

MAIL MIX CHANGES AS A MOMENT TO REDEFINE A PUBLIC SERVICE

Some introductory observations from the case of the
Canadian Union of Postal Workers
and
Canada Post Corporation

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Objectives of Paper

- Changes in the mail mix currently being observed may occasion a recalibration of the relationships between employers and unions in the postal sector.
- Falls in lettermail and rising volumes of parcels should not be seen as a shrinking of the unique public service role of postal services due to an increasingly commercial role.
- Rather, a changing mail mix might well occasion a redefinition of what public service roles a postal service can fill.

Outline of Presentation

1. Two post office periods.
2. A theoretical framework to situate these distinct periods.
3. Brief discussion: The Canada Post Corporation Act.
4. Union and employer responses to declines in letter mail.
5. International responses, and a framework for further analysis.
6. Concluding remarks.

Two Post Office Periods

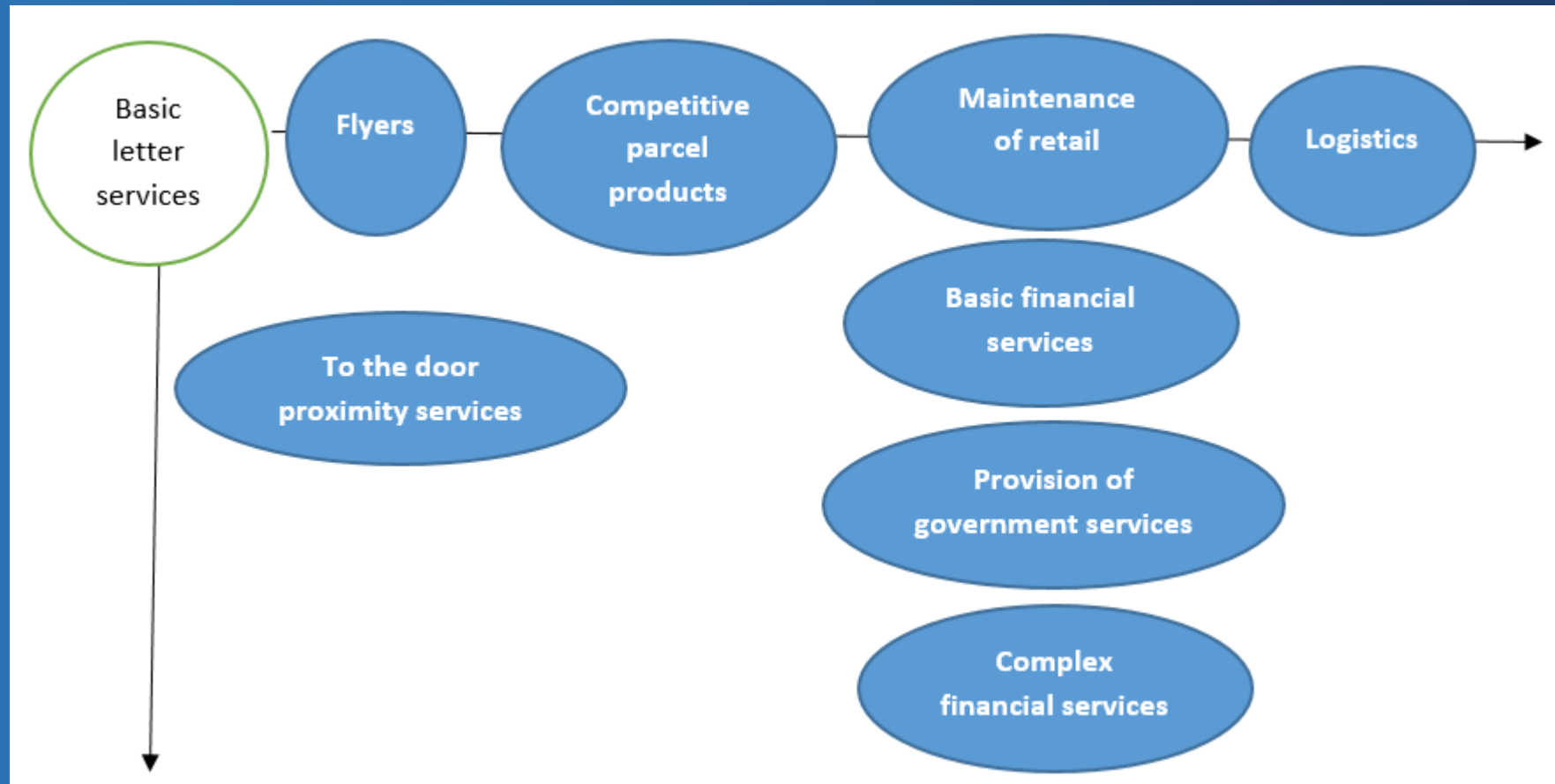
Facilitating Nation-Building

- The Post Office Department (POD) – a platform to create, and expand, the State as well as a national market.
- Minimal regard for cost.
- Postal banking services.

A Core Element of Canada's Economic Situation

- This begins in 1950's-1960's.
- Sustained growth and a retarding of technological development meant that the operation was at a breaking point by the mid 1960s.
- This shift occasions a period of labour strife.
- Shift of focus: from nation building to focusing on the key communication piece of moving huge volumes of letters, especially from large volume mailers.
- A focus on technology.
- As period progresses: a greater scrutiny of costs associated with the operation.

An illustration with some service examples



Some Key Characteristics and Drivers

POST OFFICE PERIOD	SERVICE APPROACH	FINANCIAL CONCERNS OF POST OFFICE
1 st period – Roughly 1860's to 1950's	Depth-based: focused on supporting settlement, and development of communications in support of a national market and growth of the State	Less concerned with financial performance
2 nd period – Roughly 1950's to 2000's	Decreasing depth, narrower breadth: Increasingly mail-centric, promoting reliability, cementing social relations and enabling financial transactions. Focus on large-volume mailers	Greater concern and scrutiny of costs associated with the operation

The Canada Post Corporation Act (1981)

- The 1981 Canada Post Corporation Act turned the Post Office Department into Canada Post Corporation, a crown corporation. It mandated financial self-sustainability but also that CPC needed to follow developments in the field of communications. Importantly, it did this without providing a relative balance between these two priorities.
- When declines in letter mail volumes occurred globally, responses by different posts varied.

The Third Post Office – A Changing Landscape for Labour and Employer Alike

- 2006: volumes peaked and began falling.
- The union began to see this as a moment for profound structural change for the post office.
- It searched out solutions, but took stock of some of its starting points.
- Labour flexibility – through mixed committees. Additionally, the system through which urban letter carrier routes were constructed was designed to ebb and flow with volume changes.
- A strong presence: it benefitted from the largest retail presence, strong public trust and the largest vehicle fleet.
- A complex, multifaceted relationship with its employer. Because of this, it needed to work through channels constructed on a less adversarial basis.

5 Point Plan – and a Depth-Based Alternative

- Response to declines by CPC was focused on a breadth approach.
- CUPW: viewed response as inadequate, given challenges facing traditional model.
- Focus on depth – but also being clear on importance of parcels.
- Added into the extension of the public service: issues surrounding climate.

An International Perspective

- Three typologies of responses to the decline of letter mail:
 1. Posts who've seized the opportunities of digitization, retracted their social roles;
 2. Posts who have built off of strong financial services foundations;
 3. Posts who have re-intensified the social role as a response to pressures of digitization (letter mail decline) while seizing the opportunities of digitization.
- Further research required.

Concluding Remarks

- The response of CUPW to this process has been to conduct a wholesale reappraisal of what its priorities for the Post are: from breadth responses to depth responses.
- It's also sought out improvements in its labour management relationship, this process is ongoing and cannot, due to the complexity of the interrelationship, said to be complete or linear.

THANK YOU!

Questions, comments, ideas?

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