

Effective Governance in Public Sector Organizations Principles, Issues and Lessons from Experience

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Some Things to Bear in Mind

1. The term 'governance' refers to the systems, processes and mechanisms used by an organization to:
 - Develop policy
 - Set direction
 - Make decisions
 - Share information
 - Measure progress toward objectives
2. Every government organization requires a governance structure. What kind of structure is appropriate for a particular organization depends on factors such as:
 - Nature of business
 - Mandate
 - Size and geographical presence
 - Maturity
 - Environment (both public and political)
 - Organizational priorities and objectives
3. The systems you need for a free-standing department are different from those required for an organization within another department.
4. In any governance structure, there is a balance to be struck among a variety of objectives:
 - Efficiency
 - Inclusiveness/participation/transparency
 - Rigour in process and decision-making
 - Speed/timeliness
5. For a variety of reasons, the current environment in Ottawa places a premium on:
 - Accountability over efficiency
 - Process over substance
 - Planning and reporting over policy and results

6. A structure can be adapted to new circumstances or new leadership – but the longer you wait to put a structure in place, the harder it will be to manage and govern the organization effectively.
7. Every organization needs an effective ‘Senior Management Committee’ as a forum for final discussion and decision on issues such as:
 - Strategic direction of the organization
 - Major resource planning and decision-making
 - Major HR and other administrative decision-making (i.e., where decisions affect significant interests of parts of the organization or the future direction of the agency)
 - Dealing with major policy issues of similar import
8. It may be difficult to have such a forum include everyone who feels they would like to be there (e.g., all heads of regional offices). If not all can be members of this senior decision-making forum, then there are several ways in which senior regional people can otherwise be included:
 - You can have rotating membership by two or three RD’s
 - You can hold a monthly teleconference focused on information-sharing and involving all senior managers
 - You can design an organizational structure that has more of a hierarchy
9. The key point to bear in mind is that membership on the Senior Management Committee is not a matter of being there to protect or advance a particular headquarters or regional interest, but rather of participating in the collective management of the agency under the leadership of the Deputy Minister or Agency Head.

Some Lessons from Experience

1. A Departmental Executive Committee should be large enough to include all senior corporate decision-makers, but small enough to allow for effective discussion and decision-making.
 - This means preferably no more than 10, and ideally less than that.
 - It also means it may be difficult to include all senior regional managers in the most senior departmental management committee (though there may be a monthly forum where all can participate)
2. Any committee chaired by the Deputy is a decision-making committee. If the committee is not going to make final decisions, he/she should not chair it.
3. It is often useful to set up separate senior committees for:
 - Policy
 - Management issues
 - Major operational issues (in your case, prosecutions)
4. Everyone cannot (and should not) be on the all the same committees.
5. Even if you want most of the same senior people on several committees, it can be useful to create them as separate forums.
 - This enables you to maintain the focus of discussion and ensure there is adequate time for the different kinds of issues that need to be dealt with.
6. It is essential to minimize 'bilateralization' in senior decision-making.
 - Any senior-level decision affecting other people's interests should be dealt with in the forum of a committee, and not one-on-one between the Deputy and a single senior manager.
7. Keep the number of non-senior people attending meetings of senior committees to a minimum. This facilitates collegiality and frank discussion.
 - Ideally, the only person present other than members of the committee should be the DM's EA/notetaker.
8. Every meeting requires:
 - A clear mandate
 - A regular time slot (rigorously adhered to)
 - Rules for submission of materials (timing, format, prior consultation)
 - Membership rules
 - A notetaker who produces prompt, high-quality notes