

Is innovation a question of will or opportunity? The case of three governments

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Abstract

This paper contrasts two approaches to understanding innovation: voluntary, which is based on will, and determined, which is based on factors, usually outside the immediate control of those in government. The two methods are applied to examples of innovation in three Canadian governments, the Region of York, the Government of Saskatchewan, and the Government of Canada. Both voluntary and determined approaches were found to reveal and to hide certain aspects of innovation. Each approach is found to have merit and to teach lessons. Whether one is a better approach to understanding the innovation process is assessed. © 2002 Information Age Publishing Inc. All rights reserved.

Introduction

During the 1990s a typical conversation about innovation in government referred to the need for a strong leader and a burning platform to force bureaucrats to innovate. As the 1980s and 1990s environment of scarcity gave way to a more plentiful period during the late 1990s, more gentle and ecological sources of innovation were considered. Proponents of both schools asked a common question: How should the way government creates something unique, an innovation, be understood? Is management key, or does the core to understanding innovation lie in context?

An understanding of how innovation occurs is partially dependent on how it is defined. In this paper innovation is defined as the first, second, and third time something is done in this

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way in the public sector. Because of the nature of communication channels in North America, the geographic area considered is likely to be limited to North America. The innovation may have been pilot tested but it has not been introduced before as government policy, program, or process.

The literature has taken two quite different approaches to the study of public sector innovation. One method focused on organizational innovativeness—individual and organizational characteristics, and controllable factors. Authors attempted to identify key correlates of innovativeness. Gray (1973) and Walker (1969) were characteristic of this group. A more managerial approach was reflected by Mohr (1969), who identified innovation as the interaction among individual motivation to innovate, the strength of obstacles against innovation, and the availability of resources for overcoming such obstacles. Big organizations were found to be the ones that innovated most, because of the greater resources available to them (Mohr, 1969).

Merritt suggested six factors affected a government's innovative capacity: (1) the resources it could reallocate for this purpose, including the absolute quantity available to the government, their diversity across social sectors, their replaceability, and their liquidity; (2) its information-processing system, including indicators of effectiveness, multiplicity and diversity of sources, rapidity, and noise levels; (3) its procedures for encouraging nonroutine thinking about public policy; (4) the intensity, limits and rigidity of support for governmental flexibility on the part of relevant publics; (5) procedures for evaluating and choosing proposals for tentative adoption; and (6) the ability to develop behavioral patterns to institutionalize innovative policies (Merritt, 1985, 12).

A criticism of these and other studies held that the findings were inconsistent (Downs & Mohr, 1976; Rogers, 1995; Downs, 1978). Of thirty-eight generalizations cited by Rogers (1995), almost 90% were found to be unstable. Downs (1978) suggested that contradictory findings were the result of nonsimple interaction.

Some authors began studying innovation in a second way, as complex behavior, often using systemic approaches. According to Rogers and Kim, for example, the four main correlates of innovativeness were the innovation, communication channels, time, and the members of a social system (1985, 85–94). Jacques and Ryan suggested the four characteristics of innovative organizations were uncommitted resources available for innovative ventures, uncertainty diffused throughout a structurally loose organization, personal and organizational objectives aligned, and organizational conflict used to stimulate creativity (Jacques & Ryan, 1978). The focus shifted from the planning and adoption of the innovation to the innovation application process and the organization in relation to an innovation (Rogers & Kim, 1985, 86–87); the process of innovation; implementation, not just the decision to adopt an innovation; the active role of adopters; the fact that there are both negative and positive consequences to the adoption of innovations; and indepth case studies instead of cross-sectional surveys (Rogers & Kim, 1985, 96–97). This approach was characterized as a process model, as compared to the earlier variance model (Mohr, 1978), which dealt with variables and their associations (Rogers & Kim, 1985, 97).

A Rand Corporation study (Yin et al., 1977) of technological innovations in state and local services evaluated the success of innovations and the importance of the way in which the innovations were introduced for success. Some factors studied included time pressures,

number of decision points, degree of professional organization, the reward structure among service practitioners, amount of client contact and influence, and the traditions and other organizational differences among the different types of local services (Yin et al., 1977, 14). In reviewing 140 published case studies, the study revealed the importance of the characteristics of the innovation and the community, the stable state of the organization, and implementation (Yin et al., 1977, 16, 123). Correlates of innovation identified by these authors are listed in Table 1.

Innovation in government, as opposed to the private sector, usually occurs within a bureaucracy, although it may not be carried out in a bureaucratic way. Innovation in bureaucracy faces greater challenges than in other forms of organization. According to Thompson (1976, 48), public administration is not only resistant to innovation but is becoming increasingly so, due to its reaction in the past twenty years back to economy, efficiency, and even Taylorism. Taylorism, bureaucracy, program-based budgeting systems, and the New Public Management (NPM) have taken rationalist, linear, hierarchical approaches to management in government.

Overly rationalist and bureaucratic systems of government have been criticized, not only for stifling of innovation but also as being at the root of major modern problems (Barzelay, 1992). Hummel (1987) saw bureaucracy as contradicting basic human values, treating people as cases rather than individuals; as a new and destructive culture, lacking rationality, with great power but no legitimacy. Saul (1992) went even further. He saw bureaucracy as being rational without guidance from values, and thence responsible for some of the most heinous of modern crimes, including the Inquisition and the Nazi Holocaust. These authors call for new forms of organization to replace bureaucracy.

Rationalist systems have also been rejected as overly objective and narrow by some students of sociology and management. According to Burrell and Morgan (1979), there are four ways to study sociology and organizations; Alvesson and Wilmott (1996) use the same categories to study management. Their category of objectivism, which would probably include empiricism, bureaucracy, and NPM, fits into a paradigm they call functionalist. This category also encompasses interactionism and social action theory, integrative theory, and social system theory. Three other categories of thinking about organizations are interpretive sociology, radical structuralism, and radical humanism.

As can be seen from this brief review of literature on management, innovation, organizational change, and sociology, some thinking juxtaposes rationalist, reductionist, cause-effect, and one best way objectivism to other approaches. Saul (1992, 1997), Capra (1996), Alvesson and Willmott (1996), and Wilson (1992) saw a strong alternative to objectivism in whole systems, contextual, process analyses. David Wilson suggested a dichotomy that contrasted reductionist/objectivist ways of knowing to others with his dimension of voluntarism-determinism. He conceived of the change process at the voluntary end of the dimension as something that can be controlled within organizations and at the determined end as something that is determined primarily by outside forces. Transferring this way of thinking to the study of innovation would see innovation at the voluntary end of the continuum as driven by factors like planned change, leadership and deliberately induced crises and at the determined end as a continual, adaptive response by an organization to a complex environment of factors impinging on it. Voluntarism emphasizes management and the organizational

Table 1
Correlates of innovation

Variables:	Rogers & Kim	Jacques & Ryan	Mohr 1969	Merritt	Yin et al	Hale & Williams	Grady	Borins 1998
The innovation	x							
Communication channels	x			x			x	
Time pressures	x				x			
Members of a social system	x							
Availability of resources		x	x	x				x
Uncertainty in structurally loose organization		x						
Organizational conflict		x						
Strength of obstacles			x					x
Personal/organizational objectives closely related		x	x		x		x	
Process to encourage nonroutine thinking				x				
Support for government flexibility by public				x				
Process to evaluate and choose proposals				x				
Institutionalization of innovative policies				x	x			x
Number of decision points					x			
Degree of professional organization					x			
Reward structure					x		x	
Organizational traditions					x			
Amount of client contact and influence					x	x		
Incremental innovation	x	x	x	x	x			
Quasi sequential process							x	
Employee participation						x		
Managerial discretion						x		
Partnerships						x		
Productivity improvement/work measurement						x		
Central role of management in fostering innovation*							x	x
Initiators front-line/middle management								x
Politicians and agency heads as initiators							x	
Comprehensive planning							x	
Coordination								x

* Grady (1992): Higher-level managers support new concepts, lower-level managers support implementation.
Source: Glor, 2000, p. 12.

level, while determinism emphasizes societal factors and patterns outside the control of bureaucrat or politician.

Based on the distinction between voluntary and determined concepts, this paper examines in turn evidence for innovation as voluntary and innovation as determined in three govern-

ments with which I am personally familiar. It then ponders, “What is the best way to understand innovation?” This study of the three governments creates an opportunity to examine the innovation process.

Methodology

In an attempt to understand and to assess the relative value of analyzing innovation in voluntary and determined terms, innovation is studied in the Regional Municipality of York in Ontario of the early 1970s, the Government of Saskatchewan of 1971–82, and the Government of Canada of the 1980s and 1990s. The study deals with innovation at three levels of government, over three decades. Evidence salient to the voluntary and determined approaches is presented, and the learning suggested by each is identified.

Voluntarism is the concept that people can choose to make and can enact changes. Will (motivation), empowerment (morale), and culture are cardinal concepts in the current versions of voluntarism, and formed the basis of much writing on innovation in the 1980s and 1990s, including NPM and my own (Glor, 1997, 1998). The innovation process in the three governments is analyzed in voluntary terms, exploring problems faced, solutions chosen, results achieved, processes followed and skills needed. The voluntary analysis concentrates on the actions of decision makers, planners, and implementers.

In deterministic terms, the study seeks to uncover consistent strategies and patterns of behavior. Emphasizing forces that define what happens, within a context, this approach includes circumstances internal to the organization, but focuses on external ones. The theory that innovation is determined holds that innovation emerges because of fundamental characteristics of the government, its society, its history, and its social and political processes. The deterministic analysis treats change as emergent, a process, and in relationship to other factors in the environment such as the economy, ideology, power relationships, and the health of the environment. Innovation in the three governments is examined as a government trait, as emerging through history, and as a process (Glor, 2000), through context, population ecology, organizational life cycles, markets, power in organizations, and political models of change (Wilson, 1992).

Case studies—innovation as voluntary

This section explores the hypothesis that management is the most important factor in understanding the innovation process. It addresses planning, implementation, and will internal to the three governments by describing innovations and by emphasizing plans, strategies, processes, and results.

Voluntarism in the Region of York

Problems

During the 1960s it became clear to the Government of Ontario that county, village, and town services were inefficient due to the small service units, and that important services were

lacking because small counties and towns could not support them. This was especially true of health and social services (HSS). York Region's primary problem was the population pressure from Metropolitan Toronto into the region.

Solutions, results

To centralize and enlarge services, the province added a new, fourth level of government, the regional municipality, during the late 1960s. Three regions integrated their HSS—York, Kitchener-Waterloo, and Sudbury. At the time, great benefits were expected of integrated human services, and the same innovation was adopted by Manitoba and the federal government during the early 1970s. The chief administrative officer (CAO) of the region was a long-time municipal administrator with no special interest in health and social services, while the commissioner of Health and Social Services (CHSS) was a progressive doctor. Two young staff with experience in the new field of community development were hired during the early 1970s, one to head up the social services program, the other to provide planning support to HSS.

The new regions were required to prepare official plans, cost them, and submit them for approval to the Ontario Municipal Board by a specific deadline. York Region was an early innovator, in being one of the first regions to prepare its plan, and one of only two or three to include HSS in its plan. It focused its planning efforts on funneling Metropolitan Toronto's expansion into towns rather than allowing it to scatter throughout the rural farming areas.

The Board of Health, the Health and Social Services Committee (HSSC) and the Regional Council were involved in decision making. The preparatory work and the planning process for HSS was conducted with the approval of the HSSC, but the health and social component was not approved by the HSSC. Rather, the input was incorporated into the official plan and addressed by the Regional Council. The Regional Council turned down both the efforts to control growth with zoning and transportation services and the public housing component.

Processes

The Region provided funding to hire consultants to support the analysis of the road, water, and sewer needs of the region. Although no budget was provided, a small amount was also made available for the health and social component. Using staff resources, a consultation and planning process was conducted by the HSS unit with regional HSS agencies, including both public and private homes for the aged, voluntary agencies, physicians, and the two large hospitals. While most of the groups stayed actively engaged, the hospitals, which received their funding from the Province of Ontario, dropped out of the process. Contrary to expectations of the regional engineers, sewers and transportation did not end up being the most expensive component of the plan, but rather the HSS component, with a substantial public housing element. York Region did not have any public housing at this time. When key components of the plan were rejected, the planning commissioner resigned and the HSS planner soon left the Region for another position.

Skills

The work involved both developmental/consulting skills and political skills. The new head of Social Services had run for office and had both.

Voluntarism in Saskatchewan

The Blakeney government took office in 1971 with a major change agenda. During its ten years out of office, the social democratic CCF/NDP had spent considerable effort developing and discovering new ideas and methods for responding to Saskatchewan's challenges. In government from 1971–82, the NDP developed or was an early adopter of 126 policies and 34 new processes, a total of 160 innovations (Glor 1997, 2000).¹

Problems

As the Blakeney government came to power it faced “a rusty and demoralized public service that was fundamentally resistant to change” (Wallace, 2000). The province's economic situation was poor, but because the government had been inactive it had no debt. Saskatchewan's staples-based economy produced considerable variability in revenues from year to year. To deliver on the government's many promises, government and public service were challenged to generate new human and financial resources, a budget process capable of sound resource allocation, new systems for policy planning and financial management, a governmentwide management information system, effective horizontal and departmental coordination that did not destroy departmental initiative, systemic changes in the crown corporation sector, and new crown corporations. (Wallace, 2000) The government needed, as well, to engage the public on an ongoing basis, to keep client and interest groups on-side, to develop at least some control over its boom-bust economy, and, because of its social justice agenda, to bring the disadvantaged into the government's economic agenda in an effective, developmental manner. The province also wanted to maintain federal government and national support and funding. The Blakeney government sought to renew and modernize the public service at the same time as it introduced a major change agenda that required first-rate public administration. This combination of problems created a more complex and difficult challenge than most new governments confront. Innovative governments face these more than others.

Solutions, results

According to a voluntary analysis, the government dealt with its public service problems by motivating and supporting existing staff and hiring new staff. It created a culture of excellence by appealing to professionalism, modernization, and a tradition of good government and by respecting public servants and taking their ideas seriously.

Because the government's financial resources were minimal—it had the lowest expenditures and revenues per capita in the country—introduction of new programs required strategies for creating additional revenue, involving both economic expansion and increased taxes. The government supported the poor economy by investing equity in resource industries, accelerating development, and creating new crown corporations to invest in, own, manage, produce and sell resources. As resource prices increased and the economy expanded rapidly, tax revenues on resources were retained for further investment. New budget processes were introduced—long-term fiscal accounting and a program-budgeting management information system. An active program and policy analysis function was created. Line managers were allowed to manage while remaining accountable to cabinet. New cabinet-

based planning processes and structures created a shared agenda and maintained control and accountability. The budget was balanced and all debt was self-liquidating. At the same time, government finances were made more transparent. As management and processes were modernized, changes were often introduced iteratively.

Even in areas where transformational commitments were made, the approach was incremental. Although the NDP had identified nationalization of potash as a goal in its platform, the takeover of 40% of the potash industry by the province was primarily a strategic and tactical rather than an ideological decision. The government's objective was to increase its economic rents in an industry where Saskatchewan had 40% of world reserves and 40% of world trade (Laux & Molot, 1978), but received little revenue from them because of concessions made by previous governments. A 72-step process was pursued, reflecting the government's tenacious efforts to find negotiated solutions, but also its consistent renewal of its decision to take action in this important industry. In the north as well, local organizations had identified transformational goals of power- and revenue-sharing, and the cabinet committed to this approach. The desire for quick results and the decision to create a single agency to serve the north finessed the community and political objectives. The lack of inclusive processes and a shortage of front-line staff with consultative and developmental skills assured incremental change when transformational change was possible.

Processes

A cool, logical strategy and an incremental approach marked the government's processes (Glor, 2000). Across the government, ministers and departments consulted and appointed permanent advisory committees as they introduced the NDP's platform, acted on the advice received, and introduced new policies and programs. Issues were coordinated horizontally and vertically; additional sources of funding were found. At the same time, public, client group, and interest group support was developed. A variety of consultative processes were used, especially at the beginning of the government when the pace of change was fastest. Some argued that the government later lost its support because the premier removed himself from these processes and spent too much time on constitutional discussions (Glor, 2000).

Skills

Many skills required to bring about this change were similar across functions and departments. Personal skills were needed—like aptitude in leadership and human development; listening and communication; teamwork and cooperation; negotiating, tactics, and conflict resolution. Political skills were required, and infighting ability. Staff needed creativity, problem-solving, and integrative proficiency, and adeptness at lateral thinking. Technical skills were also needed, such as policy, research, and program planning, implementation and evaluation ability; financial planning, control and disclosure capacity; management and coordination expertise; and professional skills such as legal, economic and resource-specific ones. At the same time an ethical foundation was maintained through values such as a commitment to equity, openness to change, flexibility, tenacity, clear objectives, a sense of balance, and a long-term perspective. The profession of public administration was highly respected—preferred to all others. Together these public manage-

ment problems faced, solutions adopted, processes chosen, skills developed/engaged, and the results achieved supported and made possible the choices and will of the government.

Voluntarism in the Government of Canada

During the late 1980s and the 1990s, major changes occurred in the federal government.

Problems

High deficits and high debt created stress, even burning platforms that set the stage for change.

Solutions

Although earlier Liberal governments had periodically cut budgets, from 1985 to 1993 the Progressive Conservatives (PCs) made yearly budget cuts in the order of \$2 billion, introduced sunseting (temporary) programs, and made the first cuts to transfer programs, both to individuals (unemployment insurance) and to the rich provinces (for social and educational programs). The cuts were only sufficient to meet the increased payments on the new debt incurred each year. When the Liberals returned to power in 1993, they introduced a major retrenchment, Program Review, involving the retirement or severance of 50,000 of 240,000 public servants, and major cuts to all programs, including support to the nonprofit sector and all provinces. Program Review 1 and 2 from 1993 to 1998 reduced overall spending by 10% and program spending outside of debt payments by 16% (\$19B Canadian/year). Between them, the program cuts and increased economic activity restored a balanced budget (Glor, 2001).

Results

When prosperity returned, the Liberals introduced a variation on the PC's sunseting programs. The introduction of a large yearly contingency fund of \$2–3 billion was a Liberal invention, that gave the government more flexibility to provide temporary relief for irritants and to react to issues more quickly, while not tying the government to ongoing, yearly funding of the initiatives. While taxes were cut permanently, program enhancements such as The Canada Fund for Innovation, aid to agriculture, and support to the arts were given one-time funding out of the surplus.

Processes

Decision-making processes were primarily top-down. In the decision to act, departments were not consulted, nor were target groups nor clients. The decisions were announced shortly after visits to Ottawa by the major financial houses and international funding agencies, creating an implied link. At the same time, departments and ministers were given considerable flexibility in how they would implement the massive cuts. Review committees, chaired by the Privy Council Office, the Prime Minister's department, and not Finance or the Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS), which were isolated from the public in their day-to-day operations, reviewed each department's proposals. Although programs and provinces had

been cut previously, at the Program Review stage of the budget cutting exercises, nonprofit third parties (NGOs) and all provinces were cut substantially for the first time.

Skills

The skills required for budget cutting were substantially different from those required for growth. For twenty years the federal government had placed a good deal of emphasis on cooperative federalism, problem solving, and (to some extent) governance of the public sector. The cutbacks required decisive, top-down management, and rigidity of application—although limited amounts of flexibility were shown. Health Canada, for example, was allowed to take its largest reduction during Program Review II instead of I, as other departments did.

Case studies—innovation as determined

The theory of determinism focuses on antecedent factors and processes, and treats innovation as emergent and a process. What does a deterministic analysis reveal about these three cases?

Determinism in the Region of York

As portrayed in the previous section, what happened in York Region can be seen as voluntary. It can also be seen as the outcome of broader forces.

Trait of innovativeness

Because it was a new government, York Region cannot be assessed for traits, but none of its component counties had a reputation for innovativeness.

Historical determinants

The decision makers on the Regional Council were mainly former members of county councils. As was typically the case, many of them were pro-development, seeing growth as a way to augment services and (possibly) their own power. At the same time, they were mostly conservative, agrarian-based councillors, despite the large, growing towns in the region, and the encroaching Metropolitan Toronto. Even the chair of the HSS Committee, a town representative who was a former NDP candidate, had become more conservative, if not more traditional, over time. The original counties of York Region were not known for their adherence to the then-dominant liberal political ideology. Despite a temporary period of greater consultation and openness conducted by new staff, this conservative pattern was retained. The demands of the provincial Municipal Board and the commissioners of Planning and HSS supported a period of innovativeness, but the traditional interests, councillors, and the engineering-based departments quickly returned to dominance. In fact the Commissioner of HSS soon decided to break down the joint HSS again into separate services, and this experiment was also ended. Within a few years he retired. It was twenty years before the

Table 2
Life cycle model—Region of York

Birth/rebirth	Change	Death/transformation
New organizational structures: region created, HSS amalgamated Consultation process	HSS became momentarily more important than roads, water, sewers Integrated into official plan process	Council unwilling to make major increases in expenditures for HSS, especially public housing Most recommendations ignored
New, innovative staff: commissioner of planning, head of social services, health and social planner	Integrated into administrative and planning processes	Staff had implicit choice to ignore their beliefs or leave

original head of social services replaced the CAO of the region. While growth did not occur willy-nilly, it spread throughout the agricultural area near Metropolitan Toronto.

A systems perspective

Seen from a systems perspective, the HSS program can be perceived as part of a population ecology in the region that included competing sets of rural and town interests; planning and development interests; federal, provincial, regional, and town governments; departments of HSS, Planning, Engineering; community services, including voluntary organizations, doctors, hospitals; and local health services such as public health, home care, and homes for the aged. The HSS department gained greater prominence and a larger budget through amalgamation, and acquired power by creating consensus among its stakeholder groups about how to proceed. At the same time the departments of the Region were in competition for budgets through the official plan process: consensus was not achieved. When HSS filled a niche, it was successful, but when it began actively competing for funds and prominence with the engineering-based programs, it lost out. County sector recipes favoring engineering services continued to be followed in nonadaptive ways in the new, broader context. Seen as a life cycle, new policies and new staff initiated change and adaptation, but decision makers were consistently unwilling to adopt staff recommendations (Table 2), and the proposals died.

Determinism in Saskatchewan

The Saskatchewan government of 1971–82 introduced at least 126 policy innovations as an innovator (first) or early adopter (second or third) (Glor, 1997, 10–19) and thirty-four administrative/process innovations (Glor, 2000, 143–44). Considering traits as absolute—an organization either does or does not have a trait—the Government of Saskatchewan can therefore be described as innovative in policy and administration, as having the trait of innovativeness.

Historical determinants

The trait of innovativeness can be considered to have been determined historically—by the historical, social, individual, economic and political environment. Saskatchewan is a

mid-sized, relatively poor province, with a population that has remained stable since the 1930s at about one million. Several Saskatchewan historians (Lipset, 1968; McLeod & McLeod, 1987; Glor, 1997; Gruending, 1990; Harding, 1995) have described the conflict of Saskatchewan people and provincial businesses with national and multinational corporations in the grain, food, and potash industries. Its people have suffered hardship and isolation: out of hardship grew a need and a willingness to deal with problems. Openness to new ideas, nurtured in progressive social, political, and religious movements, was facilitated by exposure to outside thinking that came with extensive in- and out-migration. Many people developed a sense of providing leadership, of playing on a larger stage than the boundaries of the province. Saskatchewan leaders have been especially prominent in showing the way for social programs and the developmental use of public ownership in Canada. They became national leaders in aboriginal organizations, in cooperatives, and in the political domain, especially in the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) and New Democratic Party (NDP), but also in the Progressive Conservative (PC) Party.

Over many years, NDP agendas were set at local and provincial party meetings and conventions, and were outlined in party discussion papers and policies passed by them. In the 1968 edition of *Agrarian Socialism*, Seymour Martin Lipset said of the 1960s Saskatchewan CCF/NDP, “party conferences did function as realistic means of communication between sentiment at the rural grass roots and the party summits . . . at the same time . . . the factors in the Saskatchewan social structure that made for a high level of rural political activity were declining with the improvement in communications and transportation facilities . . . grass roots involvement in the formation of party policy (had) been weakened” (Lipset, 1968, xx). The NDP government elected in 1971 found more of its support in the cities than had the CCF before it, but it still had a strong agricultural orientation.

The political environment prior to the Blakeney government was one where a noninterventionist Liberal government, succeeding a long-term CCF government, had been in power provincially for eight years from 1964 to 1971. A willingness to change was reinforced by two changes of government in eight years and the activism of the Diefenbaker Tories (1958–63) and the Pearson (1963–68) and Trudeau (1968–79) Liberals in office nationally. The election of the NDP signaled readiness to embark once again on active efforts to address common needs.

A system/process perspective

While Saskatchewan’s innovativeness can be considered a government trait, developing over time, it can also be considered a process. A process model does not see implementation of change as the only problem faced by government. Two systemic approaches to studying innovation in open systems—the ecological approach and the life cycles approach—are applied to Saskatchewan below.

In Saskatchewan several populations are important to government, including the government’s political party, in competition with other political parties, and the set of federal, provincial and territorial governments. The process of creation/birth, transformation, and disappearance was reflected in innovations like the Human Resources Development Agency, Land Bank and the Saskatchewan Science Council (Glor, 1997, 242–45). The Government of Saskatchewan, in turn, occupied an innovative niche by identifying and being the first to

implement many innovations. Other provinces adopted Saskatchewan innovations selectively and more or less quickly, and the federal government aided dissemination of some innovations (Glor, 1998).

Innovations occupied other niches, such as the niche of empowering workers as opposed to companies and managers. Compared to the Tommy Douglas government, the Blakeney government entered more fully the niche of managing, developing, processing, and marketing primary resources. As predicted by niche analysis, the Crown Investments Corporation, with its advertising campaign for the Family of Crown Corporations adopted the same strategies as others occupying the niche of resource development. The public did not react well. The government expanded niche width in areas such as education, training, and private sector- and crown corporation-based employment programs for Aboriginal people.

Saskatchewan governments had to occupy a broad niche, appealing to a wide sector of the population throughout the province, in order to be elected and continue to be elected: hence the need to satisfy citizens, interest groups and client groups. This helps to illuminate the NDP's defeat in 1982. By promising new assistance programs and tax cuts for the middle class and farmers, the Conservatives occupied a niche of people who were having a tough time economically. The NDP failed to evolve or transform itself to meet the needs of a large enough population in a deepening recession. In some ways the government had become too specialized, occupying a narrow niche with its economic and constitutional policies, no longer satisfying social activists sufficiently, and failing to meet the personal economic needs of the population. NDP governments often face this problem, typically only being elected in three-way splits.

Despite failing to occupy a sufficiently broad niche, Saskatchewan can be seen to have created sector recipes. Government investment in natural resources, in an environment of perceived scarcity of oil, gas, and energy generally, became a sector recipe that was also adopted by the Quebec Parti Quebécois, the Ontario and Alberta PCs, and the federal Liberals. These governments occupied the niche for different reasons, however—Saskatchewan to gain some control over the industries, Ontario to support the industries. The subsequent Saskatchewan PC political campaign of 1982 and the federal PC campaign of 1984 followed the conservative Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan recipes of reduced government, with success, while the NDP did not.

An analysis of the Blakeney government as a political system is presented in Table 3. Major exterior and interior influences, interior relationships, processes and functions, government products, impacts and overall performance are assessed. The complexity of such an analysis is evident, but its capacity to include many relevant factors is also clear. This analysis includes and highlights external influences, stakeholders, and the effects of the political system.

Another open system approach is a life cycle analysis, focused on the deterministic potency of organizational age and development over time. Analyzed as a life cycle, the Blakeney government could be seen as follows:

A. Entrepreneurial stage. The government's key issue was survival and its first task was to get elected. In 1970 the Saskatchewan NDP fashioned a new, dynamic, inclusive political platform.

B. Collective stage. After 1974 the organization began to take shape. Planners and

Table 3
Systems analysis: the political system in the Blakeney government

Exterior influences:	Interior influences:	Interior relationships:	Processes and functions:	Govt. products:	Govt. impacts:	Overall performance:
History of Sask.	Type and quality of information	Political, social, bureaucratic networks	Legal context	Information Programs		Optimal or sub-optimal?
Culture of Sask.	Ministers opinions	Political opinion	Implementation processes	New Crown corporations	Restructuring of economy =	Optimal
Provl and nat. NDP	Ideology	Ethics	Accountability processes	Jobs	Increased economic activity =	Sub
Stakeholders, interest, client groups	Perceptions	of bureaucracy	Decision-making processes		Social changes =	Sub
Political culture	Motives	Bureaucratic opinion of government	Budgetary processes		Cultural changes =	Sub
Social movements	Political awareness	Relationships among members of cabinet;			Environmental changes =	Sub
Intern., nat., and prov. unions	Polling	between cabinet and MLAs;			Political changes =	Sub
International orgns.	Expectations	among specialists, planners and decision makers			Structural changes =	Optimal
Economic dvmt.	Intentions					
Sustainable dvmt.	Planning					
Weather	Supposed consequences					
Physical environment	DMs and central agencies					
Technical changes	Appropriate political options					
Appropriate options	Technology					
Infrastructure	Objectives					
Federal and prov. govts.	Ideals and ideology					
Sask. elites						
Public opinion						
Information						
Media						
Experts						
Concepts/ideas/options						
Ideals, values						
Com. and soc. envs.						

Source: Glor, 2000, p. 166.

Table 4
Life cycle model: the political cycle of the NDP in Saskatchewan

Birth/rebirth	Transformation	Death
CCF/NDP government 1944	Agrarian base Participative, grass roots party Economic recession	Liberal government 1964
NDP government 1971–82	Agrarian, shift to urban base Conservatives more populist, middle-class oriented Economic recession	Conservative government 1982–91
NDP government 1991–2000	Primarily urban base Economic recession in agriculture	Coalition NDP-Liberal government, 2000

Source: Glor, 2000, p. 170

professional managers were recruited, departments and functions defined. The organization began to establish its position, internal tasks were allocated and who had responsibility and autonomy to carry them out became important. Greater division of labor was established in Finance, Executive Council and line departments as the implementation and much of the planning function was transferred from Executive Council to line departments. By the second election in 1975, the Department of Finance had completed and Social Services was contemplating a major reorganization.

C. Formalization stage. Coordination was a major concern by 1979, the year of the third election. An interdepartmental committee was created to provide one-window and any-window coordination of applications for development projects. Intergovernmental Affairs was created. Evaluation and reducing costs had become preeminent concerns.

D. Elaboration stage (strategic change). The government developed a management training process to teach new skills and create change within the bureaucracy. Key senior bureaucrats—Gary Beatty and Wes Bolstad—left the government. Central agency bureaucrats were moved into line positions, for example, Murray Wallace from deputy minister of Executive Council to president of Saskatchewan Government Insurance. The government lacked a source of new ideas.

Other life cycle analyses can be done, giving somewhat different impressions of the Blakeney government in relation to its environment. Table 4 outlines the electoral life cycle of governments in Saskatchewan since 1944, when the first CCF government was elected. As interest rates skyrocketed around 1980, life became harder for many and the Blakeney government's support faded. While government results were usually good, eventually they were not good enough. Drought, low grain prices, and recession were often associated with changes in government in Saskatchewan—with the election of Diefenbaker in 1958, Blakeney in 1971, Devine in 1982, Romanow in 1991, and a coalition government in 1999. Election results were more unstable in Saskatchewan than in the other governments studied.

In terms of the appropriateness of strategies during different stages of the life cycle, the NDP in Saskatchewan can be seen to have succeeded in 1971 by adopting radical solutions in the face of difficult economic challenges during a shift between historical periods, and

Table 5

Life cycle model: the political cycle of the Liberals in the Government of Canada

Birth/rebirth	Change	Death/transformation
Liberal government 1935–1957	Progressive conservative government 1957–1963—two minority governments	Defeated
Liberal government 1963–1984—six months in 1979 PC minority	Progressive conservative government 1979, 1984–1993	Liberal government 1993–present

subsequently to have faltered in 1982 by failing to adopt sufficiently revolutionary changes in the face of economic depression, instability, and radical policy proposals from the New Right PC Opposition. The way the NDP subsequently shifted to the right in the face of the 1980s and 1990s conservative political environment, with its notion of reduced government, can be seen as adaptive in the life cycle context.

Determinism in the Government of Canada

Given its size, the Government of Canada should be Canada's most innovative government, according to voluntary theory. For the most part the federal government has not, however, interpreted its role as that of being a policy and program innovator. Because of shared jurisdiction with the provinces, Canada has seen the provinces as taking the lead in program innovation, and itself as leading and facilitating the adoption of innovations by laggard provinces in order to create common national programs (Glor, 1998). Portrayed as a life cycle in the political domain, Canada has tended to be dominated by one party (Table 5). In the process or administrative domain, on the other hand, Canada has been an innovator (Gow, 1994; Kernaghan, Marson & Borins, 2000).

Factors contributing to the federal government's innovative administration have been the consolidation and implementation of conservative ideology, the government's extensive resources and the power of political decision makers. Public servants generated influence through consultation processes—they could argue that the ideas brought forward had a form of legitimacy. The budget reduction process had no public mandate, however. When the Liberals replaced the PCs in 1993, their election platform did not call for budget cutting. In the face of a looming financial crisis, the government soon adopted cutback patterns similar to those of the Conservatives in government before them, then deepened the cuts further. The competition internal to government among social, economic and financial departments was won by the financial and economic departments—Finance, Industry and the Privy Council Office. As the Canadian economy failed to pull out of the cyclic recession of the early 1990s effectively, deficits grew. When the economy began to grow again, many of the new tax cuts and new funding were put to economic growth agendas, more minor amounts to dealing with social inequalities. Part of the reason for this was the new international ecology that had developed. With international economic institutions, free trade agreements, and communications technology making economic globalization easier, Canada responded to international pressures for lower taxes and less government. Assistance to agriculture declined considerably and an emphasis was placed on industry and agri-business. The government offered a

generous early retirement program that released a good portion of the 50–60 year-old cohort in the civil service. This changed power relationships in the public service, and reduced organizational memory.

The preceding analysis concentrates on conflict among different departments of government, levels of government, domestic and international agencies, and among types of services. Many other ways of analyzing the situation of the Government of Canada are possible, from the interpretive, to the structuralist, to the humanist. All suggest patterns in the ways organizations behaved over time.

Analysis

The comparison of innovation in a conservative, social democratic, and liberal government in both voluntary and determined terms allows different aspects of the governments to come to light. York Region retained a rural focus, despite urbanization; Saskatchewan shifted but maintained both rural and urban foci; Canada moved to an urban emphasis. While the voluntary approach identified the rationalist steps and elements that made creation of the innovations possible, they presented an insufficient picture. The trait, historical, and systems approaches offered a different understanding not of what happened, but of why and how it happened.

Voluntary perspective

Much of the writing on innovation in government has taken a voluntary approach. Although nothing has been published about York Region's planning process during the early 1970s, Alan Blakeney and Sandford Borins' (1992) book on management² of the Saskatchewan government and Glor's (1997, 2000) books on policy and process innovations in that government took voluntary perspectives by treating the government's policy and process innovations as systematically planned phenomena. Likewise, publications on the federal government tended to take voluntary outlooks (Ingstrop & Crookall, 1998; Aucoin, 1995). From a voluntary perspective, the Saskatchewan and the federal government's innovations can be seen as planned change, using an implementation process, and the correlates of innovation can be identified. In this admittedly limited consideration of each government's innovations, four innovations were identified for York Region (early preparation of an official plan, amalgamation of health and social services, developmental consultation, and inclusion of HSS in the official plan), 160 for Saskatchewan (of which three-quarters were policy innovations), and seven for the federal government (all of which were administrative innovations).

Internal correlates of innovation

It is possible to describe the innovation process in these governments as rational, but is there consistency among them, such that lessons for creating innovation can be drawn from them? One way of addressing this question is to consider the relevance of variables (correlates of innovation) identified in other studies to these cases. Most striking in exam-

Table 6
Assessment of three governments' meeting of correlates of innovation

Variables:	Region of York	Government of Saskatchewan	Government of Canada
The innovation	Yes	Yes	Yes
Communication channels	Yes	Yes	Yes
Time pressures	Yes	Yes	Yes
Members of a social system	Yes	Yes	Yes
Availability of resources	Yes	Yes	Yes
Uncertainty in structurally loose organization	Yes	Yes	Yes
Organizational conflict	Yes	Yes	Yes
Strength of obstacles	Yes	Yes	Yes
Personal/organizational objectives closely related	Yes	Yes	Yes
Process to encourage nonroutine thinking	Yes	Yes	Yes
Public Support for government flexibility	No	Yes	No
Process to evaluate and choose proposals	Yes	Yes	Yes
Institutionalization of innovative policies	No	Yes	Yes
Number of decision points	Yes	Yes	Yes
Degree of professional organization	Yes	Yes	Yes
Reward structure	No	Yes	Yes
Organizational traditions	Yes	Yes	Yes
Amount of client contact and influence	Yes	Yes	Yes
Incremental innovation	Yes	Yes	Yes
Quasi sequential process	Yes	Yes	Yes
Employee participation	Yes	Yes	Yes
Managerial discretion	Yes	Yes	Yes
Partnerships	Yes	Yes	No
Productivity improvement/work measurement	No	Yes	Yes
Central role of management in fostering innovation	Yes	Yes	Yes
Initiators front-line-middle management	Yes	Yes	No
Politicians and agency heads as initiators	No	Yes	Yes
Comprehensive planning	Yes	Yes	Yes
Coordination	Yes	Yes	Yes

ining the variables other authors have identified was the limited overlap across authors and the resulting long length of the list (see Table 1). In Table 6, the three cases are assessed against the twenty-eight correlates and processes of innovativeness identified in Table 1. An analysis of the three governments against these correlates of innovation reveals little difference among York Region, Saskatchewan and the federal government in terms of creating the correlates of innovation.

Since other evidence presented showed substantial differences in the innovativeness of the governments, if these were the factors that made successful innovation possible then addressing these issues or having these characteristics should presumably have made a government innovative. Such a long list of management factors, almost all of which can be identified in all three governments, does not seem to clarify how the governments were able to be innovative. In fact, it is not clear that these were the determinants of innovation, nor is it apparent what these correlates revealed. Thus the limits of an internal correlates approach are demonstrated: While it was asserted that specific approaches were needed, which, if any, were key to successful innovation was not discovered. The voluntary approach

was found lacking in that it claimed specific steps were necessary but did not make clear what was key to the success of innovation. If the voluntary approach failed to identify the keys to innovation, was the determined approach more successful?

Determined perspective

Innovation considered as an emergent government trait shows the Region of York as exhibiting innovativeness over a set of specific issues for a short time, then pushing these disruptive forces out of the organization. A study of historical determinants in Saskatchewan offered an explanation for the population's, the leadership's, and the NDP's willingness to support innovation. In this Saskatchewan context, innovation considered as a process through population ecology and life cycle analyses revealed determinants outside the control of public service and politicians, but affecting their futures and the outcomes of their strategies. Likewise in the Government of Canada, external and internal forces pushing the Government to reduce its budget expenditures became dominant within a year of the Liberals' election. Understanding of these determinants did not, however, identify the keys to innovation, nor make it possible to predict innovativeness in future. They did create some appreciation of the importance of context and create some learning (Savoie, 1998).

Voluntarism or determinism

Both voluntary and determined approaches have strengths and weaknesses. While a voluntary analysis identified internal and some external correlates of innovation, it was unable to pick out key elements. Likewise, a deterministic analysis explained the innovation in a variety of ways, but it could not identify best approaches. Can anything be said about whether voluntarism or determinism seems a more appropriate and useful strategy for understanding innovation? Participant-observer authors have not typically seen innovation in either voluntaristic or deterministic terms, but as a mixture of the two (Glor, 1997, 2000; Kernaghan et al., 2000; Peters & Savoie, 1998). Frequently, innovations were made possible by history and the economy, were initiated by will, and were followed by a period of uncertainty in which negotiation, power, choice, will, and the interaction of these and other factors played a role. In Saskatchewan, Wallace, Kramer, Gentles, Snyder and Glor (Glor, 2000) emphasized the voluntary aspects of innovation, seeing the innovations they examined as defined and implemented through planning, decisions, structures, processes, and individual contributions. While the authors ascribed voluntarism to the innovation processes, they identified many determined factors, in an openness to the wider context. Wallace (2000) saw PMIS (Program-based Management Information System—a Massachusetts innovation) emerging as the best choice among several competitors being proposed and adopted outside of the Saskatchewan government. There was no initial sense of one best way. The well-researched choice was perceived to serve the information needs of line departments, not primarily the control (voluntary) needs of the central agencies. The innovation was not imposed by will but offered for noncompulsory adoption. The government's internal cycle of centralization and decentralization was an influence here as well. Hammersmith and Hauk

(2000), in turn, argued that greater openness and diversity of input to decisions would have produced stronger institutions and programs in northern Saskatchewan, and more efficient and effective programs that were better adapted to northerners' needs. Although they used a voluntary argument, they were also advancing the need for a more open and cooperative rather than a closed competitive process. Harding (1995) saw the Blakeney government implementing state corporatism and a technocratic approach to government, and lacking a focus on social justice. He highlighted the conflict between party and government. Based on the evidence presented in this paper, it is not possible to choose a best way.

Conclusion

Some of the strengths and weaknesses of voluntary and determined analyses have been described in this paper. From a voluntary perspective, how innovations were planned and implemented was identified. No one key to success was revealed, nor was it possible to predict what would happen—to say for certain that the immediate participants played the essential roles. Some determinants and processes were identified and analytic categories seemed appropriate and helpful, but each process remained unique. While some factors that determined what happened were identified and examined, it is much more difficult to claim they were understood, accurately characterized, or captured the one best explanation. Despite the discomfort this demonstration of uncertainty creates for those working in the current voluntary environment (the certainty consistently presented to administrators seems to constantly change as management gurus sequentially claim to have the answer to complex and difficult challenges), it also opens a different window on perceptions of reality. Nonetheless, the research on this dichotomy illuminates two fundamentally different ways in which the innovation process is understood.

Notes

1. Further information on these analyses are available from the author.
2. The popularity of the word management grows out of voluntarism.

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