Chapter 11
A Proposed Analytical Framework for Canadian Whole-of-Government Lessons Learned

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ABSTRACT
Meta-organizational approaches involving multiple government agencies or levels of government, military-civilian combinations, multi-sector or international coalitions are becoming increasingly standard practice for addressing complex operations. One of the challenges in the post-event lessons learned period has been the lack of an adequate analytical framework, which has led to the re-identification of key issues in similar lessons learned processes and documents each time. The objective of this chapter is to build upon the existing knowledge base of identified lessons and reduce the learning curve for future analysts. By developing a framework for the collection and analysis of whole-of-government lessons learned, future practitioners will have a consistent set of parameters upon which to develop their core collection plans, a structure for analysis, and be able to identify known risks to mission success. Drawing upon Canadian and international experiences from whole-of-government and comprehensive approaches, the chapter provides two considerations for issues analysis: a derived critical topics list for meta-organizational approaches and a capabilities framework that could be applied to lessons learned approaches in these kinds of complex initiatives.

INTRODUCTION
Meta-organizational (an organization of organizations) approaches involving multiple government agencies or levels of government, military-civilian combinations, multi-sector or international coalitions are increasingly becoming standard practice for addressing complex operations. Examples include domestic responses to emergency incidents, military operations in failing or failed states, international responses to humanitarian crises, and security planning for large international sport-
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In the aftermath of such events, the analysis of lessons tends to be done by individual military or civilian organizations to improve their own capabilities; in a few cases, senior government leadership has recognized the need for comprehensive lessons learned processes to address the broader inter-organizational perspective with the intention of improving future efforts. One of the lessons learned challenges has been the lack of an adequate analytical framework, which has led to the re-identification of key issues in similar lessons learned processes and documents each time.

This chapter draws upon Canadian and international experiences in gathering and analyzing lessons in multi-organizational operations and provides two considerations for issues analysis: a derived critical topics list for meta-organizational approaches and a capabilities framework that could be applied to the analysis of lessons in these kinds of complex initiatives. It begins by describing a selection of Canadian examples and then compares them with international experiences as a means of validation. The result is the creation of a preliminary critical topics list and capabilities framework. The proposed lessons learned framework suggested here is not intended to represent a rigorous research approach to identifying critical themes in multi-organizational lessons learned; rather it is an initial list of topics from which to identify, test and validate topics as the basis for future analysis.

BACKGROUND

The complexity of national and international problems and the responses to the resolution of those problems is more evident than ever. Globalization and advanced communications have made ideological, economic and security issues from which we might have once felt isolated no longer so. Conflicts, crises and situations in parts of the country or the globe now frequently have national or international implications, and call for collaborative or cooperative resolution and response by multiple stakeholders. The discussion of how or why this occurred is well beyond the discussion here, but suffice it to say, that there is a general need for those stakeholders to address what are referred to as wicked problems. These are described as problems that: are difficult to clearly articulate; have many interdependencies and are multi-causal in their creation; the responses lead to further consequences; are “moving targets”; have no clear solutions; are socially complex; do not rest within the responsibility of a single organization; involve changing behaviour; and may be a result of previous and serious policy failure (Australian Public Service Commission, 2007).

Governments recognize the need to address these problems on various levels and a whole-of-government approach is often required. While the Canadian and allied governments have always collaborated and leveraged capabilities across their respective ministries, departments and agencies, the recognition that this must be a standard approach has become more ingrained in the past 20 years. This shift has likely been due to economic pressures and the adoption of knowledge sharing as a tenet of good business and government, although supporting machinery remains a challenge. Whole-of-government has best been defined as:

...whole-of-government denotes public service agencies working across portfolio boundaries to achieve a shared goal and an integrated government response to particular issues. Approaches can be formal and informal. They can focus on policy development, program management and service delivery (Australian Government Management Advisory Committee, 2004, p. 1).

Federal organizations are obliged to align themselves, as appropriate, to the 16 outcomes of the Government of Canada’s Whole-of-Government Framework. Some of the outcomes that are relevant in the current context are: a safe and secure Canada;
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