



Innovative management tools

Seven tools that can save you, and taxpayers, money

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TIME WAS WHEN SOPHISTICATED BUSINESS TOOLS were the prerogative of the major management consulting firms and their clients. These days, purpose-built tools are available to almost everyone in government, business and non-profits – you just need to know where to look.

They used to be expensive because you had to buy proprietary software. But now they are inexpensive because the best of them are available on the Web.

We are in an era where you and your clients in government are expected to have more in their tool boxes than their MPAs, their MBAs and their experience, so some of the best and most innovative management tools available are described in the next paragraph.

What's in it for you?

Why should you know about these tools? There are many reasons, but among them are:

- They can save yourself, your clients and the taxpayer money.
- Your clients' operations will be less successful without them.
- You are likely to start getting enquiries from your clients about them, if you haven't already.
- They are probably more efficient, effective and reliable than the ways they use now.
- They do what they say on the label.
- They are among the best of their kind at what they do.
- They automate the heavy lifting so your clients can do the thinking.



they are beginning to find their way into Canadian organizations. Many One Page Business Plan users can have a comprehensive business plan ready to go in days, not months!

2 Deciding and prioritizing – picking your winners

With restricted funds available, government organizations may have difficulty choosing which competing opportunities to implement, or which of them they should do first. Sometimes, decisions are taken in groups, perhaps by the executive committee.

For some decisions, especially the important strategic ones, the decision criteria are intangible and there can be strongly conflicting views. There are few numbers to guide the way; those there are don't tell you all you need to know; there may be strong differences of opinion around the table; and, you might be dealing with apples and oranges.

The Canadian science and technology research community faced these issues a decade ago when trying to prioritize research projects for government funding. So they thought up ProGrid® (www.progrid.info). ProGrid helped them decide which projects to fund, and which not, even if the available information was little more than a glint in a research scientist's eye. Since then ProGrid has evaluated some \$12 billion in projects and opportunities for over 100 organizations, mainly in Canadian governments.

It saves time and money because you are more likely to make the right decisions and because the time taken by the decision-making group can be a fraction of the old way. The effectiveness of your decisions can be assessed easily and inexpensively afterwards using the same methodology.

3 Online policy and strategy collaboration

Have you ever faced a problem where the only solution seemed to be to get the various individuals and groups from around the country, the region or the organization together in one location to sort it out? This is a key issue in developing policy and it is invariably expensive.

The Challenge Dialogue System® (CDS) (www.innovationexpedition.com/CDS.html) is a rigorous, flexible and comprehensive process which helps stakeholder groups to collaborate electronically. Businesses, governments, research centres, knowledge networks and nonprofits all use CDS to come to conclusions about knotty problems which need everyone's input. It can be applied to small scale problems, to routine but complex issues or to larger, multi-level or multi-stage "dialogues". Think of a Delphi approach but with legs.

CDS can save your clients money because you will arrive at a better, more informed, more defensible and more accountable solutions. You will save the travel costs because all the players are at the same "virtual" table wherever in the world they are located.

4 Assessing your organization and its management

We have a colleague, a highly regarded independent management consultant working with the US federal government, who has lots of experience using QuadRed® assessment tools (www.quadred.com) with his government clients. We asked him what he thought of it. "It's more a question of what my clients think of it – they generated enough fees in a single year to put my daughter through college!" We thought this was a pretty good reference for QuadRed in government.

- They are scalable so they can be used in smaller operations just as well as in large ones.
- They are notably inexpensive.
- Their user support is excellent.
- They can be fun and rewarding to use.

If there is common ground between these tools; it's to do with decision making, planning and execution. All of them are generic and all of them can be used by any type or size of organization. Most of them can be piloted first so there is almost no implementation risk; none of them will need the blessings of the IT department; and most of them are "pay-as-you-go" so you don't have major up-front costs. And you don't need major project cost approval. But they are certainly not for everyone.

1 Business planning

Every government operation has a plan – and few of them work as well as the authors expected. So for planning, we can recommend Jim Horan's One Page Business Plan® series available at www.onepagebusinessplan.com. There are separate versions for creative entrepreneurs, non-profits, financial services organizations, women in business, and even one for management consultants. Used extensively by consultants and their clients in the US, each has a CD inside the back cover containing the planning templates.

If your client asks about preparing a business plan, give the team a copy of the One Page Business Plan for Non-Profits, ask them to read it, and talk to them the following week. If nothing else you will be speaking the same language and be on the same "one page". This version contains much of what a government organization would need to know.

These guides are hugely popular in the US, deservedly so, and

QuadRed has a variety of standardized online qualitative tools which assess the performance of the organization, any of its components, or its leadership – just like an MRI of the organization but a lot less expensive. It is a great favourite with US business advisors – and for good reason. But it is hardly used in Canada at all.

QuadRed can save you money by delineating actual and potential problem areas on which senior management can then focus and address.

5 Executing your plan

As we said before, every component in government has a plan, and few of them work as well as the writers expected. But it's not always the plan that's at fault – more often it's the execution. How many government organizations have a simple, automated strategy execution management (SEM) process to which every manager can contribute?

Not long ago Deputies couldn't monitor their organizations' operational performance in real time – they had to wait for printed monthly reports. Even now, it is difficult for them to know and understand how their strategy is faring as the year goes by. Yet plenty of recent research shows that organizations that have an effective automated strategy execution management process are highly likely to be more successful than those that don't.

But where do you look for an SEM? Most organizations which have them are large companies and their systems are expensive and they are not transferable to government organizations like yours. Most so-called SEMs on the market are merely enhanced employee performance measurement tools. But Deputies want their performance management to be based on strategic initiatives that they, the Minister, and perhaps even Cabinet, have carefully chosen, not just on employee competencies. This is a fundamental difference in concept, as most Deputies and management experts know perfectly well.

A few years ago, a small Indiana firm called Keyne Insight (www.keyneinsight.com) developed a very different performance management tool, originally for a manufacturing client in California. The result, KeyneLink®, is strategy based, not competency based. It is generic, scalable, transferable, easy to implement and one of the world's first Web-based strategy execution management systems. Scalable? Users range from four employees to over 10,000. Cost? Perhaps 2 percent of the salary of each manager in the system. Implementation? You pilot test it with the chief executive and the executive team first, and then cascade it down through the organization as far as you like. It can be effective in days, not months. Does it work well? Yes, we have used it in our own practice.

KeyneLink saves the taxpayer money by helping to make sure every that department, branch, team and individual in the organization is working to achieve the initiatives created and communicated by the chief executive.

6 Keeping your documentation in order

When I start work on a management consulting engagement for a new government client I ask for their operating documentation such as systems descriptions, job descriptions, organization charts and operations manuals. As often as not I get a response such as “OK, but they are a few years out of date” or “they are on our to-do

list but we never seem to get around to them” or maybe “yes, but that was before the new director came and he has changed things around”. Occasionally I am met with a blank stare.

Is this important to governments? W. Edwards Deming thought so. He wrote “If you can't describe what you are doing as a process, you don't know what you are doing”.

One way to address this is to use Touchstone® (www.businessdesigncorp.com/touchstone.htm). With Touchstone you can develop your systems documentation, job descriptions and operations manuals on the Web and automatically update them. They are all linked together so one update does the lot. Once your system is in place it will generate all your process check-lists too – so a new employee won't miss anything.

Touchstone can save you money by automating a difficult chore and making sure the processes documentation stays current.

7 Hiring and promoting

Every now and then your clients have to decide about a staff promotion or engage a new manager. This is a serious responsibility for obvious reasons. We would not advise a client to take the irrevocable hiring or promotion step without a psychometric assessment. Omnia® (www.omniagroup.com) does these online for a very reasonable cost.

The candidate fills out the online questionnaire and your client gets a comprehensive report a few days later, reviewed by a “real” person. One of the best things about an Omnia report is a series of questions which they recommend your client should ask the candidate before making a final commitment and offering the job. This alone can be worth many times the cost because it reduces the likelihood of mistakes which, especially in the public service, can be hard to correct.

Omnia can save you money by reducing the risks associated with incorrect or ineffective hiring and promotion decisions.

Conclusion

While not for everyone, these innovative tools are used extensively in the US, less so in Canada and, with one exception, almost never in Canadian governments. Why is that? Isn't the taxpayer entitled to benefit from the efficiencies that innovative management technologies can provide? And where's the risk? There is almost none.

These tools, and others like them, have the potential to generate cost savings for your clients' organizations – and hence for the taxpayer. 

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