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**Closing the Implementation Gap:  
Improving capacity, accountability, performance and  
human resource quality in the Canadian and Ontario  
public service**

**Human Resources in the Public Sector:  
The quest to make government an  
employer of choice**

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## Acronyms

AETP	Accelerated Economist Trainee Program
ALP	Advanced Learning Program
AEXDP	Accelerated Executive Development Program
CAP	Career Assignment Program
CSPS	Canadian School of Public Service
MTP	Management Trainee Program
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OPM	Office of Personnel Management
Partnership	IBM Center for the Business of Government and the Partnership for Public Service
PSHRMA	Public Service Human Resources Management Agency of Canada
TBS	Treasury Board Secretariat
TLN	The Leadership Network

## Introduction

Beginning in the 1980s, public services in developed states underwent substantial structural changes, transmuting from Weberian to New Public Management (NPM) models of public service. In contrast to the wholesale changes instigated in most facets of bureaucracy, human resources management was not a particular focus of these reforms. Indeed, sundry governments forcefully pushed for the contraction of their public services and reduction in costs, often at the expense of plans for improved human resources. Hence, increasing the attractiveness of the public service as an employer of choice fell low down on government agendas—if included at all. In the late 1990s, certainly by the year 2000, weak, and failing systems of human resources management within public services won attention and incited anxiety among the most prescient public service executives. Senior public service leaders looked warily at the aging of their workforces, and the problems of recruitment and retention aggravated by tightening labour markets. The research intensive *Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development* (OECD) confirmed the gravity of the matter by organizing a *Competitive Public Employer Project* in 2001. Once the OECD—a high status, consummately professional group—acknowledged the extent of the problem, a cascading effect occurred as plans for the reform of human resources swiftly multiplied in developed states.

## OECD Work on Public Sector Human Resources

The main product of the Competitive Public Employer Project was the report *Public Sector—An Employer of Choice?*<sup>1</sup> The report comprised studies on the public service problems facing twelve OECD member states, including Canada. For example, the Canadian Government faces current problems in hiring and retaining qualified personnel, and a critical skills shortage and paucity of professionals (auditors, engineers, and scientists) compounds the difficulty.<sup>2</sup> Although the Canadian challenge is especially serious, Canada is by no means alone in encountering a subtle, yet “quiet crisis” in its public service.<sup>3</sup> The report has an abbreviated list of factors propelling the crisis, including lower wage levels, an unflattering impression of the public sector, poor recruitment strategies, employees demanding individualized approaches to work, amorphous career paths, and meager employee development and opportunities for learning.<sup>4</sup> The OECD identified four broad strategies for making the public service an employer of choice: improving the image of the public service, reforming outdated human resources management systems, fashioning better working conditions, and boosting the professionalism of the public service.<sup>5</sup> To encourage a more appealing image of the public service, the OECD issued a series of recommendations. Some key techniques proposed are to (i) emphasize the favourable aspects of public employment (meaningful work for the common good); (ii) concentrate more attention on easily-identifiable, individual agencies rather

<sup>1</sup> Kirsi Aijala, “Public Sector—An Employer of Choice?” Competitive Public Employer Project, OECD Publishing, 2001, <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/37/29/1937556.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, P8.

<sup>3</sup> Clerk of the Privy Council, “Fourth Annual Report to the Prime Minister on the Public Service of Canada,” Supply and Services Canada, 1996, Chapter 6.

<sup>4</sup> Aijala, P11-12.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, P12.

than the public service as a whole; (iii) modernize systems of human resources management to create positive points unique to the public sector; (iv) continually monitor the image among citizens and applicants of the public service; and (v) enhance the public service's performance and broadcast the improvements to the public.<sup>6</sup>

In the effort to reform human resources management systems, the first task is to identify where the dissatisfaction lies. According to a study in Denmark, 43% of those who considered leaving or in fact departed from the Danish public service stated that poor leadership was the principal reason.<sup>7</sup> As a result, Denmark is reforming its human resources regime by putting increased focus on identifying and nurturing possible leaders. Danish training programs will incorporate some characteristics of traditionally private sector employee development, including mentoring, coaching, and more formal networking.<sup>8</sup> Germany has endeavored to make its rigid career structures more flexible and to establish regular career and promotion talks that clearly communicate the criteria for promotion. Expanding room for employee mobility is another technique in revised human resources systems. The potential for real mobility between the public and private sectors, between governments, and between the public and non-profit sectors can increase the attractiveness and distinctiveness of public service employment. Numerous states—including Japan, South Korea, Canada, Australia, and Great Britain—are expanding the abilities of their employees to obtain secondment positions outside their organizations. Conversely, opening additional possibilities for recruitment and lateral points of entry into the public service can infuse outside talent and expertise into government. Such reforms have enjoyed particular success in South Korea and Austria, where previously the opportunities to join the public service were limited to low level and low skill positions.<sup>9</sup> In an exhaustive study of human resources management in Belgian governments, the OECD found that mobility policies were exclusively focused on internal mobility within governments rather than facilitating the mobility of public servants across the Belgian, Flemish, and Walloon governments. The OECD study argued that constrained mobility was a significant factor in the dysfunction of Belgian human resources systems.<sup>10</sup>

Employee compensation is another area of reform, especially at the senior levels of public services. Australia, Great Britain, and the United States pioneered the practice of performance pay for top managers in an attempt to emulate methods of executive compensation in the private sector. In theory, performance contingent pay rewards excellence and achievement, while concurrently boosting motivation and the drive to succeed. Canada has adopted a modified form of performance pay for its senior executives, and an OECD Canadian case study cites the reform as a success.<sup>11</sup> The literature on performance pay in the public sector is expansive and contentious, but suffice it to say

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, P14.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, P16.

<sup>8</sup> OECD Report, "Denmark," Competitive Public Employer Project, OECD Publishing, 2001, 5 <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/37/11/1937628.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> Aijala, P21, 24.

<sup>10</sup> Ella Pilachowski, "Belgium," OECD Reviews of Human Resource Management in Government, OECD Publishing, 2007, P118.

<sup>11</sup> OECD Report, "Canada," Competitive Public Employer Project, OECD Publishing, 2001, 3, <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/37/9/1937604.pdf>.

that the studies are decidedly mixed on the efficacy of the results. Another approach to creating better working conditions avoids the issue of wages altogether. Instead, the objective is to refine the non-monetary rewards of public service employment. Since public sector salaries at the managerial levels cannot customarily compete with private sector remuneration, it is critical that nonmaterial incentives are used to enhance public sector attractiveness.<sup>12</sup> For instance, Germany has developed flexible working hours, flatter hierarchies in organizational structure, and provided employees with the most cutting-edge technology and equipment.<sup>13</sup>

However, marketing such nonmaterial incentives is the crucial task since prospective employees seeking full-time work typically evaluate an employment opportunity by the salary offered. Some strategic comparative advantages that the public sector can use as incentives are (i) opportunities to control work time through flexible hours and annual leave; (ii) opportunities for educational leave and interchange/fellowship programs; (iii) a work culture exemplified by cooperative leadership and open communication; (iv) the commitment to “public service values” which differ from the private sector focus on profit; (v) real employee recognition; and (vi) family friendly personnel policies that allow for munificent parental leave and benefits.<sup>14</sup> The generosity and flexibility of maternal and paternal benefits for public service employees is a powerful advantage over private sector counterparts according to the OECD. Interestingly, the OECD does not mention fixed, generous pensions—increasingly distinct to the public sector—as a key marketing point. Perhaps, the distant timeline and deferred benefits of pensions reduces their attractiveness to young people despite the long-term income security that fixed pensions confer. In sum, all these nonmaterial considerations are expected to rise in significance in coming years as employees—and particularly women—demand a better work life balance.

In congruence with the general OECD report, Austria had found that the “attractiveness of government service is not covered by monetary items only.”<sup>15</sup> As such, Austria has focused on reformulating its array of working conditions—and is one of the first member states to take the OECD’s recommendations to heart.<sup>16</sup> It has expanded opportunities for sabbatical leave, and has implemented flexible working hours per day in most ministries and agencies. Austria has aimed to close the mobility gap between public service and free enterprise by shifting the emphasis of its employee development programs from specialized government knowledge to more transferable knowledge. Austria has also sought to quash the arcane, technocratic appearance of the public service by remarketing itself as an open, dynamic employer. It uses actual public servants as its chief messengers to advertise the new openness of the Austrian public service.

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<sup>12</sup> Aijala, P23.

<sup>13</sup> OECD Report, “Germany,” Competitive Public Employer Project, OECD Publishing, 2001, 3, <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/37/28/1937544.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> Aijala, P23.

<sup>15</sup> OECD Report, “Austria,” Competitive Public Employer Project, OECD Publishing, 2001, 5, <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/37/27/1937532.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, P2.

## The Possible Benefits of Mentorships

Some academic literature has examined the utility of employee recognition informal networking and mentorships in building a cohesive public service. In a survey of Canadian public servants, Saunderson found that 87% of respondents maintained that adequate recognition for good work was an important factor in retention.<sup>17</sup> However, in the survey only 49% of Canadian public sector managers indicated that they were familiar with recognition policies and procedures.<sup>18</sup> This is in stark contrast to the private sector, where managers are actively encouraged to recognize and reward outstanding employees. A 2001 survey of 600 Danish public servants found that that recognition and networking—the nurturing of close personal ties across departments and pay grades—are some of the most important considerations regarding public servants’ development. Yet another originally private sector technique—mentoring—is gaining in popularity for public services. In the Singapore Administrative Service, “each new officer is assigned a mentor who can offer friendly advice and show you the ropes.”<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, since mentoring often works best in an informal fashion, Denmark and Iceland take a less formalized approach and instead help public service leaders organize networks amongst themselves. Such a technique allows interested public servants to forge relationships at their choosing rather than mandating awkward relationships.<sup>20</sup> In the Queensland Public Service in Australia, the state government has actively encouraged “mentoring/coaching cells” in departments where senior managers enter into groups of three or four.<sup>21</sup> A survey of New Zealand public servants confirms the importance of informal, loosely organized mentorships. Only 14% of mentored New Zealand public servants had initiated contact with their mentor through a formalized mentoring program.<sup>22</sup> The literature on mentoring also reveals that it can disproportionately benefit women and underrepresented minorities in the public service.

In a study of the sources of upward mobility in the Australian Public Service, having a mentor (or sponsor) was one of the key factors in career advancement. Moreover, mentorships are critical for women’s career growth because “women need alternative mechanisms for getting ahead perhaps to counter the ‘old boys’ network’ that excludes them.”<sup>23</sup> In 1999, Norway initiated a mentoring program for women in middle management jobs and in 2001 Norway created organized meeting places for women in leadership positions in order to facilitate networking.<sup>24</sup> In the New Zealand mentorship study, mentored staff members were more likely to seek opportunities for advancement, felt more positive about their access to challenging work, and also reported more

<sup>17</sup> Roy Saunderson, “Survey Findings of the Effectiveness of Employee Recognition in the Public Sector,” *Public Personnel Management*, 33:3 (Fall 2004), P272.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, P273.

<sup>19</sup> Gambhir Bhatta and Sally Washington, “Hands Up: Mentoring in the New Zealand Public Service,” *Public Personnel Management*, 32:2 (Summer 2003), 213.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, P214.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, P219.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, P214.

<sup>24</sup> OECD Report, “Norway,” *Competitive Public Employer Project*, OECD Publishing, 2001, P6 <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/53/59/33881226.pdf>

“good feelings” of accomplishment in their jobs than non-mentored employees. Of course, employees with these qualities might be predisposed to seeking out a mentor in the first place, so any conclusions establishing causation are unwarranted.

### The Distinctive American Approach

Like most OECD projects, the United States had little engagement with the Competitive Employer Project. Unfortunately, they did not participate in the studies, nor submit data. However, the United States is not ignorant or cavalier regarding the seriousness of the issue, and the government has produced sundry training and development strategies seeking to improve human resource management in the federal public service. Curiously, in the United States, organizations outside government named the *IBM Center for the Business of Government* and the *Partnership for Public Service* (henceforth referred to as the Partnership) have taken robust lead roles in renewing the federal public service. Considering the richness and sheer volume of think tanks and public interest organizations in the United States, perhaps an American divergence from other OECD states should not be surprising. *The Center for the Business of Government* publishes reports and funds research advocating the NPM approach to public administration. In contrast, the Partnership is less involved in administrative processes than human resource/capital issues. Amidst a wealth of American think tanks, the Partnership stands out as the organization most heavily invested in creating a vigorous public service for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The Partnership works with the Office of Personnel Management (OPM)—the human resources branch of the American government—to heighten the allure of working in the public service. The OPM has performed much work on modernizing the government’s human resources regime, but the Partnership has spearheaded the campaign to make the public service a more popular career choice for young Americans. A former Kennedy Justice Department official named Samuel Heyman founded the Partnership in 2001. In 2005, the Partnership merged with the Private Sector Council (PSC), a nonprofit group whose principal purpose is to lend the expertise of the private sector to enhance the business of government. For example, the PSC provided essential services in aiding the American government digitize the *Food Stamp Program* and improve procurement policies when coping with declared federal disasters. The Partnership has recently created *Service to America Medals* in an attempt to increase the recognition for superb work performed by public servants, and has served as a key player in founding a bipartisan Congressional Public Service Caucus to increase the visibility of public service renewal on Capitol Hill. The Partnership ardently lobbied for a Chief Human Capital Officer for every federal agency and in 2002 the effort succeeded as Congress passed the *Chief Human Capital Officer Act*, mandating such a human resources official for each agency.

For recruiting talented young people to the federal public service, the Partnership has collaborated with the OPM on the *Call to Serve* initiative. *Call to Serve* consists of nearly 600 colleges and more than 60 federal agencies in an attempt to link talented young people with in need employers in the federal government. With this in mind, the Partnership has put together a Federal Career Day Toolkit to structure productive job fairs that provide clear information on departments and agencies. American students often complain that the range of federal employers is daunting, and the



array of acronyms especially confusing. Taking a page from OECD recommendations, the Career Day Toolkit encourages individual employers to market their agency by explaining its mandate, duties, and organizational culture.<sup>25</sup> Establishing an agency's distinctiveness is critical. Organizations searching for similar skill sets—say, biologists—are grouped together at the career fairs.

The Partnership is currently developing two unique programs for the federal public service. *The Fed Experience* initiative is designed to encourage retiring baby boomers in the public service to pursue part time encore careers within the federal government. After the research component is complete, the Partnership and the OPM intend to conduct pilot projects for older workers with selected federal agencies. The other initiative is the State of the Public Service, an attempt to craft a meaningful report card for the public service. The working group on this task has settled on six indicators of an effective public service: the right talent, an engaged workforce, strong leadership, public support, systems and structures, and high performance. The challenge is to fashion the metrics used for calculating the indicators. Some measurements the Partnership plans to employ include new hire, job offer acceptance and employee retention rates, ratios of supervisors to employees, the number of employee hours required to generate specific outputs, the number of steps necessary to perform critical processes, etc.

Lastly, the Partnership ranks federal employers in comprehensive biannual reports titled *Best Places to Work*. The reports draw on hard data from OPM surveys, responses aggregated into ten categories, and then assign an index score for each employer. Some of the evaluated categories are training and development, family friendly culture and benefits, effective leadership, and employee skills/mission match. The *2009 Best Places to Work*<sup>26</sup> report used 221,000 responses spread over 283 federal organizations.<sup>27</sup> The data used for grading was sourced from the OPM Human Capital Survey. For the index overall, high scores for leadership are most strongly correlated with employee contentment. In 2009, the three highest rated large federal agencies were the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Government Accountability Office, and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. The global economic crisis may explain why the Securities and Exchange Commission dropped from 3<sup>rd</sup> in 2007 to 11<sup>th</sup> this year. The three most lagging agencies were the Department of Transportation, National Archives and Records Administration and Department of Homeland Security. The Partnership also breaks down the index scores by age, race, and sex, though the variance between these variables tends to be small. Rankings are invariably controversial—especially for the disgruntled poor performers—but the Partnership claims that the benefits outweigh all the risks. Specifically, the rankings address “one of the biggest barriers to federal employment: a staggering lack of information among prospective employers .... and highlight the federal government’s high performing agencies .... that often go unheralded.”<sup>28</sup> Moreover, the Partnership contends that human resources professionals in the federal public service “have told us

<sup>25</sup> Partnership for Public Service, “Federal Career Day Toolkit,” Call to Serve, June 2007, P12 [www.ourpublicservice.org/OPS/programs/calltoserve/toolkit/FCDToolkit.pdf](http://www.ourpublicservice.org/OPS/programs/calltoserve/toolkit/FCDToolkit.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> The 2009 rankings are the fourth edition of this ongoing series, following the 2003, 2005 and 2007 versions.

<sup>27</sup> Partnership for Public Service and Institute for the Study of Public Policy Implementation, “Best Places to Work in the Federal Government, 2007 Rankings,” 2007, 2, <http://www.ourpublicservice.org/OPS/publications/viewcontentdetails.php?id=91>

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, P13.

that [the rankings have] heightened awareness among senior leaders and spurred reform of human capital practices.”<sup>29</sup> Clearly, the United States has a unique model of public service human resources reform since an organization outside government has triggered many of the critical changes.

### The Canadian Case: Human Resources Structure and Reforms

In the review of public service surveys by Axworthy and Burch<sup>30</sup>, a common complaint stemming from the need for improvement in both the areas of management and leadership is noted. Often the two terms are used interchangeably. However, by definition, they are very different. John Kotter from the Business School of Harvard University offers this distinction between management and leadership:

*“Management is basically a process, the function of which is to produce consistent results on an important dimension ... Leadership by contrast, is a process whose function is change. Usually, leadership involves creating a vision of the future and a strategy for achieving this vision. It involves communicating that direction to all relevant parties so that they understand it and believe it. It also involves providing an environment that will inspire and motivate people to overcome any obstacles that may rise along the way. In this way, leadership produces change; effective leadership produces useful, adaptive changes for organizations.”*

Mau (2007) defines leadership as the “the power to influence intended changes in the thoughts and actions of followers by engendering either a commitment to the leader’s goals or an internalization of his or her values.”<sup>31</sup> In Canada’s public service, leadership has been defined primarily through the creation of core competencies. In 2004, TBS developed a streamlined list of four required competencies: (i) public service values, (ii) strategic thinking, (iii) engagement, and (iv) excellence in managing. Each competency has its own specific characteristics across the six executive levels in the Canadian public service—deputy minister, assistant deputy minister, director general, director, manager, and supervisor. The Canada Public Service Agency (CPSA)—an independent agency within TBS—has stated the need to “integrate and modernize the leadership development programs into a continuum from the first-level supervisor to deputy heads.”<sup>32</sup> However, former Clerk of the Privy Council Jocelyne Bourgon argues that leadership should spring from all job positions, no matter how low the level. Mau argues that this strand of argument broadens the notion of leadership too much.<sup>33</sup> It is possible for support staff to show leadership, but it is probably of a different kind since technical and administrative workers cannot have followers in the traditional sense.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Axworthy and Burch, 2009, Appendix 1: Comparative Analysis of Public Service Employee Surveys

<sup>31</sup> Tim Mau, “Public Sector Leadership: The Canadian Model Considered,” Centre for Studies in Leadership Review, 1:4 (Spring 2007), P272, <http://csl.uoguelph.ca/pdf/CSLReviewSpring2007Mauarticle.pdf>.

<sup>32</sup> Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, Public Services Human Resources Management Agency of Canada, 2005-2006 Estimates: Report on Plans and Priorities, 2005, S.1.5.2.

<sup>33</sup> Mau, P276.

In the OECD report on leadership development, developed countries have responded to the leadership challenge by creating new institutions for leadership development, and expanding existing management training programs to integrate notions of leadership development. Canada has adopted both approaches for refining leadership expectations in the public service. Leadership training has a contentious history in Canada. Mau argues that certain elements of the Canadian public service have viewed training and leadership development programs with distrust and cynicism. Some public servants considered the programs “hyperbolized witchcraft” and an underhanded attack on the merit principle, but by the 1960s the legitimacy of training and development programs won greater acceptance.<sup>34</sup> In the 1980s and for most of the 1990s, however, NPM reforms and the rationalization and downsizing of the public service superseded any training and development programs. After 1995, senior officials spoke of the “quiet crisis” facing the public service and concern over human resources management intensified. In the Clerk’s reports to the Prime Minister on the public service, Bourgon warned of an increasingly aging public service facing large, impending retirement waves. Auditor General Sheila Fraser cautioned that a human capital shortage loomed within the Canadian government, and that, “negative perceptions of the public service as a career choice” exacerbated the challenge.<sup>35</sup>

The recently created Canada Public Service Agency (CPSA)<sup>36</sup> took on the lead role in restructuring human resources management. The Agency’s mandate is to modernize and foster continuing excellence in people management and leadership across the Public Service.<sup>37</sup> CPSA’s responsibility is to overseeing a number of training, development, and leadership programs. The programs form an alphabet soup of acronyms, including *Accelerated Executive Development Program (AEXDP)*, the *Career Assignment Program (CAP)*, the *Management Trainee Program (MTP)*, *Accelerated Economist Training Program (AETP)*, *Interchange Canada*. Arising from the PCO, Bourgon initiated a strategy titled *La Releve* in 1998, with the intention to overhaul human resources throughout the Canadian government. Under *La Releve*, every federal department and agency had to develop specific three-year action plans for restructuring recruitment and staffing, learning and training, values and vision, and performance measurement and accountability. *La Releve* had some successes in pushing departments to focus more attention on human resources. For instance, the Department of National Defence took Bourgon’s recommendations to heart and created a framework and policy guide for continuous learning, and planned to recruit candidates to the MTP and CAP.<sup>38</sup> The CAP comprises a defined learning curriculum offered through the CSPA in six weeks over two years, language training, career counseling, and recurring performance reviews. Some successful interdepartmental collaboration is occurring as well. For example, the Solicitor General Canada has organized in-house

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, P280.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> The Canada Public Service Agency (CPSA), formerly the Public Service Human Resources Management Agency of Canada (PSHRMAC) was created on December 12, 2003, to ensure that the government’s agenda for renewal of human resources management throughout the public service was carried out. Following ministerial approval, effective May 1, 2007, PSHRMAC adopted a new applied organization title—Canada Public Service Agency (CPSA)—which serves to identify the goal of its work more simply and helps strengthen clients’ recognition of the Agency. <http://www.infosource.gc.ca/inst/hrh/fed01-eng.asp>

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.infosource.gc.ca/inst/hrh/fed02-eng.asp>.

<sup>38</sup> May, Ibid, P283.

learning opportunities, yet it also partners with the Department of Health to gain access to the career management and development programs that are available in the much larger Health Canada.<sup>39</sup>

Clearly, the public service—especially central agencies—has devoted considerable resources to improving the elite training programs for high-level entry candidates. However, only a small number of recruits, customarily the most highly regarded, actually receive such extensive training. The most promising, high-level entry candidates tend to benefit from the most employee development, and especially leadership training. In an attempt to slightly mitigate this imbalance, all public servants hired for a term over six months now receive a formal two-day orientation in Ottawa. The orientation is designed to provide new employees a briefing on the unique culture, functions, and values of the public service.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, rather than merely relying on the courses and e-learning products offered through the CSPA, PSHRMAC is trying to broaden the availability of comprehensive training programs to those outside the elite leadership programs.

Over the past few years, the Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS) has worked feverishly on revamping employee development within the Canadian public service. TBS crafted the *Policy on Learning, Training and Development* in 2005 that states

*Learning, training, leadership development, and professional development are key to ensuring that the public service is equipped to meet the challenges of the 21st century. The acquisition of skills and knowledge and the development of managerial and leadership know-how is critical for the effective management of the public service—it is the foundation of responsible, accountable, and effective government.*<sup>41</sup>

Evidence over past few years indicates that the Canadian government is devoting more funds to continuous learning and employee development. A report on investments in learning found that 31 departments and agencies had revamped learning policies in place a full year ahead of the 2004 deadline. Moreover, the report identified a 49% rise in financial investments in continuous learning activities over a three-year period up to 2003.<sup>42</sup> Investments in learning across the public service in 2002-2003 amounted to 2.9% of the salary-operating budget. This amount exceeds the 1.7% reported by the Conference Board of Canada as spent by private sector companies on learning and employee training.<sup>43</sup> This is a promising development and indicates the depth of the Canadian government's commitment to enhanced human resources since traditionally the private sector has spent more on development programs. One final development in continuous learning programs is that public service managers—rather than professional teachers and trainers—are increasingly

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, P287.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, P286.

<sup>41</sup> Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, *Policy on Learning, Training and Development*, November 25, 2005, 1, [http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/pubs\\_pol/hrpubs/TB\\_856/ltd-afp\\_e.asp](http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/pubs_pol/hrpubs/TB_856/ltd-afp_e.asp).

<sup>42</sup> Mau, P284.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

teaching these programs.<sup>44</sup> This is likely a positive change since employees admit to occasionally tuning out educational consultants unaffiliated with an employee's department or the government as a whole.

### Interchange and Fellowship Programs in Canada and Abroad

The importance of interchanges in making the public service a desirable employer was a concern in the surveys reviewed by Axworthy and Burch and the subsequent roundtable recommendations. Perhaps surprisingly, the availability of public servant interchanges in Canada, Great Britain, New Zealand, and Australia is, at least in theory, wide open. Since 1971 *Interchange Canada* has comprised a skills-exchange program between the Canadian public service and business, other governments, nonprofits in Canada and internationally. Interchange is commonly referred to as a secondment, and that is the traditional term still used in policies and statutes. The program does not entail a direct exchange in employees, but allows public servants to seize opportunities the federal government and any organizations to place employees in the Canadian public service. The objective of the program is to encourage the acquisition and transfer of knowledge through temporary assignments, while also fostering the professional development of employees. The eligibility requirements for the program are rather minor—each participant must have worked for the sponsoring organization for at least six months, and the work performed in the host organization cannot constitute a conflict of interest with the sponsoring organization. The duration of the assignments are flexible, but cannot exceed three years in length without special permission (the majority of the assignments are one to two years in length). The sponsoring organization continues to pay a regular salary to its employee while he or she is on leave, but usually a compensation deal is hammered out between the host and sponsoring organization. PSHRMAC provides the overarching management of Interchange Canada, but the program is promoted and approved at the departmental level. Deputy Ministers have the task of approving almost all *Interchange Canada* assignments.

As of February 2007, 150 employees were on assignment outside the Canadian public service, and 51 of those participants were at the executive level. On the other side, 328 participants—78 at the executive level—were on temporary assignment in the public service from a range of outside organizations. Compared to the public service as a whole, these numbers are exceedingly low, particularly for public servants working outside government. However, Canada's low participation rates mirror New Zealand's secondment rates. As of June 1999, New Zealand had 130 secondments, representing a slight 0.6 percent of the total public service.<sup>45</sup> Such scant take up of interchange programs is probably linked to the fact that the responsibility to find an assignment lies with the employee participating in the program. Thus, employees that are not well connected and that have weak networks are not likely to find a willing host organization, even if employees have a keen interest. Moreover, hard-pressed managers might be reluctant to temporarily part with productive

<sup>44</sup> Mau, P288.

<sup>45</sup> State Services Commission, "Learning and Returning: the use of secondments in the New Zealand Public Service," Occasional Paper 23, December, 1999, 5. <http://www.ssc.govt.nz/display/document.asp?docid=4330&pagetype=content&pageno=1>.

employees, and thus subtly discourage participation in the program. TBS has found that secondment programs are particularly under utilized for those toiling in audit, evaluation, and program review positions for the public service. TBS reports that the small take up of secondment opportunities in these areas stems from the reluctance of managers to second good performers when such government professionals are already scarce, and that some managers do not perceive the benefits of a secondment, nor do some employees consider such stints as career enhancing moves. In the New Zealand report, managers cite the poaching of secondees as a chief concern, meaning that the secondee decides against returning to his previous position.<sup>46</sup>

The freshly created *Government of Canada Fellows Program* is similar to *Interchange Canada* except the Fellows Program is intended for high-level executives in the public service and outside executives interested in temporarily working in the public service. The Fellows Program allows executives—from both inside and outside the public service—to obtain experience at businesses, different levels of government, nonprofit agencies. The timeline of the assignments is shorter than *Interchange*, with the duration varying between about six and ten months. The objectives of the program are to “build understanding, share talent and ideas, and foster the continual development of Canada’s senior executives.” The requirements for the program are broad professional experience at an executive level, the demonstration of outstanding leadership skills (evaluated by the Government’s four leadership competencies mentioned earlier), and, for public servants, a willingness to return to the public service for at least five years. The program has a formal nomination process. The Clerk of the Privy Council, other senior government officials, and some select leaders from business, academia, nonprofits, and other levels of government evaluate the applicants and proffer the fellowships to the most appealing candidates. In its first year of operation, ten senior executives (five from the Canadian public service and five from outside agencies) were to participate. In future years, the Clerk hopes to have up to twenty participants in the Fellowship Program.

Similarly to Canada, the civil service in Great Britain maintains an *Interchange* program for public servants. There are no formal eligibility criteria for *Interchange*, but departments must approve each assignment and are encouraged to actively seek the involvement of ethnic minorities and the disabled. The administration of the *Interchange* program is similar to Canada’s, though there is no time limit on length of secondments “since [its] aim is primarily developmental, it should clearly last long enough for the benefits to be felt.” Great Britain also differs from Canada in that it provides help to public servants desiring an interchange opportunity but unable to find one. Great Britain posts and advertises interchange opportunities online. This benefits those public servants eager for an exchange but daunted by the difficult task of seeking out opportunities. Great Britain also offers some more formalized interchanges to civil service employees. Departments manage bilateral exchange agreements with other EU member states, and departments also enable employees to work for five months at the European Commission through what is called a *Structural Traineeship*.

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

Australia has expanded its Interchange program, following a 2002 recommendation made by an Australian Senate Committee report on recruitment and training. In a report to the Australian Public Service Commission, the authors “identified the need for a more mobile workforce to gain a wider pool of leaders, and the important role of secondments outside the public service.” One noteworthy aspect of Australia’s Interchange program is the *Horizons Programme* available to Aboriginals in the Australian Public Service. The Horizons Programme provides a grant of \$15,000 to home agencies to partially offset the costs of releasing an employee. The Horizons Programme also allows for professional coaches to work with the employee, and the home and host managers to help all participants get the most out of the program. Furthermore, the Australian Public Service is developing a secondment strategy for senior managers working in Indigenous-related portfolios to move between partner agencies, and especially nonprofit agencies servicing Aboriginal concerns.

New Leadership Horizons (SES Band 1)—this programme is designed to assist SES Band 1s who have been appointed in the past three years to gain confidence in their new roles and leverage their experience so as to enable them to make significant contributions to their organisation and across the APS. In 2008, 76 SES from 37 agencies participated in the programme, up from the 58 SES from 28 agencies in 2006–07.

An elite program created by the Australian Public Service Commission (also representing New Zealand, is *Leadership Across Borders*—an international leadership initiative designed for up to 45 senior public sector leaders working within a Westminster system. The program provides an opportunity for senior leaders to work across borders on topical and relevant case studies. The inaugural programme was launched in February 2008 and attracted 10 Australian, two New Zealander, 12 Canadian and 12 British SES Band 2 (equivalent) participants. Participants spend most of their time studying in their own countries under their own public service schooling systems, specifically the UK National School of Government, the Australian Public Service and travel, together, for three weeks of the eight-month program. “The goal of the program, said André Thivierge, director of communications for the Canadian School of Public Service, is to enhance their leadership skills, allow them to compare their public-service challenges and develop strong networks across borders.”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Campbell, Jennifer. Senior bureaucrats study global issues. *Ottawa Citizen*, 17 September 2008. Retrieved from: <http://www2.canada.com/ottawacitizen/diplomatica/story.html?id=59d297f6-4ac0-4063-96ee-37808b45a3d0>

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