

# Service, Openness and Engagement as Digitally-Based Enablers of Public Value?

## A Critical Examination of Digital Government in Canada

Jeffrey P Roy, Dalhousie University, Halifax, Canada

### ABSTRACT

Public value creation is increasingly viewed as a central pivot of a government's digital transformation. The objective of this article is twofold: to better understand some of the major inhibitors of public value creation within a context of digital government, and to offer some fresh insight into how such inhibitors may be overcome in order to strengthen public value creation by leveraging digital governance innovation. In pursuing this objective, the author adopts the Government of Canada as a broad, qualitative and exploratory case study of digital government's capacities to generate public value. These findings reveal many structural and cultural inhibitors within the Government of Canada to innovation and public value creation across the inter-related realms of service, openness and engagement. How inhibitors can be addressed and eventually overcome is also discussed as a basis for future public sector reform and academic and applied research.

### KEYWORDS

Canada, Data, Democracy, Dialogue, Digital, Engagement, Governance, Government, Information, Openness, Public value, Service, Technology

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Public value creation is increasingly viewed as a central prism of government's digital transformation (O'Flynn, 2007; Roy, 2013; Bannister and Connolly, 2014; Pang et al., 2014). For example, the Government of Canada has recently embraced an OECD definition of digital government predicated upon this linkage. Yet at the same time, transformation often collides with the gravitational pull of tradition and the public sector penchant for caution and incremental change. While public value pursuit seems evermore intertwined with notions of greater openness and engagement (for reasons explored and referenced below), models of traditional public administration are often predicated upon an ethos of hierarchical control and information secrecy (Roy, 2013).

Accordingly, the objective of this article is twofold: to better understand some of the major inhibitors of public value creation within a context of digital government, and to offer some fresh insight into how such inhibitors may be overcome in order to strengthen public value creation by leveraging digital governance innovation. In pursuing this objective, we adopt the Government of Canada as a broad, qualitative and exploratory case study of digital government's capacities to generate public value. We seek to first explain why and how the current structures of digital government are poorly suited to public value creation (despite language deployed by the Government itself embracing the latter). Building on this dissection, we then aim to shed new light on how digital innovation in public sector organizations can lead to public value generation – and the sorts of technological, institutional (including political), and organizational factors shaping the public sector's evolving capacities (Janssen and Helbig, 2016).

The Government of Canada (GOC, or federal government) represents a highly relevant and useful case study with which to examine the aforementioned dynamics in a real-world digital government context. Lauded as an e-government leader in the early 2000's, the country's federal government has since languished into something of a laggard in recent years – a characterization supported by various academic studies, third party ratings (notably the United Nations and Accenture among others), and perhaps most notably the GOC itself. In its 2017-launching of a renewed digital government effort, the GOC recognizes the quicker progress made by many other countries, with specific reforms and initiatives highlighted accordingly.

Given the complexity and breadth of initiatives being examined, we have utilized a qualitative and exploratory case study methodology. Specifically, we adopt an 'interpretive or social constructivist' approach to qualitative case study research [which] supports a transactional method of inquiry, where the researcher has a personal interaction with the case' (Hyett and Kenny, 2014). The author's personal interaction with the case stems from prior academic studies of digital government in Canada, interactions and discussions within training and graduate educational forums devoted to digital government, numerous research consultancy engagements with the Canadian public sector, and a set of fifteen, semi-structured qualitative interviews with senior managers from within the digital government community (both inside and outside of government). Notwithstanding any methodological limitations, this multi-layered investigatory approach to gathering insights and evidence is a highly useful constructivist undertaking necessitated by the many facets of digital government activities that are nonetheless interdependently shaping the Government of Canada's strategies and capacities for public value creation.

The article is organized as follows. Building on this brief introduction, Section two explains the main foundations of public value management (PVM) and contrasts PVM with both traditional public administration (TPA) and new public management (NPM). Along with these three governance typologies, the emergence of digital-era governance (DEG) is further examined as an additional lens of better understanding today's public sector evolution. Shifting from a conceptual to a more applied lens, section three examines three of the main components of the Government of Canada's pursuit of digital government over the past decade – specifically seeking insight and evidence of attempts to leverage digital innovation into some form of public value creation (and where possible,

assessing whether public value has indeed been generated). Section four then provides a more detailed consideration of the main lessons learned from the Canadian experience with respect to what can be done to lessen the constraining impacts of public value inhibitors over time. A brief conclusion then summarizes the main findings of this investigation and offers some promising avenues for future research that will prove consequential to building on the findings of this endeavour.

## 2. DIGITAL GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC VALUE CREATION

Fluid terminology notwithstanding, digital government has become an umbrella term for the application of digital technologies to the functioning of the public sector (Clarke and Franco, 2016). One early definition of e-government provided by the OECD has stood the test of time reasonably well: namely, ‘the continuous innovation in the delivery of services, citizen participation, and governance through the transformation of external and internal relationships by the use of information technology, especially the Internet’ (p.9, Roy, 2006). A slightly revised OECD definition, adopted in the Government of Canada’s 2017 report “Beginning the Conversation”, inserts public value into this complex set of governance equations:

*...the rethinking of government policy, program and service delivery through digital enablers, as an integrated part of governments’ modernization strategies, to create public value. [Digital government] relies on and enables an ecosystem that connects government, non-governmental organizations, businesses, citizens’ associations and individuals to support the production of and access to data, services and content through interactions with the government (p.1 Government of Canada 2017).*

In addition to adding public value, this latter definition’s explicit encompassing of data also denotes an important shift, one closely tied to public value (as examined below). Both OECD definitions, however, are united within a scope of multi-faceted transformation entailing both internal and outward elements. While digital (or electronic) government focused primarily on the former early on, the more recent emergence of ‘Gov 2.0’ models are more squarely rooted in the later and how public sector actors interact and engage with a more informed and technologically-savvy citizenry (Gasco, 2014).

Within such a dynamic and evolving context, what does it mean to postulate that digital government can be a driver of public value creation? Although there is no consensus-based definition of PVM, our approach to this concept stems from three inter-related and well-established perspectives rooted in the research literature. First, and most broadly, PVM is not only distinct from private value in the context of business and the marketplace, it is further distinguishable from TPA and NPM in its dissection of public governance processes (Stoker, 2006). Secondly, a key distinguishing trait of PVM in this regard is the emphasis on voice and deliberation – as citizens, politicians and public managers engage within dynamic and adaptive democratic institutions designed to balance accountability in process and in performance in ways appropriate for a democratic arena, and in ways that distinguish public value from private value (Stoker, 2006). Thirdly, and most concretely, much as profit and economic surplus are the identifiable drivers of private value creation, a key set of drivers or determinants of public value creation also necessitate identification and evaluation.

On this third perspective, and borrowing from prior works, O’Flynn proposes three components of public value: i) the direct provision of services; ii) high-order public interest outcomes stemming from governmental action (often overlapping with service delivery processes but accounting for wider and more collective aspirations and consequences); and iii) trust, legitimacy and confidence in government (O’Flynn, 2007). In a 2011 study focused on the digital transformation of the public sector, the World Economic Forum adopts a PVM framework for better understanding and assessing evolving public sector governance and in doing so, presents four elements of public value that align reasonably well with O’Flynn’s synthetic presentation. first, quality public services are delivered;

secondly, socially desirable outcomes are achieved; thirdly, citizens are satisfied with the services and outcomes; and fourthly, trust in government is created and/or increased (ibid.).

Across both the O'Flynn and WEF presentations, the respective invocations of service and trust are central to the Canadian storyline presented below). While service delivery is centrally important to the evolution of digital government (as it shall be in the Canadian context examined in section three), it is the emphasis on trust that is particularly relevant to better situating and understanding public value management as a distinct paradigm of public sector governance. Working outside of the confines of digital government – but nonetheless in a complementary manner, Stoker (2006) presents three of the four typologies adopted for this article (TPA, NPM, and PVM). All three typologies (and a fourth, DEG) are central to the understanding of digital government's service reforms (Dutil et al., 2010; Roy 2013, 2016).

TPA is based upon hierarchical structures and clear delineations of authority between elected officials and public servants (the latter implementing the decisions of the former). Within such an environment, the public is a passive observer, indirectly partaking in governance via electoral mechanisms of representational democracy that enable elected officials to act. There is otherwise little direct involvement of the citizen as government determinations of the public interest are made largely within the confines of the executive branch, ideally held to account by the legislative branch (Roy, 2008; Aucoin et al., 2011). Control is the underlying ethos of this form of execution of power and authority (Stoker, 2006). With respect to service delivery, the public sector is a monopolistic provider, with standardization and rules determined by bureaucratic oversight in manners that provide little to no autonomy to public managers to account for the specificities of recipients.

NPM has instead emphasized competition as a means of lessening this over-arching control that can often lead to bureaucratic bloating and stifled innovation and creativity. Within the contours of NPM, decentralized authority is thus preferred in order to enable responsiveness to 'customers' in efforts to improve performance, particularly performance measures of cost and efficiency. Similarly, the outsourcing to industry of various aspects of backend infrastructure and frontline service delivery is highly welcomed in a NPM-stylized world, as are reforms designed to instil more of a business ethos in the workings of the state (Roy, 2013, 2017; Nam, 2014; Rose et al., 2015).

In terms of service delivery, then, the public is viewed through a customer prism and as such, market principles such as responsiveness and convenience imply some freedom and autonomy to public managers to focus more on outcomes measured with a greater consideration of performance rather than process (Dutil et al., 2010). In contrast, Stoker describes the discursive and networked essence of PVM as a 'conversation between citizens and politicians in order to ensure efficient, appropriate and innovatory public service provision is taking place in a more complicated delivery environment' (Stoker, 2006, p. 6).

Yet despite Gov 2.0's emergence and the growing embracement of public value logics (as with the OECD and WEF above), without question all three typologies examined above continue to shape public sector governance in ways that are complex, cumulative and interdependent. For instance, while embracing NPM through private-public comparisons and industry-inspired technology solutions, the World Economic Forum (WEF) also seeks to supplement NPM with public value management – as explained above. For the WEF and likeminded scholarly undertakings (the WEF effort guided by early e-government pioneer Jane Fountain of Harvard), trust in government, enjoins PVM and Gov 2.0 within an open and participatory logic consistently emphasizing new forms of public engagement and more networked-based governance systems (Maier-Rabler and Huber, 2011; Lee and Kwak, 2011; Harrison et al., 2012; Lips, 2012; Clarke, 2013; Roy, 2013; Mergel, 2014; Gasco, 2014; Pang, 2014; Greve, 2015).

Consideration of a fourth governance typology – digital-era governance (DEG)– is instructive here, since its' focus has been more directed at understanding the interface between digitization and public sector governance. The 'first wave' of DEG was meant to show how NPM was insufficient as a basis for responding to contemporary digital challenges: notably that the three key tenants of

NPM (disaggregation, competition, and incentivization) were breaking down in the face of alternative pressures and emerging realities associated with the advent of digital technologies (Dunleavy et al., 2010). Instead, the authors focus in re-integration, need-based holism, and digitalization as a basis for DEG, noting that ‘the three sets of drivers are first organizational and budgetary factors internal to the state apparatus (re-integration); second, citizen and client oriented factors in public services (holism); and third, influences from the societal adoption and cultural adaption of technology drivers (digitalization).’

A tremendously important contribution of DEG lies in its exploration of technology’s impact on public sector governance in ways that are not sufficiently accounted for by NPM. Yet as DEG’s pioneers themselves recognize, the enduring relevance of NPM remains an important explanatory tool in dissecting digital government today. TPA, similarly, remains an important lens for examining any fundamental attempt to adapt public sector governance (Roy, 2008, 2013). And while it is indeed puzzling, in my view, that public value creation (and thus PVM) was not more explicitly embraced as a concept within DEG, there are many important synergies between them (a point elaborated upon below, partly via the insight of a leading DEG scholar).

As data has become a more prominent theme of digital government (including most notably the advent of ‘open government’, which though admittedly contested and partially distinct, we adopt as a core component of digital government rather than an entirely separate undertaking, their invariable overlap underscored by the OECD digital government definition above), the relevance of all four typologies grows as well. For example, one revealing study by DEG-pioneer Margetts and her colleague, Clarke explored the implication of data – notably the notion of ‘big data’ within the UK Government (Clarke and Margetts, 2014). The authors conclude that despite the significant attention devoted to notions of data management (and open data in particular), government’s capacities for leveraging innovation remained limited.

Although not the primary focus of their undertaking, it bears noting that others have similarly concluded that the traditions of TPA and proprietary-mindset of NPM are significant constraints around data-based innovation (Roy, 2016). Indeed, the distinction between big data and open data is important here, as while the former is based upon algorithmic automation and often utilized within the secrecy-laden confines of the public sector security apparatus (a point made by Margetts and Clarke in their UK study), the philosophy of open data is much more about enabling data sharing and new and more collective forms of participatory governance underpinned by the collective intelligence of a more engaged citizenry (Gasco, 2014).

This is not to say that big data cannot be the basis of public value generation across many realms of public services and governmental action, but rather that nuance and distinctions matter greatly. Moreover, it is here where PVM and DEG differ in an important manner, with the latter much more interested in the redesign of internal governance mechanisms in light of digitization and other aforementioned trends (re-integration and needs-based holism). Such adaptation is bound to be constrained significantly by the gravitational inertia of TPA and NPM. By contrast, PVM is much more rooted in an ethos of engagement and openness – much as many of its characteristics that initially drew primarily from institutional and political theory (as with Stoker for instance), have come to align well with the emergence of Web 2.0 as a proxy for challenging the predominance of proprietary forms of infrastructure, information and data through open-source design and content sharing socialization platforms.

While there are important differences between DEG and PVM, there are also important commonalities enjoining them that shed light on public value. Margetts herself indirectly reflects this logic through her invocation of the centrality of trust, arguing (within a volume devoted to the theme of public value creation) that ‘the only way to restore trust in government is for the people to join with government, in effect to become the government, in providing the security and services they need’ (Margetts 2017). In my view, then, it is this notion of trust rooted less in deferential authority (a central maxim of TPA) and more driven by a culture of enlightened and active engagement that

enjoins PVM and DEG as a critical basis for understanding at least some of the key outward-oriented drivers of public value creation associated with digital government.

Updating and adapting the WEF 2011 approach, and based upon the preceding review of public value management theoretical perspectives, we can postulate three key determinants of trust that, in ways both partially separate and partially inter-related, contribute to public value creation within a digital government context: i) service delivery; ii) openness; and iii) engagement. By focusing on these outward dimensions of trust and public value, it is not to suggest that the internal infrastructure of government – and traditional dynamics of efficiency and interoperability and more recent DEG notions of re-integration, are not themselves sources of public value, but rather that our primary focus is to view and dissect public value from the citizen's perspective. At the same time, whether the internal infrastructure of digital government enables or constrains trust and public value is a key consideration in our investigation below.

### **3. CASE STUDY: THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA**

Within such context, the focus of this section is on key GOC undertakings in each of these interrelated areas that carry at least the potential for public value creation. The GOC initiatives examined here stem mainly from the mandate of the current Liberal Government (2015-2019), although where noted some of these initiatives are built upon prior efforts of previous governments, notably the Conservatives that held power in the decade preceding the 2015 federal election.

By presenting the GOC as an exploratory case study, the aim is to broadly situate such a descriptive review within the parameters of the four conceptual typologies examined above, emphasizing friction and points of tensions between TPA and NPM on the one hand, and PVM and DEG on the other hand (in other words typologies that are pre-digital versus those that have become more prevalent in the digital era, albeit with the continuing relevance of all four typologies as acknowledged above). Building on the mainly descriptive presentation of Government of Canada initiatives across three distinct though inter-related realms – digital service delivery, open government, and public engagement and democratic reform, the subsequent section of this article centres on critically assessing the extent to which engagement serves as a public value enabler in light of its encompassing presence across all three realms of digital government initiatives and reforms.

#### **3.1. Digital Service Delivery**

In Canada, the evolution of digital government and electronic service delivery has taken place in a manner largely shaped (until quite recently) by the space in between TPA and NPM. An early example is Service New Brunswick (SNB), a model that paved the way for the creation of Service Canada federally: SNB's autonomy as a provincial crown corporation facilitated a more business-like approach and the formation of unique public-private partnerships (Dutil et al., 2010; Roy, 2013a). Similarly, arguably the most successful federal agency processing online services – the Canada Revenue Agency – had been previously transformed from a traditional department into an operationally autonomous agency precisely to add a dose of NPM-inspired flexibility and innovation that would prove effective in championing online tax services.

Nonetheless, new public management would also encounter important limitations and blockages as e-government took hold, due to pressures for interoperability and more cross-governmental coordination that lead to centralizing tendencies. Such contradictions yielded a significant under-performance of Service Canada as an enabler of online delivery (Auditor General of Canada, 2013), and a partly stunted digitizing agenda for the federal government's service architecture and back-office infrastructure (Roy, 2013a). Similar findings characterize the country's largest provincial government of Ontario where, despite the more formal creation of a centralized departmental structure responsible for government-wide service functions (Service Ontario), the uptake of electronic services has been

gradual and well short of the entity's own performance targets in this regard (Auditor General of Ontario, 2013).

Despite such difficulties, this customer-driven logic of service delivery remains an important focal point for government strategists, scholars, and the various private consultancies and vendors that inform the digitization of the public sector service eco-system (Rose et al., 2015). Whereas the governance structures of the service entities are often embedded in horizontal and vertical tensions rooted in TPA, those deploying a more NPM-inspired lens instead focus on the technical design and performance of the service channels themselves (Osman et al., 2014; Nam, 2014). Other scholars argue that within this e-government context shaped predominantly by TPA and NPM pressures, bureaucratic structures remain essential to the state apparatus and should not be viewed as fundamentally at odds with the deployment of new digital technologies (Cordella and Bonina, 2012; Cordella and Tempini, 2015). Such pressures and opportunities also underscore the need for a broad rethinking of service design and delivery, as well as creating new space between NPM and PVM.

In 2018, the GOC established the Canadian Digital Services unit, modeled closely after the UK's Government Digital Services team created some six years prior. Situated within the central agency, Treasury Board Secretariat, CDS is meant to serve as the Government's catalyst for digital service innovation and transformation. Accordingly, it is meant to build upon and supplement the foundational work of Service Canada, an informal body that nonetheless never realized the wider ambitions of becoming an online integrator of most or all GOC service offerings. Accordingly, CDS presents itself as creating innovative products via a continuum of various phases (Discovery, Alpha, Beta, Live) that are reflective of the user experience and user design movements and techniques that have become predominant across both the public and private service landscapes in recently years, notably with the advent of mobile devices and the challenges associated with adapting online platforms and processes to a mobile-centric world (Roy, 2013, 2014).

In doing so, the creation of CDS draws sustenance from three of the four typologies discussed above (overcoming traditional TPA barriers, inviting private sector comparisons in manners invoking elements of NPM but also embracing DEG with its government-wide holism and user-centric perspective). The federal government would further suggest that CDS is one agent in its wider efforts on launching a new public conversation on digital government, thus inviting elements of PVM as well.

### 3.2. Openness and Open Government

Open government is not a new concept. Many definitions, such as that of Wikipedia, refer to the centrality of transparency on the one hand, and public access to government-held information on the other. Over the past decade, however, a newer and more digitally-enabled approach to open government has emerged, one aligned with the Internet as a platform for not only transparency but also active participation and engagement. In a 2012 special issue of *Information Polity* devoted to open government, this distinction is well-explained:

*There is an important difference between the traditional approach to open government and the current, renewed one. While the traditional approach emphasized transparency, current approaches also involve key elements of participation, collaboration and innovation (Luna-Reyes and Chun, 2012).*

Former American President Barack Obama's inaugural 2009 Presidential Directive on Open Government is influential in this regard, a directive built upon three core principles: transparency, participation, and collaboration. It is the nexus between the second and third principles that result in what Lee and Kwak (2011) characterize as the ultimate endgame in the pursuit of these principles, a somewhat nirvana-like state of 'ubiquitous engagement' where citizens are empowered to actively contribute to the creation of public value. Obama's 2009 Directive would facilitate the formation of the Open Government Partnership (OGP), which today represents a network of some 75 member countries. In examining OGP's scope and potential, Clarke and Francoli (2014) reveal that most

governments had approached OGP from a mainly traditional interpretation of open government, emphasizing information availability and access as well as strengthened accountability.

The Open Government Partnership was launched in September of 2011 with Canada as one of more than forty signatory nations at that time. Earlier that same year, however, the Canadian Government announced its inaugural open government action plan predicated upon two foundational commitments: an open government directive and an open government license. Whereas the directive sought to provide 'guidance to 106 federal departments and agencies on what they must do to maximize the availability of online information and data, identify the nature of information to be published, as well as the timing, formats, and standards that departments will be required to adopt,' the purpose of adopting the license was to remove restrictions on the reuse of published Government of Canada information (data, info, websites, publications) et aligning with international best practices.' The license, as stated on the open government portal, allows users to 'copy, modify, publish, translate, adapt, distribute or otherwise use the Information in any medium, mode or format for any lawful purpose' (Clarke and Francoli, 2014).

With respect to the internal governance of open government and the Action Plan, a lead unit would be established within the CIO Branch of the Treasury Board of Canada: 'a dedicated Open Government Secretariat that manages the overall coordination, monitoring, and reporting of its implementation activities' (Francoli, 2014, p. 3). Following public and stakeholder consultation, the Government of Canada announced its first set of initiatives in 2012, followed by a three Open Government Action Plan from 2014 to 2016 (which has since been updated into a more recent plan from 2016-2018 by the Liberal Government that succeeded the Conservatives following their 2015 electoral victory).

Building upon its two foundational commitments, the federal government Action Plan comprises three core dimensions – information, data, and dialogue— and twelve core commitments. Each dimension reflects a different starting point and unique basis for pursuing digital government and public value creation in manners predicated upon openness.

Information reflects a point of departure rooted within a more traditional orientation of open government – namely improving access and accountability via democratic mechanisms (such as Parliament), the media, and the public at large. Open Government Action Plans of recent years have typically included pledges to improve the Access to Information Regime, making it easier for journalists and other stakeholders to request government documents – and lessening the secrecy constraints that often delay and limit such requests. The Parliamentary Officer overseeing such processes (the Information Commissioner) has been a longstanding critic of successive Governments in this regard.

Through the lens of data, then, open government is based upon the 'notion that public sector information is a resource, the release of which will maximize its social and economic value to citizens' (Ubaldi, 2013). As of spring 2017, the Government of Canada's open data portal featured more than 120,000 data sets gathered from various federal departments and agencies - and readily available under an open usage license now adopted by many provinces and local jurisdictions as well. Such a license allows anyone to 'copy, modify, publish, translate, adapt, distribute or otherwise use the information in any medium, more or format for any lawful purpose.'

Other mechanisms were sought by the GOC to further spur open data usage and the leveraging of such usage into wider forms of innovation across society at large. The Government of Canada thus similarly supported the establishment of the Canadian Open Data Exchange as a vehicle to explore new research and commercialization linking public sector data holdings with academia and the private sector. These collective efforts reflect the emergence of an openness eco-system – within which open data becomes a platform and catalyst for collective learning and innovation (Roy, 2016).

In terms of dialogue, while a rhetorical emphasis on public participation predates the digital age, it has benefited from a huge impetus since the advent of the Internet and more so, models of Gov 2.0 emphasizing 'ubiquitous engagement' as a key to public value creation (Lee and Kwak, 2011). Accordingly, in successive versions of the GOC's Open Government Action Plans pledges were made to improve online capacities for public consultation, better share findings from public consultations



in online formats, and invest in innovative usages of social media to deepen public engagement (Roy, 2016). The most recent phase of this ongoing effort took place in the spring of 2016, leading to an updated three-year plan from 2016 to 2018 (Francoli, 2016).

The current Liberal Government (elected in 2015) has committed to a greater emphasis on dialogue, and to a much more ambitious usage of social media and new technologies to expand citizen involvement in governance matters both in terms of policy-making and service delivery. The Government was relatively quick to set a new cultural tone by encouraging public servants – notably scientists – to speak and express their viewpoints openly via traditional and new media, potentially incentivizing the sort of directions envisioned by the previous version of the Open Government Action but never realized in practice. Yet by midway through their first mandate, the contours of open government have arguably not altered considerably from the Conservative's tenure.

The central challenge of open government is cultivating a mindset of openness by default within a governance system where transparency has been managed in a more contained and controlled manner. Accordingly, information and data holdings previously regarded as corporate or proprietary assets to be processed internally instead become the basis for more outward forms of sharing and dissemination. In doing so, governments are seeking to create the conditions for more responsive government, new forms of collective and participative governance enjoining all sectors, and a more engaged citizenry in order to foster collaboration and innovation.

Despite the visibility of such efforts, the open data portal and apparatus in particular, represents a tiny expenditure within the estimated envelope of some five to six billion dollars spent annually on technology systems across the federal government, and as such it is an initiative that has arguably punched well above its financial weight. Yet as Lips and others have noted, and partly because of these modest investments, wider structural and cultural changes to public sector governance of the sort that would substantively boost the potential for tangible benefit creation (both inside and outside of government) have yet to be realized (Lips, 2016).

This latter point underscores similar findings noted above from Margetts and Clarke in their examination of the UK Government's data capacities – and the inertia of TPA in limiting open government as a public value driver. While NPM remains somewhat relevant (given the emphasis on commercial innovation opportunities stemming from open data policies – opportunities it should be noted that have been more aspirational than demonstrated to date), the evolution of the open governments apparatus and its three main components in Canada (information, data and dialogue) is arguably also intertwined with elements of PVM and DEG. Questions and participatory capacities associated with dialogue align closely with PVM, whereas DEG captures the horizontal governance demands of open government in orchestrating data gathering and sharing on a government-wide basis.

### **3.3. Engagement and Democratic Reform**

Since the advent of the Internet and e-government, digital democracy has remained an important focus for scholars, activists and even elected officials as potential and actual reforms have been either explored or undertaken (Roy, 2006; Reddick and Aikins, 2012; Clarke, 2013; McNutt, 2014). In one recent examination of such reforms across a range of democratic-minded countries, Simon et al. (2017) define digital democracy simply as 'the practice of democracy using digital tools and technologies.' They go on, however, to distinguish between minimalist and maximalist definitions, with the latter predicated upon a more participatory role for citizens. Accordingly, open government has become a transitional prism from earlier digital government efforts emphasizing electronic service delivery and the sort of maximalist approach to digital democracy as defined by Simon et al. above.

Accordingly, a direct lineage may be drawn from the Obama Directive to scholarly reports calling for 'ubiquitous engagement' strategies predicated on new forms of open data and public engagement (Lee and Kwak, 2011; Gasco, 2014), as well as the emergence of the Open Government Partnership globally (Francoli and Clarke, 2014; Roy, 2016). Within the Canadian context, Longo (2017) concurs with this broad direction, invoking newer technologies and big data capacities as

bases for new engagement techniques as yet unexploited by governments. Instead, Longo observes that “governments still look to public and stakeholder engagement using prior models of intensive involvement, albeit using new electronic mechanisms, which nonetheless do not respond to shifting citizen expectations” (p. 531).

In 2017, in a modest effort to link online platforms with democratic accountability, the Liberal Government launched an online report card tracking progress on their main campaign commitments from 2015 including an acknowledgement of those promises unfulfilled. Not surprisingly, however, the online tool showcases progress on the vast majority of Liberal pledges (as either completed or in progress), offering little more by way of details as to how citizens can further understand the progress to date and policy processes underway. In other words, lacking detail and any independent capacity to the site’s information, the online reporting scheme is primarily a communications tool.

An established global barometer in trust suggests that, while not directly related to this particular initiative, on the whole the Liberal Government has failed to stem the erosion of public trust in the public sector: the annual Edelman trust survey of countries around the world for the first time in 2017 placed Canada in the ‘distruster’ category with a notable drop of ten percentage points from 2016 in trust levels afforded to government (from 53% to 43%). The implications for public value are obviously important, a point to which we now turn in greater depth.

#### **4. ENGAGEMENT AS A PUBLIC VALUE ENABLER?**

One important and over-arching lesson from the preceding case study is the need to reframe the pursuit of digital government as a primarily service-driven endeavor to one more equally weighted across the three realms discussed here (service, openness and engagement). While such a reframing has occurred conceptually and scholarly, it has often been resisted by traditional actors and structures within the public sector. Such an applied broadening is necessary for two reasons: first, the most significant sources of participation-driven public value are arguably rooted within the evolving dynamics of openness and engagement; and secondly, even digital service reforms themselves are increasingly intertwined with notions of dialogue and engagement. Here again it is worth reiterating Margett’s call for systemic involvement of the public in democratic governance systems for meaningful public value creation (Margetts, 2017).

With respect to openness as a foundational platform for public value creation, Millard’s articulation of open government as a more outward and innovative governance system is predicated upon ‘doing more with more’ - rather than ‘doing more with less’, this latter phrase being the mantra of what he terms of as ‘lean government’ – are well-aligned with TPA and NPM-oriented pressures and constraints (Millard, 2015). For Millard, doing more with more through systemic openness stems from the inter-play of open assets, open engagement, and open services – with participation as a central and overlapping dimension of these latter realms. Herein lies a central insight from our case study above – namely the absence of this link by the Government of Canada’s approach to digital government which instead seeks to compartmentalize digital service delivery and open government rather than view them as interdependent. Instead, however, it is arguably engagement that provides the enabling lubricant for such interdependence to be leveraged as a basis for collective adaptation through greater systemic openness.

In fairness, and perhaps somewhat encouragingly when looking ahead, there is some nascent evidence) of recognition by the Government of Canada as to at least part of this logic – as open government and open services have tentatively begun to cross-fertilize one another in government planning documents shared publicly as a basis for public and stakeholder consultation. Yet the fact remains that CDS organizationally resides within the CIO Branch of the Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS), the central agency with management board responsibilities for the Government of Canada as a whole. Accordingly, the CIO functionality (emphasizing infrastructure planning, interoperability, security, etc.), nestled within a predominantly expenditure review and control-minded apparatus,

is poorly suited to many elements of PVM (while TPA, NPM and even many elements of DEG fit comfortably within such a purview). In other words, CDS is a novel creation of modest size in terms of resources and authority – and there is a risk that its efforts to spur user-design methodologies and other forms of service innovation will be perceived more as a form of central agency intervention than a collaborative undertaking.

The inclusion of the Open Government unit (separate from CDS) within the same CIOB structure further underscores this organizational tension. While it bears noting that the open government team has made significant progress in data gathering and sharing capabilities, and in emphasizing ‘dialogue’ as a core component of successive Open Government Action Plans, what is missing across this entire CIOB – TBS apparatus are the human competencies and organizational capacities to explore public engagement in fundamentally new ways. As a result, the public consultations underpinning both open government and digital government have been undertaken in very narrow and specific ways, arguably more limited forms of informed stakeholder consultations than wider and more innovative forms of public engagement of the sort espoused by PVM advocates.

#### **4.1. Service Innovation, Public Trust, and Voice**

Beyond service transactions, there is also growing recognition that PVM’s notion of voice is a central ingredient in service innovation from the perspectives of both service design and service evaluation. In terms of the former, this passage from an Accenture international survey is illustrative of the shift at play:

*Public services need to increasingly involve citizens in the service design—engaging them through online platforms (both to educate and to gain citizen inputs) and for expanding their options. Our Citizen Satisfaction Survey results showed that all governments need to proactively seek and secure citizen involvement. Even in Germany, which has the lowest score in this category, 64 percent of surveyed citizens believe that people should be more involved in shaping how public services are designed and delivered (Accenture, 2014).*

The striking absence of such participative service design capacities within the Government of Canada is widely acknowledged – and meant in part to be addressed by the formation of CDS. Notably, as with identity management, CDS can take inspiration from many provincial governments that have sought to invest in capacities such as service design units and innovation labs (Roy, 2013, 2014). A similar and related shortcoming is apparent in terms of service evaluation, as the much-vaunted Citizen’s First public surveys pioneered by the Canadian public sector more than a decade ago have languished in recent years – without any new significant public methodologies for service evaluation and performance, despite growing evidence of Canada’s stymied public sector performance in digital service delivery and with respect to mobile channels in particular (Roy, 2014). Instead, the Liberal Government’s preference for importing an emphasis on ‘deliverology’ as a basis for internal reporting and measuring outcomes within the public sector arguably reflects the mixing of inertias of TPA (control) and NPM (measurement).

What is perhaps most interesting about this discussion of measurement and trust within a Canadian context is the Canadian roots of a ‘public service value chain’ more than a decade ago that gave rise to the Citizen’s First surveys lauded, at that time, as an innovative tool for benchmarking and better understanding the inter-relatedness between service outcomes and performance on the one hand, and public trust in government and democratic institutions more broadly on the other hand (Heintzman and Marson, 2005; Roy, 2006). Yet the scholarly-minded pioneers of this methodology (adopted by government authorities in a linear and quantitative manner reflective of the TPA and NPM tendencies that have given rise to deliverology more recently) envisioned such a measurement tool as a basis for a wider conversation and a wider examination of the determinants of trust. In other words, pioneers

of the service chain envisioned an approach more in line with PVM whereas the tools were instead largely constrained by the inertia of TPA and NPM.

The resulting erosion of public trust in the Canadian context is at least partially attributable to an ever-more technologically stagnant service delivery apparatus (Roy, 2014, 2016). The recent creation of Canadian Digital Services notwithstanding, the result has been weakened levels of public value generated through service innovation (or an absence of such innovation), and a wider and inter-related malaise surrounding open government, democratic engagement and digital government more broadly.

## **4.2. Looking Ahead: New Capacities for Meaningful Engagement**

It is hardly novel to suggest that any government must focus more on public engagement as a means of cultivating trust and innovation – themselves enablers of public value. What becomes apparent from the Canadian context, however, is that despite rising awareness both inside and outside of the public sector about the need for such an investment, it has not yet materialized in any significant manner. In moving beyond trying to understand why this has been the case for the GOC (and thus for Canadian democracy more broadly), it is important to ask what sorts of reforms are warranted to enable a more virtuous and productive cycle of engagement, trust, innovation and public value creation.

First, and most fundamentally, there is an absence of organizational capacity within the apparatus of the Westminster-based executive branch that underpins the conduct and operations of the GOC. While the creation of CDS is meant to bring about a more digitally-minded, design-centric and thus citizen-based perspective on service innovation, and despite user engagement as one important aspect of its mandate, the focal point of CDS's efforts remains internally-minded, improving and updating government service delivery channels. Moreover, the emphasis on viewing the public in a predominantly service-minded manner leads to a customer service logic that is not inherently out of step with public service realities but is, as argued above, insufficient for a more interactive and collective approach reflected in the logic of PVM. CDS may thus include a small dose of outward engagement as it focuses on enhancing service outcomes but nowhere is the GOC looking to this new entity to catalyze wider public conversations on open government, policy matters, or wider governance reforms that may facilitate new participative capacities based upon the co-creation of public value.

This organizational deficiency is also a political matter as it reflects the over-arching TPA-minded logic of representational democracy and the controlling ethos of central agencies and their interactions with an exclusive set of elected officials, typically Ministers and Prime Ministers from the governing political party. While such a logic can admittedly be stretched or altered in times of minority governments, this engrained concentration of power is especially prevalent in Canada in recent times with few exceptions. Accordingly, the governing Liberals came to power at the federal level in 2015 with a strong majority of Parliamentary seats – succeeding a Conservative majority government (whereas the largest Province of Ontario has witnessed, in 2018, the return of the Conservatives in the provincial legislature with a solid majority status, themselves successors to prior Liberal majorities). Thus, while much of the logic of controlling and communications-minded governance would find resonance in many political regimes (and even any Westminster Parliamentary variants), this concentrated dynamic of centralized power is particularly acute within the Canadian context, most especially at the federal level (Aucoin et al., 2011).

It is, therefore, not possible to address the organizational deficiencies within the GOC apparatus without also embracing some form of political innovation. In doing so, we will focus on service delivery and open government as two areas that could benefit from political innovation and public engagement through more PVM-stylized mechanisms more outward and participative than insular and contained.

With respect to service, a new and more participative scorecard and a wider set of engagement mechanisms for both evaluating and designing service offerings and delivery capacities are required. In place of the highly technocratic and quantitative scoring of Citizen's First surveys (essentially conducted as public opinion surveys), the usage of co-design innovation labs and citizens advisory

panels could be leveraged to shape investments and decisions of public sector service providers both individually and collectively. It is at least marginally noteworthy in this regard that the GOC has acknowledged the need for such wider conversations on the matter of digital privacy. Much as in the realm of public safety, the GOC is creating an external advisory board to advise it on expanding openness and public engagement in this inherently insular and secrecy-laden realm of government activity (the latter example is one plank of the GOC's Open Government Action Plan).

Nonetheless, such trepid but hopefully not inconsequential examples of experimentation notwithstanding, open government itself remains largely constrained by the same Westminster apparatus shaping the service delivery logic within a mainly traditional governance mindset (i.e. TPA with doses of NPM and even some elements of DEG but an absence of PVM). Open government agendas remain both fully orchestrated from within the executive branch and challenged by independent Parliamentary Officers (the Information and Privacy Commissioners respectively), thus ensuring that any political involvement takes place within the partisan and adversarial confines of Parliament. A highly predictable cycle thus ensues, with the Government (of successive political stripes) accused of secrecy and attacked by the Opposition on specific matters revealed by the media (often stemming from Parliamentary Officer investigations and reviews), with little dialogue outside of core government agencies as to how openness can be expanded or explored in novel ways, as a basis for the sort of outward and more participative logic espoused conceptually by the likes of Millard, and even articulated at least rhetorically by the Government itself.

It thus becomes apparent that any significant deviation from the confines of TPA and NPM, and any significant exploration of PVM requires new institutional mechanisms immersed in the interface between openness and engagement (and while service delivery remains an important component that would benefit from this interface, it should not be the point of departure for the sorts of systemic innovation required). One potential avenue worthy of exploration is the creation of a new multi-stakeholder entity devoted to open government – with formal accountabilities diffused across partisan boundaries and in a manner encompassing direct citizen involvement.

Beyond open government, the rebalancing of representational and more direct and deliberative (not one in the same) democratic models is an essential component of public trust, much as democratic engagement itself admittedly remains an inherently contested notion. Exploring the potential for digital democracy – and drawing from a series of both local and national case studies from seven different countries, the implications for the Westminster Parliamentary model are potentially profound, requiring not only a refurbishment of Parliament itself as an institution but also the creation of new mechanisms for engaging the citizenry in ways that recast the inter-related roles and conduct of elected officials, public servants and citizens.

The Canadian experience, therefore, suggests two important shifts as necessary prerequisites of such political innovation and adaptation: first, a lessening of strict partisanship within the legislative branch; and secondly, a greater emphasis and exploration of the role of the 'citizen' versus the predominant 'customer' logic that has been more influential in shaping digital government's evolution thus far. A less partisan and more collaborative political culture, coupled with new civic-minded capacities for public oversight and involvement, are not only consistent with the philosophical underpinnings of PVM as a governance paradigm, but they enjoin service, openness and engagement and carry at least the potential to reduce the inhibitors to greater public value creation in an increasingly digitized and networked era.

## 5. CONCLUSION

By way of conclusion, it is useful to return once again to the modified and adapted OECD definition of digital government put forth early on in section two – namely: the rethinking of government policy, program and service delivery through digital enablers, as an integrated part of governments' modernization strategies, to create public value. The definition goes on to invoke the notion of an 'eco-

system' comprising actors inside of government and stakeholders outside as well as a more informed and engaged citizenry, while also referring to the growing importance of data in today's society.

The Government of Canada case study reveals that elements of this definition are being acted upon. In the realm of service, most notably, the creation of CDS is meant to catalyze digital innovation and a more user-centric design perspective around service processes. Additionally, open government has been embraced as a platform to foster a data ecosystem both within and outside of the public sector. Finally, the Canadian Government has at least recognized the growing importance of engagement (admittedly only indirectly recognized by the definition but central to public value definitions and discussions) in two ways: first, via the dialogue dimension of its open government framework; and secondly, via its democratic reform agenda and political pronouncements with respect to widening necessity of political innovation and greater citizen involvement in democratic governance.

Yet much of this rhetoric has failed to translate into meaningful and systemic change as digital government remains shaped predominantly by a TPA and NPM-based ethos (with elements of DEG reinforcing these tendencies as digitization takes shape). Part of this failure may well be that politicians are simply unwilling to act in new ways – ways that fundamentally alter power sharing relationships and thus create political uncertainty and risk. Yet such an explanation cannot solely suffice given the widening cleavage between government pronouncements that shape citizen expectations, and governing realities that seem to be falling short both by the Government's own admission and by various external sources (such as the referenced survey on public trust among other sources). We have thus argued that it is only through systemic innovation in fostering a new democratic ethos based upon the guiding principles of PVM – and thus enjoining openness and engagement as foundations for such an ethos – that a virtuous cycle enjoining trust, participation and public value can emerge. In such a world, service remains essential to government performance, but it is no longer the overriding prism of digital government – and it can ideally become less constrained by the traditional confines of TPA and industry-mined pressures and comparisons of NPM.

An important aspect of such a transformation, and an area mainly unexamined by this article and ripe for future research opportunities, is the horizontal governance capacities within the public sector implied by such systemic reforms pursued through a more PVM-minded lens. In the GOC context, reforms such as CDS and open government initiatives have been hatched mainly from within the confines of a traditional central agency, whereas undoubtedly more novel and collaborative governance arrangements enjoining actors from across government and spurring new forms of integrated behaviour are required. Such reforms would, however, require a greater investment of energy and resources by elected officials into not only digital government but public sector reform more generally – as well as a greater exploration of how such internal reforms can be aligned with a more outward and participatory polity encompassing executive and legislative actors.

In this regard, while it has not penetrated the Canadian Westminster psyche as of yet, there is growing digital engagement experimentation from which to draw (as discussed above) including, notably, the municipal level in Canada which on the one hand benefits from alternative political models, but on the other hand is often overshadowed by the much more significant fiscal and policy resources and media visibility of provincial and federal governments (both structured squarely upon Westminster customs and structures). Though unclear at the moment whether local and (more limited) provincial experimentation can spur further reform federally, further research here is also warranted, much as growing interdependencies between jurisdictions suggest that public value will also invariably be determined in part, perhaps in large part, by the overall functioning and performance of the Canadian public sector as a whole – rather than separate jurisdictional levels (as dictated by the constitution and another source of influence of the TPA mindset at least federally and provincially).

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*Jeffrey Roy is a Professor in the School of Public Administration at Dalhousie University's Faculty of Management. He is a widely published observer and critic of the impacts of digital technologies on government and democracy. He has worked with the United Nations, the OECD, multinational corporations, at all levels of government in Canada. He has produced more than eighty peer-reviewed articles and chapters and his most recent book was published in 2013 by Springer: From Machinery to Mobility: Government and Democracy in a Participative Age. Among other bodies, his research has been funded by the IBM Center for the Business of Government and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.*