were required through specific legislation or other agreements to report on their intended and actual performance.



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