Comptrollership is often equated with accountancy, where the past is examined through detailed numerical data. This view of comptrollership supports the systems, attitudes and methods that constrain our ability to modernize government. For public sector managers, comptrollership has meant restrictive financial rules and conditions – the financial experts create, interpret, enforce and explain the complexities of these regulations and the managers strive to comply.

But this is changing. In December 1997, the Treasury Board committed itself and the government to a new vision and direction for comptrollership. This vision, outlined in the Report of the Independent Review Panel on Modernization of Comptrollership in the Government of Canada, repositions comptrollership as the key to an open, accessible, values-driven and results-oriented government. It identifies responsibilities at every level and sets in motion sweeping change in how the federal public service is managed. It not only repositions comptrollership, but also provides a guiding philosophy for facilitating the mental shift necessary to implement change and some suggestions for achieving it.

Modern comptrollership, along with other change initiatives such as La Relève and the Advisory Committee on Senior Level Retention and Compensation, are part of an overall effort to create a public service that will lead Canada into the next century.
Why we need a quantum leap

There are sound reasons why new approaches to comptrollership are necessary. The relationship between citizens and government is changing as we move toward greater citizen- and client-centred service delivery. Program Review identified what government should and should not be doing, and we are now designing and implementing changes based on this new vision of the public service. As government becomes smaller, it will increasingly form new and innovative types of partnerships with other levels of government, the private and not-for-profit sectors and the academic community. Public management in this new environment will require such a shift away from past patterns as to constitute a quantum leap.

The recommendations of the report on modernization of comptrollership recognize that today’s public service manager faces many challenges. The report’s purposes are broad, encompassing the breadth of change across all departments and agencies and laying down the principles upon which managerial and policy excellence can be balanced. Modern comptrollership will provide the drive behind results-based management. An important feature is the acquisition and analysis of information that can be used as a tool for better management decision making at all levels and as a basis for better governance and communication with citizens.

A new manager-specialist partnership is necessary

Public sector managers must discard their old notion of comptrollers as financial specialists and begin viewing comptrollership as an essential part of their own responsibilities. They and the specialists must establish a different kind of relationship.

Effective comptrollership comes about when

- decision-makers at all levels accept and adopt comptrollership attitudes and values and place a premium on supporting their decisions with meaningful information and analysis
- specialists and professionals who are engaged in comptrollership-related activities have a sound understanding of their department’s programs and services while demonstrating managerial acumen.

Modern comptrollership provides a range of analytical tools that, properly applied, will drive success. Once managers master these tools, they can take more effective control of their resources, risks, processes, relationships and tasks in order to achieve their goals. Such comptrollership calls for fewer rules and regulations that constrain action and for better support for management decisions, whether strategic or operational. Rules, while fewer in quantity, will be better communicated and enforced. As a result, managers will be enabled (and expected) to define and achieve the goals of public policy and recognized for their managerial, as well as policy, performance. This is the essence of a results-oriented public service.

The balance has shifted from reporting and controlling to forecasting, modeling and enabling.

Peter W Currie, Executive V.P., CFO, Royal Bank of Canada

The aim of modernization is for managers to be able (and expected) to be “stewards” of an enterprise that produces goods or services. Their preoccupation will no longer be to figure out how to function within a set of artificially imposed constraints; rather, it will be to improve the quality of their service and provide better value to the public. Managers will be able (and expected) to lead their units by establishing a vision, planning their goals and objectives, and using innovative methods to achieve these goals in accordance with the core values of the public service.

First of all, define objectives very clearly so that people . . . know exactly what’s expected of them.

The Hon. Doug Young, Chairman, SUMMA Strategies

The role of the specialist communities in government will change as well. Effective manager-specialist partnering will enable managers to set new directions and to implement, innovate and improve operations, and thereby to balance operational and policy excellence. Functional specialists will provide the information, analytical tools and advice necessary to accomplish this.

Financial and other quantitative specialists will have to move “out of the silo” to take on the role of management.
advisers. They will be enabled (and expected) to provide advice and support on such matters as

- techniques of risk management
- accounting, costing and productivity (linking financial and non-financial data, inputs and outputs)
- accounting, non-financial and financial reporting
- business planning and budgeting.

They will advise managers on how to define objectives, align resources and develop measures to monitor and control progress toward their stated goals. This shift from simply providing managers with information about compliance or non-compliance to helping managers achieve excellence and maintain balance between conflicting objectives is critical to modern comptrollership.

Information will be used as a support tool for managers. Systems for supporting decisions will include historical and prospective, financial and non-financial information. Managers will learn to analyze and interpret information for use in planning and strategizing. Information will also be used to isolate areas that may need improvement, as well as to provide objective and rational justification for expenditures, projected resource allocation and accountability structures. A key role for specialists will be to support managers in this area.

Specialists will have the difficult but essential role of developing, applying and interpreting both financial and non-financial indicators of performance. These measures will provide relevant and valid information primarily for management decision making, rewards and recognition. As well, the availability of such information will improve the quality and reliability of communications with Canadians.

The review panel on modernization of comptrollership suggested that the following be taken into account when considering performance:

- the extent of achievement of specified objectives or goals and the occurrence of unexpected results
- the continuing relevance of programs or activities to public needs and interests
- the appropriateness of the ways in which the organization chooses to provide such services either directly or indirectly, and the extent to which those who use or are affected by the programs or services are satisfied with them
- the quality of management direction and monitoring
- financial results and cost and productivity considerations
- anticipation and response to change.

Bringing about change

We must adopt a culture that moves from being rules-based to being values-based ... from focusing on inputs to focusing on outcomes and outputs. The bottom line is that management must seize the ground of value for money.

V. Peter Harder, Secretary of the Treasury Board and Comptroller General of Canada8

Cultural change will not happen by itself. It will demand an extraordinarily high level of political and senior management support sustained over a long period of time. A variety of supporting systems and mechanisms must be developed and deployed to bring about and sustain this change. Focal issues for change management include capacity development – training, career pathing and incentives – and standards and frameworks.

Given the unique cultures, mandates and operations of each department and agency, department heads and their management colleagues will be responsible for organizing their own transformation plans and procedures. Each department and agency will assess its unique needs and chart its individual course for realization of modern...
comptrollership. Department heads will be responsible for creating organizational cultures that not only respond to and lead change, but also maintain core values.

For modern comptrollership to be successful, senior managers and department heads must create and foster cultures that promote, recognize and reward pioneers of change who exemplify the values of

- **accountability**
- **service quality and efficiency**
- **responding to change**
- **stewardship and public trust**
- **principles of fairness and equity in all dealings with all Canadians.**

These values, together with honesty, integrity and probity, are central and integral elements of modern comptrollership. Managers who incorporate the principles of public service with those of entrepreneurship will be the leaders of change. These managers will know how to exercise the self-discipline necessary for success and essential in an environment where top-down directives on methodology are limited and managers have more freedom (and responsibility) to act quickly to achieve results. Consequently, government will increasingly reward managers who have internalized these values and are capable of attaining operational results without compromising them.

The reservoir of values and ethics is there, but they have to be much more clearly rewarded than they have in the past. The major challenge in activating that value system is going to have to do with rewards and some times sanctions, but mostly rewards, and putting a value on trust.

*J.P. Boisclair, President of the CCAF, Chair of the Independent Review Panel on the Modernization of Comptrollership in the Government of Canada*

The review panel also suggested the following incentives to managers to encourage change:

- **clear linkages to career progression**
- **linkages to compensation**
- **latitude to operate with less oversight and intervention from the centre**
- **support from the centre when the occasional thing goes wrong in an otherwise well-functioning organization**
- **audit and oversight approaches that recognize excellence.**

An important element of each departmental effort will be developmental training to enable managers and specialists to function in their new multi-role capacity. Training will be designed to improve managers’ ability to use financial tools and systems to achieve their objectives. Likewise, departmental specialists will be trained in the operational aspects of managerial responsibility. Development may take the form of cross-functional assignments, on-the-job training and/or classroom instruction.

The single most important thing . . . is to inform, educate, train . . . both the controllers who will have to learn to function . . . somewhat differently . . . and the managers who will have to learn to work with their controllers in partnership.

*Louise Fréchette, former Deputy Minister, Department of National Defence*

The biggest “Don’t”: don’t allow complexity to remain in the organization in the name of control.

*Thomas Walther, Consultant*

To support the modernization effort, the Modernization Task Force, comprising the Secretary of the Treasury Board and Comptroller General, and a small number of deputy ministers, is providing leadership and
direction to all departments. A comptrollership council with representatives from each department and agency is developing common approaches, standards and tools and will share best practices.

The Treasury Board Secretariat will also be responsible for giving excellent counsel to departmental managers and for providing comptrollership services across government.

**Conclusion**

Modern comptrollership is not an end in itself, but a tool for government to meet the expectations of its citizens. It is about selecting, guiding, training, evaluating and rewarding people. It is also about focusing, fine-tuning, planning, judging, prioritizing, reflecting, predicting and, when necessary, discarding processes. It is a way in which the government can respond to changes in technology, demographics and global interdependency, to name a few.

Some of the Panel’s recommendations can be applied within . . . a relatively short time-frame, while others will require major changes in both the public service culture and in the personnel responsible for the day-to-day provision of comptroller services. This is an important . . . one of the great challenges facing the Canadian public service. . . The government has the will to act and the will to find a way.

**Endnotes**


2. Ibid., p. 11.


7. Ibid.


9. Ibid., p. 42.

10. From remarks to the CCAF (Canadian Comprehensive Auditing Foundation) National Conference, October 1997.


15. Ibid., p. 15.

16. Ibid.

