Policy on Results – The Government of Canada

Statistics Canada

On July 1st, 2016 the Government of Canada established the Policy on Results. The objective of the policy was twofold. First, the policy aims to improve the achievement of results across the government and second its goal is to enhance the understanding by citizens of the results governments seek to achieve, the results they do achieve and the resources used to achieve them.

It is expected that, once implemented, the policy will ensure:

- Departments are clear on what they are trying to achieve and how they assess success;
- Departments measure and evaluate their performance, using the resulting information to manage and improve programs, policies and services;
- Resources are allocated based on performance to optimize results, including through Treasury Board submissions, through resource alignment reviews, and internally by departments themselves; and
- Parliamentarians and the public receive transparent, clear and useful information on the results that departments have achieved, and the resources used to do so.

Government of Canada departments reacted to this policy by establishing Chief Data Officers (CDO) and Results and Delivery Units (RDUs) in their organizations. These individuals and units were tasked with implementing the policy and establishing a departmental results charter. Much of the early work involved identifying departmental data that could be used to report on results or identifying collection systems that could be used / developed to acquire the necessary information in order to report on the results. Work has not progressed into the development of departmental results and delivery indicators which can be shared with the general public.

Departments faced two main challenges implementing the policy. The first was a lack of experience in data management practices - the ability to acquire the data, store it, provide broad access and extract knowledge from the data and use it to tell a results story.

The second challenge departments faced concerned the lack of an available statistical infrastructure they could use to construct their results indicators. Classification systems, concepts and statistical methods were foreign constructs and not clearly understood. This lack of an infrastructure also had the potential to create inconsistencies between the various departments. For example, a key Government of Canada priority was the establishment of a ten-year $180 billion commitment to invest in Canada's infrastructure.   This priority was shared

by several departments including Infrastructure Canada, the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation and departments responsible for Culture, Transport and Fisheries. The initial problem these departments faced was that there was no general definition of infrastructure. Without first agreeing on the concept of infrastructure, departments would be unable to baseline their results.

This is one of the areas where Statistics Canada was able to exercise a leadership role. The agency could leverage its expertise in developing statistical infrastructure which the departments could use to construct their results story. This role was beneficial from several perspectives. First, having the Statistics Canada develop the overall framework ensures that the resulting indicators are apolitical and provides increased credibility to results being reported by the various government departments. Second, the fact that Statistics Canada could ensure these frameworks align with national and international frameworks meant that the results can be viewed in a greater national or global context.

The policy on results the SDGs and other policy performance monitoring frameworks have the potential to change the role of NSOs. In the past, NSOs were responsible for producing broad economic measures such as indicators of national income, investment and wealth. As governments (Policy on Results in Canada) and international organizations (SDGs and the UNSC) strive to measure the outcome of their policies and programs the type of indicators required become more refined and specialized. For example, Statistics Canada regularly publishes statistics on the level of investment in and stock of public transit infrastructure. Reporting on the value of the investment or the value of the stock is no longer sufficient from a government departmental perspective. The department wants to know if the investment is making a difference in the lives of Canadians. Did the investment reduce commute times? Did the investment improve access? Did it result in a net reduction in green house gas emissions? – and can you provide this information on a project by project basis.

In the past, NSOs were not pushed into this space because users understood that the data and methods available did not support the development and analysis of these types of indicators. With recent advances in both the type of data available, the means to collect it, and the sophisticated methods that we can now employ on the data users are coming to expect these types of service and products from NSOs. The question we need to address is whether the future system of economic statistics has space for this type of product or whether this type of product is best left for others to produce.