



Public sector

MANAGEMENT TODAY

It is vital that governments maintain their commitment to the sharing of control as they adopt a strategic focus, argues Professor Geoff Gallop

PUBLIC SECTOR MANAGEMENT today is a complicated business.

Firstly, we see the public looking for real and demonstrated outcomes from government. We are in a world of rapid communication and many shared values. The community can compare their government with others and will no longer rely upon rhetoric in judging performance. Nor will they use expressed ideology as the basis for judging governments as it is no longer a good guide for outcomes.

Put simply – the people want results.

Secondly, we see governments looking for leverage to achieve these results. The whole arena of policy and strategy has been opened up as governments look for the means to produce the results the public is seeking. And these matters involve improvements in community well-being as well as efficiency in performance.

It is, then, a world of pressure – from people to government and from government to the public service.

All of this is complicated by the fact that we live in a world of uncertainty and change. Not only do we see new powers such as China and India emerging, we also see continual changes in the technological base for

life and work generally. No sooner do we introduce a new system than another one is appropriate.

None of us has a clear view of where the current set of changes will take us. We do know, however, that these forces, added to which is now global warming, represent a challenge to governments seeking to produce good outcomes for their people.

Above all else, governments are seeking some degree of control over the processes that affect their communities. Not only does this mean an increasing regionalisation and globalisation of government, it means a strategic approach to government itself.

Good governments are now planning for the future and linking the best research available to their plans of action. At the same time they are engaging the public more directly in their work, and not just at election time!

Strategic plans are being developed by national, regional and local governments. Objectives are set, performance targets related to those objectives developed, strategies created to realise the objectives and systems set up for evaluating performance.

As these plans are developed they become guidelines for public

sector agencies. Working within government today means working across government agencies and with the community to achieve results.

As part of the strategic planning process more and more governments are using consultation techniques to help in the setting of objectives, strategies and measures of performance. The notion that the government has all wisdom has been replaced by the doctrines of “shared values” and “shared responsibilities”.

What we see in this process is an attempt to break down the gaps between government and people (“lack of trust”) and between government and the public sector (“lack of purpose”). In a sense, it is a mobilising style of government but one which needs to recognise the important separations required to preserve balance and promote innovation.

Herein lies the challenge facing all governments as they seek to control in the face of change and as they seek to influence in the face of complexity. Individual freedom and multiple centres of power are proven methods of ensuring progress and need to be protected as we move to a strategic conception of government.

Professor Geoff Gallop is Director of the Graduate School of Government. (see page 11)