



A Phoenix Rising? The Federal Pay Crisis and the Fate of Public Service in Canada

Contemporary Issues Facing the Canadian Public Service

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The Canadian public service has a reputation for administrative competence, skilled policy implementation and political acumen which it has used to ensure that public policy is smoothly and successfully implemented. Yet a series of scandals, policy fiasco, poor advice and other accusations of malfeasance that are traced back to the actions of the public service is rapidly undermining this reputation and feeding into Canadians scepticism and suspicion about the motivations and professionalism of public servants and the institutions of public administration. Something appears to ail the public service at this point and this is feeding an existing narrative about the inability of the public service to get the simplest elements of public administration right, including paying its employees.

These assumptions of administrative incompetence will be tested, and examined to determine how much truth exists to this characterization. Are these just bad cases that get amplified, or are we seeing a true decline in the quality of our public administration organizations. This paper will examine a number of cases, both federal and provincial, and determine if the cause of the problems is with the public service and its leadership or unrealistic expectations, a more confusing and contentious policy environment among possible other cause.

Yet whatever the causes, the public service clearly appears to have lost its confidence, its sense of purpose and its ability to undertake major projects on its own which out the aid of outside paid consultants' particular the big management consultancies all of whom are eager to do what the public service cannot do on its own. This can only accelerate as the government continues to deal with the multiple challenges of the continued move toward digital government, which it appears to struggle with.