Improvement in Public Sector Decision Making

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Improvement in Public Sector Decision Making

by

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Abstract

Improving public sector decision making has been a continuous quest since the emergence of democratic governance in early Greece. Resistance to more involvement by citizens has been one of the major barriers to improvement, as elites struggle to retain control of the reigns of government. Increasing urbanization and levels of education have produced pressure to solve a growing list of difficult problems. Expectations have risen faster than governments’ ability to respond, which has led to a loss of confidence and increasing citizen initiatives to gain control of the public sector. A model for reform of public sector decision making is possible and flows from many recent initiatives, the implementation of which must now be accelerated through the remaining barriers.
I. The Roots and Evolution of Participatory Democracy.

Democracy and public involvement in decision making have been evolving for more than two thousand six hundred years and yet in many ways they are still in a very primitive state. Democracy is said to have been officially born in the 5th century B.C. in Greece but may have had its roots even earlier in the Doric villages known as demos. This new form of government was a direct response to the autocratic self-serving rulers who were prevalent during this period. The basic tenets of democracy were established as public deliberation, elections, diffusion of power and the rule of law (Mathews, 1994, p.199). These principles are valid today but unfortunately we are still trying to convince the private, political and bureaucratic elites to share power with a largely disenfranchised public.

The aristocrats of the Roman society in the 3rd and 4th centuries B.C. were forced to yield some of their power when the Plebians rebelled against their magistrates. This rebellion is remembered today in the use of the term plebiscite which is a voter initiated change in legislation. Eventually, the Plebians worked their way into the formal ruling class and by 172 B.C. controlled both elected bodies of the Roman Empire (Hopkins, 1983). This incursion of the middle class into the decision making process proved to be short lived as democracy generally fell into a state of decline for the next millennium, although some very interesting and relevant developments impacting on democracy did occur.

During this period of decline for democracy there was a significant growth in the palace administration which eventually lead to the professional bureaucracy we have today. Professional politicians were associated with the earliest democratic experiments but became more entrenched with each passing century as Roman senate seats were passed from father to son. Perhaps the most significant achievement during this weak period for democracy was the effort of Justinian I to bring all Roman laws together through a systematic codification process. The resulting Corpus Juris Civilis became the model for civil law codes in most of Europe (Barber
and Watson, 1988). While these changes did not immediately impact on the ability of democracy to improve and evolve they laid the groundwork for some very significant changes in years to come.

Other changes occurred during the middle ages which also have had significant influence on the development of democracy and public involvement in decision making. In 1215 A.D. the Magna Carta changed the rule of law to apply to all men equally although the application of the new law was extremely problematic (Barber and Watson, 1988, p. 128). Urbanization and increasing trade created a new class "the bourgeois" comprised of merchants, bankers, lawyers, doctors and skilled craftsmen. They wished to share power with the aristocrats, and the clergy, who along with the monarchs had controlled virtually every aspect of life (Barber, 1993, p. 9). This pressure to share power has been an important part of the struggle for democracy from the very beginning of Greek experiments.

The Greek aristocrats were not happy with the rude and ignorant behaviour exhibited in the early public forums (Barber and Watson, 1988, p.26). The Roman aristocratic senators were not very happy with the Plebans and King John was not very happy when the English nobles forced him to sign the Magna Carta. Even respected philosophers came down on the efforts to involve the common man in the affairs of government. Voltaire and Montesquieu wanted enlightened rulers to show the way because they felt the bourgeois class was incompetent and incapable of understanding complex issues (Barber, 1993, p. 48). The Age of Enlightenment (1680-1780) saw many intellectuals concentrate on the imperfections of the Ancient Regime but they couldn’t agree on precisely how the reforms should be achieved. Mosca and Pareto thought political elites could transform themselves (Bachrach, 1967, p. 14). Hobbes and Locke challenged the inherent right of elites and appealed to the use of reason and natural laws (Barber, 1993, p. 44). And finally, the French Revolution captured the attention of the western world with its violent resistance to the control of the elites. Unfortunately, this, like so many other revolutions, did not produce the most favourable or long lasting results.
While democracy may not have progressed as steadily as it might have in the 15th to the 18th centuries there were indeed some significant developments. Industrialization changed the way Europeans lived and how they would eventually be required to govern themselves. The Age of Enlightenment changed the way people thought, which may have confused most people at first but eventually laid the groundwork for modern democratic philosophies. And the French Revolution ushered in a new social and political system that still influences governments today (Barber, 1993, p. 69). The American Revolution, considered by many to be the most successful event in the development of democracy in this millennium, certainly benefited from all of the groundwork which had been laid before from the Greek Doric villages to the French Revolution.

The struggle for democracy and meaningful public involvement took on a new dimension after the American Revolution. According to observers, such as Alex de Tocqueville, the United States of America didn't have the disadvantages of excessive historical and class baggage to slow them down. They were able to have substantive political debates and refine the laws and governmental systems which had been established. Expanding population and economic growth created opportunity for many people and the business elite did not feel the same sense of obligation to the lower classes that the European land-based elite had felt. Dependency was not as present and this led to an even greater dependence on the common man to manage his own affairs as well as be involved in the affairs of government (de Tocqueville, Bradley (ed.), 1980).

The industrial revolution was the turning point in the change from an agrarian society to an urbanized, industrialized society. As population grew in Europe and North America the need for increased government became obvious, especially in densely populated urban areas. Pollution and health concerns were uppermost on the list of concerns, along with fire hazards and crime. There were different views on how to solve these and other problems which heightened the need for political debate. Governments grew in size and complexity making it increasingly difficult for citizens to gain access and special interest groups began to assume higher levels of importance.
Special interest groups were actually considered to be a very positive factor in the preservation of democracy because they helped to provide a balance to the influence of elites or authoritarian rulers (Dumhoff, 1990). One of the earliest examples of special interest groups were the tower societies established in Northern Italy around 1000 A.D. These networks of mutual aid and benefit were one of the few bright spots for democracy at this time in history. In this case the citizens came together to protect each other from violent neighbours and eventually these groups evolved into civic institutions of local government (Putnam, 1993, p. 173). Unfortunately, special interest groups seem to have gotten out of hand in our current system of governance and have actually become a part of the problem we have with effective government operation. Excessive numbers of interest groups, some with inordinate power, sometimes delay or skew the decision making process thus making it more difficult for politicians and bureaucrats to be responsive to the needs of the whole community or society at large.

Citizens have been promised a much more significant role in the affairs of their governments than they are often given or are willing to assume. The United States Declaration of Independence states that each man has a right to pursue his life unobstructed with an equal voice in decisions that effect the whole community. Various theorists including Roland Pennock believed this could be extended to suggest that all men should have the equal opportunity for protecting and advancing his interest and developing his powers and personality (Bachrach, 1967, p. 83). Unfortunately, most democratic governments do not usually live up to this and other similar idealistic goals.

In the early period of America's development direct democracy was alive and well in the form of Townhall meetings where the entire population could vote on important issues. Since that time there has been a gradual distancing of the government from their constituents. In the late 1800's this distancing was combined with a conspiracy theory by Marx and Engels to spawn the creation of socialism (Barber and Watson, 1988, p. 196). Perhaps the strength of America's democratic roots allowed for the avoidance of such dramatic changes to socialistic and even totalitarian governments which
emerged in Europe. Changing the political parties in power or instituting broad based reforms seems to have satisfied the need for change in America in the later half of the 1800's and the first half of the 1900's.

However, the very pressures which spawned the revolutions for democracy in Europe in centuries past, as well as other rebellions, are showing signs of threatening democracy today. Governments are in a serious debt situation, the gap between the rich and the poor is growing, social welfare programs are not succeeding and the list of unsolved problems is getting longer instead of shorter (Barber and Watson, 1988, p. 213). These problems which also include health care, education and environmental conditions are unresolved for many reasons including legislative gridlock, lack of sufficient revenue (due to excessive debt), demands by special interest groups and a decision making process which has become overly cumbersome and complex. Politicians promise solutions but when they aren't delivered people become increasingly cynical (Chrislip, 1995, p. 239). And it's not that the public doesn't want to be involved because a recent survey by the Kettering Foundation found that people were interested, they just didn't feel welcome at the decision making table (p. 243). So it is the process which must bare a major part of the blame for the breakdown in our representative form of government. Citizens have lost control to the politicians, the bureaucrats and special interests including strong business interests. The reluctance of the "system" to address these issues has put the public in a very ugly mood.

The media must also bear a certain amount of the responsibility for this breakdown in our democratic system and processes. They seem to have increasingly come between the political process and the public as a sort of intermediator or interpreter. There are good and bad aspects of the media's role in governance. Certainly they can and often do provide detailed and timely information on issues of public importance. But recently many people in the media have tended to manipulate the news to suit their own purposes which is beating the competition and selling advertising. Many politicians have also engaged in this is manipulation of the press with the public becoming more cynical than ever about their governments and the media (Jamieson, 1993).
The roots of participatory democracy are very long chronologically and some of the examples of success are inspiring. However, the evolutionary process has not been as positive as it might have been given the potential for improvement. The pressure to avoid public involvement has always seemed to be slightly greater than the pressure to pursue it. If one factor were to be identified as the reason for this imbalance perhaps it would be greed. The lust for wealth and power has always been a significant factor in the evolution of our governmental systems. The common good is all too often thought to be threatening to those who already enjoy some special status or condition. Protecting the status quo or even trying to benefit at the expense of others would seem to be one of the primary barriers to the pursuit of participatory democracy.
II. The Loss of Confidence

A fair percentage of the population probably possesses a healthy skepticism about government and this has been true from the very beginning of government, democratic or otherwise. Sometime after World War II there seems to have been an inordinately large drop in public confidence in government in the United States and in many other countries as well. Some political pundits in the United States point to events such as the Vietnam War or Watergate to explain this decrease in confidence but there are probably a number of factors which can be assigned some portion of the responsibility (Hansell, 1996, p.5).

Certainly one of the factors impacting on the loss of confidence in our governments must be the change in the education level of our population. In 1950 two thirds of the people were unskilled workers whereas today two thirds of workers are professional or skilled. This must certainly have created a higher level of understanding about government as well as higher expectations (Osborne and Gaebler, 1993, p. 167). The private sector has also become more consumer sensitive which has produced a higher standard as people expect to get good service and be treated like someone who is special. Governments simply have not been willing and/or able to assume similar levels of excellence (p. 168).

Expectations are only the beginning of the gap which has been created between our governments and their constituents. In many debates about public input into the decision making process politicians and bureaucrats continue to use the time honoured excuse that the issues are simply too complex for the average person to understand. The second part of that argument usually involves some statement by the government representative about people only looking out for their own self-interest while those in government must do what is best for everyone (Mathews, 1994, p. 66). This assumes that people don’t have shared values or shared interests which is clearly not true (Orren, p. 28 Reich (ed.), 1988). It can be argued that the so called "me" generation lost touch with their shared community interests in the 1970’s and 1980’s and practised a kind of blatant materialism,
but hopefully the recession of the early 1990's has brought most of them back to their senses.

Another prevalent reason given for the loss of public confidence in government, is the decreased contact with our governments. Urbanization has caused a large percentage of our population to live in large urban areas with bigger, less accessible governments. State governments and the Federal government have grown in size creating increasing levels of bureaucracy to penetrate. And with inventions such as radio and television it became less necessary for politicians to actually go to the people because they could get there electronically (White, 1992, p. 165). It didn't take long for the politicians and their advisors to realize that this electronic media could be cleverly used to their benefit because it could be used to manipulate public opinion. In the 1970's and 1980's, especially at the national level, the rift between the government and media grew. A very telling point in the deterioration of public confidence in government came when one advisor to President Reagan argued that the constitution did not guarantee the public right to know anything about what the government was doing (Hertsgaard, 1992, p. 40). This was indeed a new high in political arrogance and certainly contributed to the public's feeling that the government was looking out for somebody's interest, but it certainly wasn't the man in the street.

The media has played a role in this loss of public confidence. As the competition for customers and advertisers increased there seems to have been a corresponding decrease in the media's willingness to serve the public's interest. The media seemed to respond to its increasing role as government intermediary by pursuing conflict, scandal and mistakes made by our governments. Substantive stories or good news stories didn't sell according to many editors and publishers (Rosenstiel, 1994, p. 111). The politicians were trying to manipulate the media and the media was trying to bring down the government or at least make them look as bad as possible. How could the public help but become frustrated and cynical with such a steady diet of half truths and negativity?

Expectations, decreased contact and media manipulation only touch on
the attitudinal and behavioural side of the problems facing government and the loss of public confidence. There is an equal case to be made for the lack of actual results. For years governments have thought that throwing money at a problem was the solution. After ten years of education reform and spending over 60 billion dollars, test scores have not improved nor have dropout rates. Tens of billions of dollars on environmental clean-up have also yielded meager results (Osborne and Gaebler, 1993, p. xxi). The list of unresolved problems is growing, instead of getting smaller and every level of government is reeling from the financial and political fallout of these unresolved problems. The taxes spent on welfare and many other government programs has produced unprecedented debts and deficits (Chrislip, 1993, p. 237).

In a recent case in Metropolitan Toronto, in Canada, the Provincial government has threatened to eliminate six local governments in order to create one megacity. In an obvious state of desperation to save their jobs local mayors and council members promised to reduce expenses drastically if this megacity initiative was avoided. The public did not succumb to this pathetic plea and simply responded with letters to the editor asking why these costs had not been reduced in the past.

Governments have not been paying attention, for the most part, to the needs of their customers. Programs have often been planned on the basis that one size will fit all with no regard for the special needs of various groups. When threatened the politicians and bureaucrats circle the wagons in order to look out for their interest first (Osborne and Gaebler, 1963, p. 168). It’s not hard to figure this out when people see the size of government pensions compared to their own. There is little doubt that the public has lost confidence in the public sector. The emergence of third party candidates like Ross Perot, the passage of tax limitation legislation and increased calls for more direct democracy are just a few of the more obvious indicators. Public polls support this opinion and the rousting of incumbent candidates is certainly a good indicator as well (Boyer, 1993, p. 109). The fact that confidence has been lost does not automatically explain how it happened. Understanding why government has been unable to see the problem as it is
or deal with it effectively can be very useful in understanding what should be
done in order to begin to win that confidence back.
According to two public sector consultants, "government agencies have challenges today that are more difficult and complex than any faced by our nation in peacetime. They must cope with seemingly intractable deficits, steady growth in demand for traditional services, new and unusual requirements brought on by a drug epidemic and a highly competitive world economy, and increasing disillusionment with governments ability to serve the needs of its citizens. We can no longer throw money at these ideas. The only realistic solution is to improve performance, providing more and better services for each tax dollar spent. We believe TQM is the best, and perhaps the only, method government can use to meet these challenges" (Carr and Littman, 1990, p. ix). The authors provide a fine brief summary of the problem facing governments, at least from the stand point of the bureaucracy. This is logical given their profession as management consultants and the fact that their livelihood depends on their ability to get contracts to fix or improve bureaucracies. What they have very much forgotten is the role other key actors must play if government is to get the job done and must be joined in that task by the politicians, citizens and the media. It has been the collective failure of each of these groups which has caused government to fail and it will take a joint effort to return government to a level of excellence and respect which is easier to envision than it is to achieve.

The bureaucracy has, in many cases, become too big, too self-serving and unwilling to challenge itself to become more responsive, more efficient and more effective. When "In Search of Excellence" was written in the early 1980's for private sector companies it didn’t take long for someone to adapt the principles put forward for use by governments. George A. Sipel of The Center for Excellence in Local Government in Pal Alto, California established eight elements necessary for local government excellence. They are:

1. values
2. employee orientation
3. autonomy and entrepreneurship
4. closeness to citizens
5. action orientation  
6. political relationships  
7. structure  
8. mission, goals and competence  
(Sipel, 1984, p.2)

One could surmise that this list had something to do with what was not working in local governments at that time. Many local governments probably did not have established values or codes of ethics; employee orientation was probably grossly inadequate; individual initiative and entrepreneurism was likely discouraged; citizens were avoided in most cases; the status quo was considered the safest approach; relationships between different groups was likely very strained; structures were very hierarchical and overly complex; specific goals and attention to competence was the exception and not the rule. If these conditions had not existed it would probably be safe to assume that crime rates would have been lower, welfare costs would have been lower, solid waste would not have been such a pervasive problem, infrastructure would not have deteriorated so badly and our government debt would not have risen so sharply (Bens, 1994, p. 33).

The bureaucracies in most government agencies have not been getting the job done but what about the politicians, have they done any better? One of the biggest complaints against politicians is their unwavering willingness to make promises which they know they cannot keep (Chrislip, 1993, p. 239). Our selection process must also be suspect as charisma seems to guide most voter decisions instead of a candidates stand on the issues or proven track record at getting things done (Bens, 1985, p. 6). The party system has also stymied more than a few well intentioned reformers who found out that the seniority system and special interest groups took over very shortly after the oath of office was sworn. And what happens when political egos bump up against each other as politicians vie for headlines to impress their constituents? Does the lust for re-election ever get in the way of making the right decision for the community, the state or the country? In both the bureaucracy and the political realm we seem to have missed one key element and that is accountability. We haven’t perfected a system for holding
our public servants, elected or appointed, accountable for the right things.

The media has already received some attention but it should be added that accountability is also a problem with this group. Certainly freedom of the press guarantees the media’s right to speak freely on any issue, but we, as citizens, also have the right to insist on fair and accurate coverage of our public business. If this is not done then it will be impossible to provide the public with the information they need to make intelligent and timely decisions. The media has seemed less and less interested in providing this quality information for decision making and more interested in providing entertainment and competing for the limited viewers and readers available. Negative reporting has become the norm as politicians and the media concentrate on character assassination (Rosenstiel, 1994, p. 59). Evidence of the public dissatisfaction with this approach is obvious in most public opinion polls, but a real indicator of their dissatisfaction can also be seen in their declining interest in political conventions. In 1960 the viewing audience for political conventions comprised 82% of available viewers, while only 36% were viewing them in 1992 (Rosenstiel, 1994, p. 208).

Citizens are not without blame when it comes to assessing the reasons why government has been failing. It became popular in the 1970’s and 1980’s to talk about citizen apathy as if it was something that you could catch like a disease. As political scientists examined this thing they called apathy more closely they recognized some factors which may have contributed to this decline in interest in government.

It has been assumed by many political observers over the years that democracy works best when people are involved and that this self-governing aspect relies heavily on a sense of community. Unfortunately, after World War II America, and many other countries, experienced a suburbanization of society which took people away from their urban neighbourhoods and placed them in sterile suburban communities with little inherent sense of community. Our population became more transient with frequent job changes and less roots being laid down (Lasch, 1995, p. 8). Some observers have even called this suburban growth “white flight” because so many
caucasians seemed to be leaving their colored urban neighbours behind. They took their wealth with them causing not only racial divisions but also class distinctions that have consistently revealed themselves in the quality of education and other services offered to citizens of various communities. The inner-cities lost their employment not only due to businesses moving to the suburbs but also due to the general decline in blue collar manufacturing jobs (Peirce, 1993, p. 19). Is it any wonder that citizens have become less excited about their governments? The inner-city people have felt abandoned by all levels of government and the suburbanites were too busy consuming and driving their children to school activities to really pay attention to who was running their cities or their school boards. Of course, this was not universally true. Some communities did manage to build a sense of community and citizen involvement but they were the exception rather than the rule.

Perhaps the most unfortunate thing which occurred during this breakdown in our public sector was the nearly complete failure of most politicians, bureaucrats, citizens and media types to see what was happening. Some academics saw it but very few people were listening to them and we are paying the price for that ignorance today. Politicians and bureaucrats have returned to the time honoured position that most of the public cannot grasp the complex issues of today which translated means we don’t wish to share our power. The media has become equally impressed with their ability to speak on behalf of the people even though no consultation process exists. And the public has lost their ability to be engaged and feels to a large extent that their involvement is not only unwelcome but wouldn’t make that much difference in any event (Lasch, 1995, p. 11).

The result of this total misunderstanding of the seriousness of the problem facing the public sector is a growth in adversarial politics and reactionary decision making. New political parties are being formed. In the United States Ross Perot’s Reform Party got almost 20% of the vote in the 1992 Presidential election. In Canada, a reform party and a separatist party won major victories in the last federal elections with the separatist party actually becoming the official opposition in parliament. Incumbents are being turfed out in record numbers at every level of government. Tax revolts
are alive and well in most regions in North America. Privatization of services has become an extremely popular service delivery alternative and the public debt is being assailed as public enemy number one. The battle lines have been drawn, it's just very difficult to decide who is on which side of any debate or issue. The only thing that most people can seem to agree on is that most governments have not been a roaring success for the most part and something must be done about it; but what?
IV. Case Studies of Hope

Fortunately, not all governments have been total failures. Some have managed to distinguish themselves as models of excellence and are now being increasingly used as a benchmark for how all governments should operate. Reviewing some of the case studies of successful governments can re-enforce what is possible and set the stage for consideration of how other governments might increasingly adopt these reforms.

The success of governments must start with citizens being more interested and involved. A perfect example of decisive citizen action and involvement occurred in San Antonio, Texas in February of 1975. COPS, the Community Organized for Public Service, has used a variety of tactics to get the attention of the bureaucracy and city politicians, but none more dramatic than their "try on" and "line up" campaign that year. The members of COPS had prepared an alternative budget which they felt met their needs better than the City's budget did. They were initially unsuccessful in getting a meeting with the Mayor but then decided they would march en masse to a local department store and a local bank to try on clothes but not buy any and to cash in rolled up pennies then return to get pennies. Their tactics got business leaders' attention who then got the Mayor's attention and eventually led to $100 million dollars being allocated to programs in the alternative budget (Crimmins, 1995, p. 151). Similar citizen initiatives have been recorded from around the world. Citizens in Chattanooga, Tennessee formed their own planning group and dealt with such difficult issues as business closings, failing schools and racial tensions (DuBois and Lappe, 1994 p. 173). Citizen groups in Kentucky started doing their own water tests and eventually got the State to recognize them as valid because State inspectors weren't getting the job done (p. 183). In Colorado Springs, Colorado a computer buff used the computer network in the City to stop and change an objectionable City by-law (Barber ans Watson, 1988, p. 270). In Japan a citizens group used worldwide computer information to stop the destruction of a local forest (p. 271). What we can see from these and similar citizen initiatives is that citizens are no longer waiting to be invited to participate in the decision making process; they are inviting themselves in and they do
not want to wait until they are threatened by some serious problems. Direct
democracy in the form of referendums and the right of recall of poor
performing politicians are just a few of the tools more citizens are demanding
as a way to take back control of their governments (Boyer, 1993, p. 70).

The previously mentioned case studies of citizen involvement as well
as the push in, some jurisdictions, for more direct democracy should not be
misinterpreted as a groundswell of public involvement. It is an encouraging
sign but belies the fact that most citizens are still very distant and disengaged
from their governments. To find out why this was the case The Kettering
Foundation conducted a major survey in 1991 and found that citizens do care
about politics and want to be informed as well as involved. The problem,
according to this survey, is that civic duty has become dormant because
people feel they have been cut off from their governments by a system that
doesn't care about them and listens to special interest groups. The media is
failing in its responsibility and people are looking for ways to become more
engaged (The Harwood Group, 1991). The results of this survey are
interesting but one wonders how valid they are and whether people would
really tell the truth about their personal willingness to become more engaged
because ample opportunity does seem to exist.

Perhaps direct access to most governments is limited due to a number
of factors but citizens have been using alternative methods of improving
their communities for nearly a thousand years. In Northern Italy between
1100 and 1300 A.D. there began to emerge a number of guilds and fraternal
groups who offered mutual assistance to one another. Some of the early ones
were referred to as Tower Societies because they built towers to see if raiders
were coming and then they would warn each other (Putnam, 1993, p. 123).
Some of these groups led to the formation of town councils while others
made up what we call today the "third sector" or non-profit organizations.

Through the ages these community help groups have increased in size
and number offering a wide range of opportunities for involvement and
interaction with the community. Many work in co-operation with
governmental bodies and have a significant impact on public policy and
program delivery. If people really want to be involved there is no excuse so
the results of the Kettering Foundation survey are interesting but one
wonders about their credibility.

People actually seem to be turning off to the available opportunities for
engagement with their communities and their governments. There is a
decline in political party membership, labour unions, church membership,
voter turnout and other third sector opportunities (Horwitt, 1990, p. 414). We
seem to have misplaced our civic values and the traditions through which
these values were expressed. The breakdown in our education system and
the dramatic increase in crime are just two of the prime indicators that we
indeed have lost our ability to be a civil society (Eberly, 1995, p. 121). John
Dewey spoke of the importance of ethics in a democratic state and of the need
for participation for democracy to work. And David Mathews has suggested
that the third sector is the real public sector because this is where the real
community work gets done. This according to Mathews is where the real
political debate takes place, where public leadership is nurtured and where
the public will is expressed (O'Connell, 1995, p. 127). The dichotomy is
incredible as the third sector is there, ready to help people become engaged
and to grow their citizenship, while people seem to wait for some special
hand delivered invitation to join up.

Some citizens are finding the way to becoming more involved and part
of the answer has been the development of new skills. Collaborative decision
making is succeeding where government programs and blue ribbon panels
have failed miserably (Chrislip, 1995, p. 23). In Charlotte-Merklenburg, North
Carolina a diverse group of community stakeholders developed a plan for the
future with strong consensus (McCoy, 1991, p. 121). Phoenix, Arizona’s
incredible growth pressures didn’t stop neighbourhoods from developing a
comprehensive plan for reasonable future growth (Hall and Weschler, 1991,
p. 135). And the success stories continue to pour in with the hope that
someday a truly significant percentage of the population will see the light and
start to pay more attention to their duties and responsibilities as citizens.
Citizens constantly complain about the inaccessibility of the bureaucracy as one of the foremost reasons for their lack of interest in government. Public management has certainly come under extensive fire in recent years and there are some obvious reasons for this. When governments are failing they deliver poor quality services, they implement inappropriate policies, there is weak financial management and they tend to become increasingly arbitrary in their application of rules and laws. This causes a corresponding reaction by the citizens to not comply to the rules, not be motivated to grow the economy and generally reduce their level of caring about the environment and their communities (United Nations Development Program, 1995, p. 21). We can see how low performing governments and disinterested citizens seem to feed on one another in a catch 22 manner. If no one wants to make the first move the obvious result is continued and increased deterioration of the relationship between government and the people and hence the deterioration of democracy.

Fortunately some governments have sensed this gap due to their mismanagement and have taken correctional action. Baltimore, Maryland instituted effective revitalization of its neighbourhoods and its downtown with strong leadership from all sectors including the grassroots. They used collaborative techniques to get governments, businesses and neighbourhoods to work together (Henderson, 1993, p. 329). St Paul, Minnesota Mayor George Latimer challenged the city government to change its role to become a catalyst and facilitator rather than trying to do it all alone. By leveraging the communities resources major problems were successfully overcome in record time (Osborne and Gaebler, 1993, p. 27). The Florida Department of Transportation used Total Quality Management teams to save millions of dollars and improve service as well. Co-operation with other agencies were also key to their success (Carr and Littman, 1990, p. 259). Atlanta, Georgia used a community based approach to solve many problems related to urban poverty. The Carter Center, started by former President Jimmy Carter, played a key role in these initiatives started and bringing people together (Giles, 1993, p. 354). Customer sensitivity has found its way into the public sector with the increased use of surveys, focus groups, interviews, electronic mail, quality guarantees, suggestion boxes and more (Osborne and Gaebler, 1993, p.
The success stories of bureaucratic turn around are growing every day with leadership coming from places like the State of Oregon, the City of Dallas and the Cities of Phoenix and Scottsdale, Arizona (Carr and Littman, 1990, p. 260). Schools are becoming more democratic, public housing is becoming a good place to live, employees are being given an opportunity to speak up and add value to the workplace (Dubois and Lappe, 1994, p. 201). And while the success stories are increasing so is the resistance to change as many public sector managers feel increasingly threatened by this wave of involvement. Some will see the success stories as a reason to be hopeful and try them, feeling less risk, while others will only see the risks and potential downside of letting too many people have access to the information which gives them the power they love so much.

A few of the previous examples of bureaucracies changing were related to service improvement initiatives while most were more related to community renewal. Service improvement deserves a little more attention because of the influencing factors and trends which are a part of this change in our public sector. One of these influencing factors is the increasing willingness and ability to use timely, high quality information to help find and implement service improvements. The need for better information to make public sector decisions was identified hundreds of years ago. In London around 1667 Sir William Petty felt he could substantiate a cost benefit ratio of 84 to 1 if certain improvements were made in public health conditions (Thompson, 1980, p. 2). This attempt to analyze the impact of proposed programs and projects has been repeated on various occasions over the past three hundred years, usually for projects related to large capital expenditures such as road construction or water projects. In democratic societies this ability to properly evaluate alternative proposals can allow governments to systematically compare various options and select the one which serves the public best (Schmid, 1989, p. 285). The words "can allow" are very important in the above statement because it is also possible to manipulate this information to serve the special interests which formed over the years to get what they wanted from government.

The continued urbanization of the United States and other countries
led to larger more complex governments which tended to support the need for more centralized planning and decision making. This tendency occurred at all levels of government as politicians and bureaucrats rationalized central planning on the basis of its efficiency and ability to make decisions which were better for everyone concerned (Little and Mirrless, 1990, p. 84). Unfortunately, the exact opposite happened as central planning around the world proved to be both inefficient and ineffective in many cases. After this deficiency became increasingly apparent in the 1980’s there was a move to change the way information was gathered and utilized. Central agencies were still felt to be the best gatherers of information in many cases but the analysis and use of this information often occurred more effectively at a decentralized or lower level, closer to the people being impacted. In this way the inaccuracies or disagreements concerning the data could be debated by the actual stakeholders. Costs and benefits could be compared and traded off by those who would not only pay the bills but also be required to live with the consequences of any decision (Campen, 1986, p. 33). Even central agencies began to improve their consultation processes to get input from local stakeholders, or at least they wanted to appear to be seeking this consultation. In reality many were simply going through the motions to get people on side so to speak. We will see in later analysis that the people have not been fooled by these efforts.

Two groups not mentioned thus far regarding efforts to reform are the politicians and the media. A few case studies of such reform efforts will show that changes in these two groups may be the biggest challenge of all.

Politicians seem to approach reform from a very structural and a financial basis. They put forward suggestions to change the rules related to campaign finance or the elimination of negative advertising (Levin, 1995, p. 294). These are not bad topics to address but they do not seem to get to the heart of the problem which is how to encourage better candidates to run for office and how to effectively hold them accountable once they have been elected (Bens, 1985 p. 6). Some media representatives have been much more creative and focused not only on improving the quality and performance of politicians but also on improving the media’s role in public affairs.
At the national level one of the first efforts by the media to reform was a joint effort by the three major networks to try harder to ensure truthfulness in the advertising bought during political campaigns. Verification of information was more actively pursued during the 1992 Presidential campaign and this was a significant improvement (Rosenstiel, 1994 p. 280). Several television stations in the United States and Canada have picked up on the idea of holding town hall meetings on local, regional and national issues (DuBois and Lappe, 1994, p. 121). Several newspapers have decided to do more indepth coverage of key issues both during campaigns as well as on a regular basis in order to provide their readership with more high quality information. To their surprise this not only pleased their readers it also helped their bottom line with increased sales (Crimmins, 1995, p. 99). Some radio and television stations have even allowed local business people to use their facilities as a means of conducting public debates and polling the audience to provide politicians with immediate feedback on key issues or their performance related to those issues (DuBois and Lappe, 1994, p. 121). Unfortunately, the media is being increasingly owned and controlled by fewer and fewer people which makes access more difficult for those without contacts or money. Again American creativity has played a role as some low income communities have started their own radio stations (p. 110) or used computer networks to mobilize people to take action on critical public issues (p. 129).

The media is also in need of improvement but it might be too much to ask them to take the initiative on this issue. Some have begun significant reforms to help the public understand issues and increase their participation but can improvements be made in the area of media accountability? The PEW Charitable Trust thinks so and has established the PEW Centre for Civic Journalism which gives grants to various newspapers, radio stations and television stations to help them strengthen their relationship with readers, listeners and viewers. As several media outlets improve their performance a new standard is being established, which other media outlets will be increasingly expected to attain (Fouhy, 1994, p. 262). Accountability is also being addressed by Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR), a small New York based organization whose purpose is to eliminate bias and censorship in
the media. They have already successfully tackled a few major networks and have created a sense of awareness in the media that someone is indeed watching and will challenge them if their performance is not acceptable (DuBois and Lappe, 1994, p. 33).

These are all impressive initiatives but they do not yet constitute a ground swell of reform. There is still much work to be done in getting a majority of the media, politicians, bureaucrats and citizens to really pay attention to the reforms needed to put our public sector back on track. Perhaps by looking at all of the possibilities together along with some reform models which have been put forward it will be possible to produce a new comprehensive model for reform which could accelerate the improvement in the quality of our public sector, and thus the restoration of confidence in it.

Collectively the changes and reforms previously presented constitute a major paradigm shift for the public sector from a closed culture to a much more open and participative one. To better understand the dynamics of this shift as well as the implications for all concerned, it would be helpful to identify various criteria or factors which would need to change over time. These factors will be presented in three evolutionary stages which categorize the state of the public sector from a severely closed and low quality position through a mid-point evolutionary stage and finally to an open, high quality mature state. We will title these three stages the closed system, the uncertain system and the open system. The following types of characteristics or tactics are usually evident in each of these stages.

**Stage One: Closed System**

1. One strong political party with no or weak opposition
2. Weak leadership or overly dominant leadership
3. Secretive bureaucracy
4. Special interests drive the public agenda
5. Media is controlled or easily manipulated
6. Citizens are unorganized
7. Information quality is poor and is not shared
8. Employees are either unorganized or overly controlled

**Stage Two: Uncertain System**

1. Multiple political parties with adversarial styles
2. Leadership struggle is constant
3. Bureaucracy is self-centred
4. Special interests form alliances against others
5. Media is not fully competent and has narrow perspective
6. Citizen groups exist but are very ineffective
7. Information systems exist but not effectively utilized
8. Labour organizations suspicious and not part of the decision making process

**Stage Three: Open System**

1. Progressive and co-operative politicians
2. Open and shared leadership
3. Progress, quality oriented bureaucracy
4. Groups put community first, special interest second
5. Media is competent, involved and trusted
6. Citizen groups well organized, well researched and engaged
7. Information is high quality, timely and shared
8. Labour organizations co-operative and participating

(Bens, 1994, p. 33-34)

Many citizens might react to these three systems by asking where does Stage Three actually exist? While the existence of such public sector organizations is still relatively rare they do exist at every level of government in the United States, Canada and elsewhere in the World. The more usual situation is for a jurisdiction to be operating at different levels in each of the eight categories. In other words they may be advanced in some categories but still developing in one or more of the others.
The consequences of not moving towards Stage Three has been well documented in a number of recent books including "The Quickening of America" by Paul DuBois and Francis Lappe, "Excellence in Government" by David Carr and Dan Littman and "Reinventing Government" by David Osborne and Ted Gaebler. Some of the consequences mentioned most frequently in these and other sources include:

1. Increasing taxes
2. Decreasing level of services
3. Decreasing condition of physical infrastructure
4. Increasing crime
5. Increasing environmental problems
6. Increasing health problems
7. Increasing social unrest
8. Increasing economic vulnerability
9. Increasingly adversarial relationships
10. Loss of trust and decreased quality of life

In other words, if we do not address the problems facing the public sector in America and elsewhere in the world, we are doomed to living in a world in a constant state of crisis management and decline. We will reap the rewards of not having paid more attention to what the public sector was doing and spend an inordinate amount of our time dealing with the problems created, instead of making progress as the civilized, advanced people we think we are.

Moving from Stage One to Stage Three will not be easy because people resist change both at an individual level as well as at a group or organizational level. In 1977 the Rand Corporation undertook a study of innovation in state and local government. They found that bureaucracies are always innovating and changing but only when the changes result in opportunities for bureaucratic growth or increased status and power (Downs, 1967, in "Tinkering with the System", Yin, Heald and Vogel, 1977, p. 123).

During the past few decades, centrally driven bureaucracies had a
significant argument to support their continued control of information and decision making due to the existence of mainframe computers. There was virtually no other way to organize and manipulate the massive data being produced until the introduction of the microcomputer. With the introduction of this single technological innovation the pressure for decentralization, local autonomy and experimentation was tremendously increased. The central bureaucracy no longer held all of the power which mainframe computers had bestowed on them (Bolman and Deal, 1991, p. 13).

The previously mentioned three stages of public sector existence based on their relative state of openness can actually be divided in four or even five different stages of evolution if necessary. It depends on how specific one wants the various characteristics of the culture to be. It may also be helpful to use a visual medium to capture the essence of this paradigm shift.

**Figure 1**

**Paradigm Shift of Public Sector Culture**

Along the vertical axis the degree of openness can be plotted while the horizontal axis can be used to depict the time required to go from one stage to another. (in this case four stages are used). Under each of the stages various characteristics or traits can be attributed which allows for the evaluation of where an organization or jurisdiction is and how well it is moving towards the desired final state (see the characteristics previously listed under the three
The excuses people will give concerning their inability to move towards the open system can include the following:

1. We are not certain what the problem is.
2. We are not certain what the current state is.
3. We are not certain what we or others want.
4. We do not have the time or resources necessary to change.
5. We do not know who is supposed to do what.
6. We are not certain how to get what we want.
7. We are not certain how to determine when we are succeeding.

(Bolman and Deal, 1991, p. 27).

These and similar excuses are often put forward to explain why any change initiative is not being supported by the various stakeholders.

Each of these change barriers or excuses has been tackled by the various models developed recently to guide public sector reform. Five different models or criteria will be presented to provide a cross section of possibilities upon which to build an even more comprehensive reform model.

The previously mentioned model presented by the Center for Excellence in Local Government established eight elements necessary for local government excellence but recently the National Civic League has produced a few additional criteria. These ten Civic Index Components are deemed to be very useful in assessing a communities ability to produce a high quality of life for its citizens.

1. Citizen Participation
2. Community Leadership
3. Government Performance
4. Volunteerism and philanthropy
5. Intergroup relations
6. Civic education
7. Community information sharing  
8. Capacity for co-operation and consensus building  
9. Community vision and pride  
10. Inter-community co-operation

While the two models were addressing somewhat different groups of people it is interesting to note various similarities and differences. Both mention citizen involvement, inter-group relationships and the need for a shared vision. The Civic Index added leadership, civic education and co-operation which are vital to the achievement of a more open, high quality community or public sector organization.

In 1988 The Urban Institute in Washington D.C. documented a model for managing change in the public sector which was developed in the State of Minnesota. The STEP approach (Strive Toward Excellence in Performance) features a six step process.

1. Closer customer contact  
2. Increased employee participation  
3. Increased empowerment for managers and employees  
4. Partnerships to share knowledge and improve the utilization of resources  
5. Productivity improvement techniques  
6. Performance measurement to monitor success and make necessary adjustments  
   (Hale and Williams, 1988, p. 17).

Some similar components continue to be present including citizen participation, employee involvement and emphasis on entrepreneurial activity aimed at increased productivity. Partnerships are a bit more suggestive than relationships and performance measurement is definitely more specific than mere information sharing. This model starts to move towards action and qualitative aspects as opposed to just presenting categories of possible improvement.
In 1990 consultants at Coopers and Lybrand identified ten principles to Total Quality Management for Public Sector Organizations:

1. Customer focus
2. No tolerance for errors
3. Prevention of problems
4. Fact-based decision making
5. Long-term planning
6. Teamwork by all stakeholders
7. Cross functional co-operation
8. Pursuit of continuous improvement
9. Decentralization (empowerment)
10. Partnership with outside vendors

(Carr and Littman, 1990, p. 4)

We can see an even more aggressive pursuit of attention to detail and challenging the public sector to produce its own bottom line. Citizens and employees still play key roles but now employees are urged to work in teams and outside partners are challenged to work more closely with these teams. Performance measurement takes on even more importance in the prevention of problems, low tolerance for errors and pursuit of continuous improvement. Fact based decision making really drives this model.

Perhaps the most popular or at least the most well known of all improvement or reform models is the one contained in “Re-inventing Government” by David Osborne and Ted Gaebler.

According to Osborne and Gaebler governments can reinvent themselves if they ascribe to these basic principles:

1. Becoming more catalytic and helping others to deliver services rather than doing it all themselves.
2. Becoming a community-owned government so that the citizens feel empowered and a part of the delivery process.
3. Infusing competition into government to force a revolution
in service costs.

4. Being driven by a mission or a vision instead of by the usual set of cumbersome rules.

5. Being results oriented with concentration on outcomes instead of inputs.


7. Becoming more enterprising in order to find ways to make or save money rather than just spend it.

8. Becoming more anticipatory in order to prevent problems rather than always curing them.

9. Decentralizing in order to get more employee participation and teamwork.

10. Becoming more market oriented in order to leverage economic conditions to be an advantage to government. (Osborne and Gaebler, 1993).

Many of the same principles are repeated by Osborne and Gaebler with a significantly stronger emphasis on the involvement with the private sector or private sector practices.
V. A Model for Reform

Each of the models had a particular emphasis which is understandable given the orientation of the authors. The challenge now is to pull all of these models together and create one that can serve as a balanced, objective and comprehensive model for any public sector organization wanting to improve their decision making process.

This proposed model or guidelines for improving public sector decision making is most applicable for local governments but they can also be very useful for senior levels of government. There are three basic components.

A. **Prerequisites** - Those things which a jurisdiction should be willing to do in order to prepare to fundamentally change the way public decisions are made.

B. **Principles** - Those beliefs which should be adopted and used to guide the changes which are necessary.

C. **Practices** - Those methods of making decisions which must be adopted if improvement is to become a reality.

A. **The Prerequisites**

1. **Commitment to explore and change** - There must be a sufficient level of awareness that something needs to be done in order to improve the quality and timeliness of public sector decisions. This is often done as a political event as one party or group attacks the practices of the incumbent group. If change is going to happen there should be a bi-partisan commitment to explore ways and means of doing what is best for the citizens and the community not what is best for the political parties.

2. **Assessment of willingness and ability to change** - The mere desire to change is not sufficient if there is insufficient true willingness or readiness to
stay the course. An excellent starting point for such an assessment would be the Civic Index developed by the National Civic League. The Index uses a series of questions which can be put to a cross section of community representatives either in a survey or a workshop format. The questions appear in Appendix I and can be scored using any number of techniques in order to produce an overall rating. If the workshop approach is used it would also be possible to explore the reasons for any differences and capture these explanations as part of the assessment process. It is advisable to utilize a professional facilitator in order to ensure the workshop stays focused and does not deteriorate into a non-constructive public debate.

In addition to the Civic Index assessment there are some other assessment criteria which should be factored in. These criteria were developed by the author for the Canadian Urban Institute which, in turn was under contract to the Canadian Government, to provide planning and organizational effectiveness assistance to emerging democracies in Eastern Europe, Latin America and the Far East. The considerations are as follows:

**Historical considerations** - What are the traditions and roots of this community or region? Are they relatively new or are they an established society with many generations marking their progress and development?

**Cultural considerations** - Where did the people come from and what are their customs? Is it a homogeneous group or is there much diversity? Is the existing diversity compatible or are there inherent and historical differences? Are their special religious considerations?

**Political considerations** - Is there a dominant party or group? Do people actively participate in the political process? Is there a sense of pride in the political traditions or has there been an erosion of the political landscape?

**Organizational culture** - Are the existing government institutions and business institutions respected or is there a high degree of rancor due to hardships and difficulties? Are there good organizational values in place?
Awareness and expectations - Are a majority of the people in touch with the current state of affairs and do they have a realistic set of expectations about what can be accomplished as well as what is involved?

Receptiveness to assistance - Is this jurisdiction receptive to outside experts or government assistance? Will they be able to keep such assistance in balance with their own sense of responsibility?

Work ethic - Does this community have a strong work ethic which would allow them to effectively follow through on any and all plans which are developed?

Education and skill levels - Is the population well educated and possessing the necessary skills to work together to solve their collective problems? Is there a tradition of intelligent public debate which can be used to build the skills necessary to be successful? Are there educational institutions which are able and willing to assist in this learning process?

Public attitude - Is there sufficient evidence of public interest in their community to be certain that serious challenges will be met with equally serious improvement?

Quality of life expectations - Does a majority of the community actually want a better life for themselves or are they sufficiently depressed to be satisfied with their current lifestyle?

The combination of the Civic Index components and those developed for the Canadian Urban Institute should allow for a very comprehensive assessment of the current situation. If work needs to be done in certain areas it is better to know this at the very beginning of any initiative to improve the public sector decision making process. These factors will determine the strength of the foundation upon which these improvements will be built and thus the relative possibility for success can be determined.
If a jurisdiction does not have a civic body to guide the assessment they can utilize the services of local academics, a consultant or the services of a national group like the National Civic League.

3) Public education - There will always be the need for some level of public education in order to create a sufficient level of awareness and concern to properly engage the public in a change initiative. Usually interest is associated with some type of crisis which the community responds to. This is fine but it does not always build the solid civic infrastructure necessary to sustain such involvement over a long period of time. True citizenship is based on a constant vigilance and involvement by a considerable number of dedicated individuals and groups. Two groups usually play a key role in this is public education, the schools and the media. Educational institutions at all levels should offer courses on civic education and the skills of citizenship. The media should include ongoing public education as an integral part of their news and public affairs function. This commitment to broad based citizen education is a key prerequisite to improving the decision making process because educated and informed citizens are absolutely necessary.

4. Electing Better Politicians - We cannot hope to improve public sector decision making if we continue to send inferior people to hold public office. The question is who and what decides if someone is inferior or not? In 1985 the author of this paper published a booklet entitled "Cutting Through Charisma: A Layman's Guide to Electing Better Politicians". The criteria for measuring incumbents and new candidates was set forward as well as some guidelines for applying the criteria.

In the case of incumbents the criteria were as follows:

a. People skills - Is the politician available to the people and do they actively seek input and advice from a wide cross-section of their constituents?

b. Council skills - In addition to good attendance does the politician actively participate and consistently make intelligent and meaningful contributions to the body to which he/she was elected?
c. **Accountability** - Has the politician fulfilled his/her duties in terms of maintaining service levels, improving conditions and keeping costs under control?

d. **Addressing the issues** - Does the list of issues pursued by the politician seem to match his/her constituents and has he/she been able to convince his/her fellow politicians to address these issues?

e. **Promises** - Did the politician make the right type and number of promises given his/her ability to deliver on them? Are these promises actually measurable and can his/her contribution to accomplishing them be determined?

f. **Vision** - Does the politician have a clear vision for the community and does it match well with most other people in the community?

New candidates cannot be evaluated on these same criteria but other criteria are possible including educational background, employment/experience, political philosophy, general reason for running, position on the issues, proven political skills and personal attributes.

Several communities have used these criteria to make significant changes in their elected bodies. If such criteria are presented by the media or some other objective body like the League of Women Voters then there is a good chance that more qualified people will be in public office to work with citizens and others to improve the decision making process.

5. **Adoption of Principles** - Any fundamental change in a community or an organization should be subject to a set of guiding principles. These will be covered in the next section of this three part model.

6. **Commitment to proceed** - Once the groundwork has been laid for a change in the decision making process there must be a definite commitment to proceed. This may include a motion from the governing body or be a resolution coming from a community workshop. Consensus that
improvement is needed and possible must be forthcoming.

B. Principles

Edwards Demming and many other quality gurus have established basic principles for the adoption of total quality management. Several of these principles are adaptable in the case of improvements to public sector decision making because there is also a fundamental change in attitude and behaviour required by the stakeholders involved.

1. Freedom of information - The basic right of access to information by citizens is essential to the improvement of public sector decision making. While laws have been passed to grant this right there are often flaws in the legislation which provide loopholes for those who do not honour the principle of this legislation. There is very little room on this account, for restriction in a truly open society.

2. Citizen participation - Citizens should be invited to be involved at the very beginning of the decision making process and stay engaged throughout the process. Multiple opportunities for involvement should be provided and their should be an accountability process to determine if citizens were satisfied with these opportunities.

3. Employee involvement - Many agencies will be involved in the decision making process and each should subscribe to the open and full involvement of their employees. As the front line of government service, regulation and other activities it is the employees who understand how things get done and the impact various decisions are likely to have. A commitment to their active involvement must be included as well as some feedback on their satisfaction with that involvement.

4. Continuous improvement - The principle of continuous improvement is crucial because it establishes that nothing is perfect and therefore cannot be defended blindly by politicians and bureaucrats trying to fend off the opposition's quest for power. If there is always room for
improvement then there is less risk involved in attempting something new or different.

5. **Best practices** - Accompanying the pursuit of continuous improvement is the pursuit of best practices. In politics it has been very unpopular to admit that some other jurisdiction may be doing something better than your own. This should be replaced with the assumption that someplace else has probably found a better way and it is our obligation to find it and transfer it successfully to our jurisdiction.

6. **Teamwork** - The role of individuals is fundamentally changed in this model as the community and the organizations' goals become the important consideration. People committed to working in teams must put aside individual agendas and subjugate themselves to the pursuit of team goals. This principle ensures that greed is minimized, especially if teams are comprised of a cross section of interested parties.

7. **Facilitated leadership** - The leadership called for in this model is somewhat different than the strong visionary leadership of the past. Leaders in this model play the role of facilitator, trying to build a vision based on the input of many individuals and groups. Experience and wisdom certainly come into play but not in the dominating way they have in the past (Svara, 1994).

8. **Collaboration** - The preceding seven principles all lead up to one final and overriding principle which is the commitment to collaborative decision making. That means people working together, trying to understand each others motivations and needs in order to develop solutions to problems that satisfy everyone. This win-win strategy is the cornerstone of this decision making model (Gates, 1991, p. 113).

C. **Practices**

The actual government decision making process is a specific set of practices which taken together allow governments to deliver the programs
and services required by their constituents. Peter Drucker would caution that government must first determine what it should be doing before it sets in motion the plans and procedures for doing it (Drucker, 1996). Of course he is correct, but those decisions can be made as a part of the overall decision making process being proposed here. If a public sector organization has taken the steps outlined under the prerequisite section of this paper, and enshrined the principles put forward as well, then they should be ready to put into place the open, continuous improvement decision making model which is about to be explained. Figure II graphically illustrates this model, showing the various steps of the model as well as the cast of supporting elements. An explanation of each step and each element will establish the logic and the benefits of this approach to public sector decision making, especially at the local and regional levels of government.

The steps

1. **Corporate values** - The foundation of any decision making model or process must be the corporate or organizational values upon which decisions are made. The International City Management Association has developed a Code of Ethics which many municipalities use for this purpose. The Code, with twelve separate values, establishes what the organization believes in such as fairness and equity in the treatment of its employees and honesty and integrity on the part of all employees. These core values may seem unimportant but without them there can be many abuses which would prevent the organization from being able to provide the necessary services in an efficient and effective way for the benefit of the community.

2. **Strategic Plan** - An organization can have an ethical framework by virtue of the values established but it also needs a contextual framework for the entire community. Every community should have a strategic plan which establishes the vision for what kind of community the citizens want as well as a plan for how that vision will be achieved. There are many excellent strategic planning models available to guide this exercise but one of the best was developed by the Ontario Government in Canada to guide the development of municipal strategic plans. This six step process includes a
Figure II
Continuous Improvement Model

Corporate values
↓
Strategic Plan
↓
Corporate Vision
↓
Corporate Strategies

Empowerment
Training
Customer Satisfaction
Communication
Cooperation
Accountability
Recognition
Benchmarking

Performance Measures
Program/service Improvements
Program evaluation
Performance Measures

Policies & Procedures
Performance Standards
Goals & Objectives
Roles & Responsibilities

Budget & Cost/Benefit Analysis
full range of community participation elements, the preparation of a preliminary plan, a situation audit, an overall game plan, an action plan and a monitoring program. These strategic plans must belong to the community but some organization must provide the co-ordination function and this logically is the role of government. Individual actions may be undertaken by various private, public or non-profit groups but the local government should pull all of these efforts together and help to expedite them. To accomplish this, and deliver the regular services required, a local government must have an organization which is functioning at a very high level of performance. If this is not the case then the plans will not be fully realized, the services will not be well delivered, and the citizens will suffer by paying too much for an inadequate level of service as well as an inferior quality of life compared to what they could have.

3. **Corporate vision** - The values are motherhood statements which focus on ethical behaviour and the community strategic plan establishes a broad community framework but now the municipal organization must determine what role it wishes to play. The corporate vision could be determined by checking against the ten criteria developed by Osborne and Gaebler in “Reinventing Government”. Their vision of government is based on the basic premise that direct government intervention should be minimalized, that business should be asked to do more of what government now does, and that what government does do should be very market driven and enterprising. Not all communities will want their governments to play the role that Osborne and Gaebler have suggested. Therefore, there should be considerable thought given to the appropriate role for government given the historical traditions and current circumstances which exist. This should not be something decided exclusively by the people within government but rather be a collective effort of many key decision makers in the community. This presumes that the American model of representative government prevails which requires elected persons to listen to their constituents between elections rather than the British model of representative government which ascribes to the principle of only influencing politicians at election time.

4. **Corporate strategies** - The corporate vision needs to be made more
specific with the adoption of corporate or organizational strategies. The specific vision for such topics as economic development, social infrastructure, environmental conditions and cultural preservation must be established. An inventory of assets and infrastructure must be made to decide what resources are available to pursue these corporate strategies. If the situation audit of the corporation reveals that limited financial resources are available this could have a dramatic impact on the type of strategies which are adopted. Likewise, if the physical infrastructure is deteriorated or the human resource base is deficient it would make no sense to plan for strategies which depended on higher goals in each of these or other areas. Corporate strategies take a realistic look at what is desirable as well as what is feasible. If priorities are necessary, which they usually are, then this is the place where those priorities must begin to come into play.

5. **Policies and procedures** - While Osborne, Gaebler and many others have encouraged governments to become less pre-occupied with rules there is simply no way that any sizeable organization can avoid the need for some policies and procedures. They help to bring order to the decision making process by ensuring that certain functions will be done in a consistent and equitable manner with all citizens getting fairly similar treatment. Whether it is the establishment of snow removal policies and procedures or those needed for various inspection services there is a need to ensure that relevant rules are complied with and proper procedures are followed.

6. **Performance standards** - In many cases a particular activity or task has been done a sufficient number of times that a performance standard can be established. Marriage licenses can be issued within a certain timeframe, streets cleared of snow with a certain number of hours. These performance standards can even be industry wide standards such as how much asphalt one person can lay down in an hour or how many garbage pickups one person can make in one hour. There may also be standards or requirements set by senior levels of government such as pollution limitations or eligibility criteria for certain benefits. Not all services have such standards but where they do exist such information can help government employees to gage what is possible, desirable or required in their own situation.
7. **Goals and Objectives** - What is possible in terms of service levels and quality can be best articulated as specific goals and objectives. In this way all of the previous steps are brought together to consider what is possible against what is desirable. Available conditions, resources and skills must be taken into consideration in order to establish how long something will take, how much it will cost and how well it will be done. Objectives are best written when they follow a basic acronym SMART which stands for specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely. It is also very important that all goals and objectives be assigned to specific individuals or work teams in order to have clear responsibility and accountability. In fact, several governments are using performance contracts or agreements to ensure that their desired goals and objectives are achieved.

8. **Roles and Responsibilities** - While managers and some work teams may be assigned specific goals and objectives many other employees will be responsible for certain parts of various services or programs. It is very important that these employees know who is responsible for what so they can be properly prepared to fulfil their role. Job descriptions are a good starting point but they do not always allow for a clear understanding of every situation which arises. It is even possible for job descriptions to become a negative factor if they are too rigidly applied and employees decide to do only what is specifically assigned to them. That is why the principles and practices previously discussed under the heading of openness and quality called for more empowerment of employees and working in teams. By keeping managers and employees focused on service to the customer and working together it is possible to ensure that roles and responsibilities will not be interpreted in a negative way.

9. **Budget and Cost/Benefit Analysis** - The ultimate test for what government will do and how it will do it, is the determination of what it will cost and what benefits will be realized. The budgeting process in many governmental bodies is a very political process with the most money often being allocated to the departments with strong political backing or forceful leaders. In recent years this has changed in some jurisdictions as politicians, bureaucrats and citizens have realized that wise budgeting is absolutely
necessary. Resources are scarce and the cost of correcting poor spending decisions is now well known. Roads left unmaintained cost more to fix later. Social problems usually get bigger instead of smaller and environmental problems often grow exponentially if left unattended. Program based budgeting was introduced by Defense Secretary Robert McNamara in the 1960's although similar systems were around prior to that time. Benefit/cost analysis and other quantification and qualification efforts have been around for centuries (Thompson, 1980). What has been missing in many cases is the meaningful input of citizens and the accurate measurement of service outcomes. Some important strides have been made in these areas and the benefits have been well documented. There is no longer any excuse for governments to tolerate ineffective resource allocation.

10. **Performance Measurement** - A valuable tool in the benefit-cost analysis exercise is the development of useful and meaningful performance measures. They are the partner of goals and objectives because it is the measurement process which allows governments to determine if the goals and objectives have been achieved. Performance measurement has been known to governments since the early 1930's but it is only in the last decade or two that measurements have been put to serious use. As a communication tool in the decision making process performance measurements are key because they allow bureaucrats and politicians to inform the public about the efficiency, effectiveness and quality of the service citizens are buying with their tax dollars. Measures also allow government to monitor economic, social and environmental progress so the outcomes of various programs and policies can also be evaluated. Governments can also use measures to track the health of their organization which can be crucial in terms of employee morale and have an impact on overall productivity. Performance measures also provide an accountability tool for the citizens to determine if their public servants are living up to the promises they make. Perhaps that is one of the reasons why performance measurement has not caught on as well as it should have. Giving citizens specific and timely information on government performance can be dangerous for public servants who know they are not doing what is expected of them (Bens, 1991, p.4).
11. **Program evaluation** - Performance measures are a communication tool and an accountability tool but one of the other important functions it serves is as a monitoring tool. As an early warning system performance measurement allows government to find and correct problems while they are still relatively minor. When a measure indicates that something is not as it should be then it may be time to undertake an evaluation of that particular program or service. This will allow the reason for the problem to be identified along with alternative solutions for addressing the problem. Program evaluation is a step by step process of asking many questions about the problem identified to eventually determine the root cause. Usually there are many factors which must be taken into consideration which again reinforces the need for teamwork and co-operation by those in government, as well as those stakeholders outside of government who may play some role. There has been much program evaluation by government over the years but all too often these studies seem to be used to simply delay action in addressing a particular problem. Program evaluation used, or abused, in this way does not really assist the decision making process. Rather, it hinders that process. This is precisely why some of the previous topics such as values, election of better politicians and accountability are so important. If the best people are elected and hired as well as held accountable for what they are doing, then and only then, will a tool like program evaluation be put to its proper use (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1978, p2).

12. **Program and service improvements** - At the conclusion of the program evaluation process there is usually a set of recommendations for improvement of the policies, programs or services of the governmental agency. If the topic is sufficiently important it may be brought to the public for consideration immediately or dealt with by the government in an expeditious manner. If it is less important it may be deferred to the time when a new strategy is developed for the jurisdiction or the new budget is submitted. At some point these improvements must be considered and usually there are multiple solutions to many different problems. This is why many governments have experienced decision making gridlock; they simply become paralyzed that they will make the wrong decision so they decide to make no decision. If, on the other hand, they have incorporated many of
the steps mentioned here such as performance measurement and adequate levels of employee and public involvement then there is likely to be less apprehension about the decisions to be made.

As part of these steps there are key elements which deserve special attention. They are not individual action steps per se but rather are activities which can occur in a number of the steps. In a way some of them are also principles which re-enforce and work with the previously mentioned values and principles.

13. Performance Measures- The final step in this model is the determination of whether the previously mentioned improvements have actually achieved the desired results. Performance measurement is used again at this point.

With the completion of this consideration of possible improvements a government entity is back to the step called corporate strategies where the cycle repeats itself again.

Key Elements

1. Empowerment - There have been a few references to the term empowerment. Generally this is defined as the sharing of power or the democratization of the decision making process. This is usually referred to as the key to changing an organizations culture because it represents a fundamentally shift from an old hierarchical paradigm to a new horizontal paradigm. One of the most effective ways to illustrate this very important element in the decision making process is the use of an empowerment transition chart. Figure III shows how power is shifted in an organization from management or senior decision makers to the front line workers and citizens (Katzenbach and Smith, 1993, p.16).

2. Training - If decision making is going to be more open and democratic then there will be a significant need for various types of specialized training. Beyond the technical training required to learn one's job content there will
**Figure III**

**Empowerment Transition**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Management decides, informs staff</th>
<th>Management gets staff input before deciding</th>
<th>Employees decide &amp; recommend</th>
<th>Employees decide &amp; act</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Telling</td>
<td>• Selling</td>
<td>• Participating</td>
<td>• Delegating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Directing</td>
<td>• Coaching</td>
<td>• Facilitating</td>
<td>• Liaising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Management is accountable and responsible</td>
<td>• Employee ideas harnessed as input to decisions</td>
<td>• Accountabilities and responsibilities are clearly shared</td>
<td>• Employees are accountable and responsible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Management is in control</td>
<td>• Employees are consulted</td>
<td>• Employees consult management before acting to gain support</td>
<td>• Employees set direction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Information travels down</td>
<td>• More listening to staff</td>
<td>• Two way info flow</td>
<td>• Two way info flow - focuses on bottom up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Not much information is shared</td>
<td>• More information is shared</td>
<td>• Most information is shared</td>
<td>• All information is open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Appraisal from top</td>
<td>• Some peer review, client review</td>
<td>• Subordinate rating</td>
<td>• Employees rate each other &amp; superiors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Hiring done at top</td>
<td>• Employee input to hiring</td>
<td>• Shared hiring</td>
<td>• Hiring at each level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Top accountable for results</td>
<td>• Top accountable for results</td>
<td>• Shared accountability for results</td>
<td>• Employees accountable for results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Quality control</td>
<td>• Employee feedback</td>
<td>• Employee projects</td>
<td>• Quality Management</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
need to be training on such topics as strategic planning, facilitation skills, teamwork, conflict management, process mapping, problem solving, performance measurement, priority setting, project management, benefit-cost analysis, benchmarking and many related topics. The skills required to serve customers better, work in co-operation, seek continuous improvement and make decisions collaboratively are very special. Not only should an organization have an overall training program, every employee should have a personal development plan which allows them to continually learn and achieve to the best of their ability. This is one of the consistent themes of this decision making model.

3. **Communication** - Another overriding principle of this open and democratic system of decision making is the sharing of information. Politicians must know the wants and needs of the citizens. Bureaucrats must share information in a timely fashion with each other, with politicians and with citizens. Everyone needs to consider who needs what information and why they need it? Unfortunately, as has already been pointed out, information is often used to gain or retain power. It can also be used to influence decision making in both a positive and a negative way. The lack of effective communication is often cited as one of the major problems plaguing organizations today (Miller, 1989, p. 137).

4. **Co-operation** - Co-operation goes hand in hand with communication as the key element in the new culture being recommended for public sector organizations. Many private and public sector organizations have experienced serious organizational problems due to the inability and unwillingness of various departments to work together. Operating as separate and distinct entities they often work at cross purposes and cause serious problems for unsuspecting clients. Bureaucratic infighting and lack of co-operation wastes time and money which taxpayers can ill afford. Co-operation is also important between jurisdictions and levels of government as costs can often be reduced through the sharing of facilities and resources as well as the avoidance of problems through joint planning. Partnerships between private, public and non-profit organizations are also becoming a very popular and effective way to deliver better, less expensive services. By
recognizing the special skills of certain organizations and finding ways to share those skills and limited resources it is possible to deliver a higher level of service to the public at a reduced cost.

5. **Benchmarking** - Government has acted very differently than businesses in the past when it came to searching for new, innovative ways to do things. In business, ideas are virtually stolen on a daily basis in order to keep up with or ahead of the competition. The Rand Corporation found that public sector innovations took 11 years to be transferred once their value has been proven to be beneficial to a majority of potential users (Yin et al., 1977, p. 124).

Politicians and bureaucrats have traditionally been fairly unwilling to admit that somewhere else was doing something better than they were because that would be an admission that they were doing something wrong. This is not correct thinking and many municipalities and senior government agencies have begun to change their attitude about searching for better ideas. Some organizations such as the International City/County Management Association and the United Nations have set up publications and computer networks to share best practices from around the world. Comparing one government agency to another and finding out how some keep costs down and service levels up is healthy, and this benchmarking practice should be an integral part of every government’s operation.

6. **Customer sensitivity** - We have mentioned the need for citizen involvement in the decision making process, but citizens are also consumers or customers. They in effect purchase services from various governments and need to be treated like the valued customers they are. Businesses have been paying much more attention to this important topic and the public has started to change their level of expectation. They now expect excellent service and have transferred that feeling to include the public sector. Unfortunately, this has happened at the very time when governments are downsizing and increasingly unable to meet these increased expectations. This reinforces the need for governments to get feedback from their clients to find out what they do expect and how they might serve them better. If choices need to be made
about what services to change it would be helpful to know what the clients think should be done. This philosophy of customer sensitivity also applies to the relationship between and among government departments and agencies. They all need to consider each other as customers and treat each other accordingly. This goes far beyond citizen involvement, co-operation and communication to become a real change in the attitude of government about why they exist. They exist for the citizen and the customer and this should never be forgotten (Osborne and Gaebler, 1993, p. 166).

7. **Accountability** - At every step of the decision making process some type of accountability needs to be built in. People generally want to be held accountable because it helps them to feel a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction that they are achieving something significant. Traditional performance appraisal systems in government have been very poorly administered as well as being overly subjective (Kelly, 1972, p. 16). A few governments have been changing their accountability systems to make them more objective, more equitable and more effective. By involving staff, training managers and spending more time on this important topic governments have realized a significant improvement in employee performance (Carr and Littman, 1990, p. 198).

8. **Recognition** - A companion of accountability should be an adequate system of rewards and recognition for all government employees. Some taxpayers and government critics may complain that salaries, and especially pensions, are already too generous, but for many employees under the senior level of management, this is not necessarily the case and the employees want more than just financial rewards. They want recognition as professionals and people who often put forward extra effort with very little thanks. Some governments have responded to this need with creative programs to share cost savings or allow peers to reward each other. Such programs are known to build morale, reduce turnover and generally improve the performance of employees at every level of an organization (Carr and Littman, 1990, p. 199). Recognition should be a daily exercise by all managers and fellow employees as they support each other and recognize the special efforts of their colleagues.
This model has presented the necessary prerequisites, principles and practices to produce a public sector organization of excellence. Prior to the presentation of this model there was some discussion of the consequences of not having governments which serve us well, so it seems appropriate to consider what the benefits would be of having governments which do follow these aforementioned guidelines.

Although many governments do subscribe to many of the guidelines mentioned there are only a few which have seemed to consistently lead the way in experimenting with and adopting many of them. Some of the cities most often mentioned in the literature include Phoenix and Scottsdale, Arizona; Dallas, Texas; Sunnyvale and Palo Alto, California; Milwaukee, Wisconsin and Charlotte, North Carolina. Progressive states include Oregon and Wisconsin. Federal government agencies with good track records in some sections have included the U.S. Air Force and the Department of Parks and Forestry (Carr and Littman, 1990).

These and other progressive government agencies continue to realize the following benefits:

1. Reduced costs compared to their less progressive counterparts
2. Higher levels of customer satisfaction
3. Lower error rates
4. Higher levels of service and higher quality services
5. Higher levels of innovation and creativity
6. Lower levels of pollution
7. Fewer social problems and lower crime rates
8. Better economic conditions. Lower unemployment
9. Higher levels of citizen participation and voter turnout
10. Overall better quality of life
   (Osborne and Gaebler, 1993, p. 22).

It might be argued by some critics that claims of such benefits are not valid because these jurisdictions have healthy economies and therefore would have derived these benefits in any event. That could be true accept
that there are many wealthy communities which cannot claim many of these benefits and there are very poor cities like Curitiba, Brazil which can claim most of them and is improving every year (Margolis, 1992, p. 42). The evidence may not be totally empirical but neither is it totally anecdotal. The results of more open and democratic governments are definitely increasing and if this proposed model were adopted by more governments the benefits could be considerably accelerated.
VI Accelerating through the Barriers

It may also be possible to plan for the accelerated use of this model and at least three separate strategies should be considered.

The Positive Approach

This approach to accelerating public sector reform and improvement is positive but it is also passive by comparison to the other approaches which will be considered. This approach encourages the public sector through normal channels such as trade journals, professional associations, citizen groups and the media to adopt an improvement philosophy. Citizen groups and the media would feature stories about successful agencies which had adopted reform and improvement strategies in order to encourage others to do the same. These stories are readily available in many books, magazines and even videos such as the one produced by Tom Peters on excellence in the public sector. The public sector trade journals and professional associations would also feature such success stories or best practices but would also support these recommendations with information on how to adopt these new practices. This capacity building or learning approach would depend on the individual initiative of public sector politicians and managers who come into contact with these materials.

The sheer increased weight of evidence to support the improvement of public sector performance may be sufficient to maintain some momentum but this is not borne out in past practice. That is why organizations like the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) and the Economic Development Institute of the World Bank have jointed to produce publications such as the “Guide for Managing Change for Urban Managers and Trainers”. This guide provides managers with a complete set of tools for managing the changes necessary to become a modern, progress government body. Topics include how to initiate a change process, how to assess organizational effectiveness, how to assess personal effectiveness, how to solve problems, how to change leadership styles and many other useful subjects. In fact, there is an entire series of publications for elected
officials, with work exercises and case studies. These materials were formally introduced for the first time as the second United Nations Habitat conference in Istanbul, Turkey in June of 1996. Thousands of representatives from the public sector were in attendance from around the world as were representatives from many non-governmental organizations (NGO's). It is difficult to gauge the immediate impact these materials have had but the topics of capacity building and change seem to be increasingly present in local, regional and national conferences around the world, (note: the author attends these conferences on a regular basis).

The United Nations has also initiated a computer based best practices program which provides case study information to users of the Internet. This new best practices program joins others which have been ongoing for many years by the International Association of City and County Management and several other university and trade associations.

New organizations are also being formed on a regular basis to promote some aspect of this change and improvement process. A few years ago Francis Moore Lappe began the Institute for the Art of Democracy, which promotes citizen involvement and initiative as a key element of the reform process. These new NGO's are joining with others to create more momentum through research, promotion and information sharing.

The breakdown of confidence in the public sector due to their less than capable performance over the past several years has created a new threshold of interest in the public sector which is encouraging. The National Civic League, founded at the turn of the century by a group of reformers, including Teddy Roosevelt, has taken a particularly active role in this reform effort. They have produced a Civic Index which allows any community to self-evaluate to determine its strengths and weaknesses, as well as initiate an improvement program. One of the ten elements of the Civic Index is government performance and the League actually provides consulting assistance to communities wishing to use this Index. The League also provides a monthly journal which keeps academics, government practitioners and reformers up to date on the latest developments in
government and community reform. Their national conference acts as an annual clearing house and re-energizing exercise for those committed to making government as good at it can possibly be.

The positive approach to accelerating public sector reform and improvement has many champions and very commendable initiatives. Perhaps the most encouraging feature of this approach is that it does not depend totally on the public sector to promote it. In fact, a majority of the impetus seems to be coming from the Third Sector, the non-profit NGO's which were so relatively quiet in the 1970's and 1980's when governments were doing so many things wrong. With the help of this Third Sector it is quite possible that this positive and somewhat passive approach may actually work but there are those who believe that more aggressive strategies will be needed (Wallis, 1966, p. 35).

The Pro-Active Approach

Improving the public sector has never been an easy task. Through the ages the protection of the status quo has been the order of the day for many reasons. In the first instance it is the nature of humans to fear change and attempt to retain those systems, structures and procedures with which they are comfortable. In the case of public sector there are other motivating factors for this protection of the status quo which include an arrogance around their knowledge and ability versus those outside the government. Also, politicians and bureaucrats often enjoy the power they have attained and do not wish to relinquish it to those who would not know how to yield it appropriately. For these and other similar reasons government has avoided reform (Osborne and Gaebler, 1993, p. 323).

The pro-active approach to improving the public sector has been created out of frustration with this resistance to change. As debt levels and taxes increased without corresponding improvements in services or facilities, and as many problems continue or get worse instead of better, many people outside of government began to contemplate ways that government could be coerced into action. The initial response to government resistance to change
often manifests itself in rather general and non-threatening activities such as letters, phone calls, presentations at public hearings or quiet demonstrations at the site of a project not totally satisfying to the public opinion. As these techniques fail to get the desired results, citizens began to find more aggressive and hopefully more effective ways to communicate their dissatisfaction. Petitions would be circulated and large stacks of names from disgruntled citizens would be delivered to city halls, state houses, or national assemblies. Once again citizens were often thwarted in their efforts to get the attention of their governments.

In some cases, vehicles of direct democracy existed which allowed citizens the access and opportunity to influence governments. Citizen initiated referendums have been possible in states like California for many years and the debate over the value of these mechanism continues to rage. Recall legislation allows voters to unelect someone who has been particularly ineffective or corrupt, before their term of office has expired. Where these tools of direct democracy do exist citizens at least find they have some meaningful way to get the attention of their governments. Unfortunately, this power does not exist in most jurisdictions in North America even though citizens have been requesting and even demanding such tools for many years. Government resistance to direct democracy reforms has become more than many citizens can bear (Naake, 1996, p. 41).

The reaction is, in many cases, citizen initiatives which are not usually within the realm of conventional practice. Some might even categorize these actions as civil disobedience, although some are much more positive than that term implies. Citizen groups have been known to demonstrate in front of projects in order to stop them. Examples would be airports taking away prime farmland or tree cutting taking away endangered plant and animal species. Over the years there have been many such demonstrations which caused the term ‘not in my backyard’ (nimby) to be born. But this resistance has gone well beyond the mere nimby resistance to unacceptable projects. Now citizens are getting together on computers to change proposed laws which they think are unfair. They form committees to physically patrol their communities to keep out prostitutes or drug pushers. They form other
committees or groups to clean their neighbourhoods physically or even do inspections of water quality which are not being properly done by the authorities. In other words citizens are starting to do those things which they always expected their governments to do, but have determined that they won't get done unless they do them (Borut, 1996, p. 26).

Unfortunately, it's usually a crisis or an emergency which triggers this citizen action and that means government is still in a crisis management mode. A few communities like Chattanooga, Tennessee have combined their problems into a broader context and formed a citizens committee to tackle a wide range of issues within an overall community planning initiative. By mobilizing their neighbourhoods, businesses and other special interest groups the citizens of Chattanooga have been able to successfully tackle such serious problems as urban blight, transportation, unemployment, crime and pollution. Various government agencies eventually joined in, but it was a group of concerned citizens who took the initiative where governments were unable or unwilling to do so (DuBois and Lappe, 1994).

These citizen initiatives may need to be accelerated if the public sector is going to be stimulated to change. There is a reluctance to promote civil disobedience or citizen initiative because there is a fear that such encouragement might lead to violence or other problems. National citizen groups report on such initiatives, but they haven't yet decided to actively promote such activities in other jurisdictions.

Perhaps a better method would be to respond to the need for such initiatives by monitoring local situations. There are news monitoring agencies which can access most local newspapers and, with sophisticated computer filters, they can pull out any stories fitting a specified set of criteria. In this case, they could pull out all stories related to citizen dissatisfaction with some public sector agency. If a package of material on organizing citizen action groups and mounting effective citizen initiatives was available, it could be sent to any group which seemed poised to take advantage of such materials. In this way 'just in time' information would be available to help accelerate and improve citizen initiatives. Such kits could also be advertised.
on the Internet or through conventional advertising. In fact, some material of this type is already available, although most does not promote the more aggressive initiatives which have been mentioned here.

Clearly citizens need more evidence concerning the consequences of not reforming their public sector organizations now. An examination of the impact of various service improvement and cost reduction possibilities has led one researcher to conclude that many public sector organizations are wasting between 20 and 30 percent of what they spend (Bens, 1991, p. 8). This is confirmed by some evidence comparing private sector operation of public services which reveals a 15 to 30 percent decrease in cost when the private sector takes over. These figures are not usually scientifically validated but they are certainly important to consider, especially when trying to get citizens to take a more active role in reforming their government (Osborne and Gaebler, 1993, p. 45). The continuous improvement model proposed in this paper could be more forcefully promoted if citizens were aware of individual savings and service improvement opportunities. These missed opportunities are one of the biggest potential benefits of taking a more aggressive approach to government reform. The Rand Corporation has shown that the transfer of innovation in the public sector is very slow and this is born out in individual studies of municipalities to determine how many innovations have been transferred versus those which could have been (Bureau of Municipal Research, 1979).

A national news story on these lost opportunities, the continuous improvement model and the need for citizen initiatives to force government attention to these matters is long overdue. One story in Time Magazine or on 60 minutes would turn the tide in terms of accelerating the reforms needed. A group of concerned citizens or agencies could easily produce a very convincing story and, if it was not utilized by the main stream media, it could be made into a documentary and distributed through other channels. Now is the time to take full advantage of the evidence to support the reforms proposed in this paper. The weight of evidence is impressive and the public seems ready to respond.
The Competitive Approach

The pro-active approach to encourage improvement in public sector decision making features several initiatives to stimulate positive reform. By getting the attention of our public servants, as well as by taking direct action to influence public policy and public services, it is hoped that attitudes will begin the change in this group. But it is not enough to hope for such changes in our politicians and our bureaucrats. If we really want to accelerate through the many barriers we must also hold them accountable. There must be standards of performance and methods of evaluating the improvement in policy making and services.

There have been several monitoring and measurement tools mentioned which can be used to create such an accountability system. In the spirit of American competition it should be possible to provide standardized guidelines for citizens to follow at the local, state and national level in this evaluation of their public servants.

One of the monitoring tools can be drawn from the booklet entitled "Cutting Through Charisma: A Layman’s Guide to Electing Better Politicians". The guidelines used to make this initial assessment can be utilized repeatedly to determine if a politician improved during his or her term of office. This guide evaluates both behavioural and professional elements. In order to measure actions, citizens could use the Civic Index to determine if the ten categories of community assessment have improved or not, as a result of the outcomes achieved by incumbent politicians. Numerical evaluations could be assigned in both cases in order to keep a more accurate record. Citizen groups could could tabulate the results from their members or newspapers could tally results submitted by their readers. These wouldn’t necessarily be totally accurate or scientific results, but they would be extremely helpful in terms of getting politicians to pay attention to their performance, as well as provide citizens with some very useful assessment information.

These tools can be changed or upgraded to suit the conditions in
various jurisdictions because there is no real need to create a national average. The information may be very helpful for people wanting to move to a new community or for businesses wishing to establish a new location. Knowing the relative quality of politicians is almost as important knowing the relative quality of the education system. Somehow parents always manage to find out where the best school system is if they really want to. They should be just as interested in the quality of their municipal governments and the politicians.

It is equally important to know what the quality of the bureaucracy is. Some specific tools have been developed to assist in this type of evaluation and one such tool developed by the writer of this paper is presented as Appendix II. This tool has been successfully used by municipal governments in North America and Europe. While it measures overall local government performance, it has special implications for the bureaucracy which is responsible for most of the categories included in the evaluation. This tool can be used by municipal governments to evaluate themselves but it could also be used by citizen groups, chambers of commerce or other NGO's as well. By using such an evaluation tool on a regular basis, it would be possible to track the improvement of the government and the bureaucracy.

A further refinement of the evaluation tools just mentioned could be made with the addition of actual performance measures for the departments of any government, at any level. Many agencies have developed such measures and citizens should insist that all governments adopt this practice. In this way citizens can monitor the average time it takes for a fire truck to arrive or how long it takes to get a marriage license. They can find out how much it costs to teach a young person to swim or how long a fixed pothole stays fixed. If every government agency had a set of performance measures, then citizens could accurately monitor the improvement or lack of improvement in every government service on a regular basis. Such measurement systems exist in the State of Oregon, as well as in cities like Phoenix, Arizona, Dayton, Ohio and Sunnyvale, California.

Citizens need to challenge their politicians and bureaucrats to develop
such measures and if they don't then they should join with their NGO's and develop such performance measures on their own. This would also allow citizens to make more accurate evaluations of initiatives to privatize public services. Many of the recent privatization efforts were not done with well prepared cost-benefit analysis information and we will likely find that many mistakes have been made that we will pay for in the years to come (Rose, 1994, p.3).

The competitive approach is more about accountability, while the positive approach dealt more with education and the pro-active approached encouraged initiatives. They certainly can be done together and should be, in order to get the optimum improvement in public sector decision making. But they also represent a natural evolution of thinking and action. We can even consider these approaches as gradual changes in the status quo and create a management of change model to track the impacts as we move from one approach to the next. Fifteen separate indicators have been created to allow for this tracking of impacts and they are presented as Figure IV. A brief description of each category would perhaps be in order.

**Management of Change Indicators**

1. **Elites** - The public sector is controlled, for the most part, by a relatively small group of elites from both inside and outside of the government. They naturally want to hold onto the power they have attained, but will find it increasingly difficult to do so as the various methods of improving public sector decision making are successfully applied. Elites can change the same way senior managers change when a new flatter organization is created along with a new participative culture. The elites will still be there, but their role will change just as the experts role will change (Chrislip, 1994, p. 25). They will become facilitators instead of taking all of the responsibility and eventually they will be comfortable in their new role as mentors and coaches (Gates, 1996, p.3).

2. **Citizens** - The role of citizens must change substantially if public sector decision making is really going to be transformed. At present citizens are
Figure IV
Accelerating Through The Barriers
Management of Change Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status quo</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Pro-active</th>
<th>Competitive Accountability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elite control</td>
<td>Elites resist</td>
<td>Elites hiding</td>
<td>Elites changing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizens minimalized</td>
<td>Citizen awareness</td>
<td>Citizens control</td>
<td>Citizens drive process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest groups dominant</td>
<td>Interest groups defend their role</td>
<td>Interest groups defend themselves join broader debates</td>
<td>Interest groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politicians manipulate</td>
<td>Politicians convert</td>
<td>Politicians retire</td>
<td>Politicians accountable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bureaucrats deflect</td>
<td>Bureaucrats blame</td>
<td>Bureaucrats retreat</td>
<td>Bureaucrats accountable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media negative</td>
<td>Media confused</td>
<td>Media take sides</td>
<td>Media accountable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reform through re-organization</td>
<td>Reform through individual initiative</td>
<td>Reform through group initiative collaboration</td>
<td>Reform through</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information protected</td>
<td>Information subjective</td>
<td>Information shared</td>
<td>Information utilized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication mostly one way and as PR</td>
<td>Communication channels opened awareness up</td>
<td>Communication forced open</td>
<td>Communication multi-directional and trusted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership by seniority/power</td>
<td>Leaders sell &amp; promise reform</td>
<td>Leaders join citizen initiatives</td>
<td>Leaders facilitate and empower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values missing</td>
<td>Values identified</td>
<td>Values emerge</td>
<td>Values established</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systems complex</td>
<td>Systems review</td>
<td>Systems re-engineered</td>
<td>Systems self-adjusting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services and infrastructure deteriorating</td>
<td>Services under examination for rationalization</td>
<td>Services prioritized and arbitrarily</td>
<td>Services and infrastructure improving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxes increasing</td>
<td>Taxes stabilizing</td>
<td>Taxes reducing</td>
<td>Taxes stable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of life deterioration</td>
<td>Quality of life examined</td>
<td>Quality of life seems better</td>
<td>Quality of life is improving</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
minimalized but they must increase their awareness, take more control and eventually become the primary drivers in the decision making process. There is evidence to suggest this can happen in special situations, but in order for it to happen on a wider scale some serious information sharing must occur. Just as health issues have moved from the health journals to the mainstream media so must the movement towards responsible government move from the reformers to the general citizenry (Friedland, 1996, p. 47).

3. **Interest groups** - The role of special interest groups will be a particularly difficult change to manage since they are already involved, but too often in a self-serving way. They must become more aware of the interest and needs of other interest groups and the broader community. By adopting a more collaborative style most interest groups can find considerable common ground with other groups and help to bring communities together instead of tearing them apart (Chrislip, 1993, p. 224).

4. **Politicians** - The role of politicians will need to change so dramatically that many of the current cadre will likely opt for early retirement. They will resist, but citizens have already begun to speak with their support of alternative parties and their ousting of incumbents. This revolution will likely continue until politicians are found who meet the publics increasingly high expectations and are willing to be held accountable.

5. **Bureaucrats** - Like their fellow insiders, the politicians, bureaucrats will resist changes in the decision making process, or at least many will. Unlike their political friends, bureaucrats can not be unelected so they will be more likely to resist to the end, although a growing number are adopting some progressive practices. In the end accountability mechanisms may be the only way to get many bureaucrats to pay attention.

6. **Media** - The media will need to make some adjustments if the public sector decision making process is to be improved. Some media representatives have already begun to move away from the overly negative concentration of their coverage on the public-sector. Confused by pressure to make profit as well as serve the public interest, it may take some guidelines
from outside sources to direct reform of the media. They too must be held accountable by objective bi-partisan groups. Producing balanced coverage without impinging on freedom of the press. Constitutional rights will be a delicate situation requiring vigilance and hard work (Friedland, 1996, p. 47).

7. **Organization reform** - The actual reorganization or re-inventing of governmental units will occur in quite different ways during this process of change. Current practices favour restructuring of the organization with little attention to the interworkings and behaviour of individuals and groups. This superficial reform methodology needs to give way to a more holistic and interactive process which creates new relationships and challenges the organization to change its culture to consider the customer and the quality of service provided. Collaboration will be the earmark of this part of the change process with a noticeable improvement in the engagement of more people throughout the organization as well as people from the outside (Potapchuk, 1991, p. 159).

8. **Information** - A vast difference in the quality and sharing of information should be noticeable as the public sector decision making process undergoes improvement. Information is often used for selfish purposes today and is protected by those who feel threatened. Much of the information used to make decisions is rather subjective, but with the development of performance measurement systems information will become more objective. The requirement to share and better utilize this information will be built into strategic planning models and also be part of the accountability mechanisms with the public sector (Crimmins, 1995, p. 92).

9. **Communication** - With change in the quality of information and the suggested sharing of this information, must come an improved desire and ability to actually communicate. Opening the channels of communication and pushing information through them does not automatically guarantee that effective communication occurs. Information must be timely, well presented, received and used in order for communication to be effective. This qualitative element of communication must be monitored by all participants involved in the decision making process and continuous
feedback provided to ensure the desired improvements are occuring in the use of information.

10. **Leadership** - The research on the transformation of leadership style during a cultural change or shift to a more participative organization points to clear distinctions, falling into four categories. The status quo sees many leaders telling people what to do. The next stage involves the selling of ideas, while the final two involve joining to do things in teams and delegating more responsibilities. Some leaders will be able to adapt to this more facilitative style, while others will have difficulty. Once again organizations will need to build in accountability mechanisms like employee evaluation of managers in order to ensure this desired change of leadership style actually occurs.

11. **Values** - One of the key building blocks to many of the desired changes in public sector decision making is the establishment of values by which people decide how they will behave. Values such as trust, honesty, consideration and merit are just a few of the most common ones that should be embedded in every organization and community. These values are often implied or expressed in our religious backgrounds or even our laws, but they need to be specifically adopted and monitored if they are to be adhered to. As a cornerstone of collaborative decision making, the formalization of these value systems must be encouraged and even demanded.

12. **Systems** - Government systems have become very complex over the years, with the result that the word bureaucracy has become a very negative word implying difficult to reach or utilize. People expect that the transformation of the public sector to a more open and participative system will reduce the complex nature of our bureaucracies allowing them to become much more user friendly. This will require extensive evaluation and re-engineering on the part of politicians, managers and employees. The methods to accomplish such improvements are readily available with only the appropriate incentives and accountability mechanisms to be properly developed and disseminated. Professional associations will play a role in this but so should the media, citizen groups and other others who can bring the
necessary pressure for reform.

13. **Services and infrastructure** - A very visual and important indicator of changes in public sector decision making will be the improvement in services and the communities physical infrastructure. The current state indicates that many communities are experiencing a deterioration of both services and infrastructure in spite of increasing levels of taxation. Improved productivity and creativity can reverse this trend as techniques are available and need only to be properly publicized with sufficient encouragement and pressure to allow a larger number of public service agencies to move forward more quickly with these improvements (Wallis, 1993, p. 128).

14. **Taxation** - Some politicians are beginning to promise tax stabilization or even tax reduction, but very few can deliver on these promises. Lower taxes in one category often means other types of taxes will increase usually at a different level of government. These false adjustments in the level of taxation should eventually be replaced with more realistic and accurate corrections. The change in taxation to a reduced or at least a stable and value added situation will be one of the later results of the transformation of the public sector decision making process.

15. **Quality of Life** - Perhaps the last indicator of success for this change in public sector decision making will be noticeable changes in the quality of life experienced by the citizenry. The economic, environmental, social and cultural conditions should start to change for the better as the decision making process improves.
Bibliography


Appendix I

Civic Index Questions

1. **Citizen Participation**
   1. Do citizens volunteer to serve on local boards?
   2. How visible and active are local civic groups?
   3. Do citizens know how local government works?
   4. Is participation proactive or reactive?
   5. Are citizens actively involved in major projects?

2. **Community Leadership**
   1. Is there active leadership from all three sectors?
   2. Is government willing to share leadership turf?
   3. Are there training programs to nurture new leaders?
   4. Is leadership results oriented?
   5. Is leadership risk-taking?
   6. Do leaders take the long-term view?
   7. Do leaders from the three sectors work well together?

3. **Government Performance**
   1. Is government free of corruption?
   2. Does government address qualitative concerns about services?
   3. Is government professional and entrepreneurial?
   4. Is government responsive and accountable?
   5. Are services provided equitably?
   6. Does government consider and utilize alternative methods of service delivery?
   7. Is government a positive force in addressing community needs?

4. **Volunteerism and Philanthropy**
   1. Is there an active community foundation?
   2. Do local corporations have active giving programs?
   3. Does the community have long term philanthropic goals?
   4. Do local programs encourage and honour volunteers and philanthropists?
   5. Do government and business work closely with the non-profit sector?
5. **Intergroup Relations**

1. Is the community dealing with ethnic and racial diversity?
2. Does the community promote communication among diverse populations?
3. Do all groups have the skills to become involved in the community?
4. Do groups cooperate in resolving broad disputes?
5. Do small, specific conflicts escalate into larger issues?
6. Is the community dominated by narrow special interest groups?

6. **Civic Education**

1. Do schools promote or require community involvement?
2. Do schools, churches, and youth agencies offer civic education?
3. Do civic education efforts involve the entire community?
4. Do youth have ample opportunity to engage in community service?
5. Are schools teaching citizenship and civic responsibility?

7. **Community Information Sharing**

1. Do citizens have information they need to make good decisions?
2. What role does government play in making information available?
3. Do schools and libraries play a role in informing the public?
4. Are there civic organizations designed for this purpose?
5. Do the media cover community issues fairly?
6. Do the media play an active and supportive role in the community?

8. **Capacity for Cooperation and Consensus Building**

1. Are there neutral forums and processes where all opinions are heard?
2. Are there informal dispute resolution processes?
3. Do community leaders have regular opportunities to share ideas?
4. Are all major interests represented in collaborative processes?
5. Do all three sectors work together to set common goals?
6. Do leaders reach collective decisions and implement them?

9. **Community Vision and Pride Checklist**

1. Is there a shared sense of a desired future for the community?
2. Has the community completed a broad strategic plan?
3. Does the community have a positive self-image?
4. Does the community preserve and enhance what is special and unique?
5. Does the community proactively monitor critical issues?
6. Does the community deal with problems before they become crises?

10. **Inter-Community Cooperation Checklist**

1. How do local governments relate to each other?
2. How do region-wide policy challenges get resolved?
3. Is economic development addressed on a region-wide basis?
4. Do leaders in the region have a common forum to discuss issues?
5. Are any services provided on a regional basis?
6. Are any planning activities carried out on a regional basis?
Appendix II

Organization Assessment Survey

There are a number of factors which combine to determine how well a city is operating. Making an honest assessment of the current situation is the first step toward developing a strategy to ensure the city's decision makers are making every effort to perform at the highest possible level.

Review each factor by answering the questions provided and then indicate the overall rating for each factor. Fair or minimal ratings indicate areas where improvement is most needed.

1) The city organization is structured in a way that is understandable and allows for clear lines of authority, responsibility and decision making.

Yes No

a) All departments report to a central administrator or manager who co-ordinates all services and programs.

b) Responsibility for each service area is clear with no disputes between departments or other agencies.

c) The number of departments and agencies is appropriate for the size of city and level of responsibility assigned.

Overall rating: Excellent Good Fair Poor

2) The policies and regulations used to guide the decision making process are clear, comprehensive and easy to interpret.

Yes No

a) A policy document exists which explains how and when to apply all city policies.

b) Legislation and regulations exist for all situations with appropriate enforcement mechanisms.

Overall rating: Excellent Good Fair Poor
3) The city has a very current and comprehensive strategic plan which is used to guide all decisions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
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</table>

   a) The strategic plan incorporates all land use, economic, social and environmental plans.
   
   b) The plan is based on a set of corporate values which promotes equity and fairness to all.
   
   c) The plan includes specific objectives which can measure progress accurately.

Overall rating: Excellent       Good       Fair       Poor

4) The city has a high level of co-operation and consensus among all of the key stakeholders in the decision making process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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</table>

   a) The politicians and the bureaucracy work very closely together with minimal disagreement.
   
   b) The city works well with all senior governments with few disagreements or delayed decisions.
   
   c) The level of co-operation between departments within the city is very high with few problems.
   
   d) The city works closely and well with special interest groups such as business and environmental groups.

Overall rating: Excellent       Good       Fair       Poor
5) The level of employee morale and productivity is excellent with employees highly motivated, creative and working well in teams.

Yes  No ?

a) Managers trust and respect employees with little supervision needed in most cases.

b) Employees work together and freely assist each other whenever it is necessary.

c) Employees are happy in their work and very satisfied with the way work is assigned.

d) Managers and employees are recognized and rewarded when they do outstanding work.

Overall rating: Excellent  Good  Fair  Poor

6) The city is very aware and interested in meeting the needs of citizens and the users or customers of their services.

Yes  No ?

a) The city regularly surveys their citizens and service users to identify their needs and level of satisfaction.

b) The city uses feedback from citizens to help guide the development of their capital and operating budgets.

Overall rating: Excellent  Good  Fair  Poor
7) The city uses a system of priority setting which is based on objective, factual information and a systematic method of assessing the overall costs and benefits of all decisions.

Yes  No  ?

a) The city has a complete performance measurement system with measures of efficiency, effectiveness and quality for all services and programs.

--- --- ---

b) The city conducts evaluation of costs and benefits on regular basis especially on new, expanding or a problematic service areas.

--- --- ---

c) The city uses a priority setting process which compares the economic and social benefits of various programs and services in order to expand or reduce the appropriate ones.

--- --- ---

Overall rating:    Excellent    Good    Fair    Poor

8) The city is taking full advantage of all of the innovations and technology which is available and obtainable within their resource limitations.

Yes  No  ?

a) The city ensures that all existing technology is used to its fullest potential.

--- --- ---

b) The city is constantly looking for new innovations and technology from around the world through magazines, conferences and other sources.

--- --- ---

c) The city conducts needs assessments and cost-benefit analysis to ensure that all cost saving innovations are actually pursued.

--- --- ---

Overall rating:    Excellent    Good    Fair    Poor
9) The city is very open in the sharing of information and communicates well with everyone concerned about the city’s welfare.

Yes No ?

--- --- ---

a) Information is always shared in a way that allows input on most decisions well in advance of any final decisions.

--- --- ---

b) The public is well informed and has full confidence in the decisions made by the city government.

--- --- ---

c) Information is shared between departments and is not used as a way to keep power and authority over various programs & decisions.

Overall rating: Excellent Good Fair Poor

10) The city is continuously searching for ways to improve its operations and has excellent methods of accountability.

Yes No ?

--- --- ---

a) The city promotes the search for new ideas from employees and citizens with many being adopted.

--- --- ---

b) The city systematically evaluates all services to find better ways to deliver them.

--- --- ---

c) The city evaluates managers and staff using modern appraisal and evaluation tools.

--- --- ---

d) The council and the senior bureaucrats are also evaluated on their performance by an independent source.

Overall rating: Excellent Good Fair Poor