

Report

Consultation of Official Languages Champions

Tuesday, May 22, 2001

5:30 - 7:30 pm

**Canadian Centre for Management Development, 65 Guigues Street,
Ottawa, Plenary Room 2**

led by

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Commissioner of Official Languages

and

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**Assistant Secretary, Official Languages
Treasury Board Secretariat**

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Table of Contents

	Page
I. CONTEXT	3
II. PARTICIPANTS	3
III. COMMENTS RECEIVED	4
A. Official languages and modernization of human resources management	4
1. Language identification, staffing and classification of bilingual positions	4
2. Language training	4
3. Second-language evaluation	4
4. External recruitment	5
5. Training and development	5
6. Bilingualism bonus	5
7. Accountability of public servants	5
8. Bilingualism for members of the Executive Group (CBC EX)	6
9. Translation	6
10. Culture change	6
11. Ways to modernize the language regime	7
12. Miscellaneous	7
B. Strategic plan of activities to support the official languages champions	8
IV. ACTION FOLLOWING THE CONSULTATION SESSION	9
A. Official languages and modernization of human resources management	9
B. Strategic plan of activities to support the official languages champions	9
V. APPENDIX	10

Consultation of Official Languages Champions, May 22, 2001 - Report

I. CONTEXT

On May 22, 2001, the Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS), in partnership with the Commissioner of Official Languages, held a consultation with a group of official languages champions on two topics in particular:

- A. Official languages and the modernization of human resources management;
- B. A strategic plan of activities to support the official languages champions.

II. PARTICIPANTS

Dyane Adam	Commissioner of Official Languages
Diana Monnet	Treasury Board Secretariat
Bruno Bonneville	Law Commission of Canada
Jean-Claude Bouchard	Industry Canada
Michel J. Cardinal	Public Works and Government Services Canada
André Carrière	Human Resources Development
Charlotte Cloutier	Treasury Board Secretariat
Michelle D'Auray	Treasury Board Secretariat
Mario Dion	Justice Canada
Bill Ferguson	Human Resources Development
Gérard Finn	Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages
Liseanne Forand	Fisheries and Oceans Canada
Nicole Fortier	Treasury Board Secretariat
Marcel Gibeault	Natural Resources Canada
Hélène Gosselin	Canadian Heritage
Michel Granger	Canadian International Trade Tribunal
Gilbert Langelier	Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages
Marlene Levine	Statistics Canada
Jacqueline Loranger	Treasury Board Secretariat
John McBride	Industry Canada
Elizabeth Nadeau	Privy Council Office
Weldon Newton	Hazardous Materials Information Review Commission Canada
Louis Ranger	Transport Canada
Doug Rimmer	Public Service Commission
Georges Tsai	Citizenship and Immigration Canada

III. COMMENTS RECEIVED

A. Official languages and the modernization of human resources management

1. Language identification, staffing and classification of bilingual positions

- ? The language skills for positions should be incorporated into the standards required and evaluated for those positions. At the same time, it must be made certain that the language requirements identified correspond to the real needs of the position.
- ? The language requirements should be a rated core competency.
- ? It must be remembered that the language requirements are already part of the skills required for positions, even if they are not rated for classification purposes. All the policies and processes are in place now. It is the way they are used, and the way the importance of language skills is considered, that should be changed.
- ? It is hard – when one knows the incumbent of a position – to take the necessary measures when that person does not meet the language requirements of his or her position. The existing system or measures to correct such a situation are largely ineffective and allow too much flexibility in their application.

2. Language training

- ? We should put in place special measures (for learning, and so on) to accommodate certain groups, including members of visible minorities and persons with disabilities.
- ? The approach should be changed. At present, public servants are trained to pass the language tests rather than to be able to function in both official languages in their positions.
- ? The methods of language training now in place do not meet the learning needs and styles of adults. We should adopt methods that are more oriented to adults and to public servants' work environments.
- ? Language training should be simplified, and should permit faster attainment of the required levels.

3. Second-language evaluation

- ? The second-language evaluation methods now in use do not meet the needs of adults. We should re-examine the methods and focus them more, taking the work environment of public servants into account.
- ? The method of evaluating language skills is frustrating for some candidates. The tests' results do not always match their ability to communicate in a real situation.
- ? The unilingual people who have succeeded in achieving the language level for their positions cannot all function bilingually. For some people, there is a great difference between achieving a language level and being able to work in the second language.

4. External recruitment

- ? We should require a good level of bilingualism on entering the federal public service.
- ? This may constitute a challenge if we want to increase the number of members of visible minorities. For some of them, English or French, is their third language. A balance should be struck between the level required on entry and the achievement of other objectives, such as those for employment equity.
- ? The issue related to bilingualism among visible minorities and persons with disabilities is more a matter of understanding their situation than a problem in itself.
- ? We should act more strategically: in some cases, we should recruit persons who are already bilingual (for example, for Foreign Affairs); in others, such as for regions designated as unilingual for language of work purposes, we should be more moderate.

5. Training and development

- ? Career plans should incorporate an employee's language skills. Those who want to advance in the public service should understand the necessity of being able to use both official languages.
- ? We should not wait until employees are in their positions (following a non-imperative staffing action) to begin language training.

6. Bilingualism bonus

- ? We should incorporate language skills into the standards required and evaluated for positions. We should abolish the bilingualism bonus.
- ? We should show that we recognize the importance of having language skills (English and French) to enter the public service, by offering an attractive bonus to candidates who are already bilingual.
- ? We should offer candidates a choice: a bonus on entry, or access to language training paid for by the government.

7. Accountability of public servants

- ? Public service employees must be made accountable concerning official languages objectives. The complexity of the system at present means that a person can easily lose sight of the objectives sought by official languages.
- ? Official languages objectives should be part of Deputy Ministers' accountability agreements.
- ? Official languages objectives should be part of managers' performance evaluations where applicable.
- ? Make employees responsible for their language training.

8. Bilingualism for the members of the Executive Group (CBC EX)

- ? We should ensure that members of senior management are bilingual if we want employees at more junior levels to be bilingual.
- ? Anyone who does not understand the reality of Canada's linguistic duality should not be a manager in the federal public service.
- ? We should be consistent : if we require EX-01s to be bilingual (CBC for EX), we should also require their Deputy Ministers to be bilingual. We must avoid contradictions.
- ? People "imitate the boss", who often "sets the tone".
- ? The example must be set from the top down.

9. Translation

- ? With the growing use of "E-government" and software that can do machine translation, it is time to review our policies and practices in this area.
- ? However, we must remember that machine translation should be done in both directions: sometimes from English to French, but sometimes also from French to English.

10. Culture change

- ? We should induce public servants to realize that they must bear their share of responsibility for achievement of the official languages objectives in the federal government.
- ? Too many compromises are currently being made concerning the official languages objectives, thereby minimizing their achievement.
- ? We must develop civic spirit in public servants: they must understand that they are government employees and therefore have responsibilities toward both of Canada's official language groups.
- ? So far efforts have been directed mainly at administering a mechanical language infrastructure, not at the culture change that achieving the official languages objectives presupposes.
- ? In a context of renewal, we should explore measures that are based more on the values that a culture change implies, in order to achieve the objectives sought in official languages.
- ? When we speak of achieving the official languages objectives, we should aim high and think of the entire country. We should not focus our energy solely on Ottawa.
- ? We should provide for a transition period for any change made to the present system.
- ? We should demonstrate that language skills are considered important when employees are promoted.
- ? We have developed a culture of tests and language training (in the Public Service). We have to change this "culture".
- ? The complexity of the system at present means that individuals can easily lose sight of the objectives sought by official languages.

Consultation of Official Languages Champions, May 22, 2001 - Report

- ? We should remember that considerable progress has been made in the federal government in the past 30 years. However, the times have changed, and now we must think about more modern strategies in order to position official languages better.
- ? We must make a major change in direction in order to upgrade the implementation of the Official Languages Program in both, the workplace and the minds of individuals.
- ? We have lost sight of the essence that should flow from the official languages objectives.
- ? We should change the way things are done and review the existing official languages policies and Regulations.
- ? The image of the costs associated with bilingualism should be changed. Some members of the public see it as a waste.

11. Ways to modernize the language regime

- ? We should deregulate the present system related to language requirements, language training and testing, and take a simpler approach.
- ? We should try to find out more about what young people in their twenties think about implementing measures to achieve the government's official languages objectives.
- ? We should study the current public service language regime in the light of technological change (such as E-recruitment and E-staffing).
- ? The costs involved in management of official languages (translation, training, the bonus, etc.) are not sufficiently recognized as real operating costs.
- ? The situation in the federal public service is changing: technological change, demographic change. These changes affect the map of the functional geographic distribution in Canada.
- ? We must change the fact that currently official languages are often seen as a problem to be overcome (translation, high costs, levels required, etc.), not as an inherent component in the Canadian identity.

12. Miscellaneous

- ? We should not hire unilingual consultants when they would be interacting with groups from both official languages.
- ? The level of bilingualism in the departments varies from organization to organization.
- ? There is too much folklore surrounding official languages.

B. Strategic plan of activities to support the official languages champions

General comments about the role of the official languages champions

- ? The official languages champions are in sales: they are selling the official languages. However, they need an interesting product to sell. That is not the case at present.
- ? Unfortunately, the official languages champion can easily be considered as often having the same old story to tell. This makes the official languages hard to sell.
- ? The champions should be visibly supported by the Deputy Minister community and by the Clerk.
- ? The Clerk has made official languages one of his priorities for 2001-2002. However, it would be important that he identify activities and strategies to educate public servants as to the importance of this priority.
- ? Consideration should also be given to developing the concept of a "team of champions" (or a network of champions) in a department, not just one champion. Also, there should be champions both in the head office and in the regions.
- ? There is a limited number of Assistant Deputy Ministers. They cannot be involved in everything. This makes the concept of a team or network very attractive.
- ? We should include in the champions' network "La Relève" for champions.
- ? We should seek out ideas among the young employees.
- ? In order to watch out for "acute championitis", we should set up a stronger infrastructure to support the official languages champions.
- ? The champions do not feel truly equipped to advance the cause of official languages. It would therefore be important to support them.
- ? Having an official languages champion in an institution should not displace the accountability of the other managers. In other words, other managers in a department should not think that they have less official languages responsibility because a champion "is already looking after that".
- ? Role of the champion: to motivate, educate and demonstrate a degree of wisdom.
- ? Champions must demonstrate balance, influence and leadership.
- ? Champions should be chosen by the department's executive committee as a whole.
- ? A strategic way of thinking common to all champions should be developed. The role of the champion should not be limited to doing promotion. He or she should be directly involved in the department's important matters, especially if there may be repercussions for aspects of the official languages.
- ? It could be interesting to reconsider the term "champion".

IV. ACTION FOLLOWING THE CONSULTATION SESSION

A. Official languages and the modernization of human resources management

- (a) The comments received during the official languages champions consultation session will be reviewed by a working committee chaired by the Official Languages Branch (OLB) of the Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS) and consisting of representatives of the TBS, the Office of Commissioner of Official Languages (OCOL), the Public Service Commission (PSC) and others, as needed.
- (b) The committee's mandate will be to review the results of the consultation to determine which issues relate to policy, which to legislation, and so on. The committee will also identify the authority with jurisdiction in the given area; i.e. which issues are the responsibility of the TBS, the PSC, the *Task Force on Modernizing Human Resources Management in the Public Service*, or others.
- (c) A template developed for that purpose could serve as a tool to support the review. (See the Appendix).
- (d) A report (with recommendations) will be prepared for consideration by Dyane Adam and Diana Monnet.
- (e) If necessary, further consultations could be held with the champions or with other groups.
- (f) The champions will be informed of the action taken following the consultation of May 22, 2001.

B. Strategic plan of activities to support the official languages champions

- (a) The comments received during the consultation of the official languages champions concerning activities that could help them play their role of champion in their individual institutions will be studied by the OLB.
- (b) Some bases will be identified with a view to preparing a strategic plan of activities to support the champions in their role of promoting the government objectives sought in the renewal of the Official Languages Program.
- (c) A presentation will be made to all the champions at the meeting on September 13 and 14, 2001, to consult them about a plan of activities to support them in their role.

