

INTRODUCTION

This document, outlining much of the Government of Canada's recent experience regarding public service reform, was created in response to the Commonwealth Secretariat's global survey of public service reform within the Commonwealth countries. This initiative and others like it, for example the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's public management surveys, stand as evidence that there is a public service reform movement underway throughout the world. International surveys serve the important role of enabling people in different countries to share their experiences, learn from one another, and adapt one another's best practices to their own context.

The purpose of this short introduction is to point out some of the major themes in the document and to make clear some distinctive features of the Canadian context, thereby increasing the value of this survey of Canadian experience to the non-Canadian reader.

If one can identify a starting point for the Government of Canada's journey on the road to administrative reform, it would surely be a process entitled "Public Service 2000." In late 1989, the federal Cabinet announced the initiation of a process of renewal of the federal public service. It had political interest and support, but it was not closely directed or actively managed by the politicians. Thus, it does not bear the imprint of a particular political agenda, as was the case for public service reforms in some other countries. Rather, Public Service 2000 was very much the effort of the federal public service. For two years, task forces of the most senior public servants - deputy ministers and assistant deputy ministers - worked long and hard on numerous aspects of public service reform. The immediate products of these task forces included a series of major reports and amendments to legislation governing the public service. These first changes have led to major reforms in many federal government departments and a process of change that is involving staff at all levels.

Public Service 2000 staked out the following key themes. The Public Service must strive to provide high quality service and increase client satisfaction. The Public Service must become more engaged, more open, more visible and more consultative. Public Service managers must create organisations in which people are valued for their skill, dedication, energy, and loyalty. To achieve these objectives the Public Service must invest more heavily in the development of its people. It must also reduce the burden of internal controls so that intelligent, well-motivated managers have greater latitude to take initiative to improve service quality and client satisfaction. Many of these key themes are echoed again and again throughout this document.

In reading this document, the reader will see a mixture of discussions of broad-based initiatives throughout the Government as well as detailed case studies of individual departments and programmes. Here are four broad-based initiatives, as well as the sections that illustrate them:

Initiatives to improve service quality These include the establishment of an inter-departmental quality network (entry 3.2) and an initiative, led by the Treasury Board Secretariat, to establish service standards for all departments (entry 3.5).

The reduction of central agency constraints on departments This is being addressed by increased delegation of authority to departments for human resource management (entry 1.2) and for financial management through the establishment of Operating Budgets (entry 1.11) and increased fiscal year-end flexibility (entry 6.5). Section 2.5 discusses how Special Operating Agencies are being created to give service units within departments direct responsibility for results and increased managerial flexibility.

Training and development Even in an era of fiscal constraint, the Government of Canada has been increasing its investment in the people who constitute the public service. This is discussed in entry 1.3, which outlines training and development policy, entry 1.4, which outlines the activities of Training and Development Canada, a new Special Operating Agency within the Public Service Commission of Canada, and entries 5.1, and 5.4, which deal with the Canadian Centre for Management Development. The Canadian Centre for Management Development was established in 1988 to focus on the management development needs of the executive level, and it has emerged as a key player in public service reform.

Applying information technology Employing new information technology is emerging as a key way of achieving objectives such as improving service and reducing cost. The establishment of the position of Chief Informatics Officer within the federal government is discussed in entry 5.2 and the *Government's new Blueprint for Renewing Government Services using Information Technology* is outlined in entry 5.3.

In addition to discussions of broad-based initiatives, this report contains a rich yet diverse menu of case studies that reinforce the major themes with detailed departmental and/or programme experience. These include the following:

- the experience of two new Special Operating Agencies (the Canada Communication Group, entry 2.5; the Government Telecommunications Agency, entry 3.3) that are attempting to improve the standard of service to customers within government;

- the experience of Canada Post Corporation (entry 3.3), which has been converted from a government department to a Crown corporation, and is improving customer service through the use of improved technology and partnerships with the private sector and with other nations;
- the experience of Revenue Canada (entry 3.3) at increasing its client orientation through public consultation, process redesign and technological innovation;
- the experience of Public Works and Government Services Canada in re-engineering the procurement process through the application of information technology (entry 6.4) and in accelerating the adoption of new technology throughout the public service by establishing a software exchange service (entry 5.3) and a training institute for informatics professionals (entry 4.4);
- the experience of Statistics Canada in improving its human resource management practices, including recruitment, training, and career development (entry 1.2).

Despite the comprehensiveness of this collection of broad-based initiatives and case studies, the reader should realise that it does not tell the whole story of public service reform in Canada. Canada has a very decentralised federal system of government, in which some major powers are held by provincial governments (for example, health and education) and many other powers exercised jointly by the federal and provincial governments (for example, policing, taxation, and environmental management). The public service reform movement is equally energetic within provincial and municipal governments. This can readily be seen by referring to the Institute of Public Administration of Canada's (IPAC) Innovative Management Award. This award has been given annually since 1990, and is open to federal, provincial, and municipal governments, as well as Crown corporations. It now receives over 100 applications per year. Since its inception only 25 per cent of the applications have been from the federal government. Therefore, readers who are interested in learning about the other 75 per cent of public sector reform in Canada should look into the IPAC Innovative Management award.

Each year, the IPAC award has had a theme (service to the public in 1990, empowerment in 1991, partnerships in 1992, doing better with less in 1993) and the applications' contribution to knowledge about that theme has been analysed in the academic literature.¹ In addition, IPAC publishes profiles of the winners and

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See Sandford Borins, "The encouragement and study of improved public management: the Institute of Public Administration of Canada innovative management award," **International**

finalists as well as a list of all applicant organisations and associated contact persons in its news magazine **Public Sector Management**. *Details of IPAC are given at the end of this publication under Contact Addresses.*

This introduction will conclude with some very brief speculation about the future of public service reform in Canada. There are several reasons to believe that this process, now well underway, will continue for many years. First, there is a major economic problem that gives it urgency. As a result of very substantial federal and provincial government deficits in the last two decades, Canada finds itself in the uncomfortable position of being a major international debtor. Federal and provincial public debt has risen rapidly and is approaching 100 per cent of Canada's gross domestic product. Almost half of that debt is held outside Canada, which is by far the highest level of international indebtedness in the OECD. Recently, bond-rating agencies have been down-grading their ratings of federal and provincial debt. It will take years, if not decades, to reduce this debt to more sustainable proportions. Federal and provincial Cabinets, as a consequence of this constraint, as well as a desire to maintain services to the public without increasing taxes, will demand major reductions in the operating cost of the public sector.

A second factor that will support public service reform is a major opportunity. By virtue of its development as a nation of a widely-dispersed population occupying a large land mass, Canada has always been in the forefront of advances in communications technology. Canada possesses outstanding research, development, and marketing capability in communications and information technology within both the business and university sectors. The Canadian public sector will continue to draw upon this expertise to apply leading-edge information and communications technology to the provision of public services.

The final factor that will support public service reform is the commitment of public servants in Canada. Public service reform efforts have achieved successes; public sector organisations have renewed themselves; training and development initiatives have multiplied; and, through innovation competitions and informal networks, best practices are being shared. The values that Public Service 2000 has espoused are taking root within the culture of the public service in Canada, at all levels of government.

Review of Administrative Sciences 57: 179-194 (June 1991); Kenneth Kernaghan, "Empowerment and public administration: revolutionary advance or passing fancy?" **Canadian Public Administration** 35: 194-214 (Summer 1992); Kenneth Kernaghan, "Partnership and public administration: conceptual and practical considerations," **Canadian Public Administration** 36: 57-76 (Spring 1993); and Donald Savoie, "Looking to managerialism to do better with less", **Optimum** 24: 12-18 (Winter 1993).

The compilation of this document is itself evidence of how widespread the culture of public service reform has now become within the Canadian federal government. It was prepared by numerous authors at a variety of organisational levels, including CEOs. The Canadian Centre for Management Development was responsible for coordinating its production; Ms. Oy Lo played a key role in that effort. All of these individuals are deserving of thanks for this contribution to the international public sector reform movement.

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