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# Closing the Implementation Gap:

Improving capacity, accountability, performance and  
human resource quality in the Canadian and Ontario  
public service

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January 2010



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## Acronyms

ADM	Assistant Deputy Minister
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CSD	Centre for the Study of Democracy, School of Policy Studies, Queen's University
CMHC	Canadian Mortgage and Housing
CSDES	Survey designed and executed by the Centre for the Study of Democracy, Queen's University
DM	Deputy Minister
DFAIT	Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade
FAA	Federal Accountability Act
EEIT	Employee Engagement Inter-jurisdictional Team
EHR	Electronic Health Records
H1N1	New strain of pandemic influenza
IPAC	Institute of Public Administration of Canada
LGBT	Refers collectively to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people
MPA	Queen's Masters of Public Administration program alumni
NPM	New Public Management
OPSES 2009	Ontario Public Service Employment Survey
PAC	Public Affairs Commission
PCO	Privy Council Office
PEP	Queen's Public Executive Program respondents to CSDES
PMO	Prime Minister's Office
PS	Public service
PSES	2008 Federal Public Service Employment Survey
PSMA	Public Service Modernization Act
SSHA	Smart Systems for Health Agency



## Acknowledgements

This study on the public service is part of a larger project at the Centre for the Study of Democracy on the current performance of critical institutions for Canadian democracy, like Parliament and the party system.

Mr. L.R. (Red) Wilson, a former member of the public service who understands how vital an asset a good public service can be, agreed that the time was ripe for an independent think-tank to look at the future of the public service. We are most grateful for his support of this project.

This study was also greatly assisted by a grant from the Aurea Foundation, and we thank them for their generous contribution. We are especially indebted to Peter Munk, the founder of the Aurea Foundation, and Allan Gotlieb, its chair, for making the Centre for the Study of Democracy one of the beneficiaries of the Foundation's first grants.

This paper is richer for the variety of contributors to whom we owe a debt of gratitude. We extend our thanks to Glenda Fisk, Tyler Johnson, Mathew Johnson, Craig Jones, Amie Skattebo, Kyle G. Toffan, and Ben Winner for their research input; Deborah Aarts for a superb job in consolidating all the disparate pieces; and Sara French for editing the final paper.

The two years of time spent on this project has seen the investments of research, opinions, and assistance from a great number of interested Canadians. All told, four roundtables have been held—one in Toronto and one in Ottawa with former students of the Queen's School of Policy Studies Masters of Public Administration, and at two at Queen's with academics and policy experts, many of whom formerly worked in the federal or provincial civil services. Appendix Two contains a list of those who participated and we wish to thank them all.

The CSD method is to complete penultimate drafts of reports and then subject them to peer review and public scrutiny. *Closing the Implementation Gap* incorporates many of the insights of the Roundtable participants and to give readers a flavour of their input, we include a summary of their remarks in Appendix 2.

We also have an immense debt to the former students of the Queen's School of Policy Studies MPA Program, who took the time to complete our survey. We are equally indebted to the participants in the Senior Public Executive Program of the Queen's School of Business and the Civil Service Training and Development Institute of the Government of Hong Kong. The responses of these senior public servants allowed us to compare and contrast their insights with more recent entrants. The heart of this study is the survey included in Appendix 1 and we want to thank all who responded for taking the time not only to answer the posed questions, but also in providing detailed and insightful comments in the open-ended sections.

## Executive Summary

The recent controversy at eHealth Ontario has put the spotlight on the public service in 2009, just as the Gomery Inquiry into the Sponsorship Scandal did in 2005. Public administration finds itself as the unlikely centrepiece of bitter debates. This study finds that it has become evident that the cornerstone of the Westminster model of responsible government—“who is accountable to whom for what?”—has broken down, and that the resulting confusion has soured the relationship between politicians and public servants. On implementation issues this study affirms the necessity of reducing the turnover rate in staffing positions, particularly at the more senior levels.

The Gomery Commission concluded that the public service is demoralized. This study seeks to find out why this is so. Through evaluation of surveys conducted by Canada’s public service and the Centre for the Study of Democracy at the School of Policy Studies, Queen’s University (CSD), we have compared and contrasted the attitudes of civil servants in both the Ontario and federal public services. Graduates of the Queen’s Master of Public Administration (MPA) and participants in the Queen’s Public Executive Programs constitute the CSD survey (CSDES) sample. The MPA sample is particularly instrumental in that it captures the views of younger public servants.

The findings of the survey reveal serious concerns, among employees, about internal management issues that affect employee engagement, these influence performance, which in turn influence implementation. We put forth recommendations under three broad categories: capacity and performance; attracting and retaining employees; and accountability.

### *Capacity and Performance*

Performance improvement mechanisms need to be revamped to provide the autonomy, flexibility, and creativity that public servants want. The surveys indicate that public sector employees feel that the excessive rotation of senior staff (31% have had three supervisors in three years)<sup>1</sup>—is a major issue for performance improvement. With deputy ministers and assistant deputy ministers spending less than two years in their positions, public servants are constantly readjusting to new management, which affects their ability to do their job.

1. Recognition that the neutrality, merit-based recruitment and expertise of the public service are fundamental features of our democracy and must be preserved.
2. Implementation must become as important to the policy process as analysis or communication is. Cabinets should regularly review implementation issues. A “Results Unit” should be created in the Treasury Board to fulfill this function.
3. The norm for holding senior management jobs in the public service should be five years.

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<sup>1</sup> 2008 Public Service Employee Survey, Treasury Board . The “public service” refers to the core public administration (those departments and agencies for which the Treasury Board is the employer) and separate employers (principally the Canada Revenue Agency, the Parks Canada Agency, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, and the National Research Council of Canada).

4. Discourage the use of consultants in line positions in favour of building up the capacity of the regular public service.

### ***Attracting and retaining employees***

While 80-90% of respondents say they are “content” in their job only 55% believe they have opportunities for promotion and most think that the job posting that they replied to does not match the job that they ended up doing. Only 2% of CSDES respondents felt that the civil servant’s efforts to identify, recruit and retain young people are working very well. Complaints about the recruitment process were prevalent. However, complaints in this area seem to go two ways, as the study concluded that young recruits have high demands: they do not want or expect an entry-level job; they want freedom to change jobs regularly; and they have unreasonably high expectations for compensation and perks.

5. Improve the recruitment process.

To improve the attraction of employees this study suggests that the public service needs to be realistic in its hiring goals—balancing the needs for both generalists and for experts. Long-term planning needs to include dialogue with schools of public administration and dealing with employment barriers due to citizenship even when Canadian credentials have been earned.

6. Expand Interchange Canada and make it work much more directly as a focus of Canada’s development policy.

Canada needs to develop an exchange program that would see its federal and provincial public servants working abroad in their respective home departments around the world, while other country’s civil servants come to work in Canada. Our idea is to greatly expand *Interchange Canada* and make it much more directly a focus of Canada’s development policy.

7. Establish a Mentoring Program

A formal mentoring program modelled on the Singapore experience needs to be adopted by both federal and Ontario public services.

Open-ended comments from the CSDES sample and interviews with public servants for this study reveal great interest in the potential of mentoring programs. Winner, in Appendix 4, cites the *Singapore Administrative Service* where “each new officer is assigned a mentor who can offer friendly advice and show you the ropes.” The 2001 OECD report highlights that mentoring is especially critical for women and under-represented minorities because of perceptions of an “old-boy’s network.”

### ***Improvement to accountability design***

The Queen’s CSD survey found that while 75% of respondents knew what was expected of them regarding accountability, only 52% thought that these mechanisms measure the right factors. An area of concern, according to the surveys, is how accountability is shared among political staff and

civil servants. Most respondents felt that neither they (66%) nor political staff (54%) are adequately trained to work together. This has left public servants feeling vulnerable to political pressures—51% say that they are NOT free from undue political pressure and this figure rises to 80% for municipal employees.

To address the *accountability issue* this study recommends that:

8. A task force or “Wise Person Group” is established to create an Accountability Code that will clarify the responsibilities of public servants, ministers and the staffs that ministers employ. This code, passed as a non-binding resolution in Parliament and the provincial legislatures, would become the benchmark to guide future accountability disputes.
9. It should be a condition of employment in any minister’s office that exempt staff be required to attend a two week course on the essentials of government and the political-civil service relationship.
10. Develop an Exempt Staff Code of Conduct and Ethics.
11. Adopt the title Executive Assistant to more accurately reflect the duties of political advisors.
12. Exempt staff post-employment activity restrictions should be reduced to one year.

Ultimately, the public service is a reflection of the political and institutional context where it resides. In order for public servants to have the clarity, flexibility, and creativity they require to implement policies properly, a workable accountability bargain between ministers, their staffs, and the public service needs to be recreated. Until this is achieved it will be very difficult to close the implementation gap identified in this report.

## Foreword by Thomas S. Axworthy

*“The civil service in a democracy works under very peculiar conditions. The control exercised over it from the top is both more lax and more severe than in other bureaucracies. Because of the conflicting and unreconciled interests in the electorate, in the legislature, and in political parties, direction of the civil service is often vacillating and lacking in vigor ... on the other hand, because the civil service deals so much with the private interests of groups and individuals whose rights must be respected to the letter except in so far as legislation authorizes interference, there is very rigid control of the actions of the service from the top. There is more reliance on the bit and tight rein than the spur.”<sup>2</sup>*

The subject matter of this study is the peculiar conditions in which Federal and Ontario public servants work. J.A. Corry and J.E. Hodgetts, two of the greatest teachers of public administration in the history of Queen’s University devoted two chapters of their seminal *Democratic Government and Politics* to the issue of democratic values and the role of the public service in contributing to their attainment. Written more than a generation ago, the insight that politicians, parliament, and the public rely more on restraint and control—“the bit and tight rein”—in their relationship with the public service, rather than encouraging risk taking and creativity (“the spur”) could serve as a description of our current age of accountability overdrive. The public service today endures a daily barrage of criticism far greater than in the days of Corry and Hodgetts—the bit cuts deeper than it did then—and as the survey in the next section demonstrates, this is taking a toll on the morale, expectations, and career prospects of the men and women who have dedicated their lives to public service.

The centrepiece of this study is the Canadian Public Service Career Satisfaction Survey (CSDES) designed and carried out by the Centre for the Study of Democracy (CSD), at the Queen’s University School of Policy Studies. Two groups were targeted for the survey: i) alumni of the Queen’s Masters of Public Administration program (MPA), half of whom are young recruits and have less than ten years experience; and ii) senior public executives attending the Public Executive Program at the Queen’s School of Business. The respondents are, by and large, divided equally between the Federal and Ontario Public Services. Although not integrated into the data presented, some references are also made to the responses of senior Hong Kong public servants who completed a survey in 2009.<sup>3</sup> The Hong Kong results show that concerns about accountability resonate far beyond our borders.

One can argue that samples restricted to Queen’s public administration graduates or participants of Queen’s executive programs are too narrow to generalize about the state of public service as whole. Such caveats are duly noted, but the CSD results are broadly in line with many of the findings of the public service employee surveys conducted on a regular basis by both the federal and provincial governments. The CSD survey results were supplemented by a series of interviews and roundtables with Ontario and federal public servants who reinforced the survey findings by augmenting

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<sup>2</sup> J. Corry and T. Hodgetts (1960), 488.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Axworthy facilitated Directorate Seminars for the Hong Kong SAR Program, April 2009.



statistical data with personal colour and anecdotes. Further, the 2009 CSD study complements the findings and research of the 2007 Public Policy Forum study *Canada's Public Service in the 21st Century*<sup>4</sup> and the three reports of the Prime Minister's Advisory Committee on Public Service.<sup>5</sup> I am very confident that this survey is an accurate snapshot of the current views of many in the federal and Ontario civil services.

Public servants do a variety of things ranging from senior officials who manage crises and advise ministers to the very different roles of those who deliver front-line services through interaction with citizens. James Q. Wilson (1990), in his classic *Bureaucracy*, divides public services into three categories: operations, managers, and executives.<sup>6</sup> All are members of the public service, yet some parts might be in crisis while others are working perfectly well. For example, senior executives dealing with ministers and legislatures on a daily basis may be malfunctioning when compared to other parts of the machine, like those providing passports or constructing highways. Or a policy framework may be well thought out and articulated at senior levels, such as in Canada's Public Health Agency's H1N1 strategy, but the implementation at the delivery level—vaccinations—for example, might be flawed. In bodies so vast (estimated employment levels in the federal public service: 401,000<sup>7</sup>; Ontario: 68,645<sup>8</sup>), it is prudent to be careful about generalizations. As the Public Policy Forum Report, *A Vital National Institution* warned in its summary of several roundtable discussions “there is too much emphasis on the 5,000 employees who provide high level policy advice to politicians, and far too little on the 400,000 including Crowns, the Canadian Forces and other organizations, who implement programs, deliver services and work directly with the public.”<sup>9</sup>

Certainly many use the word crisis<sup>10</sup> in describing today's public service. Donald Savoie, a very astute observer of comparative public administration, for example, quotes a former Canadian senior government official who remarked: “the civil service has simply lost its way.”<sup>11</sup> Savoie examines, in great detail, the relationship between politicians and civil servants in Canada and Great Britain and concludes that the old cooperative model is “now broken”<sup>12</sup> Politicians directing policy but staying out of administration, and civil servants willing to “speak truth to power,” have been replaced by “court government” where individual public servants may flourish (if they

<sup>4</sup> Green, Baird, Fawks, (2007).

<sup>5</sup> See the Fourteenth, Fifteenth, and Sixteenth: Report to the Prime Minister on the Public Service of Canada within the annexes the first, second, third report of the Prime Minister's Advisory Committee on the Public Service chaired by The Right Honourable Donald F. Mazankowski, P.C., O.C., A.O.E., LL.D. <http://www.pco-bcp.gc.ca/index.asp?lang=eng&page=information&sub=publications&doc=ar-ra/16-2009/3rd-3eme/20090226-eng.htm>

<sup>6</sup> James Wilson, (1990).

<sup>7</sup> Statistics Canada, 2009. Retrieved 27 November 2009. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/090529/t090529b1-eng.htm>

<sup>8</sup> Howlett, (2009). <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/ontario-shrinks-civil-service-by-1500-jobs/article1376568/>. Retrieved: 25 November 2009.

<sup>9</sup> Public Policy Forum, (2007). P12.

<sup>10</sup> Whether crisis is the right word or not can be debated, but many who work in the public service responded that they perceive themselves to be under significant stress. Graham Lowe, for example, cites the Statistics Canada Community Health Study to show that in self-perceived work-stress – respondents saying that almost always at work they were “quite a bit” or “extremely stressful”, public administration employees were near the top of those most under pressure. With 37% of the public administration sample indicated that they were stressed, compared to 22% in primary occupations, like agriculture or process-manufacturing. Only employees in financial management or the health sector recorded higher percentages of stress than public administration employees generally. Source: Lowe, 2007. [www.cprn.org](http://www.cprn.org). Retrieved: 4 January 2009.

<sup>11</sup> Donald Savoie, (2008). P15

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, P16.

implement the wishes of the court), but the distinct personality and independent role of the civil service as a whole has withered.

The CSD's data, however, demonstrates that while the civil service may have some dents, it is far from broken. Heavy majorities of the respondents to the CSD survey reported high levels of job satisfaction—80% of the Queen's sample describe their job as satisfying and over 50% of Federal respondents think that their organization is performing better than it did when they started over a decade ago. In general about two-thirds of the respondents are happy with their work, with the other third thinking about leaving or are actually seeking another job.

Tony Dean, then Secretary to the Ontario Cabinet, in his 2007 *Framework for Action Report* to the Premier took many insights from a March 2006 survey of OPS employees and his conclusions are roughly similar to the Queen's study. The report found that Ontario employees "were fairly satisfied and reasonably engaged with their job"<sup>13</sup>. About two-thirds of those surveyed said that the work that they do gives good value for tax dollars and that their unit places high value on good service. The 2009 *Ontario Public Service Employee Survey* even shows an increase from the time Dean wrote of job satisfaction among public servants (67% satisfied and 12% not), which represents an increase from 3.50 mean in 2006 to 3.77 mean in 2009<sup>14</sup>. Yet, like the Queen's CSD survey, Dean also highlighted areas for improvement—only 38% felt that they had opportunities for career growth, only 22% felt leaders were providing clear direction, and only 35% said the amount of training and development received met their needs<sup>15</sup>.

Even though job satisfaction is relatively high, the Queen's CSD survey demonstrates that there are significant problem areas, particularly in the political civil servant relationship that Savoie highlighted. Over half of the respondents believe that their organization suffers from undue political interference (this number is 10% higher among MPA graduates) and 53% of the MPA sample believe that political staff are seldom capable and trained adequately for their responsibilities<sup>16</sup>. Savoie argues that civil servants should have a legal basis for resisting instructions from elected politicians to perform essentially partisan acts, and the Queen's CSD sample demonstrates that he has identified a real concern<sup>17</sup>.

What we heard from our roundtable experts, however, is that the problem is not so much about interference as it is about understanding the relationship between civil servants and exempt staff. This relationship issue is more about misunderstandings rather than malign intent.

Savoie wonders if there ever really was a "golden age" of the political civil-servant relationship. Regardless, he believes that it is "not possible to turn the clock back to the way things were."<sup>18</sup> Perhaps he is right. Compared to their predecessors two generations ago, today's public service

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<sup>13</sup> Tony Dean, (2007). <http://www.gov.on.ca/mgs/graphics/121594.pdf>. Retrieved: 25 November 2009.

<sup>14</sup> Ipsos Reid, (2009).

<sup>15</sup> Tony Dean, (2007)

<sup>16</sup> For more information on political staff, see Liane B. Benoit. "Ministerial Staff: the life and times of parliament's statutory orphans" in Commission of Inquiry into the Sponsorship Program and Advertising Activities: Restoring Accountability, Volume 1. (Ottawa: Public Works and Government Services Canada, 2006.)

<sup>17</sup> Donald Savoie, (2008). P338.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, P335

must manage in a world with a twenty-four-hour news cycle, much less deference to authority, articulate think tanks and interest groups of every persuasion, and the pervasive influence of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which has made the judiciary much more of a policy factor<sup>19</sup>. Add to this frequent deputy minister job switches that often result in deputies bringing with them their closest associates, so that there are whole teams of senior officials on the move. In 2007, the Public Service Commission highlighted this problem in its annual report with a study of pay records that showed that 40% of public servants started and ended the year in different jobs; 58% of the government's 5000 executives moved to different jobs. Linda Duxbury, a human resources expert, told the *Ottawa Citizen*: "It's a big dance. Someone moves which causes someone else to move to acting position and someone else to position themselves for the next promotion"<sup>20</sup>. Managers do not stay long enough to know their files or gain the trust and loyalty of their employees. Churn means that there is no one to mentor or train new recruits. Duxbury further reflected that this trend results in "no corporate memory, so its like a ping-pong policy game"<sup>21</sup>. Henry Mintzberg, Canada's leading management theorist wisely concludes that: "the whole issue of musical chairs in senior management is destructive. The managers I've seen who are effective are devoted to their department..."<sup>22</sup>.

### Golden Moments

Stability, however, was the norm in the 1960s. If the Pearson era was not in fact a "golden age", there were certainly "golden moments" and we should not forget the achievements of the past in trying to construct a better public policy future. In certain key areas, such as the constant shuffle today of senior public servants compared to the stability and acquired expertise evident in the 1960s era of civil service leaders, there is no doubt that in the past the public service was managed more intelligently. C.E.S Franks reports, for example, that in September 2009 eleven out of the core twenty-two deputy ministers in Canada had been in their office for less than two years, nine less than one year<sup>23</sup>. Yet, the Public Accounts Committee was told by a Secretary to the Treasury Board that it took about two years for a deputy minister to become fully effective in a post. As Franks concludes, "to the extent that this is true most departments in Canada, much if not most of the time, are operating with a less than effective deputy minister"<sup>24</sup>. Constant personnel changes are also not simply an Ottawa phenomenon. Our study frequently references the recent controversy over Ontario's electronic health record initiative (or lack thereof). The Auditor General of Ontario found that a contributing factor to the implementation woes of that project was that, "the recent replacements of eHealth Ontario's board Chair and CEO mark the fourth such overhaul of leadership at eHealth Ontario and its predecessor, SSHA. Each of these overhauls brought with it its own period of transition where progress on the initiative's objectives was slowed or, at times,

<sup>19</sup> Savoie (2008), P94-123 has an excellent chapter on society then and now.

<sup>20</sup> Ottawa Citizen. "'Too much' reshuffling in PS ranks, expert says." Ottawa Citizen. November 2007.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Vic Pakalnis, "Canada's Management Guru" in Canadian Government Executive. Vol. 13. No. 1. 2007. P6.

<sup>23</sup> C.E.S.Franks, from an unpublished paper: "The Functioning of the Present-Day Canadian House of Commons: a paper prepared for the conference in honour of Peter Aucoin," Halifax, November 2009. Table V, page 8

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

halted”<sup>25</sup>. The Auditor rightly notes that on eHealth (and his observation applies to the public service as a whole) that with every senior change in personnel there is a price to be paid in terms of lost time, lost expertise, and working relationships.

I was fortunate that my first experience in Ottawa policy-making was in the 1960’s during the great creative period of the Pearson government. This was also the tail end of the so-called “*Mandarin Era*”<sup>26</sup>. I observed first hand the men (and a few women) who were responsible for establishing Canada’s reputation as having one of the best public services in the world. That was also an era when political parties actually debated policy—Liberal Party delegates at the 1961 Rally, not the leader’s advisors, made the Canada Pension Plan a platform priority. Again, in 1966, Liberal Party delegates resisted any attempt to unduly delay medicare<sup>27</sup>. Mr. Pearson, with a good eye for Cabinet talent, brought three new faces into Cabinet in April 1967 each of whom eventually became Prime Minister. The cabinet that these young men—Pierre Trudeau, John Turner and Jean Chrétien—joined was much more than a talk-shop. Equally critical to the success of the Pearson Government was the strength of the public service. Vibrant volunteer-based parties, strong-willed Cabinets, and a powerful public service made the 1960’s a golden era of public policy making. Today each of these three pillars—party, cabinet and public service—has been weakened.

In the summer of 1967, I began work as a junior research assistant to Walter Gordon, President of the Privy Council. Gordon had worked at Finance during the war as a “dollar a year man”<sup>28</sup> and in 1946 he chaired a Royal Commission on *Administrative Classifications in the Public Service*. I happily accompanied Mr. Gordon when he met old friends like W.A. MacIntosh<sup>29</sup> who had also held senior positions in the Department Finance and Reconstruction and I listened attentively as they swapped anecdotes. In discussing the successes of the post-war Mandarite and their preference for anonymity, I remember their insight that there was no limit on what one could achieve in Ottawa provided you did not care for public credit. This is an insight that political assistants anxious to get their names in political gossip columns should reflect on carefully.

Considering a career in public service, I wrote the Foreign Service exams and was offered positions in both External Affairs and the Privy Council Office, but the siren song of politics was too strong. Keith Davey and Jim Coutts had little difficulty in persuading me to become a political assistant. Prior to the 1960s there had certainly been political advisors to ministers in Ottawa, but they were few in number<sup>30</sup>. The best known was Jack Pickersgill who despite being a member of the public

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<sup>25</sup> Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, (2009). P10.

<sup>26</sup> Granatstein, (1982).P1-18. Gordon Robertson, one of the great public servants of that era has written an insightful memoir on decision-making in Ottawa. See Gordon Robertson, *Memoirs of a Very Civil Servant: Mackenzie King to Pierre Trudeau*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

<sup>27</sup> In contrast, the policy forum at the 2006 Liberal leadership convention was a sea of empty chairs, devoid of any discussion of the Liberal Renewal Commission’s report that I had chaired that year, which had garnered the contribution of hundreds of volunteers.

<sup>28</sup> Dollar-a-Year Man, a term used during WWII to describe those business executives who were brought to Ottawa to work in government, largely in the Department of Munitions and Supply and in the Wartime Prices and Trade Board. Their companies paid their salaries, while Ottawa provided living expenses. Source: The Canadian Encyclopedia

<sup>29</sup> W.A. MacIntosh became a distinguished Principal at Queen’s University, as did J.J. Deutsch, another of the famous mandarins who also retired to Queen’s to educate graduate students, myself included. For a description of the Mandarins at the Department of Finance in the Golden Age see: David W. Slater. “Economists at the Department of Finance, 1945-1980” in *Canadian Business Economics*. (1997).

<sup>30</sup> For an examination of the role of political staff prior to Mr. Trudeau’s initiative in creating a formal class of exempt political advisors see: J.R. Mallory, “The Minister’s Office: An Unreformed Part of the Public Service” in *Canadian Public Administration*. Vol. 10. No. 1 (1967).

service gave partisan advice to both Mackenzie King and Louis St. Laurent (a transgression of neutrality that would not go unnoticed today). I was a member of the first generation of political assistants, a cadre that has grown in influence ever since. The data from the CSD survey shows clearly how uneasy many public servants are about the expanding role of political assistants. However, political advisors make a real contribution to policy-making and this should not be forgotten when we assess the relationship between ministerial offices and the regular public service. One of the great contributions of a public service is caution—it must outline the obstacles to ministerial or political goals. Ministers are often frustrated, because the main word that they hear from public officials is “no.” Yet, this is a real service, because officials are trying to protect their minister from trouble. Political advisors, however, have an opposite virtue—they are exceedingly energetic, passionately loyal, and keen to tackle what appear to be impossible objectives. There is a role for the wisdom and memory of the public service, but also an equal role for the commitment and energy of the political advisor. We need good political advisors, just as we need good public servants.

The 1968 innovation of Pierre Trudeau of formally creating a new type of public official—the political advisor—is often cited as the beginning of the aggrandizement of prime-ministerial power<sup>31</sup>. But, in fact, Trudeau preserved our system of a professional public service by recognizing that politics was central to any government, ministers needed staff to help them do their jobs, and that it was inappropriate to ask non-partisan public servants to take on these tasks. Advancing the agenda of the government, following up on ministerial directives, interpreting public opinion, and developing a narrative and communicating a consistent message are all vital tasks; as important to the success of a government as the professional and technical expertise of the public service<sup>32</sup>. Thus, the public servant category of “exempt staff” was born. “Exempt”, because unlike career public servants, political staff are not subject to the merit-based rules of the Public Service Commission, but public servants still, because: political advisors make a legitimate contribution to the policy process, are subject to various statutes, such as the Public Service Employment Act, the Conflict of Interest Act, and the Lobbying Act and are paid from allocations authorized by Parliament. In 2008, there were over six hundred ministerial staff in Ottawa serving twenty-seven ministers and five secretaries of state, including approximately 80 staff positions in the Prime Minister’s Office<sup>33</sup>.

Ministers need assistance from political professionals just as they need expert policy advice from the public service. Public servants may often be frustrated in their dealings with political servants—as the evidence in Appendix 1 demonstrates—but they might feel far worse if they were thrown into the maelstrom of political life in today’s partisan environment. The outside impression may be of an all-powerful PMO, but inside the belly of the beast it is a constant battle to stay on top of events, manage a myriad of priorities, and move an agenda forward inch by inch in a federal country in a globalized world. I can’t imagine being any busier than I was in directing the PMO in

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, an early critique in Walter Stewart, “Shrug: Trudeau in Power.” (Toronto: New Press, 1971).

<sup>32</sup> For a description of the strategic role of the Prime Minister’s Office see: Thomas S. Axworthy. “Of Secretaries to Princes” in *Canadian Public Administration*. Vol. 31. No. 2 (1988).

<sup>33</sup> Alex Smith. “Ministerial Staff Issues of Accountability and Ethics”, December 2008, <http://www2.parl.gc.ca/Content/LOP/ResearchPublications/prb0602-e.htm> (Accessed: 4 January 2010).

Mr. Trudeau's last term and that was in an era that predated the 24-hour news cycle, *Youtube*, and email! This study has several recommendations on how to recruit and retain quality men and women for the public service. We need to be equally diligent in encouraging and supporting the "exempt" category of political advisor.

To that end, we need to realize that the political advisor group are no longer "unreformed", as J.R. Mallory wrote about the breed in 1967<sup>34</sup>. The Privy Council Office, for example, describes the political advisory function in *Accountable Government: A Guide for Ministers and Ministers of State* as:

*...to provide Ministers and Ministers of State with advisers and assistants who are not departmental public servants, who share their political commitment, and who can complement the professional, expert and non-partisan advice and support of the Public Service. Consequently, they contribute a particular expertise or point of view that the Public Service cannot provide*<sup>35</sup>.

The Accountability Guide specifically instructs that "exempt staff do not have the authority to give directions to public servants" and "in meeting their responsibility to respect the non-partisanship of public servants, exempt staff have an obligation to inform themselves about the appropriate parameters of public service conduct, including public service values and ethics and to actively assess their own conduct and any requests they make to departmental officials in the light of those parameters"<sup>36</sup>.

The *Conflict of Interest Act* has several provisions that apply to ministerial staff (such as not to use their position to influence a decision to further private interests) and sets rules for post-employment activities (such as not entering "into contracts or accept employment of a period of one year with an entity that they have significant official dealings with"). Former ministerial staff in a particularly excessive restriction are prohibited under the Lobbying Act from engaging in lobbying activities for five years! In short, ministerial staff in Ottawa already operate under a strict ethical code with significant prohibitions on post-political employment.

The problem is that few realize this fact, certainly not the public servants, who were interviewed for this study. The predominant impression articulated by many public servants in our sample was that while public servants are guided by well-articulated codes of conduct, political staff are motivated only by partisan needs. Yet, ethical standards for political behaviour exist in many statutes and political guidelines for PCO staff. This de facto code should be made explicit in a *Code of Ethical Conduct for Exempt Staff*, as recommended by the Gomery Commission<sup>37</sup>. Such a code would help dispel the image of political staff as amoral political warriors and put exempt staff on an equal ethical footing with the public service.

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<sup>34</sup> J.R. Mallory (1967)

<sup>35</sup> Privy Council Office, *Accountable Government: A Guide for Ministers and Ministers of State*, 2008, P.37.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, P.37-38.

<sup>37</sup> Commission of Inquiry into the Sponsorship Program and Advertising Activities: *Restoring Accountability, Recommendations*. (Ottawa: Minister of Public Works and Government Services, 2007), Chapter 7.

The Gomery Commission also advocated that exempt staff receive training for their important duties. Training and professional development are the hallmarks of our professional public services and there is no reason that such opportunities should be denied to exempt staff given their legitimate and critical role in the policy process. As Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, I met regularly with the exempt staff from each minister's office and sometimes seminars were organized around political topics (usually the latest in political management techniques from the United States or the United Kingdom), but such efforts were ad hoc. As a junior assistant on Parliament Hill, I received very good advice, especially when meeting very senior public servants, to keep quiet and take notes. But beyond this personal mentoring there was no orientation session.

The Institute of Public Administration of Canada in 2006 produced an *Executive Brief on Training and Recruitment of Political Staff at Queen's Park*, which contains ideas worthy of wider application<sup>38</sup>. They recommended that there should be orientation training for new political staff by current and former ministerial personnel and by public service executives. There should also be a system of master classes, for more in-depth executive development. Just as important, there should be similar classes for public servants on how to build effective relationships with ministerial staff and the premier's office. The data in Appendix 1 shows that many public servants feel that they are not adequately trained to deal with politicians and that ministerial assistants are not adequately trained to deal with their public administration duties. The IPAC program would meet both these needs.

As well as the development of a Code of Ethical Conflict for Exempt Staff and better educational opportunities for exempt staff, a key disincentive for political staff recruitment, should be removed. The provision in the *Lobbying Act*, which prohibits employment in lobbying activities for five years after leaving a ministerial office, is too draconian. By limiting career opportunities for such a length of time, it dissuades many from becoming exempt political staff. A one-year prohibition is sufficient. There is one change, however, which should be made to more accurately reflect the function of political advisors. They are "assistants" not "decision-makers". Today's designation of *Chief of Staff* implies an executive authority that such a position should not possess. In the 1960s senior political advisors were called *Executive Assistants* and that is a more accurate description for what they do.

### **Truth to Power**

Although I decided against a public service career, I had the good fortune to work with public servants who were experts in implementation and maintained the highest standards in speaking truth to power—career public servants like Ian Clark, Sylvia Ostrey, Gordon Smith, Robert Rabinovitch, Robert Fowler, Arthur Kroeger, Maureen O'Neil, Huguette LaBelle, Ed Clark, Bob Adamson, Ian Stewart, Allan Gotlieb, Tommy Shoyama, and Gordon Osbaldeston. In particular, I learned much from Michael Pitfield, Secretary to the Cabinet. Pitfield's approach to public policy-making was often criticized for being unnecessarily complicated. He was trying to achieve equilibrium between collegial cabinet debates combined with the long-term perspective of the

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<sup>38</sup> Patrick Dutil. "Working with Political Staff at Queen's Park: Trends, Outlooks, Opportunities." (Institute of Public Administration of Canada, 2006).

Canadian public service. I can personally attest that he was forthright in bringing problems to the Prime Minister—he certainly never had trouble speaking truth to power—and he was a stout defender of the public service against some of the more problematic ideas of the Prime Minister’s Office (many of which I originated).

In Ottawa in the 1960s and 70s one did not necessarily have a long personal relationship, like Mr. Pitfield did with Mr. Trudeau, to speak truth to power. I saw this characteristic displayed many times. The first thing to make clear is that speaking truth to power does not mean substituting the values of appointed public officials over those of the elected politicians. By running for office, politicians do the heavy democratic lifting and democratic accountability gives them the primary job of allocating value. But in assessing the impact of the value choice that politicians make, public servants have the duty to give their ministers their best professional advice. I have mentioned Walter Gordon as my first Ottawa boss and an anecdote about his controversial 1963 budget illustrates well the framework of a healthy truth-to-power-relationship. In the 1970s, I got to know Claude Isbister, who was a civil servant who held many senior jobs, including serving as Assistant Deputy Minister of Finance at the time of the 1963 budget. Isbister and his fellow officials were not in favour of many of the measures to reduce foreign investment that were at the heart of Gordon’s budget. But, Gordon’s views on the subject were well-known, he had campaigned on it and the Department accepted that as a minister he had the right to promote policies that he believed were in the public interest. Speaking truth to power, however, does imply the duty of public servants to give political superiors the best possible information and advice. As a devotee of Mr. Gordon, years later when I was a member of the PMO, I asked Isbister if the Department of Finance had deliberately let him down by not pointing out the implementation difficulties and financial technicalities in many of the budget’s provisions (many had to be withdrawn and Gordon’s reputation took a severe hit). Isbister told me that his conscience was clear—he and others had suggested proceeding, in stages, rather than through a bold program all at once. Gordon rejected this advice, as he was entitled to do, but the Department felt it had done its job by not hiding the probable reaction of the financial markets, nor telling the minister what he wanted to hear<sup>39</sup>.

This case illustrates the truth to power dynamics that James R. Mitchell recently outlined to a group of civil service leaders. “The first thing to remember,” he said, “is that this whole business of speaking truth to power is not about you; it is about your duty as a senior public servant. It is about the facts, and it can be about ideas, but not about you and not your ideas”<sup>40</sup>.

Of course Isbister’s cautions about the 1963 budget and the doubts of Louis Rasminsky, the then Governor of the Bank of Canada, were given to Mr. Gordon confidentially. There was no *Access to Information Act* or 24-hour news-cycle to trumpet that senior officials had reservations about the speed of the minister. David Zussman contrasts the situation twenty-five years ago when “the Canadian Public Service could be characterized as anonymous, well-hidden, and the unchallenged primary source of policy advice. As a result, public servants could be candid with their political

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<sup>39</sup> The story of the 1963 budget is well-told in Steven Azzi. *Walter Gordon and the Rise of Canadian Nationalism*. (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1999). P.95-110. Isbister was also a key source for Azzi’s account.

<sup>40</sup> James R. Mitchell. “Can I Really Speak Truth to Power? Practical Advice for New Executives,” Ottawa. March 25, 2007 at the Sussex Circle.



masters in the full knowledge that their advice would be confidential". Today, however, he concludes, "there appears to be less interest in speaking truth to power given the extremely partisan environment"<sup>41</sup>.

Ruth Hubbard, a former Deputy Minister and Chair of the Public Service Commission adds a further dimension to the necessity of speaking truth to power by making the point that the exercise does not have to be a zero sum game. It is a mistake to start "every conversation at the political-bureaucratic boundary with a mindset that presumes that what is intended is for one party to confront the other..."<sup>42</sup>. She gives the example of officials understanding the objectives of the minister while suggesting better means of obtaining the goal or public servants being attentive enough to political realities to fashion responses that take into account the political values of their ministers. With a newly elected government, she recounts, instead of relating choices to the "collective good," the value frame of the previous government, officials instead talked in terms of reducing crime, a reference more in keeping with the goals of the new minister. This skill in understanding the value frame of the party in power and then using that to highlight tradeoffs was brought home to me through observation of the effective performance of Tommy Shoyama, a Deputy Minister of Finance. Members of the Liberal caucus, supported by the PMO, wanted more done for small business in a forthcoming budget. Shoyama did not oppose this goal head-on, but instead used a Liberal principle well enunciated in various campaigns "of helping first those who need help most" to show that more resources devoted to small business would take away from the envelope that was to be used for poor seniors. Shoyama won his point not by confrontation, but by skilful use of framing and language. As Hubbard states, "ministers are neither fools nor malevolent". Therefore, "the greater burden lies with the deputy head (or other senior public servants) rather than with elected officials to find effective ways to enable the highest quality conversation to take place..."<sup>43</sup>.

### *Virtues of the Mandarins*

Beyond speaking truth to power, what were the other characteristics of the public servants that I knew in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s and how do they contrast with today's public service?

The first is that the senior public servants in Ottawa in the 1960s-1980s had tremendous substantive knowledge of their department's field. There was nothing about Finance that Simon Riesman did not know. David Golden had himself invented the Department of Defence Production. Bob Adamson of CMHC knew every aspect of housing. Senior deputies stayed in their jobs long enough to gain expert depth in the subject. Advancement depended on the ability to demonstrate substantive competence. Ministers relied on the expertise of their deputies. Today, as discussed above, we have a mad merry-go-round of deputies jumping to another job within eighteen months when it takes years to master a portfolio. Public servants need to provide expertise and politicians energy and communication skills. Senior public servants, therefore, should stay in their positions

<sup>41</sup> David Zussman. "Whither the fearless adviser?" in *Canadian Government Executive*. Vol. 15. No. 1 (2009).

<sup>42</sup> Ruth Hubbard. "Speaking truth to power: A matter of imagination and courage" in *Canadian Government Executive*. Vol. 15. No. 1 (2009).P11.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid

for a minimum of five years. This is not a new idea – it was recommended by the *Royal Commission Financial Management and Accountability* in 1979<sup>44</sup>.

Second, when I first came to Ottawa in the 1960s the relationship between politicians and senior public servants was largely one of trust. “The essence of trust,” writes Paul Thomas, “is positive, confident expectations about the motives, intentions, competence, and anticipated behaviour of institutions and their leaders”<sup>45</sup>. As Principal Secretary to Mr. Trudeau my office could not have survived except on a system of trust between myself and the Clerks of the Privy Council Michael Pitfield and Gordon Osbaldeston. With both clerks I established the rule of “no end-runs”. With both the PMO and PCO having access to the Prime Minister it was imperative to argue issues openly in front of him, rather than attempting to keep the other institution in the dark. Usually this entailed the PMO adding a political briefing note to the Cabinet package assembled by the PCO. We relied on the PCO to inform us about the agenda, they relied on us to alert them to political minefields or opportunities.

Trust means that politicians, political advisors, and public servants can disagree without impugning each other’s motives or character. Senior public servants, a generation ago, certainly had the courage to say no to a minister and ministers could say no to the Prime Minister. The head of a political office was an Executive Assistant not a Chief of Staff, and deputies were polite to EAs but they would never take an order from them nor allow themselves to be shut out of meetings with the minister. The Mandarins were powerful, because they told the truth and they had the expertise and experience to back up their claims.

Trust, however, now seems to be in short supply, in Ottawa. Civility is a companion virtue to trust. Previous reports from the Centre for the Study of Democracy have shown that the always present partisanship at Question Period in the House of Commons has now seeped through to affect the work of House Committees and recently the same disease has been allowed to poison the public service-political relationship. Linda Keen, the former Head of the Nuclear Safety Commission, was dismissed in a dispute with the Minister of Energy, but not before she was wrongly labelled as a “Liberal appointee”<sup>46</sup>. Richard Colvin, a diplomat doing his job reporting the facts from Afghanistan on detainee transfers has been similarly personally attacked by the Minister of Defence. Colvin has been supported publicly by many former Ambassadors, but not by the Secretary of the Cabinet, who is supposed to be the official defender of the public service<sup>47</sup>. And when Colvin gave his testimony to a House Committee, he did so alone, instead of being accompanied by the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Steven Covey, a world renowned management consultant, says about trust that “we judge ourselves by our intentions and others by their behaviour”<sup>48</sup>. The behaviour of

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<sup>44</sup> Royal Commission on Financial Management and Accountability. *Final Report*. (Hull: Canadian Government Publishing Centre, 1979). P.194.

<sup>45</sup> Paul C. Thomas. “Trust and Parliament Agencies” in *The Evolving Physiology of Government*, University of Ottawa Press (2009). 215 2-48

<sup>46</sup> CBC News. “Nuclear safety watchdog head fired for ‘lack of leadership’” January 2008, <http://www.cbc.ca/canada/story/2008/01/16/keen-firing.html?ref=rss>. Retrieved: 5 January 2010.

<sup>47</sup> Steven Chase and Campbell Clark. “Former ambassadors condemn Ottawa’s attack on diplomat” December 2009, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/former-ambassadors-condemn-ottawas-attack-on-diplomat/article1392248/>. Retrieved: 5 January 2010.

<sup>48</sup> Stephen M.R. Covey. “Commitment to trust” in *Canadian Government Executive*. Vol. 15. No. 1 (2009).

the Conservative Government in attacking the performance of public servants in a fashion similar to the usual cut-and-thrust of party slanging is a radical departure from the norm of the so-called “Golden Age” and makes urgent the necessity of defending publicly the tradition of a merit-based non-partisan professional public service.

In the current context, a respondent to the CSD survey shared this opinion:

*“Often, the politicians go overboard in responding to issues—the response is political, not practical. For example, with respect to E-Health, the organization ignored the rules—the rules did not need a major overhaul. It is not necessary to implement a new reporting regime. Sometimes you can bring in a consultant for a small amount of money to accomplish something quickly. So for the bad actions of one organization, everyone else that had been obeying the rules was punished, resulting in more “administrative” work (process) – less effectiveness. Sometimes the senior executives should say “no” to those political responses—recognize the workload that the political response will require—and support the public servants – acknowledge their expertise, judgment and integrity.” (Fall, 2009)*

Third, the senior members of the public service that I worked closely with throughout the 1960s-1980s had great pride in their profession. Deputy ministers in that era were primarily concerned about their own departments, but they also met and socialized informally and had a wider commitment to the government and public service as a whole. The term “horizontal government” was not in vogue, but the reality of government-wide priorities was clear. Ministers in the Pearson Government had wide leeway in their own portfolios, but also enthusiastically debated issues outside of their particular remit. As President of the Privy Council, Mr. Gordon had great interest in foreign affairs issues, like the Vietnam War. We would discuss the overall agenda of Cabinet as much as the details of the *Taskforce on the Structure of Canadian Industry*, which was his main focus at the time. In the early 1970s when I worked for Ronald Basford, the Minister of Housing, one of my specific duties was to prepare briefing notes for him on cabinet issues of importance outside of his portfolio. Cabinet was not simply a focus group for the Prime Minister, but had intense debates that decided issues.

Indeed, Michael Pitfield designed a cabinet committee system where ministers in the Economic and Social Affairs Committee of cabinet were given broad resource envelopes that they could allocate according to the Committee’s wishes. There was no PMO micromanagement of this process. Deputy ministers served in mirror committees of the cabinet structure, so that Pitfield would have the advice of his civil service colleagues on the broad issues of government. He brought this perspective to the Prime Minister in the daily briefings and politically Prime Minister Trudeau encouraged wide debate in cabinet committees and in the caucus. Trudeau loved to compare and contrast the political and public service perspective on issues and would have been dismayed if one side had consistently dominated the debate.

It is true that Trudeau began the process to create a much more powerful PMO, but our mandate was to work on and direct the issues he was personally interested in, not every issue in every department. The public service and the political staff interacted on many different levels—

departmental, cabinet committee, and prime ministerial, with a real balance between the political and the administrative. Trudeau valued the expertise of the public service as much as he valued the electoral expertise of the Liberal Party.

Fourth, senior members of the public service in the Pearson and Trudeau governments had great influence because of their expertise and longevity in their posts. But they also had a passion for anonymity<sup>49</sup>. J.E. Hodgetts, in his history of the Canadian public service from 1867 to 1970 which concludes at just about the time I went to Ottawa, writes of the era –“there is a paradox in the fact that the administrative branch of government by far the largest of our public and private institutions and yet, even to the informed members of the general public, it is the least visible.”<sup>50</sup> Ministers appeared before parliamentary committees to defend and take responsibility for their own actions and the decisions of their departments. Sometimes they paid a price. It is rare today for a minister to resign over principle or policy differences but the first minister for whom I worked, Walter L. Gordon, resigned twice. Today, in contrast, pictures of public servants are displayed in the front pages of a newspaper or are the lead stories in the televised news as they are summoned to appear before parliamentary committees. Ministers publicly blame officials for mistakes and officials have had to learn public relations skills in order to survive. This may be the single largest difference from the Ottawa I experienced in the 1960’s and the Ottawa of today.

Fifth, the civil service I knew also shared a parsimonious culture that shunned public display and was very conscious about expense accounts. I once was to have lunch with Tommy Shoyama, the Deputy Minister of Finance and had made a reservation in the Château Grill. Upon hearing this, Shoyama said, “ah no, never forget that we are paid by taxpayers who have a lot less that we do.” We ate instead at Murray’s in the Lord Elgin Hotel.

Sixth, another great change since the Golden Era of the Mandarins is the explosion of the consultant culture in Ottawa. A generation ago, departments had expertise in-house, and if consultants were employed, it would be to test out ideas already generated by the bureaucracy or to fix a short-term problem. Today, there is an underground policy triangle of regular officials, consultants (often long-term and retired public servants) and lobbyists. It is hard to believe, but when I first arrived in Ottawa there was not a single professional lobbyist office. Lawyers might discretely perform what we would now call lobbying, but there was certainly no industry. Bill Lee a former Executive Assistant to Paul Hellyer, opened the first lobbyist’s office, called Executive Consultants in the late 1960s. Today, there are nearly 5000 lobbyists, a near doubling of the breed, since the first register of lobbyists in 1989<sup>51</sup>. There may be even a greater number of consultants carrying out jobs that the regular public service used to do itself. If the private sector wants to pay large retainers to try to influence policy through lobbying, there is little that can be done about it, except making the process as transparent, as possible. With the federal government now running an annual deficit of

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<sup>49</sup> For a good description of the traditional public service ethos, including anonymity see: John Tait. “A Strong Foundation, Report of the Task Force on Public Values and Ethics” in Canadian Public Administration. Vol. 40. No. 1. 1997. Written in the mid-1990s the Tait Report discussed a “fault-line in the public service around the concept of accountability, a continuing preoccupation of the public service, as the data in Appendix 1 testifies.

<sup>50</sup> Hodgetts, 1973. P341.

<sup>51</sup> Andrew Mayeda and Jack Aubry. *Lobbying Alive and Well in Ottawa*. Edmonton Journal. January 2008.

over \$50 billion, there is sure to be significant attempts to reign in public sector spending. One good place to start would be to cut back radically on the use of outside consultants and to insist that departments should build internal capacity. This theme will be explored later in the paper when we discuss the eHealth dispute in Ontario.

### *The Way Ahead*

One cannot turn the clock back two generations, but we can suggest improvements that try to capture the strengths of the Mandarin era while being true to our own time and consistent with today's values. Certainly, the greater diversity, of today's public service, particularly in gender and employment of Francophones, is a great improvement over the public service I first encountered in the 1960s. But, the management skills and the policy expertise of senior public servants at that era is an asset that we should try to recreate. Similarly, there was a clear accountability bargain in the 1960s between ministers and public servants. Ministers had the public profile and the public servants had anonymity that allowed them to have great policy influence. This bargain cannot be exactly reconstructed, given the 24/7 role of the media, but it is possible to have much more clarity in the relationships between ministers, their staffs, parliament, and public servants. There is great confusion today, for example, over the accounting officer concept. Deputy ministers in their new role as accounting officers, since the passage of the *Federal Accountability Act* in 2006, hold responsibility in their own right for: the statutory authority they have been granted, for the public finances for which he or she is answerable, and for the efficient administration of the department. Ministerial responsibility is still the overarching concept, but within that framework deputy ministers now have personal responsibility for certain key activities. However, the Privy Council Office has provided one set of guidelines to help public servants assess their duties under the Accountability Act, but the Public Accounts Committee has developed a different protocol to spell out the responsibilities and accountability of accounting officers. Their competing definition of the accounting officer concept, which was designed to eliminate confusion over responsibility and accountability, "now appears to have made matters worse"<sup>52</sup>.

In integrating past best public policy practices with today's challenges, I think we should have a public policy system that achieves/incorporates the following:

### **Capacity and Performance**

1. Recognition that the neutrality, merit-based recruitment and expertise of the public service are fundamental features of our democracy and must be preserved.
2. Implementation for too long has been the orphan of the public policy system. Management is at least as critical a function as policy analysis. The importance of this function must become central to the career prospects of public servants and the most senior level of political decision-makers must devise systems to regularly assess

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<sup>52</sup> Savoie, (2008),P58. C.E.S. Franks' was the first to raise the issue of the "dueling protocols" between the Public Accounts Committee and the Privy Council Office over what the accounting officer concept implies in practice for the principle of ministerial responsibility.

implementation issues. A “Results Unit,” as described in the next section, located in Treasury Board should make regular reports to cabinet.

3. A public service with less turnover based on the understanding that it takes time to learn a subject and to manage intelligently.
4. The use of consultants for long-term or line jobs in the public service should be discouraged so that internal capacity within departments is cultivated.

### Attracting and Retaining Employees

5. To maintain a strong public service in the future such a career must be attractive to a new generation of recruits, especially in light of the rapidly approaching retirement of the baby boom generation. To achieve an improved public service, greater attention must be paid to mentoring, opportunities to learn and develop, and lifestyle-work balance.

### Improvement to Accountability Design

6. Our traditional system of a partnership between a professional non-partisan public service and strong ministers advised by competent political assistants is worth preserving. Politicization of the public service must be resisted as should the diminution of cabinet as the central decision-making institution. Political staff should be regarded as a legitimate part of the policy process and enjoy professional development and post-employment opportunities comparable to the public service.
7. There must be a new accountability bargain between politicians, their political advisers, parliament and the public service through the advice of a “wise persons” task force. Relationships must be clarified and a new accountability framework voted on and approved by legislatures to help guide the inevitable debates that will occur over questions of accountability. As the CSD has argued in earlier studies, accountability would be enhanced by an improved policy development process in our political parties and an improved oversight role for parliament<sup>53</sup>.
8. Building on existing provisions in several statutes and the PCO Guide to Accountability there should be a *Code of Ethical Conflict for Exempt Staff*, comparable to the 2003 *Values and Ethics Code*.
9. Institute training for exempt staff on the essentials of government and the political-civil service relationship. Public servants also need course on how to develop an effective relationship with minister’s offices.
10. The provision of the *Lobbying Act* which discriminates against political advisors by prohibiting post-employment opportunities for five years should be reduced to one year.

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<sup>53</sup> The Centre for the Study of Democracy in its previous report entitled *Everything Old is New Again: Observations on Parliamentary Reform* made a series of recommendations to improve parliament’s role in the policymaking process.: [http://www.queensu.ca/csd/documents/2008\\_EverythingOldIsNewAgain\\_CSDreport\\_ExpertiseInParliament-3.pdf](http://www.queensu.ca/csd/documents/2008_EverythingOldIsNewAgain_CSDreport_ExpertiseInParliament-3.pdf). An extensive plan on how to renew at least one of the Canadian parties can be found in: Thomas S. Axworthy. “The Four Key Questions: An Essay on Liberal Renewal”. [http://www.queensu.ca/csd/publications/Axworthy\\_4\\_Key\\_Questions.12.4.06.pdf](http://www.queensu.ca/csd/publications/Axworthy_4_Key_Questions.12.4.06.pdf).

Expertise, integrity, pride, and trust—these were the civil service attributes and ethics that I witnessed, learned from, and saw implemented. It is certainly possible to restore these values to public services today. I may be wearing rose-tinted glasses when I reflect upon policy-making a generation ago, but it truly was a genuine partnership between the public service and the ministers and staff from the political realm. The comparative survey data presented in this study indicates that public servants today have great concern about the confused accountability relationship and that this in turn negatively impacts their ability to achieve superior implementation. The public service must be confident in order to achieve optimum policy-making, we must restore the confidence to the public service that it once demonstrated on a daily basis.

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*Chair, Centre for the Study of Democracy*

*December 2009*

## Introduction

Public administration has recently become the stuff of high politics. In Ontario, questions in the legislature about the expense accounts of consultants and the sole-sourcing of contracts led, in June 2009, to the resignation of the CEO and Chair of the Board of eHealth Ontario, the agency mandated to develop electronic health records for Ontarians. In Canada, in 2005, the *Gomery Inquiry into the Sponsorship Scandal* made public its first of two reports and in 2006 the accountability issues raised by Gomery helped lead to the defeat of the Liberal Government. Public administration, long relegated to government reports that few read or academic papers (that even fewer read), has suddenly become a scythe to cut down governments.

If the Gomery report focused public attention on the shortcomings of Liberal management of sponsorship activities in Quebec, the October 2009 *Special Report by the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario*, found serious lapses in the planning of the Electronic Health Record Initiative (EHR), the oversight of eHealth Ontario by the Ministry of Health and questionable management practices within the eHealth Agency itself. The Auditor General's blockbuster report, in turn, precipitated the resignation of the Minister of Health hours before the report was made public and a month later the departure of the Deputy Minister of Health.

The eHealth debacle in Ontario contains many lessons for policy-makers and students of public administration. One of the most important concerns a central issue of this study—the capacity of our public services. Both Canada and Ontario face a tsunami of retirements in their public services over the next few years as the baby boom generation moves on. It is necessary to make the public service an attractive career choice, so that recruits are attracted and retained. This will affect our capacity to maintain or even improve upon the delivery of public services, which is a key concern of this study. A survey of Queen's graduates in the Ontario and federal public services asked a series of human resource questions concerning: performance improvements, job satisfaction, learning and development, work-lifestyle balance, and such. This paper compares and contrasts the results of this survey with the larger surveys of public service employees commissioned by the two governments.

The Ontario Auditor General's report on the eHealth controversy demonstrates that a capacity-implementation gap exists today, not only that there is a projected one for the future<sup>54</sup>. Implementation is the job of the public service. In an ideal public policy world, politicians bring energy, creativity, communication skills and knowledge of public opinion; public servants bring expertise, memory, and management skills. Ministers of Health, as the textbooks say they should do, decided in 2000 that electronic records were a health priority across Canada both to improve care and to influence costs. Yet, nine years and a billion dollars later, as the Ontario Auditor convincingly demonstrates, Ontario has little to show for all of this effort. Near the bottom in comparison to other provinces in achieving electronic record goals, the Auditor wrote that, "Ontario's progress in EHR projects has been slow," and "EHR projects have for the most part not met expectations". In

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<sup>54</sup> See C. David Crenna. "The Role of Governmental Effectiveness in a New Liberalism: Four Key Gaps" in *Searching for the New Liberalism: Perspectives, Policies and Prospects*. Howard Aster and Thomas S. Axworthy (eds) (Oakville: Mosaic Press, 2003).



addition, “the network built by SSHA (Smart Systems for Health Agency) is not being managed cost effectively”<sup>55</sup>. After pages of detail the Auditor wrote:

*“to sum up, too many procurements at the eHealth Ontario Agency and to a lesser extent at the ministry’s eHealth program branch and at SSHA were the product of rushed decision-making, the acceptance of expediency over thoroughness ... poor, absent, or contradicting documentation; and, a particular concern, the concentration of decision-making power in the hands of few individuals with no compensating controls to ensure that their decisions were appropriate”*<sup>56</sup>.

This is not an implementation gap, but rather an implementation abyss, and Ontario is not alone, nor is the eHealth controversy an isolated example. Implementation is a vital—though often neglected—part of the policy process. Public policy requires ideas and optimal solutions, hence the necessity for good analysis. Ideas, in turn, need to be communicated and adopted, thus the emphasis on political leadership. If the proof of the pudding is in the eating, the final critical step is implementation—to carry out, accomplish, fulfill, produce and complete. Implementation depends on the operational demands of the program, the resources or capacity that are required to achieve the goals, and the experience in learning on the ground what works. What is needed are street-level bureaucrats or people who know how to make things work on the ground.

Implementation is often neglected—policy advice and crisis management are the glamour tasks of the public service. Yet, it is often implementation failures that lead to policy debacles. There is little doubt that the goal of having eHealth electronic records is an important one, but the flawed implementation process led to major controversy. The goal of raising federal visibility in Quebec after the 1995 Referendum could certainly be defended, but the implementation shortcuts practised by some public servants and political advisors eventually destroyed a government.

Because of the centrality of implementation, some governments have made the process more central to the agendas of senior decision-makers. In the United Kingdom, the *Central Policy Review Staff* (CPRS) chaired by Lord Rothschild in the 1970s gave British cabinets an overview of horizontal policy issues and an evaluation of the efforts of departments to cope with these challenges<sup>57</sup>. Cabinet thereby gained a non-departmental perspective. Later, Mrs. Thatcher created the *Efficiency Unit* under Lord Rayner, which carried out evaluations and suggested managerial improvements<sup>58</sup>. Tony Blair in 2001 established a *Delivery Unit* in the Cabinet Office and Treasury. In 2005, the British Cabinet Office began a program of capability reviews, which focused on the implementation and management abilities of various departments. Two-thirds of the 170 capability assessments in the first round rated a department less than “well-placed”<sup>59</sup>.

In Canada, we need to develop a similar implementation focus in public policy-making. Once a month, Cabinet should review the progress or looming obstacles of implementation for its critical

<sup>55</sup> Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, (2009), P10-11.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, P13.

<sup>57</sup> Lord Rothschild, (1977),

<sup>58</sup> Peter Hennessy (1989), P595

<sup>59</sup> United Kingdom (2009). National Audit Office. Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General. London: The Stationery Office.

programs. A *Results Unit* composed of representatives of the Treasury Board, Controller Generals, and the Privy Council Office should develop an implementation evaluation review as robust as the regular policy and communication aspects of the cabinet agenda.

Such a unit is recommended because implementation gaps abound. With great fanfare Parliament passed the *Pledge To Africa Act (2004)* to produce generic drugs to help poor countries fight diseases like AIDS. Yet, years later not a single pill had been exported<sup>60</sup>. The *Gun Registry*, a sensible idea to aid police forces and protect citizens was subject to huge cost overruns and cover-ups that made it an easy target for its opponents and lessened its public credibility. Even as simple a task as developing a no-call registry from nuisance tele-marketers took years to create. In the preface to this report reference is made to the creativity of the Pearson Government of the 1960s; within a five-year period the federal government launched *Medicare, the Canadian Pension Plan, Canada Assistance Act, the Federal Student Loans Program* and unified the *Armed Forces*. These were all complicated programs involving many federal departments, the provinces, private sector interests, and millions of individual Canadians. The Mandarins carried it off; politicians in the Pearson government gave the marching orders, but it was the public service that put the wheels to the road, guided the throng towards the desired destination, and concluded the trip with most citizens satisfied. What can compare in recent years with such a record of implementation?<sup>61</sup>

The controversy over eHealth centred on consultants expense accounts—charging for minor lunch items while commanding large daily fees—but in tracking the implementation woes of eHealth, the Ontario Auditor raised a much more profound issue about capacity. The eHealth project was one of the most visible initiatives in the largest and best-funded department in the Ontario government, but the project was largely run by consultants, not regular employees of the Department of Health. The Auditor of Ontario wrote on this point:

*“The fact that the development of an EHR had been on the government’s agenda as far back as the early 2000s caused us to question the heavy, and in some cases almost total, reliance on consultants. This reliance continued to increase over time. This was particularly the case at the Ministry, which in 2007 consolidated all of its eHealth projects into an eHealth Program Branch. By 2008, the Branch was engaging more than three hundred consultants compared to fewer than thirty full-time ministry employees—even a number of senior management positions were held by consultants.”*<sup>62</sup>

If capacity within the Department of Health was lacking presumably the Government had little choice but to go outside the public service to drive the project. This begs the question—why was capacity lacking in such a powerful ministry? And why was it lacking over such an extended period? The priority was set in 2000, but the use of consultants continued to increase over time. One might have guessed that consultants would have been used initially, but growing internal expertise and

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<sup>60</sup> Axworthy, (2006).

<sup>61</sup> A September 2008 survey of public sector leaders in Canada by Deloitte Research found that 41% of respondents deemed government to be less successful at implementing large projects than ten years ago. 61% of Canadian respondents believe that policies are designed with little or no input from the people expected to implement them. Paul Macmillan and Todd Cain. “Closing the Gap between policy design and execution” in *Canadian Government Executive*. Vol. 15. No. 1 (2009).

<sup>62</sup> Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, (2009).

knowledge in public sector managers would have made sense for such a large project. The opposite happened. This study surveys public sector employees with the intent to assist a dedicated workforce to develop the capacity to run creatively complicated projects. The eHealth story shows that this is an urgent necessity.

Many studies show the interrelationship between the human resources issues highlighted in this report and the effectiveness of the public service in implementation. Ralph Heintzman, an experienced public servant, captured the relationship well in his talk on *People, Service and Trust: Exploring the Public Sector Service Value Chain*<sup>63</sup>. Heintzman argued that employee engagement leads to service satisfaction by citizens, which in turn leads to greater citizen trust in public institutions. The drivers of employee commitment are factors like: meaningful work, colleagues and supervisors (each of these factors can be assessed in the CSD survey in Appendix 1). Supervisors or middle managers encourage employees to use their skills, give recognition and organize a manageable workload. If obtained, these lead to better organizational performance. Citizens value timeliness, competence, courtesy and fairness in service delivery. Heintzman's advice is to use drivers of engagement, like the clarity of the mission and management performance to improve implementation. As common sense would argue, superior internal workplace practices lead to better performance. Yet, many reports demonstrate that human resources do not receive the priority they should from senior public sector managers. Linda Duxbury makes the point that the things that attract people to a public sector job—pay and benefits—are not the things that keep employees motivated. Engagement depends on career development, recognition, and work-lifestyle balance<sup>64</sup>.

It is not only the public sector, of course, where engagement is an issue. An engaged employee according to Gerard H. Seijts and Dan Crim: “is a person who is fully involved in and enthusiastic about his or her work”<sup>65</sup>. They cite a 2005 survey in which 17% of Canadian workers reported being highly engaged, 66% were moderately engaged and 17% were actively disengaged. Seijts and Crim, like Ralph Heintzman, argue that an engaged workforce is a more productive workforce: “employee engagement does not merely correlate with bottom-line results—it drives results”<sup>66</sup>.

If engagement and public sector capacity is one theme highlighted by the survey data, the second is accountability and the nature of the political-civil servant relationship. The eHealth dispute over implementation cost a CEO, a chair of the board, a minister and his deputy their jobs, but the sponsorship accountability scandal defeated a government.

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<sup>63</sup> Ralph Heintzman (2007).

<sup>64</sup> Linda Duxbury and Chris Higgins. “Work-Life Conflict in Canada in the New Millennium: A Status Report” Ottawa: Carleton University, 2003. These findings were also reiterated in a presentation by Linda Duxbury entitled, “You, Me and Them: Dealing with Generational Differences in the Workplace”. <http://www.calgaryeconomicdevelopment.com/files/Misc/DuxburyPresentation.pdf>.

<sup>65</sup> Gerard H Seijts and Dan Crim. (2006).

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. P2.

There is a large literature on the sponsorship issue, the subsequent Gomery reports and the *Federal Accountability Act* (2006)<sup>67</sup>. The Gomery Commission found clear evidence of political involvement in the administration of the Sponsorship Program; insufficient oversight at the senior levels of the public service; an absence of transparency; and “the refusal of ministers, senior officials, the Prime Minister’s Office, and public servants to acknowledge their responsibility for the problems of mismanagement that occurred”<sup>68</sup>.

The Sponsorship Program had its origins in 1994-1995 when the advertising section of Public Works and Government Services Canada began to disperse funds for “special projects.” This activity intensified after the Quebec referendum in 1995, leading to newspaper articles which began to question aspects of this spending. An internal audit of the program was ordered in 2000 and the Auditor General of Canada made a dramatic report in May 2002 with certain files being referred to the RCMP. In December 2003, the Martin Government cancelled the Sponsorship Program and created the Gomery Commission in February 2004, which attracted considerable attention and reported in 2005. The Martin Government was defeated largely because of this accountability issue in 2006.

The Sponsorship Scandal is a particularly vivid example of the difficulties that can occur between political demands and civil service responsibilities, but the issue of the proper relationship between the non-partisan merit-based public service and a partisan-dominated executive and parliament is hardly new. Luc Juillet and Ken Rasmussen in *Defending a Contested Ideal*, a history of the public service commission, argue that, “a decision to build a professional and impartial bureaucracy is of fundamental importance to the development of modern democracy”<sup>69</sup>. Democratic governments require legitimacy and legitimacy is derived in no small measure from the effectiveness of public servants, “in delivering important public goods and from citizen’s ability to trust that they will be treated with fairness and impartiality by the state bureaucracy”<sup>70</sup>. The interactions between a non-partisan civil service and very partisan staffs, however, is often a dialogue of the deaf fraught with misunderstanding, incomprehension, finger-pointing, and as the Sponsorship Scandal showed, sometimes outright larceny. “Accountability,” writes David Johnson in *Thinking Government*, “has political, legal, and social dimensions and it includes concerns of ministerial responsibility and the developing and functioning of a ministerial chain of command and discipline along with broader questions about the responsiveness of public policies to the needs and interests of society”<sup>71</sup>. Accountability is often complicated and always crucial.

Who is responsible, as Judge Gomery asked, is the basic question in accountability. The CSDES survey points out that the answer to this question is difficult, because of the lack of clarity about the proper roles of the public service and the minister’s office. These concerns are not only a Canadian

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<sup>67</sup> See the reports of The Commission of Inquiry into the Sponsorship Program and Advertising Activities: Who is Responsible (2005) and Restoring Accountability (2006). See also: Francois Perreault. *Inside Gomery*. Translated Carl Angers (Toronto: Douglas and MacIntyre, 2006) and Ruth Hubbard and Jilles Paquet. *Gomery’s Blinders and Canadian Federalism* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2007).

<sup>68</sup> The Commission of Inquiry into the Sponsorship Program and Advertising Activities: Who Is Responsible?, P7.

<sup>69</sup> Juillet and Rasmussen,(2008), P2.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, P2.

<sup>71</sup> Johnson (2009), P 222.

preoccupation as CSDES data from Hong Kong demonstrates. Hong Kong has recently introduced a ministerial system and responses to the CSDES demonstrate that the elite Hong Kong public service is as conflicted about accountability as public servants in Ottawa and Queen's Park. The survey data that follows compares the views of junior and senior public servants, who have attended courses related to public administration at Queen's University (sample described in detail in the following section). This data points out very real issues in capacity and accountability.

## Section one: The state of the public service

The capacity of a government depends on the quality of its public service. While elected politicians infuse the executive process with momentum and political savvy, public servants provide the experience, technical expertise, and long-term perspective needed to govern effectively. The capacity of government depends on the motivation and calibre of the people who make up the public service. This has always been the case, but achieving this objective for a 21st century government workforce will only occur if we understand the aspirations, global outlooks, and expectations of the current generation of civil service aspirants.

Canada has been lacking in this area. In several recent high-profile incidents, the government has failed to conduct its business efficiently and sometimes even failed to conduct it legally. These scandals have put culpability at the feet of senior public officials, most notoriously in the *Gomery Commission of Inquiry into the Sponsorship Program and Advertising Activities*.

As a result, public service reform is on the agenda. But where to start? There has been some movement towards a new government order, but it has not been balanced. Many proposed reforms have centred on the Gomery-recommended issues of accountability and control. While these are important, they only address part of what must be done to improve the performance of the public service comprehensively and effectively.

What are the challenges affecting the performance of the Canadian public service, and what management directions and instruments are there to improve the situation?

Surveys of public sector employees reveal a moderately dissatisfied and unmotivated workforce with middling optimism for the future. This will not suffice going forward. Canada needs a creative, risk-taking, globally informed public service. To achieve it, the public service must attract talented young people and create a work environment stimulating and effective enough to retain them.

In his 2004 paper *The Dead Generalist*, Ed Straw argues that a high-performing public organization aligns five things: a compelling proposition to the market, a clear and comprehensive strategy to deliver that proposition, a structure wholly built around it, instruments to guarantee that all functions (systems, incentives and performance measures) all point in the same direction, and, finally, a set of shared values to support the whole.<sup>72</sup> Ole Ingstrup and Paul Crookall have a similar

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<sup>72</sup> Straw,(2004). P10.

view. Their 1998 work *The Three Pillars of Management: Secrets of Sustained Success* determined that the three pillars of well-performing public organizations are: aim (a mission and clear direction of where it is headed), character (a strong sense of what it is and what is important—namely, trust, communication, and people-centred ideas) and execution (the ability to get things done through innovation, teamwork, and openness to change).<sup>73</sup>

If effective organizations are built on these principles, it is fitting to measure the current state of the Canadian public service against them. This approach forms the base on which our research builds to come up with recommendations for improvements to three key areas of public sector capacity:

**Capacity and Performance improvements:** how can optimum performance be encouraged considering the political versus administrative tradeoffs that permeate all corners of the public sector?

**Attracting and retaining quality employees:** what reforms and modifications would make the public sector a valued and desirable place to work; a place that would attract and retain creative and innovative, publicly spirited Canadians?

**Accountability design:** how might a better environment be cultivated which facilitates better accountability to Parliament, the media and the Canadian public, while encouraging creativity and managerial flexibility?

### Survey says...

The engagement and satisfaction of Canadian public service employees, and the ability for the public sector to attract and retain new talent, is of the great interest and concern given the demographic pressures that underpin public sector reform.

This interest is reflected in three key surveys regarding the job satisfaction levels of public service employees working at the federal, provincial, and municipal levels, namely: the Canadian Public Service Career Satisfaction Survey (CSDDES)<sup>74</sup>; Public Service Employee Survey (PSES)<sup>75</sup>; Ontario Public Service Employee Survey (OPSES)<sup>76</sup>. Looking at engagement and satisfaction factors across the sector through the windows provided by the surveys allows a more complete view than any one of the three could on its own. These informed our aim to suggest improvements in the three critical areas: capacity and performance, attracting and retaining employees, and improvements to accountability design.

<sup>73</sup> Ingstrup and Crookall, (1998). P7.

<sup>74</sup> Respondents to the Centre for the Study of Democracy's self-administered Web survey (referred to as CSDDES in this document) includes alumni of Queen's Masters of Public Administration program (email invitation delivered to 689 people in October 2009; return rate of 29%) and three groups of participants in the Public Executive Program, Queen's School of Business (September 2008, January 2009, September 2009, n=98).

<sup>75</sup> The Public Service Employee Survey was administered to all employees in the Public Service for which Treasury Board is the employer as well as employees of participating separate agencies. The survey was a voluntary census, and the collection was done using an electronic questionnaire, between 2008-11-03 and 2009-01-09. Data was also captured from 6172 paper questionnaires received between November 2008 and January 2009. The target population for 2008 consisted of 257,764 individuals. The overall response rate for the 2008 Public Service Employee Survey was 65.8% (169,600).

<sup>76</sup> The OPS Employee Survey is a census survey; all 69,340 Ontario Public Service employees were invited to participate (on-line or manually) to a 98-question survey. In 2009, 41,604 employees participated (response rate of almost 60%). Ipsos Reid presented the survey results on June 1, 2009.

The comparisons clearly indicate that public servants want to make a difference—with integrity intact; they want autonomy, greater flexibility, opportunities to be more collaborative and creative, but are often working in a rigid environment that does not reward creativity; they are proud of their work and at the same time embarrassed by the public perception and attitudes toward what they do. Several expressed concern about the prevailing *'good enough for government work'* attitude—an attitude that they feel undermines the reputation of the public service.

Common themes emerged that suggest that public servants want to streamline activities to maximize efficiencies, ensure fairness, and improve communications. They want to be empowered and rewarded for good performance. Employees value cross-departmental collaboration and should be encouraged to do so.

### On capacity and performance improvements

Studies show that pride in one's work and a positive interpersonal relationship with one's boss are said to have four times greater impact on one's discretionary work effort than other factors such as pay.<sup>77</sup> Yet, the prevalence of rotating senior staff has been tagged by survey respondents as a major issue that affects accountability, productivity, and engagement.

Imagine the impact of having three different supervisors in three years while doing the same job! This is what 31% of Federal employees reported in the PSES 2008, and in real terms that means 58,000 federal civil servants. Coincidentally, only 31% of the Federal CSDS survey respondents feel that change is managed well within their department. Experience and specialist knowledge are lost when senior managers are rotated from department to department. Employees are in a constant state of flux as they adjust to different work styles.

Senior officials (DMs and ADMs) spend too little time in one place (generally less than 2 years). This negatively impacts the departments they run, and makes achieving progress on resolving key issues more difficult. (CSDS.Q60)

Respondents expressed strong concerns with management in their agencies. Trust in the grievance process is weak amongst most respondents in the surveys. Only 18% in the PSES confidently feel that they can initiate a formal redress process without fear of reprisal. Similarly, only 18% in the OPS feel free to express opinions that diverge from those of management without fear of reprisal. Municipal employee responses indicate that 65% of them trust that their supervisor will take action on reports of wrong doing (CSDS.Q27), but almost as many disagree as agree that corrective action for bad performance is in place (CSDS.Q23). While 62% of PSES respondents said that they can count on their immediate supervisor to keep promises (PSES.Q34), only 51% are satisfied with the way in that their department or agency responds to matters related to harassment (PSES.Q78).

One CSDS respondent recommended how to improve this:

*Provide a clear and confidential whistle-blower mechanism for employees, so that they may bypass destructive supervisors and directly report instances of waste, theft,*

<sup>77</sup> John Gibbons, (2006), P8.

*bullying by supervisors, racism, violence, etc. There are too many bad, bad, bad supervisors in our department for employees to be able to trust taking their concerns to their bosses. There needs to be a reliable alternate mechanism in place—and one that has real powers and teeth, rather than just a symbolic sinkhole that concerns are thrown into, never to be addressed in the future.*

Tenured federal employees, who have weathered recent scandals and who may have had to implement changes as a result, appear to feel that their organizations are performing better now than when they started. But only 3% of the tenured Ontario public service strongly agrees that their organization functions as well as it once did. These folks may be influenced by the recent E-Health scandal.

## On attracting and retaining quality employees

Finally—and importantly—recruiting processes are rated as mediocre, with not one response group giving the process a rating above 59%. While almost half of MPA respondents stated that the recruitment process was a positive experience (CSDES.Q7), almost half (43%) agreed with that statement: the “process is flawed and requires a major overhaul” (CSDES.Q12). It’s quite alarming that only 2% of all CSDES respondents think that the civil service’s efforts to identify, recruit and retain young people is working very well (31.5% agree that it is successful). And these perceptions are supported by hard data. The Canada Revenue Agency, for example, replaced Revenue Canada so that it could be liberated to handle staffing, job classifications, compensation, and other human resource issues more efficiently. But, staffing and recruitment continues to be a problem: the target of the agency is to fill a job in 66 days, but a recent audit showed that it took an average of 173 days, even more time than in its previous incarnation as a government department<sup>78</sup>.

Still, despite these frustrations, in all three surveys, the majority of respondents reported high rates of job satisfaction—80% of both the CSDES survey respondents and OPSES are content, as are 82% of their PSES counterparts, and 90% of the municipal responders to the CSESD survey are pleased with the current situation.

The nature of the modern public service calls for collaboration. “In the past, staff in an organization used to work side-by-side with individuals of the same discipline, but each individual would effectively work alone. Today the nature of work requires more sharing and, hence, more teams and teamwork,” Ingstrup and Crookall say.<sup>79</sup> In all the surveys reviewed, respondents confirmed that elements of teamwork and collaboration were present in their workplaces. But even with 84% agreeing that their colleagues support teamwork, one MPA respondent of the CSDES survey shared that group management leaves much to be desired:

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<sup>78</sup> Kathryn May, “Public Service HR Agency to be Shot Down” Ottawa Citizen. 6 February, 2009.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, P162.



*“Place a premium on managerial effectiveness, in addition to the premiums on subject-matter knowledge and technical skill. It’s great to have had experience at the Privy Council Office or the Treasury Board Secretariat, but real effectiveness could be improved by knowing something about building, directing and maintaining teams of people”.*

Opinions offered by both OPSES and CSDES respondents indicate changes due to budget cuts and restructuring efforts seem to have made recruitment and human resource planning a low priority. Only 11% of MPA respondents strongly agree that the job posting that they responded to accurately reflect the position they were hired for. Many complained about the lengthy hiring process.

Over 30% of the MPA alumni who had once worked in the public service, but had left indicated that their reason for leaving public service was that their expectations were not met.

*“I have little autonomy in my job and very little room to make my own decisions on major projects or issues management. This slows me down (and frustrates me) considerably. Communication is poor, and I am often not informed related to the ‘big picture,’ even within my branch on major implementation initiatives.” (CSDES.Q58)*

In their own surveys, Ingstrup and Crookall reveal that public organizations have “voracious appetites” for new knowledge. Even though the public service traditionally downplays individual rewards for employees, “creative, well-performing agencies seek to establish mechanisms that catch people doing things right and reward them for it.”<sup>80</sup> This may be, but the three surveys analyzed in this report reveal a different picture, one in which employees are constrained from pushing themselves to their best potential. Only 44% of CSDES respondents admitted that their organizations are willing to be entrepreneurial and take risks. Just over 50% of OPSES and PSES respondents are encouraged to innovate. But as one roundtable participant quipped, *“this is government, not freelancing”*, making us wonder how innovative do we want our public servants to be?

Recognition and rewards for good work could be better. The CSDES responses in this field showed that 71% agree that their job performance was evaluated fairly and regularly. PSES (67%) respondents said they receive useful and constructive feedback and suggestions. But in Ontario, only 51% of OPSES respondents said they receive meaningful recognition for work well done.

We asked if civil servants think that they are fairly paid compared to people doing similar work (CSDES.Q29): 77% of the PEP respondents said yes—this is 20% higher than the MPA respondents (57%).

Certainty about career options affects career optimism, and among respondents, prospects for promotion and professional development are available. In total, 85% of CSDES respondents said their employer provided them with opportunities to learn and grow in the past year. However, only 55% of PSES responders believe that they have opportunities for promotion (PSES.Q23) within the

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid, P79.



Federal Public Service, and this number drops to 47% in the OPS—with 23% neither agreeing or disagreeing (OPS.Q70).

Adaptability is crucial for an organization to succeed, but only 44% of CSDES respondents said their organizations are well-equipped to plan for future change (CSDES Q.44). PSES respondents were more optimistic, with 61% believing that their work unit takes time out to rethink its business processes, but only 33% of OPSES respondents think their organizations are prepared to handle change.

One of the 45% of CSDES respondents who believe their organization is stagnant explained the problem.

*“Public service can only change if the emphasis is placed on the public and what we are there to do, which is serve the public and put the public first. The culture that exists is more one of looking out for yourself or your job, and looking at what the next person has that you did not get—looking in vs. looking out.”*

Even if organizations are prepared for transformations, their will to do so is questionable. Overall, results of the CSDES survey show that tenured municipal employees show the most confidence in the change process with 50% agreeing that it is managed well (CSDES.Q44). Fifty percent of MPA respondents said that their organizations are not transparent or open to change, contrarily, 75% of PEP respondents think that their agency/department is transparent and open to change.

### **On accountability design**

While 75% of all CSDES respondents indicated that they know what is expected of them because accountabilities are well defined only 52% overall think that the right factors are being measured.

The overall rate of CSDES respondents with personal experience working with politicians (minister/mayors) and their staff is high (92%) and they understand the difference between their role and the roles of political staffers (CSDES.Q5), but interestingly 66% of all CSDES respondents do not feel that they have been adequately trained for the added demands that working with partisan offices brings. The CSDES results clearly indicate that employees feel vulnerable to political pressures, which they believe are undermining management. This is reflected in the fact that 51% of all CSDES respondents indicate that their organization is *NOT* free from undue partisan political interference (CSDES.Q48). Straw expounds on these challenges:

*“The civil service finds itself serving ministers and sometimes regulating them; it is impartial and yet also accountable to those ministers. Discharging these often conflicting roles successfully in parallel is not possible.”<sup>81</sup>*

CSDES demonstrates that public servants want to be engaged in policy decisions. Respondents indicate that the development of communication policy and financial policy should be shared equally with politicians. The Ontario respondents are very adamant that the values and objectives

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<sup>81</sup> Straw, (2004). P9.

of policy be shared—their federal and municipal counterparts are less convinced of this. It's very apparent that federal and provincial civil servants feel strongly that they should be implementing policy. Their tenured municipal counterparts are split on this matter.

Worries or concerns about relations with Minister's offices are not confined to Canada. The CSD also surveyed civil servants in Hong Kong and 88% of that sample indicate that they had not received adequate training to deal with the demands of the newly established ministers' offices in the Government of Hong Kong.

### Senior Public Servants respond to CSD Survey

#### Hong Kong

**82.8%** understand the difference between their role and the roles of "exempt" political staff officers for the CE and Principal Officials

**88%** indicate that they have NOT received adequate training to deal with the demands

#### Canada

**87.1%** understand the difference between their role and the roles of "exempt" political staff in the Ministers' offices.

**54.2%** indicate that they have NOT received adequate training to deal with the demands

### MPA respondents weigh in on public service and partisan relationships<sup>82</sup>:

**48%** MPA respondents have personal experience dealing with politicians and their staff (31% Federal. 35% Ontario. 15% Municipal. 19% Other)

**60%** feel that they do NOT have adequate training to deal with the added demands of working with political staffers.

**39%** think that the organization that they work for is free from undue political experience.

**1%** indicates that political (exempt) staffers are ALWAYS capable and trained effectively to fulfill the responsibilities given to them  
(Most times: 44%, Seldom: 53%).

**2%** feel that political staff is ALWAYS cooperative and easy to work with  
(Most times: 64%, Seldom: 34%).

**57%** indicate that political staff should NOT be involved in details of the work of the public service (Should be: 32%; No opinion: 11%).

<sup>82</sup> CSDESQ.49, 6, 48, 55, 56, 57, 58, 51-55.

**90%** think that the public service should have the major responsibility for implementing policy.

**50%** indicate that responsibilities for values and objectives of public policy, development of financial policy, and of communication policies for government, should be shared equally between politicians and the public service.

### *Common themes*

The CSDES was designed to garner thoughtful responses about working in the public service. The relative consistency of its responses representing the mean between those of the PSES and OPS surveys suggests that it demonstrates a fairly good understanding of the current situation.

While answers to the CSD survey provided by OPSES respondents indicate dissatisfaction in level of engagement of senior leadership regarding employee well-being (less than 50% agreeing that senior leadership is genuinely interested in the well-being of employees (OPSES.Q59)). Overwhelmingly (90%), Ontario respondents to CSDES feel that their opinions seem to count (CSDES.Q37). However, OPSES data reveals that barely 50% think that the ministry is on the right track regarding planning for the future (OPSES.Q34), less than 30% of these respondents indicated confidence that results from the 2009 employee survey will be addressed and only 21% indicate that they are aware that action was taken on the concerns expressed in the 2007 survey.<sup>83</sup>

Contrarily, only 15% of tenured Federal respondents strongly agree that their opinion seems to counts—this is a 75 point spread between federal and Ontario respondents— (CSDES.Q37), yet the majority of PSES respondents feel respected, as indicated in the table below (PSES.Q87). Interestingly, only 54% state that they have confidence in the senior management of their department or agency (PSES.Q52). This could be the result of 35% of these employees having had three different supervisors in their current job in the past three years—that’s almost 58,000 Federal Public Servants. The productivity and engagement implications are immense especially considering the significance of interpersonal relationship with one’s boss having four times greater impact on one’s discretionary work effort than other factors such as pay.<sup>84</sup>

The results of all the surveys present a public service that is far from confident in its future success. The verbatim anecdotes drawn from the CSD surveys reveal conflicted feelings about their work, and frustration with too much change (management shuffling) on one hand, and stagnation on the other (lack of creativity; no-risk taking; accountability restrictions). These frustrations are tipping the balance away from careers in public administration: Almost half of CSD respondents have given serious thought to leaving the public service. Reports one:

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<sup>83</sup> Ipsos Reid/OPS, (2009), P20.

<sup>84</sup> Gibbons (2006) P8.

*“The majority of the six and a half years I spent in the public service were very frustrating. I worked in five different departments and the overall mentality was always the same, which is ‘we do it this way because we’ve always done it this way.’ Each process is cumbersome and complex due to the multiple regulations in the name of transparency. Managers are given signing authority and accountability under the Financial Administration Act without training. New employees are usually not given any orientation to the work. Job postings do not reflect the reality of the situation. And the reward, recognition, and consequences of either good or bad behaviour is non-existent. After six and a half years, I did not have even one performance assessment. There was no exit interview. I work in the private sector with no overtime, more hours than I ever did in the public sector and I can honestly say that I’d never go back. I am so happy where I am in the private sector because the opportunities here are based on merit, not length of service. Good work is recognized. And poor performance is dealt with”.*

Of the 24% of all MPA respondents who have left the public service, nearly half now work in the private sector, with most of the rest working for non-government organizations. More than 30% indicated that their reason for leaving the public service was that their expectations were not met. Why not?

Simply put, the public service of today is not operating to its potential. The survey data reinforces CSD’s argument that its three main areas of concern—capacity and performance, attracting and retaining employees, and improving accountability design—all need improvements if it is to function efficiently in 21st century Canada. Canada’s public service needs a revised accountability structure. It also needs mechanisms to facilitate better overall performance. Both of these areas have received significant attention from policy-makers and analysts. Reforms are in the works, and should indeed help to make public service better. Of equal concern is recruiting a strong base of dedicated employees. Since a vibrant workforce will power performance improvements and accountability reforms, creating one should be a top priority of all public sector stakeholders.

## Section two: The path to reform

### *Capacity and performance improvements*

The Canadian public service’s problems imposing accountability suggest structural flaws with the system under which employees must perform. The current design rests on a tug-of-war between political and administrative needs, with no clear mechanism to oversee the struggle. Straw calls to attention the inefficacy of such a system:

*“Ministers are accountable to the electorate for the delivery and yet themselves appoint almost no one to oversee it. Imagine becoming chief executive of a large organization and being told that the entire management is ‘independent’, that you have no control over their major levers of motivation—recruitment, promotion, and reward—and they*

*operate as a separate organization with a mind of its own. Modern organizations do not and cannot work like that. Neither can government.*<sup>85</sup>

Ting reports that the absence of market information and the influence of external forces give public organizations the reputation of having multiple and even conflicting goals. The resulting clashes and complexities make organizational performance expectations ambiguous, and appear to increase formal procedural limitations on employee action and compensation. In other words “it’s easier to constrain employees from doing anything wrong than to motivate them to do something right.”<sup>86</sup>

Similar themes emerge from the three surveys. Employees have strong concerns with management in their agencies—look no further than the skepticism about the grievance-registering process for proof. They want defined responsibilities. They feel vulnerable to the political pressures that seem to be undermining management. They want to streamline activities to maximize efficiencies. They want fairness and better communications. They value cross-departmental work. They want to be empowered and rewarded for good performance.

This level of dissatisfaction is collaborated by work done by Peter Larson and David Zussman. Between May and September of 2006, the two researchers interviewed twenty people who had joined the federal public service mid-career from other areas—the private sector, voluntary or not-for-profit organizations, and provincial governments, to reflect on the move to the federal public service and their observations on the management culture.<sup>87</sup> Overall, it is not a happy story. Although many were energized by the challenge of the public service, the public service cadre they joined seems traumatized, at least, to judge them from their observations. Obviously, there are significant limitations to such a small study—and these should not be minimized, but it also presents important insights about the main barriers preventing the modern public service from thriving.

Most of Larson and Zussman’s interviewees found the federal public service to be an exclusive entity, or a “priesthood,” wherein senior officials have longstanding alliances and networks with one another. This regime is so focused on issues of equity, entitlement, and fairness that it often ignores common sense and good management. Managers seem unconcerned with “real” outcomes, preferring instead to avoid problems by relying on rules. Hierarchy and process are characteristic of all large organizations—certainly all governments—but these elements of organizational design can, and do, impede the free flow of information while slowing down and impairing decision-making. As a result, it can be especially difficult to get things done, even comparatively simple tasks that should not occupy many resources. Issues of management, especially financial management, are therefore given secondary status. Likewise, interviewees said that human resources departments are more separate entities interested in applying rules than instruments to help deputy ministers (or assistant deputy ministers) do the tasks set out by the minister.

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid, P19.

<sup>86</sup> Whorton and Worthley, (1981). 357-61.

<sup>87</sup> Larson and Zussman. (2006). P4

As it was with accountability reform, effective leadership is also in short supply. Evert Lindquist (2006) suggests that a motivated and empowered group of public sector leaders is necessary to effectively undertake public sector reform.<sup>88</sup> Unfortunately, a survey of 400 public and private executives done for the Public Policy Forum (response rate: 47% from public servant respondents, 19% from private sector respondents)<sup>89</sup> found that private sector respondents were much more positive about their leadership than their public sector colleagues. Furthermore, in the public sector, leaders who innovate tend not to be rewarded with advancement.

*“What do they do to a good deputy?” one respondent shared, “They move you—if you’re hugely successful and do a great job of running your department you run the risk of being moved to an even more messed up department until you burn out.”<sup>90</sup>*

Then there are the effects of the New Public Management (NPM) approach. A product of the Thatcher-Reagan-Mulroney era, NPM dictates that, in Osborne and Gaebler’s words, “governance is steering and administration is rowing.”<sup>91</sup> This orthodoxy creates divisions between the two streams, and places more emphasis on results than simple compliance with process. It has become a fundamental component of many Western democracies.

NPM does not necessarily jive with current challenges facing the Canadian government and a wide body of literature supports this divergence. Lindquist questions how valuable results-based accountability tools can be in a context of budget cuts, organizational downsizing and federal restructuring.<sup>92</sup> Dwivedi and Gow argue that NPM has negative effects on employee motivation and institutional memory,<sup>93</sup> and it also shortens tenures. Under this system, C.E.S. Franks argues that deputy ministers no longer spend enough time in their department to become established. Between 1984 and 2004, he points out, Canada had six Clerks of the Privy Council, seven Secretaries of the Treasury Board, seven deputy ministers of finance, and twelve deputy ministers of industry. With such “astonishingly short” periods of time on the job, inefficiencies abound. As Franks says, “a private business could not be managed properly with a senior management turnover like that.”<sup>94</sup> In a discussion paper called “*Canada’s Public Service in the 21st Century*,” it is written that such high turnover at senior levels makes it difficult to implement government priorities, like outcomes-based management. With most deputies not expecting to be in their current jobs for more than eighteen months, they do not have nearly enough time to develop a sense of direction, find the right people, secure the funds, build relations with clients, and create the collaborative work environment needed to build a team and sustain direction.<sup>95</sup> This may be a deliberate check against upper-level complacency as Moshe Maor suggests: “the more authority and discretion public

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<sup>88</sup> Lindquist, (2006).

<sup>89</sup> Larson and Zussman, (2006).

<sup>90</sup> May, *The Ottawa Citizen*, 3 October 2006.

<sup>91</sup> Gaebler and Osborne, (1992).

<sup>92</sup> Lindquist, (1996).

<sup>93</sup> Dwivedi and Gow, (1999). P144.

<sup>94</sup> Franks, (2004), P50.

<sup>95</sup> Green, Baird, Fawke, (2007). P11.

managers are given to manage programs, the less secure political executives want them to be.”<sup>96</sup> But in practical terms, as Jacques Bourgault states, this reduction in position tenure creates problems for retention, recruitment, continuity, and the preservation of corporate or organizational institutional memory.<sup>97</sup>

Unsurprisingly, NPM also presents problems in advancing employees internally at all levels, not just deputy ministers and assistant deputy ministers. Dwivedi and Gow find that the emergence of NPM in Canadian public administration has shifted the dynamics of the workplace, with a small number of broadly defined classes of clerks and special officers displaced by an extremely detailed and specific identification of different jobs within the public service. Because of this, experienced public servants are unable to be promoted in an orderly fashion, and normal personnel have very short career ladders because they are hired to fill very specific positions.

The modest effectiveness of these efforts at accountability reforms and performance improvements suggests that something is awry. Some industry experts have indicated that there has perhaps been too much emphasis on accountability as a cure-all.<sup>98</sup> Framing government around accountability sends the message that public servants should be primarily concerned with looking out for themselves. This is an ineffective frame for shaping the public service. The context and focus is entirely negative. Furthermore, the amount of bureaucratic red tape that is involved in these types of reforms is not conducive to promoting the intended changes. This does not have to be the case. With proper evaluation and communication, there is an opportunity to show employees the positive effects of an open and accountable structure.

Green et al, suggests two considerations to help move the performance of the Canadian public service closer toward that of an “ideal state”. The first is acknowledging that a heavily centralized and controlled decision-making structure is antithetical to an emerging decentralized and horizontal environment in which power, resources, and information are widely distributed. The second is that rigid hierarchical and prescriptive accountability mechanisms do not provide the flexibility to develop policy and to adjust service delivery to meet changing circumstances or local realities.<sup>99</sup>

Any efforts at reforming the performance of the Canadian federal public service must right these wrongs. This means opening the “closed-shop” personal networks of “the priesthood,” building more dynamic human resource capabilities, creating more effective leaders, and managing the effects of the NPM philosophy.

### ***Attracting and retaining quality employees***

As important as accountability and performance improvements are, when it comes to boosting the public service’s capacity, staffing is the final frontier. In one way or another, all the surveys and literature previously cited touch upon a need to advance current methods of attracting good

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<sup>96</sup> Moshe Maor, (1999). P59.

<sup>97</sup> Jacques Bourgault,(2003). P8.

<sup>98</sup> See Appendix Two.

<sup>99</sup> Green, Baird and Fawkes. (2007), P21.



workers to the public service—and keeping them there. A healthy, vibrant, stimulated public workforce will strengthen efforts to improve accountability structures and bureaucratic performance. Therefore, going forward, developing a strong labour pool will be most crucial to the success of the public service.

This is easier said than done. The young workers of today have many unique characteristics that do not necessarily conform to traditional employment standards. They tend to avoid building their careers around specific areas of personal expertise, as their predecessors were wont to do. They do not want—nor expect—to start at an entry-level job; furthermore, they want the freedom to move and change positions regularly. They see longevity and security as less important than challenge and variety. They are described as possessing unreasonably high expectations for compensation, perks, and work-related responsibilities.<sup>100</sup> For better or for worse, however, they are the future of the public workforce.

There are several structural elements in current public sector staffing methods that preclude the effective recruitment and retention of this new generation—many emerging from the analysis of employee surveys. First, the public service has something of a bad rap. Respondents felt that the *good enough for government work* attitude—that is, that public servants coast along an inevitable career path without much effort or investment, undermines the reputation of the public service. The low morale permeating many departments does not help, nor does the conception that public work is risk-averse and stifling. Is there anything about this scenario that would be appealing to a smart, ambitious, confident, young recruit?

Second, there are problems with the recruiting process itself. Budget cuts and restructuring efforts have made recruitment and human resource planning a low priority, often conducted by reluctant or untrained personnel.

Third, governments tend to over-promise about the nature of the positions they have to offer. Once employees are hired, the reality of the job seldom lives up to the hype: only 10% of MPA respondents strongly agree that the job posting that they responded to accurately reflects the position they now hold.

Again, literature supports the existence of these problems. Back in a 1997 report to the Prime Minister, Privy Council Office official Jocelyne Bourgon used the term “quiet crisis” to describe the inability of the public service to attract and keep workers—something she then attributed to years of downsizing, pay freezes, criticism, insufficient recruitment, and the departure of experienced public servants.<sup>101</sup> Ten years later, the cultural shape of the civil service appears to have changed little. Studies of the public service done in 2006 by Linda Duxbury of Carleton University reported that about a third of public service workers are not content:

*“They’re stressed and overworked, can’t balance family with their jobs, feel trapped with few career options, and have little trust for senior management.” She went on to*

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<sup>100</sup> M. Irvine, (2005), P2.

<sup>101</sup> Canada. Government of Canada Privy Council Office, (1998).

*say that bad management is eroding the quality of public servants' work, with more than 40% of those she surveyed complaining about having to do the same or more work with fewer resources, a lack of organizational stability, constantly changing priorities, and too many approval stages for decisions.<sup>102</sup>*

These recruitment inadequacies result in fewer people opting to join the public service. This is causing a big demographic shift, and the average age of public service employees is rising.<sup>103</sup> By some estimates, the average age in today's workforce is forty-seven—seven years higher than it was in 1980—meaning that retirement will deplete the workforce significantly in the coming years.<sup>104</sup> With more than half of the core public administration employees aged forty-five and over, there is an increased risk of losing necessary knowledge and expertise pertinent to the new economy.

To attract fresh bodies, some recruiters have had to entice young applicants with job responsibilities and benefits—such as international assignments and job rotation—that have traditionally been accessible only to those at the highest levels of the organizational hierarchy.<sup>105</sup> Some management scholars have theorized that this may be changing the psychological contract between employers and employees, with new hires increasingly negotiating special work arrangements, expecting unrealistic perks, and exhibiting low levels of job satisfaction and commitment.<sup>106</sup>

But aside from bribery, what can the Canadian public service do to make itself an attractive employer for creative, publicly spirited individuals from diverse backgrounds? Nothing suggests change quite like cleaning house. In *The Dead Generalist*, Straw argues that the biggest and fastest route to reform lies in changing people—in getting rid of or relocating unproductive workers and bringing in managers and staff with the right experience, education, and motivation to do things very differently. His solution is radical: a ratio of 70 'freshers' (new employees) to 30 'lifers' (veteran employees), implemented over only a few years.<sup>107</sup>

Not all solutions are quite so dramatic. Recently, much attention has been given to the under-utilization and under-representation of skilled immigrant workers in the Canadian workplace. Recruiting new Canadian workers may be one strategy by which the Canadian public service can address impending labour shortages while bringing in fresh perspectives about how government runs. However, there is work to be done before this can happen. Several young people eager to join

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<sup>102</sup> L. Duxbury, (2007).

<sup>103</sup> Statistics Canada says that within the core public administration (that is, federal government employees excluding the RCMP, the Canadian Forces and separate agencies like the Canada Revenue Agency), more than 52% of workers were over the age of 45 in 2006—up from under 40% in 1995. At the same time, the proportion of employed Canadians aged 45 and over increased from almost 30% to just under 39%. The gap between the two groups in 2006 indicates that the public service workforce is much older than the workforce in general. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/070305/dq070305a-eng.htm>

<sup>104</sup> O'Leary, Lindholm, Whitford, (2002). P325-340.

<sup>105</sup> Rushowsky, (2007). PID5.

<sup>106</sup> J.M. Twenge, (2006).

<sup>107</sup> Straw, (2004). P49.

the federal public service, shared their frustration of coming up against employment barriers due to their citizenship, even though they possess Canadian credentials<sup>108</sup>.

Organizations may also find it beneficial to modify their work arrangements to attract non-traditional (read: contingent) employees. For example, offering greater flexibility about when and where work is completed may not only increase the applicant pool, but signal to applicants that the government offers progressive human resources practices.

Early indoctrination of young people has proven to also pay off. Internship programs at all levels expose young people to the government organism and how it works. Interns who return to academic life are thought likely to impart the importance of public work to their peers. If their experiences were positive, this logic goes, they will tell their stories.

There is value, in this instance, in looking to recruitment improvement efforts in similar countries; namely, Australia, the UK and New Zealand. These nations share much common ground with Canada: all use the same language and operate using the same basic government design. Moreover, since 1975, all three have reformed the way their respective governments conduct business, ultimately changing the structure, expectations, and future of several institutions.

In Australia, after previous efforts at recruitment proved inefficient, public officials have made a priority of recruiting individuals from graduate programs and placing each in a work environment that promotes development, continuing education, and individual career-specific goals. In Britain, reforms in this area—while relatively modest—include specific targets to make government more representative of women, ethnic minorities, and people with disabilities. One such goal, for example, involves filling 25% of the top 600 positions in the public service with female candidates. The British government had also taken steps to ward off private sector poaching through a training program called *Investors in People*. At first glance, New Zealand is on par with Canada: its government has taken a modest approach to attracting recent graduates, with few comprehensive programs other than career fairs, internships, development programs and the like to address the issue. Still, New Zealand has developed some programs that have attracted employees despite not being created for that purpose. These include equal employment opportunity programs and a merit-based system of employment that gives consistency to hiring processes. Another successful—and perhaps unplanned—way New Zealand has bolstered its public service has been through welcoming older individuals back to the workforce after abolishing its mandatory retirement age in 1999.

So what can Canada learn from these reforms? A lot. Many plans for public sector reform in Canada—namely, the Federal Accountability Act—do not fully address the human resource needs that some of our most comparable international contemporaries have. That is not to say nothing is being done. There is evidence that government policy-makers are seeing the benefit of recruitment strategies. In 2007, the *Prime Ministerial Advisory Committee on the Public Service*, co-chaired by

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<sup>108</sup> Roundtable discussions at Indian Diaspora Meeting, April 23, 2009, Ottawa, hosted by CSD, sponsored by Walter Duncan Gordon Foundation

Paul Tellier and Don Mazankowski, outlined plans to re-brand the public service as an exciting, meaningful place to work. It also announced medium-term action plans to improve human resources: planning, recruitment, and employee development. Most importantly, it called attention to the importance of implementing action plans for real changes rather than making future diagnostic evaluations. Also in 2007, the *14th annual Clerk's Report on the Public Services* targeted its efforts at revamping its human resources strategy. In fact, the Privy Council Office (PCO) is requiring every department and agency to create a new human resources plan for their respective organizations. Additionally, a deputy minister's committee on public service renewal that formed in 2006 is also planning reforms. The committee's work is currently being kept secret since it constitutes advice to Cabinet, but its agenda is to improve leadership, development, and people management within the service.

## The steps to recruitment

There are a number of practical recruitment steps the public service can take to convince dynamic young workers to join, many of which are detailed in Appendix 3. On behalf of the CSD, Glenda Fisk and Amie Skattebo have created a blueprint for the Canadian civil service to bulk up its workforce using both. Informed by the feedback received by senior managers and young recruits on the formal and informal recruitment methods outlined in Appendix 3, and their personal experiences, we suggest that the following:

- ▶ Ground recruitment in organization-related requirements, but understand the reality that many new external recruits, as well as the lower echelons of internal candidates, are being hired as internally mobile public servants. The hiring processes of individual departments need to take this into account. Somehow they must not be unnecessarily narrow, or excessively focused on the specific positions they are hiring for, while maintaining clarity in the description of the nature of the position being filled.
- ▶ Make career options in the civil service more visible to Canadians by varying the sources through which employees are attracted to the organization.
- ▶ Invest in modernizing the image and practice of human resources management.
- ▶ Ensure balance between internally closed recruitment and competitions open externally with appropriate criteria for creating that balance.
- ▶ Provide better training to recruiters, those facilitating information sessions and for those who conduct the formal selection process
- ▶ Maximize the primacy effect—reduce interview-job offer lag times.
- ▶ Be realistic (but not too realistic).
- ▶ Highlight the intangible benefits of work, emphasizing the world of opportunity it opens up regarding job prospects and variety of career paths in a way that few private sector organizations can.
- ▶ Define the “face” of the public service and be intentional in achieving the ideal.

- ▶ Use the considerable clout afforded to Canadian public service by its sheer numbers to ensure that schools of public administration are preparing students for excellence in public service as a profession (leadership; ethics; communication skills).

## The steps to retention

Recruitment is only part of creating a productive workforce. Equal care should be given to issues surrounding employee retention and ensuring that the benefits associated with effective recruitment practices realize long-term gains. That is, efforts should be made to ensure that once recruited and hired, top candidates remain with the civil service, motivated by opportunities to grow and make a difference in Canada.

It helps to look to why people are initially attracted to work in public service. For many it is because they are strongly motivated by a desire to make a difference—to become involved in interesting policy developments and to be empowered to affect outcomes. So much of cultivating this in new hires comes down to management.

In a 1998 study on career development in the public service, Duxbury, Dyke, and Lam evaluated the human resources best practices of leading public sector companies to draft recommendations for the public service. Employee satisfaction comes down, they found, to good management. “There is almost uniform consensus that perhaps the most important factor contributing to the success of any career management and career development system is top management commitment and support,” they write. “Without the driving force from the very top, the best processes and tools will not work or provide the benefits they are capable of delivering.”<sup>109</sup> Furthermore, investing resources: money, time, and technology, relays to employees that career development is a priority, and that they are valued.

Ongoing education—whether through formal training or, increasingly, through mentorship programs—is a big draw for new hires. In 2004, the Treasury Board of Canada released a plan calling to enhance the role of the then-new Canada School of Public Service in the design and delivery of training. This was intended to establish a core learning curriculum for public servants from entry level through successive responsibilities. It also called for certification standards for public service managers, specialized programs for advanced financial management (as well as other core management functions like internal audit) and modern, timely, enterprise-wide financial and human resource information systems to track all spending and provide the right tools for effective scrutiny and decision-making.<sup>110</sup>

The Ontario Public Service is similarly engaged in promoting mentoring programs and was recognized as one of Canada's best diversity employers for one such effort. In 2009, thirty deputy ministers partnered with eighty-seven Queen's Park employees in a year-long diversity mentorship program. The program aims to help "under-represented" employees who are visible minorities, disabled, aboriginal, LGBT or francophone improve their access to training, career counselling and

<sup>109</sup> Duxbury, Dyke, Lam. (1998).

<sup>110</sup> Canada. Treasury Board of Canada. P26.

networking.<sup>111</sup> Another program has been created by a senior analyst in accounting policy and financial reporting, Thomas Chong. Mr Chong received a 2009 Amethyst Award<sup>112</sup> for establishing a Virtual Group Mentoring Program to improve the self-confidence and self-esteem of minority groups and enhancing service delivery to Ontarians.

As a recent nation-wide project shows, such efforts factor into overall employee engagement. *The Employee Engagement Inter-jurisdictional Team* (EEIT) made up of eight Canadian jurisdictions (British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Nova Scotia, Yukon Territories, the Northwest Territories, and the federal government) has developed a comprehensive strategy to measure and facilitate employee engagement, to be applied to employee surveys in all jurisdictions. The result is a model referred to as the *Double E*. On one side of the model is a list of factors that affect employee engagement: co-worker relationships, work-life balance, quality of leadership, opportunities for growth and advancement. On the other side is a list of how these factors translate into invigorated and involved employees: they make workers satisfied with overall employment, more willing to positively recommend the organization, and more likely to remain with the organization. If the two “E’s” are in place, workers tend to achieve government goals and better levels of organizational performance. This corroborates research done in 2005 by Development Dimensions International Inc., which states, “solid and conclusive evidence from dozens of studies shows that organizations with a higher percentage of highly engaged employees outperform others in their industries.”<sup>113</sup>

By nurturing and facilitating the factors that engage employees, the public service stands a much better chance of holding on to the talent it recruits.

## **Accountability design**

Recent government scandals suggest that the Canadian public service would benefit from a better accountability structure. This means, in simple terms, ensuring that the public service is open and clear about its obligations and responsibilities to itself and with Parliament. In a parliamentary democracy, the reasons for this are fairly obvious. “Ours is a system of responsible government,” writes C.E.S. Franks, “and constitutionally someone must be responsible and accountable to Parliament for what the government does and fails to do.”<sup>114</sup> Public servants should have to answer to their own internal colleagues, Parliament, the media, and the Canadian public. Of this there has been much written.

One of the authors of this study argue that the issues highlighted by the Gomery Commission, reveal “the absence of any notion of responsibility from those in high positions,” and that “senior public

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<sup>111</sup> Bill Taylor, [Canoe trip with minister ripples across the ranks. Mentorship program offered live lessons on the conversations crucial to decision-making, Toronto Star 19 October 2009. http://www.thestar.com/Business/article/589620](http://www.thestar.com/Business/article/589620)

<sup>112</sup> The Amethyst Awards program was created in 1992 to recognize excellence in the Ontario Public Service (OPS). Any individual, group or partnership in the OPS can be nominated. Recipients are selected based on exceptional work in the areas of client service, innovation, leadership, professional achievement, building a diverse organization, championing learning and working horizontally across government. Source: <http://www.news.ontario.ca/mgs/en/2009/06/amethyst-awards-2009-recipients.html>

<sup>113</sup> Development Dimensions International, Inc, 2005.

<sup>114</sup> C.E.S. Franks, (2004). P64.

officials ignored several internal complaints about irregularities,” and that political staff “involved themselves in policy implementation.” The crisis is of two kinds: moral and structural. “Morally we have a retreat from responsibility,” and the restoration of the ethical base must be a priority, while structurally “we have allowed confusion to set in about the separate roles of public servants, ministers, and their personal political advisors.” Therefore Canada needs, to “rediscover the ethic of responsibility” which is fundamental to the integrity of democratic processes in the Westminster model of responsible government.<sup>115</sup>

Scholars of Canadian government, as well as analysts within the Treasury Board, have taken great interest in the accountability deficit in Canadian government. There is agreement on the need to reinvigorate the role of the PAC and to more precisely clarify the respective responsibilities of ministers, deputy ministers, and their exempt staff. Concern has been expressed about the rapid turnover of members of Parliament vis-à-vis the executive as well as turnover of deputy ministers within the public service. There is also the much larger issue of “civic illiteracy” that extends, to some degree, to those who hold elected office, including public servants, as well as to those who report or comment on politics and government in the media.<sup>116</sup> The management of the public service itself, its reform and optimal administrative style, has attracted attention for decades as public services the world over have had to acclimatize to horizontally, increasingly intrusive press scrutiny, freedom of information acts, the effects of constitutions, and international trade agreements. These pressures are not unique to Canada.

At the centre of this whirlwind of investigation and analysis lies the issue of accountability and responsibility: the ‘Who is accountable to whom for what?’ question which is the cornerstone of the Westminster model of responsible government.<sup>117</sup> In recent years, it is argued, what were once broadly understood and widely shared conventions regulating accountability between ministers and deputy ministers have come under pressure, atrophied, or been neglected with the consequence that, as C.E.S. Franks observes that “something is seriously wrong with the way the principle of responsibility is construed and practised in Canada.”<sup>118</sup> While Franks’s argument certainly carries weight, it is also important to recall that there was no golden age of accountability to Parliament. As Aucoin, et al., contend,

*“There is no evidence to support the view that Parliament once performed its scrutiny or accountability role significantly better than it does today. What is different, and on this there is more agreement, is the capacity of the executive—particularly a majority government with a determined leadership—to limit the ability of opposition MPs and Parliamentary committees of scrutiny and audit to effectively hold ministers accountable for the discharge of their responsibilities and the management of their respective departments.”<sup>119</sup>*

<sup>115</sup> Thomas Axworthy, 2005. P7.

<sup>116</sup> Aucoin, Smith, and Dinsdale, (2004). P15.

<sup>117</sup> Robin Sears, (2006). P19-27.

<sup>118</sup> C.E.S. Franks, (2004). P64.

<sup>119</sup> Aucoin, Smith, and Dinsdale, (2004). P30.

There have been several sets of recommendations for improvement. For instance, in their 2005 research paper *Modernizing Government Accountability: A Framework for Reform*, Peter Aucoin and Mark D. Jarvis find that effective change could be as simple as making deputy ministers “directly and personally responsible and accountable” to Parliament for statutory authorities assigned explicitly to them and for those delegated authorities that are conferred directly on them by the Public Service Commission and the Treasury Board.<sup>120</sup> Perhaps the most notorious call to reform is Justice John Gomery’s report issued in response to concerns raised in the 2003 Auditor General’s report. The sponsorship scandal re-energized long-standing issues in Canadian public administration. “How is it,” his report asks, “that politicians and public servants are able to violate the public trust in such a flagrant matter?”<sup>121</sup> Gomery points out several structural problems: confusion over the nature of accountability and responsibility relationships within the public service and between the public service and ministers of the Crown; a demoralized public service unable or unwilling to prevent malfeasance; a legislative apparatus—and in particular, the PAC—that is unable to perform the role intended for it by the Westminster model; a general lack of transparency about government spending; and reluctance by the public service to call attention to irregularities because of the increased concentration of political power in the Prime Minister’s Office. “I have become convinced that we need to rebalance the relationship between Parliament and the government in order to attain better accountability within government,”<sup>122</sup> Gomery writes. To do so, he issued nineteen different suggestions for reform, split among four different types: structural, normative/ethical, administrative, and resource enhancements.

Gomery’s key recommendation—that the relationship between Parliament and the executive can be rebalanced by improving accountability to Parliament—is based on several concerns. First, and most obviously, the PAC is supposed to be the watchdog on the executive. However, given the imbalance of resources available to the PAC compared to the government, and given the sheer quantity of material that PAC members are expected to be on top of, and given the relative inexperience of PAC members in relation to government—particularly majority governments in a second term—it is simply unreasonable to expect that PAC members will be able to perform as the Westminster model intends. It should be noted that other standing committees of both houses perform this role and both are hampered by the same list of factors than many commentators attribute to committee ineffectiveness in performing their role in holding the government to account.

Second, the current political climate can create intimidation among public servants. It is quite possible, given that deputy ministers serve at the pleasure of the Prime Minister, to cultivate a culture of managing up—that is, managing one’s department and the expectations of senior officials in a way that does not offend the minister or prime minister—rather than managing down, or running the department according to public service values of probity, economy, value for money and ethics.

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<sup>120</sup> Aucoin and Jarvis, (2005). P10.

<sup>121</sup> Gomery, (2006). P198.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid, P198.



This is where accountability matters and where, according to Gomery, (Franks, et al., 2004) things broke down: public servants who might otherwise have brought administrative irregularities to light were constrained from doing so because the federal sponsorship program was viewed as a priority of a powerful Prime Minister; furthermore, the public watchdog—the PAC—was in the dark about the true purpose of the special reserves and what the Department of Public Works and Government Services was spending those reserves on. Thus, a lack of transparency transformed into reluctance among public servants to speak truth to power in the context of lost accountability and responsibility.

Still irate over being duped by the sponsorship program, the Canadian public paid Gomery's findings and recommendations a great deal of attention. Whatever their merit as harbingers of change,<sup>123</sup> there is little doubt that his condemnations have prompted much interest in the issue of federal accountability, but the overall reform picture is much broader than Gomery's recommendations.

The Gomery report was both the product of previous accountability reforms and the inspiration for future ones. Other recommendations issued before and after Gomery's create a more comprehensive blueprint for reform. Three series of recommendations are particularly relevant. First is the *Public Service Modernization Act* (PSMA), which was announced in 2003 and came into full force at the end of 2005. Its overall thrust was to "make staffing processes faster, fairer, and more transparent for both employees and managers."<sup>124</sup> Appropriately, of great importance in the PSMA is building stronger relationships between employees, bargaining agents, human resources advisors, and managers—the inadequacies of which bore much of the blame for the failures of the sponsorship scandal. The PSMA aimed to install within the federal public service greater cooperation and consultation, and was designed to modernize unfair labour practices and install more comprehensive grievance provisions.

The second notable set of proposals comes from Reg Alcock, President of the Treasury Board from December 2003 to February 2006. In 2005, working for a Liberal minority government trying to mitigate the electoral fallout of the sponsorship scandal, Alcock brought forward one hundred fifty-eight separate reforms for the public service. Produced without the benefit of the final Gomery recommendations, his report nevertheless identified several congruent issues. Its main proposals sought a public service that operated better—more accountably, effectively, efficiently, and transparently—but not necessarily all that differently.

Finally, a third set of reform recommendations—the Harper government's *Federal Accountability Act* (FAA)—was drafted and put into law after Alcock and Gomery's recommendations, and was

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<sup>123</sup> "The Gomery circus did 'live on TV' what the RCMP could have done in private for a fraction of the cost of the public inquiry. And both approaches would probably have generated the same results. But even though there is a great deal of national pride in the RCMP, there is also considerable distrust of it when it comes to 'politically-tainted issues'. So Gomery was not just an inquiry; it was more importantly about glasnost." (Paquet, Gilles. 2005. "Gomery as glasnost?" *Literary Review of Canada*, 13 (7), P12.

<sup>124</sup> Canada. Canada Public Service Agency, 2003.

passed in December 2006.<sup>125</sup> The FAA includes stringent rules between lobbyists and public servants, as well as a provision detailing the installation of an accounting officer.<sup>126</sup> It assumes that the real and persistent problem in Canadian government and public administration is corruption, which must be rooted out and punished.<sup>127</sup>

As well-designed as each of the four sets of recommendations may be in its own right, each entails very real problems of implementation. The middling results of employee surveys referenced above, particularly those detailing change management skills, suggest that installing a new accountability structure will not be easy. But why is this? What mechanisms within the public service itself—and its relationship with other areas of government—prevent it from adopting a better way to operate? Once again, the public service surveys shed some light.

According to the respondents, a rotating roster of senior staff creates workplace instability. Over a third of federal PS employees reported that they had three or more supervisors during the last three years. Inevitably, a new manager brings change, yet only 19% of MPA respondents feel that change is managed well within their department. Experience and specialized knowledge are often lost as senior managers are rotated from department to department. Employees are in a constant state of flux as they adjust to different work styles. But it works both ways; employees must be adaptable and open to change. Astute managers are aware that without the willing commitment of staff, change will be stalled. Even with employee buy-in, implementing new accountability structures is no simple task in the context of quickly changing governments. Straw sums up the political conundrum that ensues:

*“[T]he main central civil service which would be driving the change in any normal organization is not doing so. New governments arrive and are immediately dependent on the civil service to enact their election commitments and to respond to events. Reform takes a distant place to the pressures of the here and now. The political will is never sufficient. The opposition of the day has always seen most advantage in defending the civil service from government ‘politicization’ rather than in backing reform to its own long-term advantage. The short-termism of our modern democracy stymies reform.”<sup>128</sup>*

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<sup>125</sup> CSD researcher Kyle Toffan has done research to suggest that the government did not spend enough time deliberating on these matters, as examples in Australia, Britain, and New Zealand prove. The Gomery commission recommends that the government ‘should remove the provision in the law and its policies that enables exempt staff members to be appointed to a position in the public service without competition after having served in a minister’s office for three years.’ Even though it is unclear what the spin-off repercussions of this implementation will be in the future, the Federal Accountability Act includes this recommendation in its text. This could potentially have large implications for the quality of staff that is available to ministers. Prior to reforms in Britain, Australia, and to a lesser extent, New Zealand, a great deal of debate occurred prior to government acceptance of recommendations. Many feel that this needs to be the process in Canada as well.

<sup>126</sup> Franks has questioned the accountability officer provision, claiming that, “government has construed the powers of the accounting officer and Parliament so narrowly that [he] questions whether the committee could do its job as watchdog of the public purse.” (May, Kathryn. 2007. “MPs fear Conservatives trying to limit Parliament’s powers,” *The Ottawa Citizen*. 1 April 2007. At <http://www.canada.com/topics/news/politics/story.html?id=a4616425-def0-4200-a9a5-af481b66a665&k=4087>.)

<sup>127</sup> Whether or not this prioritization is accurate is open to interpretation—Robin Sears has argued, for example, that actual corruption is comparatively rare in Canada, and that endemic problems like political trickery and bureaucratic incompetence are bigger culprits. (Sears 2006, p. 20.)

<sup>128</sup> Straw, (2004). P16.

Furthermore, the Canadian public service tends to be myopic about accountability reform, focusing more on internal experiences and preferences instead of exploring options available elsewhere. This is a problem Straw laments, using the British public service as an example of how limited connections with the outside world and with one another can create problems. In his view, the British public service would be much better served by looking to professional institutions, conferences, seminars, trade journals, and time spent on the ground with consumers and front-line staff for perspective.<sup>129</sup> Are Canadian civil servants encouraged to look outward for inspiration? MPA survey respondents said that learning from institutional memory outweighed learning from other organizations by three to one, so the answer appears to be “no,” even though conferences, seminars, and courses to promote such learning are available through the Institute of Public Administration of Canada (IPAC), for example.

### Section three: Going forward

Ultimately, the above examples demonstrate that people are both the cause of the problems and the key to improvements in the public sector. As such, attracting and retaining a better workforce should be where the government starts efforts to build its capacity. There are clear factors at work that support investigating new human resource management policies.

Employee engagement is crucial to this. To be accountable, employees have to want to be accountable. To behave responsibly towards the public trust, they have to want to. To maintain fidelity to a *Value and Ethics Code for Public Service*, they have to want to. A public servant, at any level, has to want to behave ethically, accountably, and responsibly. As Savoie says, “the broad outline of Canada’s accountability regime has remained pretty well intact over the years. But everything else has changed.”<sup>130</sup> “Everything else” includes the global cultural milieu in which public service takes place—and that milieu has seen the establishment of a hegemonic value system that gives preference to individual needs and advancements over social well-being. To the extent that the Canadian public sector has incorporated operating principles and organizational values that conflict with a larger view of human nature (i.e., as human beings are more than bundles of appetites, that they have loyalties and allegiances that cannot be explained in terms of individual advancement or gain) there will be tension and conflict within and between different components of the political system. There will be failures of the core values of probity, discretion, good judgement, and public-spiritedness.

Public service, as an amalgam of the values that sums to a culture, is a reflection of the political and institutional context in which it resides. The Canadian public service has long been dominated by intelligent and thoughtful people; educated and reflective by training. To some extent a public service can only be the antennae—or distant early warning system—of a national society: not always, but often the public sector is among the first to feel the impact of a new idea or social force.

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid, P29.

<sup>130</sup> Savoie. (2003). P.206.



As the NPM philosophy of the late 1970s and early 1980s took hold across the developed nations, public sectors like Canada's adapted as best they could, given the collision of values that zeitgeist induced. Now, with some hindsight, it is time to reinvigorate the core principles and cognate management values that have served Canada so well. Creating a public service that attracts and retains thoughtful and talented people—imbued with a strong ethical purpose and a desire to serve the public interest—cannot, in the end, be a task much different from creating any other kind of high quality workforce. Public servants need to know that their work is valued, that it is important, that it makes a positive difference, and that they will be recognized for their achievements and sanctioned for their lapses.

Improving the foundations of the public service will be difficult, but it is necessary if the Canadian government is to thrive going forward. The transformation is not beyond our ability. Engaging stakeholders in open discussion regarding improvements in the three critical areas of public sector capacity is step one. Step two requires that pressure and desire for reform be created—followed by ownership and responsibility for said reform, being ever mindful that people support what they help create. If all parties can come together and build a potent workforce of effective, accountable and engaged employees, the capacity of Canada's public service can only blossom.

## Recommendations

### *Capacity and Performance*

1. Recognition that the neutrality, merit-based recruitment and expertise of the public service are fundamental features of our democracy and must be preserved.

The current partisan attacks on public servants must cease. Our traditional system of a partnership between politicians, their staffs, and a professional public service depends on trust and civility.

2. Implementation must become as important to the policy process as analysis or communication is. Cabinets should regularly review implementation issues. A “Results Unit” should be created in the Treasury Board to fulfill this function.

While policy advice is by far the highest rated function of the public service, implementation is the crux of policy delivery and the mark of an effective public service. Therefore to bridge the implementation gap, a review of a selected a project or program, a pre-auditor general, departmental debrief, of sorts, should be on the cabinet’s monthly agenda to ensure that policy leads to results.

This requires that programs are designed and funded with future policy evaluation and review in mind, and that evaluations are properly resourced.

Of the Australian experience in evidence policy making, the Chair of their Productivity Commission, Gary Banks, advocates for explicit budgetary provisions for the collection of base-line data, particularly in social and environmental areas.

*“... it is important that we lay the groundwork now to evaluate the consequences of those measures later, so the inevitable problems can be detected and timely adjustments made.”<sup>131</sup>*

A Results Unit composed of representatives of the Treasury Board, Controller Generals, and the Privy Council Office should develop an implementation evaluation review regiment as robust as the regular policy and communication aspects of the cabinet agenda.

3. The norm for holding senior management jobs in the public service should be five years.

The Prime Minister’s Advisory Committee on the Public Service has issued three reports that emphasize improved human resource management and the centrality of effective recruitment and succession planning. Likewise, recent reports of the Ontario Secretary of the Cabinet to the Premier concentrate on increasing employee engagement through opportunities for growth and achievement, learning and development opportunities and fair human resource practices. The survey data, especially the 2008 PSES, indicate that senior officials (DMs and ADMs) spend too little time in one place. This negatively impacts the departments they run and makes achieving progress on resolving key issues more difficult. As far back as 1979 the

<sup>131</sup> Banks, Gary (2009), Evidence-based policy making: What is it? How do we get it? Retrieved 4 December 2009: Evidence-based %20policy-making\_ANZSOG%20Lecture\_050209.pdf

Royal Commission on Financial Management and Accountability had warned that, “the high rate of mobility among deputy heads of departments and agencies has become a major management problem”. The Lambert Commission recommended that deputies be expected to serve a period of three to five years<sup>132</sup>.

*“You should be there long enough to fix your first wave of mistakes—that’s the best way to learn!” (Roundtable participant)*

4. Discourage the use of consultants in line positions in favour of building up the capacity of the regular public service.

Henry Mintzberg believes that middle managers are the heart and the soul of any public sector organization. Management is about craft and art as much as it is about analytics. Craft is about experience and art is the creative side. Science, the systemic analytic side, is important, but over emphasized. Craft is about getting things done, art is about doing it creatively, and science about doing it systematically. It takes time to build such an organization and it cannot be done through consultants. As Mintzberg says, “they say a consultant is somebody who borrows your watch and tells you what time it is”<sup>133</sup>.

### ***Attracting and Retaining Employees***

5. Improve the Recruitment Process

- ▶ Ground recruitment in organization-related requirements, but understand the reality that many new external recruits, as well as the lower echelons of internal candidates, are being hired as internally mobile public servants.
- ▶ Make career options in the civil service more visible to Canadians, especially new Canadians, by varying the sources through which employees are attracted to the organization.
- ▶ Ensure balance between internally closed recruitment and competitions opened externally with appropriate criteria for creating that balance.
- ▶ Provide better training to recruiters, those facilitating information sessions and for those who conduct the formal selection process
- ▶ Maximize the primacy effect—reduce interview-job offer lag times.
- ▶ Be realistic (but not too realistic): Highlight the intangible benefits of work, emphasizing the world of opportunity it opens up, like job prospects and variety of career paths in a way that few private sector organizations can.
- ▶ Define the “face” of the public service and be intentional in achieving the ideal: Use the considerable clout afforded the Canadian public service by its sheer numbers to ensure

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<sup>132</sup> Royal Commission on Financial Management and Accountability, P193.

<sup>133</sup> Palankis in “Canada’s Management Guru” in Canadian Government Executive. Vol. 13. No. 1. 2007. P8.

that schools of public administration are preparing students for excellence in public service as a profession based on the current and future visions.

**6. Expand Interchange Canada and make it work much more directly as a focus of Canada's development policy.**

Public servants in Canada could be seconded to work in their respective home departments around the world. The excellence of the Canadian public services would become a development asset, while at the same time giving an exciting international dimension to federal and provincial employees.

As our data makes clear, learning and personal development is a goal greatly cherished by public servants in the OPS and the Federal Public Service. Younger recruits especially value international opportunities even though comparably few are in departments with an explicit foreign mandate, like CIDA or DFAIT.

Our proposal is that Canada should develop a major program of exchange and capacity building with the public services of the developing world. Funded by CIDA with contributions by the provinces, both provincial and federal departments would invite public servants from abroad to visit and work within our ministries.

There are obvious benefits to promoting public sector-civil society dialogue and partnerships, and therefore it is recommended that secondments to civil society groups be explored.

Interchange Canada has been a skills exchange program between the Canadian public service, businesses, and other governments since 1971. The sponsoring organization continues to pay a regular salary to its employees. This program has proven its value and is good conceptually, but it is limited in its application. In 2007, for example, out of a public service of more than 250,000 (those reporting to Treasury Board) only 150 employees (.06%) were on assignment outside of the public service and a mere 328 participants were on temporary assignment to the public service from a range of outside organizations. The Canada Fellows Program, a recent innovation, is similar to Interchange Canada except that the Fellows are high-level executives. Its number is also small with a projected twenty Fellows.

**7. Establish a Mentoring Program**

As the Queen's data makes clear, there are a number of accountability issues that perplex both Canadian public servants and the relationship between the public service and political staffs. These are certainly problematic. An idea that would improve the situation is to establish a mentoring program.

Open-ended comments from the CSD sample and interviews with public servants for this study reveal great interest in the potential of mentoring programs. Winner, in Appendix 4, cites the Singapore Administrative Service where "each new officer is assigned a mentor who can offer friendly advice and show you the ropes," as a viable model. The 2001 OECD report highlights that mentoring is especially critical for women and under-represented minorities because of the perception that the public service is an "old-boy's network." Governments need to establish a formal mentoring program modelled on the Singapore experience.

## Improvements to Accountability Design

8. Create a “Wise Person Group” to construct an Accountability Code that clarifies the responsibilities of public servants, ministers, and the staffs that ministers employ.

A task force of widely respected political figures, both those with experience as ministers and opposition members, former senior political staffers, and former senior civil servants, such as former secretaries of cabinet, should come together to create an accountability code. This code should be tabled in Parliament and in provincial legislatures and voted upon so that the values and ethics enunciated would have the legitimacy of being approved by our elected leaders. While not law, a non-binding resolution on an accountability framework would become a benchmark to guide future accountability disputes.

*“We want to avoid transforming partial and perhaps complementary perspectives into irreconcilable standpoints, yet we do not want to deny real differences. It is all too common to err in both directions—assuming that others are just like us, or completely opaque to us.”<sup>134</sup>*

9. Institute training for exempt staff (political staffers) on the essentials of government and the political-civil service relationship. Public servants also need courses on how to develop an effective relationship with ministers’ offices.

Public servants are among the best-trained employees in Canada. There is a continuous training path for every public employee, but not for exempt staff. ‘Exempt staff’<sup>135</sup> enter the public service sometimes having only the most rudimentary knowledge of government, the public service, codes of conduct, and the history of the ministries where they will work. It should be a condition of employment in any minister’s office that exempt staff be required to attend a two week course on the essentials of government and the political-civil service relationship. Such executive development programs/courses could be offered by the Canadian School of Public Service or by schools of public policy and should be certified by governments. The Institute of Public Administration of Canada in 2006 suggested a comprehensive program of orientation and master’s classes for political staff working at Queen’s Park.

Paul Thomas, of the University of Manitoba, has an even more ambitious idea of creating a school of government for politicians, the Canadian equivalent of the UK’s National School of

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<sup>134</sup> Kenneth Winston (2003), P175

<sup>135</sup> Cabinet ministers hire their own advisers and political aides, known as exempt staff because they are excluded from the Public Service Employment Act, which governs the public service. They have very little job security. They cease to be an employee 30 days after their Minister is no longer a minister, and they can be dismissed at the direction of the minister with no mechanisms for complaint or appeal. Source: Treasury Board Secretariat (2006), P12. 135



Government<sup>136</sup>, or the Graduate School of Political Management<sup>137</sup> in Washington, D.C. Thomas suggests that such a school should offer core introductory courses to all newly elected legislators, as well as a course for the “growing and influential group” of political staffers. He also suggests that the Canada School of Public Service provides the physical home for the Canada School of Government that would have its own small permanent staff with courses offered to federal, provincial and municipal politicians. This is very worthwhile idea that needs to be support. The starting point of this large initiative, however, should be the introduction of courses for political staff where the need is judged to be greatest.

Further, when there is a change of government two things should occur during the transition to help foster mutual respect between political staff and public servants:

- i) The transition teams of the incoming parties should always include a public servant with first-hand experience with the outgoing government. This experience and institutional knowledge will assure a smoother transition.
- ii) After any change in government, new executive assistants (chiefs of staff) and public servants should take the proposed mandatory training course together. There is value in encouraging an understanding of the relationship between each position and the differences in the roles. It may be a positive step in building relationships between political (exempt) staff and public servants.

#### 10. Develop an Exempt Staff Code of Conduct and Ethics.

The PCO document “Accountable Government and Guide for Ministers and Ministers of State 2008” defines well the role of political assistants and contains explicit standards of ethical conduct, such as that exempt staff do not have the authority to give direction to public servants. The Conflict of Interest Act provisions apply to ministerial staff, as do the provisions of the Lobbying Act. There is already a de facto ethical code for political assistants. This code should be explicitly formulated in an analogous fashion to the Values and Ethics Code for the Public Service, which has been in operation since September 2003.

*“...that exempt Staff such as the Chief of Staff of the Prime Minister’s Office and his or her subordinates be subject to a Code of Conduct ... None of these recommendations have been acted upon, to the best of my knowledge.”*<sup>138</sup>

#### 11. Adopt the title Executive Assistant to more accurately reflect the duties of political advisors.

<sup>136</sup> “As the business school for government, we provide high quality learning and development solutions to government organisations and individuals providing public services”. Retrieved 26 November 2009: [http://www.nationalschool.gov.uk/about\\_us/index.asp](http://www.nationalschool.gov.uk/about_us/index.asp) .

<sup>137</sup> “The Graduate School of Political Management (GSPM) at The George Washington University seeks to improve politics by educating students and professionals in the tools, principles and values of participatory democracy, preparing them for careers as ethical and effective advocates and leaders at the international, national and local levels- in a non-partisan environment.” Retrieved 26 November 2009:<http://www.gspm.org/about-gspm>.

<sup>138</sup> John H. Gomery, Turning Around Canada’s Dysfunctional Accountability Arrangements, 2009 IPAC Conference Presentation.

Before the next change in government occurs, eliminate the title Chief of Staff as it falsely denotes executive authority, and replace it with Executive Assistant, or another title that accurately reflects the nature of the position. Political advisors are assistants not decision-makers. In the 1960s senior political advisors were called Executive Assistants, a more accurate description for what they do.

12. Exempt staff post-employment activity restrictions should be reduced to one year.

The provision in the Federal Lobbying Act, which prohibits employment in lobbying activities for five years after leaving a ministerial office, is too draconian. Limiting career opportunities for this long dissuades many from becoming exempt political staff. A one-year prohibition is sufficient.

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## Appendices

Appendix 1: Comparative Analysis of Public Service Employee Surveys

Appendix 2: Summary of Roundtables

Appendix 3: Recruiting the Best and Brightest for Employment in Canada's Public Service

Appendix 4: A Report on Human Resources in the Public Service: The Quest to Make Government an Employer of Choice