



A Strong Foundation

The Tait Report: 20 Years On

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Presentation to *Ethical Standards, Culture and Leadership:*

'Back to the Future' with the Tait Report

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What was the question to which the Tait Report was the answer?

- Climate since 2000 radically different from 1990s
 - difficult to recall atmosphere and challenges of the earlier period
 - obscures questions to which the Tait report was an answer
- Differences between pre- and post-2000 reflect:
 - two fundamentally different ways of approaching the moral challenge of public service
 - two deep currents in Western moral thought



A CCMD Study Team

- Concerns about the direction of public administration
- Since end of 1970s, soaring prestige of the private sector
- Beginning of 1990s: confusion resulting from the initial, over-eager embrace of private sector ideas,
 - questions about accountability and responsibility
 - questions about the PS “deal” and the PS employment contract
 - questions about the fundamentals of public administration in a parliamentary democracy



Focus of *A Strong Foundation*

- Institutional rather than individual
- Ethos rather than ethics
- *Existential* rather than ethical
- Key questions:
 - What is public administration and public management?
 - What is a public service? What's it for?
 - What's a public servant?
 - *Who are we?*



Inductive, not deductive

- Derived PS values *from* the problems, rather than the other way around
- Called its approach “honest dialogue”
 - intended to *model* PS values
 - illustrate underlying argument that PS values are actually formed by
 - role models and example
 - honest dialogue
 - speaking truth to power
- Jocelyne Bourgon: Tait report “rings true”



The key PS “problems”

- Responsible government and accountability
- Employment regime and values
- “Old” vs. “new” values
- New ethical challenges
- PS leadership and people management



Responsible government

- Anxiety about alterations to the traditional “anonymity” of public servants
- Uncertainty about accountability dimensions and requirements of new organizational forms in government (agencies and ASD)
- Tait report clarified concepts and practice of accountability in the public service:
 - Responsibility, accountability, “answerability”
- Reassured public servants about continuity, adaptability of fundamentals of public service.



Employment regime and values

- Concern about “downsizing” in the public service
 - put an end to concept of a career or professional public service?
- Core dimension of security of tenure: non-partisan PS
- Tait report affirmed continuing relevance of
 - professional, non-partisan public service
 - unity and mobility in the public service
 - merit principle
 - values of loyalty
- Importance of PS culture and “critical mass”



“Old” vs “new” values

- Uncertainty about “new public management” – relationship to old “public administration”?
- Prudence and probity vs entrepreneurial risk-taking
- Due process vs emphasis on “results.”
- “Citizen-centred” vs client-centred service delivery
- Managing “up” vs managing “down”
- Tait report’s verdict: tensions are real
 - but “dynamic rather than destructive”
- Groundwork for a “necessary synthesis”



New ethical challenges

- PS worries about subtle new forms of conflict of interest
 - client-centred service delivery
 - empowerment
- Not sure about how to apply, consistent with sound public service values
- Tait report found current principles and tools sound
 - but needed better training and support
 - as part of comprehensive “ethics regime”
- Reaffirmed the importance of rules and laws



Leadership and people management

- Widely-shared perception of a “fault line” in PS
- Those below not sure those above share same PS values
 - or whether senior leadership meets needs of PS
 - don’t seem to “walk the talk”
- Tait report affirmed importance of PS leadership
 - people values are trigger or crucible for PS values
- DMs/ADMs must model PS values
- Selection, evaluation, promotion based on measurements of people management and PS values
- Climate surveys and feedback to ensure accountability



Some key horizontal themes

- Rediscovering the democratic “mission” of the PS
- Rediscovering the public interest
- The values of loyalty
- Rediscovering the meaning of “service”
- Rediscovering balance and equity
- “Encountering the good”: models stronger than codes
- Speaking truth to power
- Renewing the moral contract between elected and non-elected officials



Four families of PS values

- Democratic Values
 - helping ministers, under the rule of law, to serve the public good
- Professional Values
 - serving with competence, efficiency, non-partisanship
- Ethical Values
 - honesty, integrity in PS mean ability to uphold public trust – put public good ahead of any private good
- People Values
 - PS must show same fairness, equity, courtesy, caring to PS employees and to citizens of Canada



Recommendations

- No formal recommendations
- But approx. 35 specific recommendations and 33 general ones embedded in Tait report
- Some implemented
- Some partially implemented
- Some implemented in a different form
- Some implemented – then *de*-implemented
- Some have not been implemented
- Some difficult to judge degree of implementation



After the Tait report

- Post-2000: implementation of some elements of Tait’s “ethics regime”
- Yet also some of the lowest points in recent history for PS *values*
 - hard times for Tait’s report’s vision of a professional, non-partisan public service dedicated to the public interest
- Post-2000 period the best of times – *and the worst of times*



Values vs ethics

- The post-2000 focus has been on *ethics*:
 - On rules, compliance and wrongdoing
 - Individual ethical dilemmas and decisions
 - Moral reasoning
- Pre-2000 focus of the Tait report was on *values*:
 - What's a public service? What's it for?
 - Who are we? And who do we want to be?
 - Existential questions of identity, purpose and goals
 - Habits of *feeling* about the good



Two approaches to the moral life

- Reflects two different approaches to the moral life:
 - What's the right thing to *do*? (Kant/Bentham/Mill)
 - What's the right thing to *be*? (Aristotle)
- Experience of fed PS since 2000 confirms the second question is *prior* to the first
- To be ethical, is “not just a matter of knowing the rules of the game ... It is being committed enough to that game to care how it turns out.”
- To be ethical, “is to be invested in a way of life and to live up to *some vision of what a good person ought to be.*”



Back to the future?

- Tait report focused on what a good public servant ought to be
- Aimed to articulate a vision public servants could
 - invest themselves in
 - seek to live up to
- To recover ethical ground lost since 2000, PS must return to a motivating vision of a public service in a parliamentary democracy
- To “ring true,” must be based on truth-telling:
 - acknowledging problems and errors



Public service as a calling

“Public service is a special calling. It is not for everyone. Those who devote themselves to it find meaning and satisfaction that are not to be found elsewhere. But the rewards are not material. They are moral and psychological, perhaps even spiritual. They are the intangible rewards that proceed from the sense of devoting one’s life to the service of the country, to the affairs of state, to public purposes, great or small, and to the public good.

The rewards of this calling, like those of other professions, come at a price. The price is submitting to very high standards of professional conduct; accepting public scrutiny and accountability; learning to hold a public trust and to put public interests ahead of self; respecting the authority of law and of democratic will; and entering into a community that values these as the foundations of good government. The values of public service are both its price and its reward.”

*A Strong Foundation: Report of the Task Force
on Public Service Values and Ethics, Canada, 1996*