



Just how far does the notion of direct service stretch?

Letter of opinion

The idea of abolishing by attrition civil servant positions that are unrelated to services offered directly to the public on the basis of “excessive bureaucracy” has been a recurrent theme in public debate since the start of the electoral campaign. As representatives of four Quebec public administration senior management associations, we question on one hand the intent thereof in the current economic context of growth in Quebec, and the notion of direct service to the population on the other.

First, we would like to specify that our associations represent chief executives, administrative officers, unit, program, or service managers, nursing care counsellors, controllers, coordinators, assistant directors and directors in various services in government departments and agencies, hospitals, CEGEPs, and school boards.

Today, Quebec is experiencing a steep growth curve as well as important demographic changes: an aging population, a significant rise in the primary and secondary school population, and the arrival of refugees. This situation exerts pressure on managers in the education, healthcare and social services, and civil service sectors. How can we consider the elimination of civil service positions in this context of growth and new needs and, at the same time, suggest a renewed vision of the role of the State and formulate a number of ambitions, in particular in healthcare and education? According to us, in so doing, the importance of management in public organizations is being overlooked.

In addition, there is a need to clarify the notion of direct service to the population. Are we to understand that the managers of school boards, CEGEPs, integrated health and social service centres, and in the civil service who run the construction and expansion of schools, CEGEPs, and hospitals, as well as road maintenance for example, are not providing a direct service to the population? Are we to understand that those who staff their organizations, plan the implantation of information technologies and new programs for students, users and investors are not directly serving the population? What about managers who are in charge of ensuring the effectiveness of the financial, procurement, and legal components of major government missions? What would happen if their positions were to be abolished?

What would physicians, nurses, educators, social workers, employment agents, and student aid officers do without the managers? What about school and CEGEP teachers and librarians, what would they do without the managers who are not in direct contact with the public, but who are the ones that are in charge of the quality of the services provided and who ensure the optimal use of public funds? What would investors wishing to settle in French-speaking North America do?

A number of government departments and agencies are entrusted with missions that are strategic to the future of the province. The vision that they must develop requires having managers at hand to propose strategies and innovative programs in order to enable Quebec to expand its resources and outreach, to protect its environment, and to ensure the well-being of its citizens. A digital agenda focused on assisting businesses, developing data on Quebec's tax competitiveness, creating an ecological reserve, integrating the payroll systems of a range of healthcare establishments, and analyzing extensively the state of our dams may not be services provided directly to citizens, but they require the expertise of managers and their teams if the State is to fulfill its duties.

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