Canada's Public Service in the 21st Century

Discussion Paper

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Foreword

The Public Policy Forum was established in 1987 largely by private sector leaders whose careers had begun in government. They believed that a well-managed, outward-looking public service was essential to Canada's social and economic well-being – in particular our ability to compete in a changing world and to cope with the then emerging challenge of globalization. Since then, the Forum has worked continuously to build productive relationships between the public, private and voluntary sectors. We have also been strong advocates for change in the way the public service is organized and managed in order to improve policy making and service delivery.

The concerns of our founders are no less relevant today. The public service is still the chief instrument that governments have to get things done. As a vitally important institution, its performance is still a key factor in promoting inclusion, safeguarding our prosperity and increasingly our safety and security. At the same time, many question whether the culture and practices of today's public service will be adequate to manage the nation's business in the face of new and growing challenges driven by demographics, technological advances and global economic change.

It is in this context that the Public Policy Forum launched ***Canada's Public Service in the 21st Century***. This project will identify measures to transform these challenges into opportunities and build a public service which thrives on continuous change while providing extraordinary service to elected governments and to Canadians.

Since we announced our project last September, there have been some interesting related developments. In November, Prime Minister Harper created an advisory committee to advise the government on renewal of the public service and the Clerk of the Privy Council created a Deputy Minister level committee to support the renewal process. Numerous organizations such as the Association of Professional Executives of the Public Service of Canada and the Institute of Public Administration of Canada, to name only two, have also begun to dig deeper into the issues facing the Public Service. The combined effect of all this work will be to create greater understanding of the kind of public service Canada needs.

From its inception, the Forum has stressed that leadership is key to meaningful renewal of the public service. As we celebrate our 20th anniversary, we are encouraged to see continued study and debate around this essential ingredient of change and believe the prospects for real change are good.

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary

This paper has been written as a primer for a cross-country discussion regarding *"Canada's Public Service in the 21st Century"*. It provides some facts and figures about today's public service and looks at key societal trends that will have an impact on the work of government over the coming years. It then presents a picture of what an ideal public service might look like and talks about some of the key challenges and questions in moving ahead.

The Public Service Today

- The Public Service performs many roles and functions. It provides policy advice, supports Ministers, manages and delivers an array of programs and services and buttresses our Constitution and democracy.
- It is Canada's largest enterprise both in terms of workforce and spending.

The Public Service Workforce

With a large and multi-faceted workforce, the public service faces several challenges including:

- a changing skill set that requires a sustained focus on recruiting and retention;
- the need to better reflect Canada's diversity;
- the need to manage people as its key asset; and,
- the need to streamline human resource management practices.

The Work Environment – the view from the inside

- A high percentage of public servants at all levels consider the public service a good place to work.
- They are proud of their work and strongly committed to serving Canadians.
- Many find that excessive hierarchy, constantly changing priorities, inadequate resources and unreasonable deadlines make this a particularly challenging work environment.
- Executives used to working in the private sector find that the public service is needlessly hierarchical, fails to generate useful performance information and pays inadequate attention to human resource management.
- Public Service executives are very committed to their work and would recommend public service careers to their children but heavy workloads and managing workplace conflicts are taking their toll.
- With the importance placed on work-life balance, attitudes of public service employees are changing.
- The frequent movement of Deputy Heads often makes it difficult to maintain momentum in change initiatives.

The View from the Outside

- The Canadian public often thinks of government as "too complicated" and worries that it has become politicized, self-interested and process-oriented.
- Those citizens who have dealt recently with the federal government indicate that they are satisfied with its performance and service delivery.
- Citizens want their government to be honest and transparent in their dealings, knowledgeable and helpful in service delivery and to demonstrate results.
- Post-secondary students appear to be much more interested in a career in the public service now than they were ten years ago but still seem to know very little about the public service and what it has to offer as an employer.

Major Trends on the Horizon

- Demographic change and an increasingly diverse population.
- Complex (and often contested) public policy and service delivery mechanisms.
- Globalization and greater international cooperation to solve problems.
- The information revolution.
- Less deference and trust on the part of citizens and a rising bar of transparency and scrutiny.
- Rising public expectations and changing patterns of civic engagement.
- A pervasive and diverse media sector.
- Growing emphasis on well-being and workplace health.

The Ideal State?

Looking to the future, we suggest that the public service should be:

- Relevant and meaningful to Canadians.
- Connected and networked with provinces, territories, private enterprise and the non-profit sector.
- Partnering with other organizations in the delivery of services and implementation of programs and policies.
- Agile at people management so it can hire, train and deploy staff quickly.
- Citizen-focused with an emphasis on collaboration and consultation.
- Values-infused, outcome oriented and accountable exercising the leadership Canadians expect and reflecting their values and priorities.

Challenges to moving ahead

- With a number of reform exercises over the past 15 years, the public service and Canadians are sceptical that real change can happen.
- Measuring "public interest and common good" makes it difficult for Canadians to understand exactly what government does and sometimes difficult for public servants to understand what their role should be.
- Clear statements of values need to be articulated from the top, understood and ingrained through all levels of the public service and need to consider the application of values around innovation, creativity and teamwork.
- A heavily centralized, controlling decision-making structure is antithetical to an emerging environment that is decentralized and horizontal and in which power, resources and information are widely distributed.
- Rigidly hierarchical and prescriptive accountability mechanisms do not provide the flexibility required to develop policy and to adjust service delivery to meet changing circumstances or local realities.
- The public service needs to be able to turn an abundance of abstract "data" into meaningful information that resonates with Canadians.
- Meaningful compliance, performance measurement and risk management need to take place in a learning environment.
- More collaboration and connecting with Canadians will put public servants in the public eye and make them less anonymous.
- Managers and executives must pay much greater attention to career development, succession planning, value-added labour relations and other basic human resource management practices to ensure people are treated as a strategic resource.

Background

The federal public service has an enormous impact on Canada and Canadians. As part of the executive arm of government, it manages a budget that amounts to over 16% of GDP and affects citizens in countless ways every day, through its service delivery, policy and regulatory work.

Businesses and governments (be they federal, provincial or municipal) operate in different environments and bring different principles to bear on management decisions. How, for example, do you measure performance and rates of return or do capital budgeting in areas like border security or regulating pharmaceuticals where expected outcomes are bad things don't happen? How do you balance efficiency considerations with the onus to treat all regions fairly, serve remote communities, often work in two official languages, or build a representative workforce? How do you encourage sensible risk-taking within an ever rising bar of scrutiny and transparency?

The factors which separate public and private sector management into different schools are real and important. They explain why theoretical appeals to run government more like a business do not always translate well into practice. At the same time, there are many areas where experience in the private, voluntary and not-for-profit sectors and other governments should offer inspiration and ideas for moving the federal government forward.

Purpose of this Paper

Our project, "*Canada's Public Service in the 21st Century",* involves a cross-country, multi-disciplinary, intergenerational discussion among those who appreciate the need to strengthen this vital national institution. The objective is to describe the kind of public service that will better meet the needs of Canadians and develop strategies and recommendations to help make that happen.

This paper is a primer for the discussion that will unfold over the coming months. We start by putting some facts, figures and characteristics about today's public service on the table. Next, we take a quick look at some key trends that will reshape Canada and the world, and hence the work of government over the coming decade. Then we draw a picture of an ideal public service, organized and managed to perform well in the changing world that lies ahead. Finally, we present a perspective on the key challenges that political and public service leaders will face in trying to put improvements into place.

We also pose a series of questions to stimulate discussion in our National Roundtables, in our focus groups and in our on-line consultation. Responses to these questions will be rolled up into a report on "what we heard" and form the basis of a final description and prescription of an ideal public service to meet the challenges of the 21st Century.

The Public Service Today

As a brief primer and reminder of the public service's important activities, we provide the outline below.[1]

The Basic Roles and Functions of the Federal Public Service

Policy advice to Ministers: Public servants remain a primary source of policy advice for Ministers. They are responsible for:
- developing, designing and implementing policy;
- facilitating the policy-making process; and,
- preparing and drafting legislation and related regulations.

Parliamentary and "political": Public servants, in supporting Ministers, perform important duties. They:
- interact with Ministerial offices;
- assist ministers through a wide range of events; and,
- support the parliamentary process.

Management and delivery: Deputy Ministers' responsibilities include:
- overseeing the management of departments, ensuring they have the capabilities and capacity to deliver the government's objectives;
- the management of services that are directly delivered through their departments, for example, employment insurance or Aboriginal health programs;
- ensuring coherent and consistent operation of Ministerial portfolios;
- interacting with stakeholders, partners, clients and the public; and,
- performing a crucial role in the regulation of the private and voluntary sectors.

Constitutional checks and balances: The public service carries out important constitutional roles, though definitions vary and have been the source of much debate and interpretation.
- It upholds constitutional propriety and makes sure that ministers act within the parameters of the law.
- In their role as accounting officers, Deputies are directly accountable before Parliament for the sound administration of public money spent by their departments.
- It provides frank advice to ministers making all information relevant to a decision available to them.

Size – Canada's Largest Enterprise

	Total Employment*	%
Core Public Administration (Public Service)	180,000	40
Separate agencies (including CRA, CFIA, Parks)	60,000	13
Federal Business Enterprises (including Crown Corporations)	88,000	19
Canadian Forces and RCMP	106,000	23
Other (e.g. Senate and the House of Commons)	20,000	4
Total	454,000	100

* Based on PSHRMAC Report of September 2006

With 454,000 men and women on its payroll, the federal government is more than twice the size of Onex Corporation, a conglomerate which is the country's largest private sector employer. The "core" public service (which excludes the military, RCMP and Crown Corporations) contracted by about 12% from 1995 to 2000 as a result of the system-wide expenditure restraint exercise known as Program Review. Since then, employment has recovered to 1995 levels; however, there are fewer personnel on staff today than in 1990.
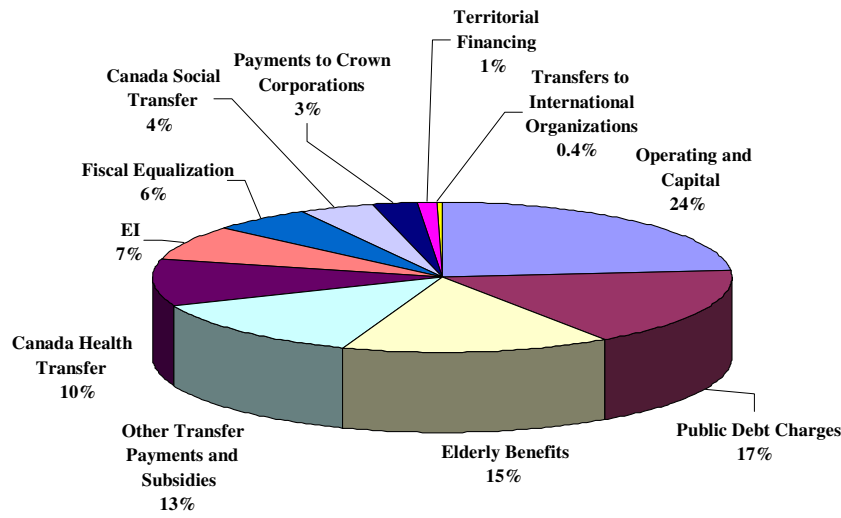
With more than 200 departments, agencies, boards and commissions, under its umbrella, the public service is also the most diversified enterprises in Canada. It is involved in everything from national defence to historic sites to copyright protection. It operates in 180 countries, provides personal service from 1,600 locations across the country and through electronic channels that span the globe. In this context, any discussion of the public service needs to understand that it is comprised of many organizational cultures and climates.

More for More. Who knew?
Demand for the federal government to play a more active role in the lives of Canadians is rising. In an EKOS Poll conducted in late 2006, Canadians were asked if they would be in favour of a larger government with higher taxes and more services, a growing number of Canadians (38% up from 29% in 2003) said yes.

Components of Federal spending

In financial terms, the federal government is also in a league of its own. In 2006 it collected over $200 billion in taxes to finance an enormous range of services and activities. By way of comparison, the federal government brought in more than five and a half times the sales of General Motors of Canada, the private sector revenue leader.

Territorial
Financing
1%

Payments to Crown
Corporations
3%

Transfers to
International
Organizations
0.4%

Canada Social
Transfer
4%

Operating and
Capital
24%

Fiscal Equalization
6%

EI
7%

Canada Health
Transfer
10%

Other Transfer
Payments and
Subsidies
13%

Elderly Benefits
15%

Public Debt Charges
17%

While much of general public may only have a passing interest or understanding of exactly how the federal government works or spends their tax dollars, it is clear that they expect "value for money" and a constant review of programs and services to identify inefficiencies and improvements. Currently, there is no regular, government-wide review process to ensure that spending programs are delivering intended results or that their objectives remain relevant in a fast changing world. What's more, the Auditor General has pointed out that in many departments and agencies, internal audit and performance measurement capacity is inadequate and mechanisms for reporting to Parliament on program performance are weak.

Government by paperwork: Compliance not outcomes.
With inadequate performance measurement capacity, federal managers and executives are more accountable for the way in which they spend money than for the outcomes and results their programs achieve. While many other jurisdictions have moved toward a results-based concept of accountability, the relevant test in Ottawa remains: did the government spend public money in the way Parliament intended and are all the rules and procedures correctly applied? This compliance culture has gained strength in the wake of "Adscam" and other events with the result that all financial transactions have become more difficult and time consuming and the public service according to many commentators more risk averse.

The Public Service Workforce

The public service workforce encompasses more than 100 occupational groups and job titles. The majority of public servants work in policy, operations or administrative support categories. Still, 15% of public servants are scientists and professionals, 10% work in technical occupations and 2.5% are executives.

The public service is also highly centralized. About 42% of public servants work in the national capital region, another 24% work in Ontario and Quebec (outside of the Ottawa-

Gatineau area); about 21% work in the western provinces and 11% in Atlantic Canada. Within the executive corps, this trend is more pronounced. About 72% of federal executives work in the National Capital Region.

As a matter of policy the public service strives to reflect the make-up of Canadian society as indicated in the available workforce (AWF) statistics produced by Statistics Canada. Today, 53% of public servants are women (vs. 52% in the AWF), 32% are Francophones (vs. 24% in the AWF), 8.1% are visible minorities (vs. 10.4 in the AWF), 5.9% are people with disabilities (vs. 3.6% in the AWF) and 4.1% are aboriginal (vs. 2.5 in the AWF). While these figures may look heartening, they do not reflect the fact that in many cases these groups are often confined to more junior positions in the public service and do not fare as well when senior levels in government are examined.

It is also government policy to deliver services in both of Canada's official languages and respect the use of English and French in the workplace. Today, about 40% of public service positions are designated "bilingual" and require some level of competence (from basic to fluent) in both languages. This ranges from a high of 65% for positions in the National Capital Region to a low of 4.4% of positions in Western Canada. Generally speaking, executive positions in the National Capital Region require the ability to use both official languages.

Like the broader Canadian workforce, the federal public service is getting older. Today, the average age is 45 years while the average age of new recruits is 36 years. The executive corps is the oldest group with an average age of 50 years. In 2006, nearly 18% of all federal executives and 36% at the Assistant Deputy Minister level were in a position to retire on full pension. The overall departure rate for the public service is growing but it is still significantly lower than the Canadian industry average. However, it is quite the opposite picture in senior management ranks implying a significant challenge for retention, succession planning and knowledge transfer in the coming years.

Challenges and Change in the Workforce

The skills and capacities required in public service work forces are evolving. New and sustained approaches are needed to ensure not only a high quality supply of entrants but, as well, a strategic and sustained focus on determining demand, particularly in relation to areas of shortage or growing need such as financial management, human resources, multi-disciplinary policy work, project management and information technology.

A key challenge is ensuring that public services promote excellence and continued representativeness by effectively attracting the talent and diversity that increasingly characterizes Canada. Attracting visible minorities, Aboriginal Canadians, and people with disabilities so their public service presence equals that of Canada's general population remains an area requiring continued effort.

Federal departments and agencies have always relied on the innately interesting nature of public sector work and the opportunity to serve fellow citizens in order to attract high calibre recruits. However, the government's human resources management regime is

often described as complex, rigid and slow. It's not just that it often takes months to classify jobs or fill vacant positions, only recently has it begun to focus on the need to integrate HR management into the broader business planning processes. Compared to the private sector and to other governments, managing people as strategic assets has not been a clear priority in the federal public service.

The Work environment

The View from Inside
The General Public Service Population

In focus groups and opinion polls, public servants paint a mixed picture of their workplace, work environment and culture. The most complimentary view comes from surveys commissioned by the government itself. These speak to the dedication and professionalism of hard working people in a system that may need improvement but on the whole works fairly well. Three major employee surveys commissioned by the Treasury Board since 1999 have consistently shown that public servants are proud of their work, strongly committed to serving Canadians and generally satisfied with their careers.

> **Workforce vs. Workplace.**
> Many employees expressed significant reservations about their work environment and identified barriers to productivity and performance including excessive hierarchy, constantly changing organizational priorities, inadequate resources and unreasonable deadlines. In the 2005 Treasury Board survey, 82% of public servants described their department as a good place to work, yet only 42% were confident that problems identified in the survey would be effectively addressed.

Executives

In a separate survey conducted in 2005 by the Association of Professional Executives of the Public Service of Canada (APEX), public service executives were more positive about their work than other employees. Almost 100% of executives said that they were committed to their work and to the public service and more than 80% said they would recommend public service careers to their children. However, another APEX survey completed in 2006, found executives highly critical of the results-based salary compensation system which they described as arbitrary, subjective, de-motivating and failing to reward team work. Although the government hoped to emulate the success of this system used in private industry as a motivational tool, the correlation of pay to performance is seen by executives as weak compared to other sectors.

> **Do public service executives love their jobs to death?**
> A recent APEX Report indicates that public service executives have much higher incidence rates of most diseases including heart disease and depression, than their private sector counterparts. The main contributing factors are seen as: heavy workloads, lack of control over day-to-day decisions and workplace conflicts. And what about succession planning to replace the tired and retired? As Linda Duxbury, Professor at Carleton University's School of Business has commented: "many people do not want a promotion to the executive level – especially the DG and Director level – they think of these jobs as black holes that suck the lifeblood out of you."[2]

Deputy and Assistant Deputy Ministers

Another interesting look at the culture and operations of the public service comes from a December 2006 focus group involving 20 mid-career executives who had joined the federal government service from senior management positions in the private or not-for-profit sectors.[3] They gave senior public servants top marks for their intelligence, determination and desire to serve Canadians. However, they were often critical of the workplace and work environment. Compared with their experience outside of government, they described the public service as a "closed shop" where people do not challenge basic assumptions about their mission or methods. Beyond this, they believed the public service is too focused on internal process and complying with rules, rather than on achieving outcomes. They also found that departments and agencies are needlessly hierarchical, fail to generate useful performance information and pay inadequate attention to human resources management.
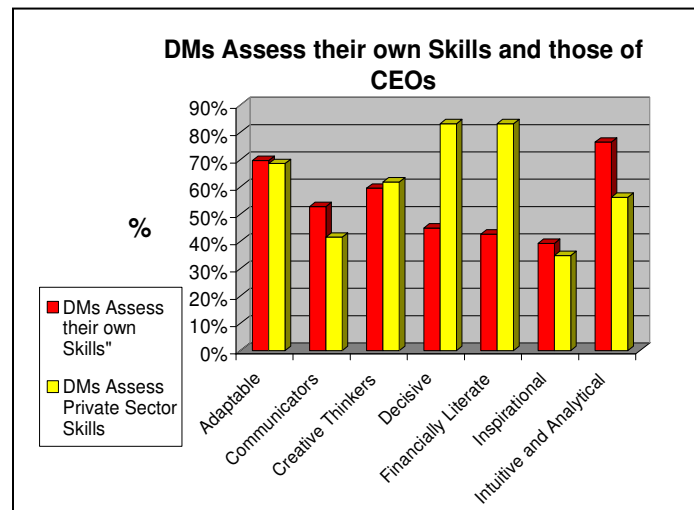
In a recent Public Policy Forum Leaders Survey, Deputies were asked to assess their own skills in contrast to their private sector counterparts. In several cases they rated private sector leaders on about par with themselves save for a few notable exceptions. Deputies rated themselves higher in the area of intuitiveness and analytical ability but well below their private sector counterparts in the areas of decisiveness and financial literacy. It is also notable that in terms of experience, about half the Deputies interviewed had been in their jobs for less than three years in contrast to private sector leaders a majority of whom

had been in their positions for at least 3 years (62%). Could there be a link between the issue of decisiveness and length of time in a position?

> **Musical Chairs?**
> One former Deputy has been clear that in his opinion while leadership principles and attributes may be fairly straight forward, the current high turnover rate at senior levels makes it difficult to implement government priorities like outcomes based management. Most Deputies do not expect to be in their current jobs for more than 18 months. "It is simply too short a period to develop a sense of direction, find the right people, secure the funds and relations with clients and to create the collaborative work environment to be truly effective."[4] Add to this the regular movement of Ministers and it becomes very difficult to build a team and sustain a direction.

The View from Outside

The General Public

Studies of individuals outside of government give public servants high marks for their dedication and professionalism particularly if they have had recent contact with them. However, commentary about the system they work in is far less cheerful. To be sure, in the general public's mind government can be seen as monolithic with a blurring of services provided by different jurisdictions and little distinction between politicians and public servants.

The public often thinks of government as "too complicated" and worries that it has become politicized, self-interested and process-oriented. They want their government to be honest and transparent in their dealings, knowledgeable and helpful in service delivery and to demonstrate results. As Paul Thomas from the University of Manitoba has suggested, "Most Canadians have a love-hate relationship with government. They express mistrust in politicians and political institutions, but still believe strongly (75%) that Canada has the best government system in the world."[5]

> **The New Normal – Less Deference and Trust?**
> Some people think the public service should care less about trust per se and more about the behaviours that engender trust: A professional, non-partisan public service that serves with integrity and a constructive accountability process that clarifies expectations, promotes transparency and provides incentives for improvement.

The Public Servants of the Future

The views of post-secondary students about the public service workplace are vitally important and will determine whether the government can compete for talent as Canada moves into a period of relative labour shortage. Here too, survey data presents a mixed picture. A Public Policy Forum survey [6]conducted in the late 1990's in the aftermath of significant and well-publicized public service down-sizing indicated that just 20% of the

over 2500 Canadian university students interviewed thought that most job opportunities were with the federal government. However, twice as many students expressed a preference to work for the federal government than actually expected to work there.

While a high percentage of students agreed that the federal government had too much bureaucracy (75%), too many rules and processes (58%) and was too resistant to change (56%), those students who preferred to work for the federal government also cited its excellent benefits (85%), its wide variety of career opportunities (71%) and the opportunities for advancement (65%). Perhaps one of the most significant findings was how many students just did not know nor had an opinion on the situation within the federal public service.

Close to ten years later, a private market research company *D-Code* asked about 30,000 students across Canada many of the same questions. Their read is that the Government of Canada has moved up considerably in the rankings (now #2 – behind IBM) as a place where students would like to work. Opportunities for advancement, good people to work with, good people to report to and work-life balance are the key things students are looking for in the workplace. However, *D-Code* did note that there is still confusion and lack of understanding about the public or indeed the private sector. "Although a majority of the students surveyed said they knew which industry they wanted to work in after they graduated, less than a third knew which specific company they wanted to work for." [7]

> **Is the Public Service Brand broken?**
> Perhaps the more important question is what brand is being sold? The broad Government of Canada brand may be popular in the abstract but it appears to lack the differentiation to let students know exactly what opportunities actually exist. Some students will be attracted by a field of work like finance, human resource management or information technology. Others will want to contribute to further a cause like Aboriginal health, international affairs or environmental issues. Breaking down the monolith to reveal the intriguing "innards" will be key.

Major Trends and Issues on the Horizon

All organizations, including government bureaucracies around the globe are responding to changing environments. Major trends are afoot in Canada and the world that will not only challenge government as a policy maker and service provider but also as an employer and manager. These issues will shape the work of government, challenge the minds and skills of employees and also test the capacity of the public service to put the right kind of people with the rights skills into jobs at the right time to protect the public interest and serve Canadians.

The Public Service in a Changing World: Implications of Longer-Term Trends

Demographic change and an increasingly diverse population

- Leading edge, competitive employment practices will be necessary to recruit quality entrants in highly competitive labour markets.
- Need to ensure efficient entry, appropriate orientation and support for new entrants.
- Need to adopt retention, knowledge transfer and succession planning strategies to ensure a smooth transition in intergenerational leadership.
- Need to assess employment policies including pensions, compensation, work hours and workplace design to both promote mobility and retain older workers.
- Improving capacity to attract, manage and retain a diverse workforce will be essential.

Complex (and often contested) public policy and service delivery mechanisms

- Greater emphasis required on integration of federal, provincial and municipal services.
- Employee development must focus on citizen engagement and consultation techniques.
- Public service will have to become more comfortable sharing expertise, power and information with partners and stakeholders.
- Core funding for non-profit partners needed to ensure capacity for meaningful engagement.
- Public servants will require autonomy and empowerment to pursue innovative and partnered approaches to public policy.

Globalization and greater international cooperation to solve problems

- Greater need for international skills and expertise across a wide range of issues.
- Consistently networked government based on knowledge sharing becomes essential.
- Broadening risk management skills necessary to better anticipate and manage global, international or national threats.

The information revolution

- Need capacity to manage and analyse increasingly broad pools of information.
- Recognition that information technology and availability is flattening and changing traditional organizational hierarchies.
- Need for continuing investment in new technologies to improve service to Canadians.

Less deference and trust on the part of citizens and rising bar of transparency and scrutiny

- Need for clear articulation and vigorous reinforcement of public service values.
- Must place greater premium on service quality and direct interaction with Canadians.
- Acceptance that public service will be less anonymous and assume greater openness for management and administrative decisions.
- Development of an accountability model that balances oversight with innovation and initiative.

Rising public expectations and changing patterns of civic engagement

- Need to provide direct communications and services to Canadians through their channel of choice (face-to-face, on-line, mail).
- Reach citizens through their growing connection with the non-profit sector.

Greater media scrutiny and scope

- Need for greater agility to respond to omnipresent media.
- Public service requirement to operate in a culture of openness.

Growing emphasis on well-being and workplace health

- Workplace dynamic needs to support flexible work arrangements and foster/reward teamwork.
- Horizontal movement is encouraged and valued.
- Training and development are built into to yearly assessments at all levels

Canada's Public Service in the 21ˢᵗ Century: The Future is Now

Considering the previous trends and their implications, what will government look like "in the future"? This is an oft-asked question that preoccupies think tanks and decision-makers alike. Many studies have been undertaken, future planning exercises embarked upon and scenarios crafted with the goal of articulating the "ideal" future state.

Ten years ago, the PPF brought together a diverse group of thoughtful Canadians as part of a National Search Conference on the Public Service and, in the end; they took a stab at describing the public service of the future which took them to…2007. The

> *"The future is embedded in the present"*
> James Naisbitt[8]

future public sector was described as having a commitment to "learning and adjusting" where "accountability systems would encourage learning from mistakes" and citizens would come to accept "the risk of an error being made". The public service would be better able to "manage interdependencies", would have a higher tolerance for risk, and would have strong leadership that stressed the "values of openness, accountability, transparency and citizen participation in decision making processes".[9] And the list goes

on. It is hard to imagine anyone arguing with the characteristics. The real question is: why does it seem so unattainable?

Here is where the calls for "transformative" change come in. Many would argue that nothing less than transformation is required to achieve these desired goals. Some observers of Canadian public administration have argued that nothing short of a major surprise or shock to the system will dislodge the inertia and help bring about much needed change. Without such a catalyst, the public service remains resistant to change and "quite defensive as a result" (Hubbard, Paquet).[10] But the societal trends driving change are real; their effects are being felt now and, in many cases, will only become more pronounced. Rather than solving the problems of yesterday, the public service needs to become an "opportunity seeker", ready to embrace the concept that "times of change are times of opportunity" (Naisbitt).[11]

Resistance, while not entirely futile, can have devastating consequences. To quote a US Army General Eric Shinseki, "If you don't like change, you're going to like irrelevance even less" ("The Leader of the Future").[12]

The Role of Government in the 21st Century: The Ideal State?

With one big caveat – that the future cannot be predicted – we are offering up a vision of government and its public service that reflects our trend analysis and which offers a context within which to make choices and trade-offs. Now is the time for the public service to be tough-minded about articulating its purpose in the face of trends and challenges that will continue to transform the country. We suggest the public service will need the following characteristics as we look to the future.

Relevant

Government in the 21st century is a meaningful and positive force in the lives of Canadians (and the public service an essential instrument of democratic government). It concentrates on issues of concern to the national interest (safety and security, foreign affairs, international trade relations) while designing framework policies and implementing programs that are firmly rooted in the public interest and that fully integrate social, economic and environmental objectives.

Connected and Networked

The federal government brings the provinces and territories together to articulate national priorities and to devise and fund mechanisms that will deliver results that Canadians want in areas such as learning, health care, sustainable environments, embracing diversity and intergenerational change. Federal, provincial and municipal services are integrated to maximize economies of scale. There is a respectful sharing of information between governments, other sectors and citizens that lowers costs and improves service quality and citizen satisfaction.

A renewed bureaucratic culture in the public service is less centralized and power is shared among the many, rather than the few at the "centre" (i.e. PCO, PMO, Finance, etc.) in response to the broader phenomenon of a globalized and networked world where power is diffuse and centralizing tendencies are, at best, inefficient and, at worst, counter-productive.

The federal government has a highly developed capacity to scan, understand and translate the national and global environment – present and future – into understandable ideas and has a strong capacity to transform these ideas into concrete proposals for action in policy development, service delivery and management practices.

Works in Partnerships

Effective partnerships and/or contractual arrangements with private enterprise, the not-for-profit sector and other levels of government exist to deliver services and implement programs and policies. There is minimal overlap or duplication of effort and resources flow to the organizations (inside and outside of government) that are best able to do the job. In some instances, departments and agencies may have to create external partners or offer core funding to ensure non-government organizations are equipped to undertake their responsibilities.

Agile People Management

Tomorrow's federal executives have the flexibility and authority to hire, train and deploy staff quickly from one area to another within and across departments and to link performance more closely with rewards. More boundary-free job descriptions and greater use of short-term work assignments and exchanges across levels of government and with partners in the private and not-for-profit sectors reaps benefits for both the public service and its employees.

Citizen-focused

The federal government places an emphasis on collaboration and consultation by engaging individuals, sectors and other levels of government in decisions which affect them while remaining responsive to emerging and changing needs. It operates through a set of integrated and interdependent networks, rather than command-and-control hierarchies and uses technology expertly and wisely to transact with and relate to citizens. The government is citizen-focused and communicates and delivers service through the channels Canadians prefer and in language they understand.

Values-infused and Accountable

The federal government enjoys the respect and trust of Canadians because it conducts its business in a way that is transparent, values-based, outcomes-oriented and accountable to the public it serves. It delivers policy advice and services that give citizens value for their tax contribution balancing value-for-money with fairness and impartiality as well as

language and regional sensitivities. Employees at all levels understand and accept the value structure and willingly operate within the defined bounds. Processes are defined with a maximum degree of flexibility allowing for discretion rather than attempting to create iron-clad rules to cover every possible instance. In short, the government exercises the kind of leadership Canadians expect and which reflects their values and priorities.

> **What do you think of our description of an "ideal" public service and the roles and characteristics we have assigned to it? Is this kind of public service Canada will need in the 21st century?**
>
> **From what you know and what you have just read, can you list some the major barriers the public service will encounter in moving from where it is today toward the ideal future we have set out?**

Public Sector Reform: Plus ça change…

"…we desperately need to look into the mirror and realize it's time to get back to the core and make the changes necessary to evoke the heritage, the tradition and the passion we all have... [ ] our success is not an entitlement and now it's proving to be a reality. Let's be smarter about how we are spending our time, money and resources. Let's get back to the core. Push for innovation…[ ] We have built the most trusted brand in coffee in the world, and we have an enormous responsibility to the people [ ] who are relying on our stewardship."

Howard Schultz, Chair, Starbucks, February 14th, 2006[13]

Back to the core? We have a responsibility to the people who are relying on our stewardship? Our success is not an entitlement? Howard Schultz is trying to rally a successful yet complacent world-wide company and brand that appears to have "lost its way". One could easily substitute "coffee" with "public service" to make it a rallying cry for the federal bureaucracy as it enters the 21st century.

From a wholesale review of government programs (Program Review) to greater flexibility and barrier busting (PS2000) to a focus on talent management (La Releve) to a renewed emphasis on service delivery (Service Canada) to public-sector wide human resources reform (PSMA), all within approximately 15 years, the federal public service cannot be accused of having lain dormant throughout the 20th century.

However, it is very difficult to determine whether these reforms have had "traction, whether sufficient attention has been given to how they relate to each other and whether the government and central agencies ensure there is closure and congruence among them." (Lindquist)[14] Little wonder public servants express cynicism over the next round of "renewal" initiatives. While the public service has been responding to some inescapable pressures, we would argue that it does not always take a hard look at its organizational design, institutional structure, and fundamental underpinnings; in other words, rarely has it "gotten back to the core".

In fact, many of the priority issues that continue to face the public service have been documented and discussed in the yearly reports to the Prime Minister on the State of the Public Service from the Clerk of the Privy Council (in the role as the Head of the Public Service). For example, today's concern about workforce ageing surfaced prominently in the 1996 report which called for more attention to HR management issues and measures to address what was termed a "quiet crisis" rooted in workforce demographics.[15] The Clerk's 1997 report stressed the need to make the public service a "learning organization" and called for a "transformation in its people, culture and leadership".[16] Since the late 1990s, successive Clerks have called for culture change and, more specifically, in recent years have called for a shift away from a focus on internal processes toward outcomes and results which matter to Canadians.

Granted the public service is a hugely complex bureaucracy. Some might also say it as institutional that is usually ignored until a scandal or crisis reveals some of its inner workings to a public only too quick to criticize it. Given the speed at which the world is changing around it, merely continuing to tinker at the margins would appear to be a fool's errand. However, if the Chair of Starbucks has the courage to question the core purpose of a hugely successful, global company, it strikes us that it is fitting to do the same for an "enterprise" which impacts on the lives of all Canadians.

> **If you were drawing up an action plan for bringing about real, sustainable change in the public service, what would the key components be?**

Public Service and the Common Good

Public sector governance is a unique undertaking. It is also uniquely messy and difficult. It is difficult to measure the benefits of policies aimed at improving the social or economic well-being of individuals. Often, immeasurable benefits accrue because negative events are prevented from happening (i.e. through environmental regulation, health protection or peacekeeping). At the same time, the public sector operates in a fishbowl, where all of its activities are visible and open to public scrutiny by an often critical media. As well, the public service operates in a partisan environment where policies and their intended outcomes are often directed toward and viewed in political terms, rather than the public interest or the greater common good.

> *"The common good cannot be achieved by a public service solely adhering to administrative values developed to enhance the production of wealth. Measure of efficiency and effectiveness are not antithetical to democracy but they are surely not enough."*
> Michael Walzer[17]

The "public interest and the common good" form part of the core values public servants are expected to uphold under the Values and Ethics Code for the Public Service. They are included as part of the cluster of "democratic values" alongside respect for the rule of law, support for democracy, neutrality and non-partisanship, due process and respect for the authority of elected office holders.

> **The public service has a responsibility to uphold the public interest and the common good. How well do you think this concept and role is understood by Canadians, by Ministers and MPs and by public servants themselves? Does the role and responsibility of the public service need to be clarified?**

Leadership: Bringing Values to Life

An organization's core values underpin its culture and shape the instinctive behaviour and beliefs of its people, the way they work together and the rules and operating procedures they put in place to guide their work. The challenge facing political and public service leaders is to cast a clear vision of the public service role and how it must operate to achieve its purpose. Then they must lead by example and articulate values that will empower executives, managers and employees to move toward that vision.

> *"A visionary company almost religiously preserves its core ideology, changing it seldom, if ever. Core values in a visionary company provide a rock-solid foundation and do not drift with the trends and fashions of the day."*
> J. Collins/J. Porras[18]

Leadership is about creating and directing productive organizations; organizations populated with motivated individuals working in an environment that reflects their values. A values-based organization leads directly to a workforce that is motivated to produce at an optimal level. Creating a values-based organization is not about creating a soft work environment where productivity is not required. Rather, it recognizes that only through a continued emphasis and insistence on behaviours consistent with the value structure can ongoing productivity be achieved.

Traditional public service values of neutrality, merit, non-partisanship, economy, speaking truth to power, and fidelity to public trust exist alongside the application of values around innovation, creativity, teamwork and quality under the rubric of "professional values". The other three categories of values include democratic (as noted on the previous page), ethical (e.g. integrity, honesty, discretion, public trust) and people (e.g. respect, concern, tolerance, fairness, collegiality, courage).

Frank Iacobucci recently noted that the public service needs, "a clearer articulation of values. We need to hear it from the top that this is a public service where we do not turn our heads when we see questionable activities, that this is a public service where we speak truth to power, and that this is a public service where there are consequences for breaking with these value statements. This has to be understood from the top to bottom and our actions must reflect these words rigorously and consistently throughout the system. That is the job of leaders."19

> **Are traditional values like honesty, fairness and speaking truth to power sufficient to encourage behaviour we want in the public service? What is the role of leadership in articulating and modelling public service values?**

Organizational Culture: Power to the People

Every organization has a strong culture and the public service is certainly no exception. Part of the challenge of culture change is specifying "from what" "to what". Shifting entrenched cultures is often times the greatest mark of success for an organization i.e. from risk averse to innovative, from controlling and rules-bound to empowering and flexible. Changes to organizational design will invariably have a strong impact on human behaviour. Indeed, bureaucratic institutions, as "social" systems, depend upon processes, relationships and systems working together in harmony. A healthy organizational culture ensures that corporate priorities are clear and that people are pulling together – rather than working at cross-purposes or actively competing with each other. Indeed, bureaucracy, in the true sense of the word, is a "team and organizational structures that improve our quality of working life and that help a company work smartly – and profitably." (Vicente)[20]

"When I came to IBM, I thought culture was important. After a short while I realized it is the only thing that is important"
Louis Gerstner[21]

One of the most striking cultural features of the Canadian public service is the power of the Prime Minister and central agencies. To this day, it has "one of the most cluttered central apparatus of the Westminster system…and is without peer among the Westminster governments with respect to complexity." (Lindquist)[22] A heavily centralized, controlling decision-making structure is antithetical to an emerging order that is decentralized and horizontal and in which power, resources and information are widely distributed. Paquet and Hubbard argue that an "emerging new way of thinking about governing apparatus…could be much more decentralized".[23]

Certainly we are witnessing this shift in the private sector where: "big companies are decentralizing…because they have to become more efficient and responsive to the new competition generated by…the new global game." Naisbitt concludes that "small, agile companies or companies that have reconstituted themselves into confederations of entrepreneurs will beat big, bureaucratic companies 10 out of 10 times". (Naisbitt)[24]

> **Can a highly centralized public service meet the challenge of governing by network? Does centralization contribute to isolation? Is decentralization the answer or are other strategies required as well?**

New Concepts of Accountability

An important dimension of cultural change will be a new, modern concept of accountability. As important as defining and deciding upon policy options is the creation of implementation processes that deliver results in an effective manner. Within the public sector, it is certainly clear that the end does not justify the means; policies must be implemented in a manner consistent with the defined value structure.

The challenge is to put in place mechanisms that effectively monitor performance and ensure compliance with policy objectives without preventing the capacity to adjust

service delivery in an appropriate fashion to meet changed circumstances or stifling innovation and creativity. In a "networked" governance environment, traditional hierarchical and prescriptive accountability mechanisms are no longer sufficient or suitable. Public servants must be accountable for the fairness, honesty and integrity of their decisions and practices, as well as for the value they deliver.

At the same time, Canadians must accept that considerations of fairness, impartiality, non-partisanship, language and regional sensitivity, as well as openness and transparency drive up costs and make decision-making in the federal public service inherently more difficult and time-consuming than in private organizations. The issue facing the public service and political leaders is what weight to place on these considerations as compared to cost, rate-of-return and value for money. In the final analysis, however, the choice is not between the extremes of absolute fairness and ruthless efficiency, but a middle ground that is acceptable to Canadians.

> **How should accountability work in the public service? What should public servants be accountable for delivering? How should these accountabilities be made clear and put into practice?**

Performance Measurement: Turning Data into Information

Steps have been underway for several years to improve performance measurement and reporting in the federal government and move toward regular, in-depth assessment of all spending programs. In theory, this will support continuous reallocation of resources from low to high-priority activities and away from programs which perform poorly or have outlived their usefulness. The complications of measuring some program outputs coupled with its sheer size and complexity make this an enormous task for the public service. However, to say that it cannot be done in the face of this complexity is, according to Jim Collins, "simply a lack of discipline" as "all indicators are flawed, whether qualitative or quantitative". [26]

> *"An organization high in spirit is one that is led by executives who are committed to doing the right thing and to getting the right things done"* Joseph Macieriello[25]

A critical issue for the public service will be to turn an overabundance of abstract "data" into meaningful information – for use by Canadians and Parliamentarians. The challenge is to use meaningful information to connect people to the complexity of public sector impacts. This means public servants must leave the language of the "technocrat" behind so that ideas, facts and analysis are used to connect – rather than disconnect – citizens from the "larger living context of society". (Menzies)[27] Too often, "objective data' is used to obscure, "game" or score partisan political points. It takes time to tell a meaningful story about outcomes and time, unfortunately, is something we all have precious little of. However, it is incumbent upon public servants, parliamentarians, the media and citizens to stop portraying data as "the truth" and to begin to weave together information that will provide a context – a narrative – that resonates with Canadians.

> **Do you believe that the federal public service needs to change its approach to performance information and reporting? Can Canadians be told a clearer and better "outcomes" story?**

The Learning Organization: The End of "Blaming and Shaming"

The Canadian public service prides itself on being a learning organization. In fact, it has been suggested that one of the most "original" features of the Canadian "model" of public service is its accent on learning. However, learning can only happen if organizational mechanisms are in place to take note of, and support follow up on near misses or mistakes: "it is only by identifying what went wrong – and why – and learning from errors that it will be possible to make systemic changes". (Vicente) [29] This means that a meaningful accountability and performance regime must be able to tolerate some failures and miscalculations and risk management must play a greater role in anticipating and mitigating risks before they happen. This is truer now than it has ever been given the complexity of systems – webs of rules and procedures combined with complicated technology – that will likely only drive error rates up.

> *"Is it reasonable to expect human beings to work effectively within the confines of an ever-tightening procedural straightjacket? Is it surprising that when things go wrong investigations <u>always</u> reveal that someone violated a procedure?"*
> Kim Vicente[28]

Of course, if a wrong has been done those responsible should be held to account. But, there is some distance between wilful negligence and an honest mistake. The accountability system must be able to distinguish between the two in order for learning to take place. Oversight and compliance systems that publicly "shame" public servants and operate on the assumption that "bad apples" must be rooted out will merely drive behaviour underground. For true learning to occur, time and energy must be spent honestly and fairly assessing the context in which mistakes or accidents occurred and thinking about the overall design (institutional and structural) that enabled the behaviour.

Rebalancing the compliance, performance measurement and risk management aspects of accountability will be a stretch for public servants who have learned from experience that keeping out of the news can be more important to their careers than bringing innovative programs on stream to serve Canadians. This challenge will be further heightened by the shift toward partnership and outsourcing which may reduce costs and improve service quality, but will also put decisions and other activities into the hands of people who are not even federal employees. Inevitably, this will lead to mistakes or improprieties which, however, minor may make headlines. Here the test for the public service will be to admit to and learn from these mishaps, take corrective actions and resume course.

A results-based concept of accountability will also throw a new light on managing so-called "horizontal issues" where important policy questions such as environmental protection, or public security, touch on the responsibilities of more than one and often many different players. Today, it is generally expected and even accepted that these horizontal processes will be difficult and protracted. Too often, the discussion focuses on the interests and concerns of the players at the table while the interests of citizens become a secondary priority. When continuing the discussion is no longer seen as an outcome and participants are held jointly accountable for producing results in these situations, the public service will have made real progress on its journey.

Moving toward a partnership model will require clear guidelines while leaving the responsibility for managing relationships and measuring and reporting on performance very much in the hands of departments and agencies. To support this arrangement, Treasury Board will have to function more as the general manager of government and not as a micro manager. This too will be a challenging journey.

Although difficult to imagine in a world of "watchdogs", increased scrutiny and transparency, improved results, innovation and learning will only thrive in a system that accepts human beings as fallible – where honest mistakes will continue to be made by good people. As Onora O'Neill has observed, "real, intelligent accountability is built on trust and moral contracts and currently fashionable methods of accountability damage rather than repair trust". (Hubbard/Paquet)[30]

> **Is it true that "the more we individualize blame the more we push up decision-making"? (Perri 6)[31] What does this say about current and future decision-making and accountability?**

Collaborating and Connecting: Goodbye to the" Faceless" Bureaucrat

Governments are elected on the basis of policy platforms. Once elected, they expect to deliver as best they can on the priorities set out in the election platform. The role of the public service is to help the government take its policy proposals from the ideas stage to practical implementation. In fact, one of the principal roles of the public service is to provide policy advice to the government of the day. But what happens if, after due analysis and consideration, the policy proposals in a political platform are considered to be ineffective, inefficient, counter-productive or otherwise inadvisable? This aspect of the policy process highlights the doctrine of "speaking truth to power" wherein the public service is required to present to political decision-makers a comprehensive analysis of policy suggestions from the perspective of how best to maximize the public interest (i.e. the common good).

Where the public interest is concerned, the public service must also build effective networks into the world outside its borders; this is critical to understanding what really matters to Canadians and to developing innovative ways of delivering the results that people expect. In cultural terms this means moving from being inward-looking and insular, to outward-looking and connected. It also means that public servants will become increasingly less anonymous as they continue to consult, collaborate and communicate with the Canadian public on a range of policy issues.

In this regard, the notion of partnering with outside organizations will extend beyond service delivery and be seen as a tool for engaging Canadians in decisions which affect them. External partners and stakeholders can be the eyes and ears of policy makers and

may be able to bring knowledge and experience to bear on issues which public servants often cannot. However, these partners will expect departments and agencies to value the strategic intelligence they provide and also have the interest and capacity to put it to work shaping policy and improving programs and services. Political and public service leaders must understand that true partnerships are based on an honest, continuing, two-way exchange of information, ideas and even people.

> **Is Canada best served by an impartial, politically neutral public service? How does the public service balance the need to collaborate and connect with being responsive to political direction?**

A Preferred Employer: It's the People!

"You lead people, you manage and control things"

Stephen Covey, "The Leader of the Future"[32]

In a service business, treating people as a strategic asset is critical. In many government activities such as developing policy advice, consulting with outside groups or building partnerships, people are the *only* asset. If there is one management function in the federal public service which holds the key to culture change, it is the approach to managing people.

"People decisions are the true control of an organization. People decisions direct behaviour because they indicate the actual values in action of the organization. These decisions reveal what is truly rewarded and punished and therefore they direct human behaviour"
Joseph Maciariello[33]

Managers and executives must pay much greater attention to career development, succession planning, value-added labour relations and other basic human resource management practices. Barriers to recruitment, retention and mobility including compensation, conflict of interest guidelines and the application of official languages policies are just some of the issues to be addressed. A further critical challenge will be to manage an orderly transfer of knowledge and experience from a generation of retiring employees to those who will take their place.

Moving toward a partnership model for service delivery, policy development and program implementation will require a wholesale change in skills requirements in the public service. The generalist – or "gifted amateur" (Lodge/Rogers)[34] – is making way for the specialist (whether in policy, management, audit, finance, HR, etc.). In addition to finding strong policy minds, the challenge will be to hire a generation of networkers, negotiators and managers, and create a system that encourages them to connect with the outside world and which ties their compensation and career development to achieving tangible results. As Jim Collins notes, a key factor in moving an organization from "good to great" is to "manage the system, not the people".[35] In other words, emphasis should be placed on organizational supports such as incentive systems, training and development, use of technology, etc. to support individuals. Rather than "motivating our people", leaders need to recruit self-motivated people and then

"provide an environment that does not de-motivate them" and "avoid bureaucracy that imposes unnecessary rules on self-motivated and self-disciplined people." (Collins)[36]

Federal executives and managers must also recognize the "internationalization" of public service work and of the labour market itself. This will increasingly put departments and agencies in direct competition with employers around the world for young people and seasoned executives who understand the global arena and the challenges it poses for businesses and individuals operating abroad. Lightening fast recruitment processes, flexible employment conditions and increasingly, the quality of the federal workplace and the federal work experience, will all have a bearing on whether the public service is able to not only attract young recruits, but retain them into the future.

> **Would fundamental changes to staffing, performance and tenure of senior leaders improve the management and leadership of the public service as an institution?**

Key Questions:

1. What do you think of our description of an "ideal" public service and the roles and characteristics we have assigned to it? Is this kind of public service Canada will need in the 21st century?

2. From what you know and what you have just read, can you list some the major barriers the public service will encounter in moving from where it is today toward the ideal future we have set out?

3. If you were drawing up an action plan for bringing about real, sustainable change in the public service, what would the key components be?

4. The public service has a responsibility to uphold the public interest and the common good. How well do you think this concept and role is understood by Canadians, by Ministers and MPs and by public servants themselves? Does the role and responsibility of the public service need to be clarified?

5. Are traditional values like honesty, fairness and speaking truth to power sufficient to encourage behaviour we want in the public service? What is the role of leadership in articulating and modelling public service values?

6. Can a highly centralized public service meet the challenge of governing by network? Does centralization contribute to isolation? Is decentralization the answer or are other strategies required as well?

7. How should accountability work in the public service? What should public servants be accountable for delivering? How should these accountabilities be made clear and put into practices?

8. Do you believe that the federal public service needs to change its approach to performance information and reporting? Can Canadians be told a clearer and better "outcomes" story?

9. Is it true that "the more we individualize blame the more we push up decision-making"? What does this say about current and future decision-making and accountability?

10. Is Canada best served by an impartial, politically neutral public service? How does the public service balance the need to collaborate and connect with being responsive to political direction?

11. Would fundamental changes to staffing, performance and tenure of senior leaders improve the management and leadership of the public service as an institution?

Endnotes

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