The DNA of Government

The defining characteristic of government is complexity. It is likely that any government, from the largest national government to a relatively small city or town, has more distinct lines of business than even the largest multi-national corporations.

In a purely rational world, all governments (from the largest to the quite small) would have a defined strategy for each of their lines of business. What are the broad goals that they are trying to achieve with each? (Unlike the private sector, these can rarely be defined in terms of pure revenue generation or contribution to the bottom line.) What actions are being or can be taken to achieve these goals? How will they measure whether and to what extent they are being successful?

In a government context, the lines of business are often referred to as programs, goals are as outcomes and the actions represent services which the government provides and which, together, contribute to achieving the program outcomes. These and other elements constitute the DNA of government.

As described in cases studies throughout this book, when governments define their programs and their related outcomes – and then the services and how they contribute to these outcomes – they can, often for the first time, see and understand the workings of government. It is rather like taking apart a piece of complex machinery and observing the inter-relationships of the component gears and mechanisms. Only with this kind of understanding is it possible to “fix” the machinery when something goes wrong – or to design improvements to address changes in the environment or needs. And yet, for most governments, the pieces have been assembled for so long and built up over time with add-ons and modifications, such that we have lost track of what results these wondrous devices were intended to achieve – or of how all the component parts were intended to work together to achieve the results.

*The DNA of Government* provides a roadmap for first understanding the workings of any government at any level (national, regional, local) and then applying this understanding to improve, measure and monitor the performance of government. The work draws on the emerging discipline of business architecture and applies the concepts, methods and structures of this field to addressing the complexity of government organizations.

The primary audience for this book consists of those with a strong interest in the workings of government - with the goal of making it work better, for the benefit of all citizens. These may include those in the public sector (elected officials, executives, managers, policy analysts, financial analysts, etc.) as well as others in the academic community, the private sector, not-for-profit sector or society at large who wish to better understand these mysterious entities which have such a profound impact on their daily lives.

The book relies on case studies, stories and real-life examples derived from almost 20 years of working with local, regional and national governments in both Canada and internationally. During that time, the principle author and co-authors have been applying and continuously enhancing and refining the approach described in this book. They have applied this approach in a board range of jurisdictions of all sizes, shapes and complexity to address a range of situations and needs. Their experience has been supplemented by an advisory panel of public sector executives, academics and consultants, who have volunteered their experiences and insight.

After 20 years of practice, the base architecture has proven to be durable, flexible and applicable to a range of situations and needs. It has stood the test of time and surely represents our first steps in truly understanding “the DNA of Government”.