

**A DISCUSSION PAPER FOR THE  
CCMD ACTION-RESEARCH ROUNDTABLE  
ON THE LEARNING ORGANIZATION**

Canadian Centre for Management Development  
Action-Research Roundtable on the Learning Organization

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## Introduction

### *Purpose*

- The purpose of this paper is to develop a framework to help guide the work of the Canadian Centre for Management Development (CCMD) Action-Research Roundtable on the Learning Organization.<sup>1</sup> This framework will situate organizational learning within the larger picture of the changes taking place in Canadian society and around the world, develop a vision of the learning-centred public service of the future, and describe the core elements of a transition strategy to achieve this vision.<sup>2</sup>

### *Background*

- Canada, along with other countries, is moving towards a knowledge-based economy and society in the 21st century. This has profound implications for how we work and organize ourselves within both the public and private sectors.
- This paper proposes that the Public Service of Canada must become a learning organization if it is to fulfill its role in society — a role that involves the provision of high-quality, non-partisan advice to government to advance the public interest and needed public services to citizens.
- This document discusses five broad questions in turn:
  1. ***What Makes the 21st Century Different?*** This section contains a description of social and economic developments in the decades leading up to the 21st century. The focus is on how the world is changing in areas relevant to learning within the public service.
  2. ***Why Do We Need A Learning-Centred Public Service?*** This section explains why the Public Service must fundamentally rethink its approach to learning if it is to adapt to the changes taking place.
  3. ***What Would a Learning-Centred Public Service Look Like?*** This section sets out a picture of the ideal, learning-based public service that should be the goal of ongoing renewal efforts.
  4. ***What New Competencies Are Required to Bring About a Learning-Centred Public Service?*** This section outlines how individuals can contribute to organizational change by developing new learning competencies.

5. *How Will the Roundtable Move Us Towards Our Goal?* This section contains a description of the roundtable's raison d'être and mode of operation.

## 1. What Makes the 21st Century Different?

- Several changes have taken place within the workplace and society that fundamentally alter the nature of both governance and business operations within Canada and abroad. Both public and private sector organizations have been forced to reflect on how these changes affect what they do and how they do it.

### *New Technology Has Eliminated the Control of Information...*

- Information used to be a relatively inaccessible resource. Assembling the data needed for a research project, for example, often meant many hours searching archival materials, visiting libraries, and perhaps even travelling to other countries to examine local records.
- Today, new information technologies have increased our ability to create and distribute large volumes of information at greater speeds and to a wider audience.
- Technology has eliminated information gate-keepers and made information more freely available to the wider population. Large stores of information are now within the grasp of virtually anyone with a computer. Individuals are becoming more equal in their ability to access and interpret information.

### *...and Is Placing a Premium on Knowledge Workers*

- As the availability of information becomes more widespread, and as new technologies accelerate the pace of change, knowledge is becoming the key to wealth creation. The capacity to create and understand knowledge allows individuals and organizations to adapt and thrive in a more turbulent environment.
- This places a premium on workers with the ability to harness the power of information and create new ideas. There is greater demand for technological expertise, problem-solving abilities and creativity. Workers need to integrate diverse bodies of knowledge and leverage them to fulfill organizational goals.<sup>3</sup>

### ***Globalization Is Creating Greater Interconnectedness and Interdependence***

- New technologies have helped to fuel increasing globalization, making it easier for people, goods and ideas to cross national boundaries. This has led to increasing global interdependence.
- The reduction of trade and investment barriers between countries has diminished the economic importance of national borders. Technology has created new production and distribution systems that allow enterprises to sell goods and services to consumers virtually anywhere in the world, and with great speed. Canadian consumers have more choice and Canadian businesses have access to new markets.
- New technology and global telecommunications (such as the Internet and satellite television) have also led to greater cultural exchange. Canadians are exposed to more information from foreign sources, and form expectations about public issues by drawing from international experiences.
- This is a source of great opportunity: fresh ideas and insights flow more freely from across the globe. But globalization is also a source of significant challenges. Greater international interdependence means that, while Canada enjoys the benefits of access to global markets and a global pool of human talent, it is also at greater risk from global economic shocks, the spread of disease, transnational crime, and illegal immigration.
- At the same time, international trade rules and economic incentives also place restrictions on governments' ability to use many traditional instruments of governance.<sup>4</sup> Canadians will need to evolve new ways of governing to retain democratic sovereignty over their country.

### ***Globalization Is Also Contributing to Greater Diversity***

- While globalization has led to increasing policy convergence and access to cultural products, it has led simultaneously to increasing diversity within societies. This includes more diverse lifestyles, standards of living, heritages, identities and world views. This diversity has the potential to either strengthen our society or erode our sense of common purpose.
- Canadians now have access to a wider variety of perspectives on public issues. This growing plurality of perspectives challenges conventional wisdom and is the source of new ideas. Dialogue is more important than ever for generating understanding of others.

- But “one size fits all” approaches to solving public problems are no longer adequate. Governments need new ways of leveraging diversity and facilitating dialogue to build social cohesion and give voice to new ideas.
- Government also needs to reconcile an emerging tension between, on the one hand, the growing interaction between people of diverse backgrounds and, on the other, the trend created by global integration towards greater uniformity in rules and standards. Within countries, there is greater diversity, but at the supra-national level, there is increasing pressure for harmonization. Diversity needs to be respected and allowed to flourish amid the new global economic order.

*These Changes Are Causing Us to Organize Ourselves Differently...*

- As in many industrialized countries, there is a decline in deference towards many traditional institutions of governance. Canadians demand a more transparent and accountable public service, as well as governance processes that are more inclusive.<sup>5</sup>
- This has caused the public service to re-evaluate the way it operates and be more responsive to the needs and aspirations of citizens. At the same time, private enterprise is also being compelled to exercise greater civic responsibility in the way it goes about its business.<sup>6</sup> The public now demands that organizations of various types respect their preferences, identities and values.
- In both the public and private sectors, organizations are delaying, downsizing and restructuring. Organizations are expected to be more responsive, flexible and efficient. Businesses have downsized to maintain profitability amid growing competition. The Public Service of Canada also restructured to maintain its fiscal integrity and save tax dollars. Everyone is compelled to accomplish more with fewer resources.
- But organizational restructuring is also driven by the changing nature of work:
  - Technology allows organizations to accomplish more with fewer resources. It frees us from rigid hierarchies and facilitates work in networks and teams.
  - Diversity and dialogue are encouraged because they are a source of new ideas and innovations.

- Relations of authority are changing. As managers become more dependent on the knowledge possessed by others, they can no longer control workers by fiat. Command-and-control is less effective than encouraging, enabling and influencing.
- Objectives and challenges are less uniform and isolated, and are more multi-disciplinary, horizontal, and integrated in nature.
- Methods of production are more flexible. The orientation of organizations is more towards greater responsiveness to customers and citizens. Organizations are required to adjust and reposition themselves continually.

*...Including the Role of Leadership*

- Leadership plays a pivotal role in this new environment. However, this is not the leadership of previous decades. Leadership now requires a more subtle and sophisticated combination of analytical and interpersonal skills. It must also be centred on learning and on leveraging knowledge.
- As well, leadership is no longer the domain of managers — it must involve everyone in the workplace. Individuals working in networks and teams are more interdependent and require new learning and leadership abilities to adapt.

## **2. Why Do We Need a Learning-Centred Public Service?**

*Many Other Knowledge Sources Are Working to Frame Public Issues...*

- In past years, the public service was the primary voice in the framing of public issues. Today, there are many other organizations actively working to frame public issues and to capture the attention of government and citizens.
- Previously, the Public Service of Canada — by virtue of its size, resources and contacts — enjoyed relatively privileged access to information. Today, however, information is readily accessible to all. Canadians and their elected decision-makers can now access advice and information on public issues from many different groups. These groups include:
  - think-tanks;

- private sector research institutes and advocacy groups;
- academic institutions; and
- non-governmental organizations.

*...Creating an Imperative to Generate Persuasive Ideas and Advice*

- If the public service is to provide advice to government and frame issues for the broader public, it needs to find new ways of adding value to widely available information. It must become a centre of excellence in knowledge of public policy issues and thereby capture the attention of decision-makers and citizens.
- Effective learning allows us to understand the growing volume of information and views, to do so quickly while sifting out what is relevant, and to articulate an interpretation that is meaningful. The public service must use learning and dialogue to put forward its arguments and make them persuasive.
- The public service needs to learn how to add value to the information that is widely available to all. It needs to bring forward the best ideas and knowledge and animate them in the minds of decision-makers and citizens.

*Learning of This Kind Requires Leveraging of Diversity...*

- Learning is required to generate excellent ideas that are both relevant and persuasive. It enables public servants to analyze complex issues, develop creative solutions, and manage complex relationships. An important aspect of this is the ability to harness and leverage diversity.<sup>7</sup>
- Adding value to information in this way means the public service cannot stand apart from societal diversity, but must embrace it.<sup>8</sup> The public service must both be inclusive and encourage dialogue that spans diversity.
  - Women and men, people from different ethnic and racial backgrounds, people from different linguistic groups, and Aboriginal Canadians do not just provide the public service with insider information about different societal groupings. Inclusiveness brings valuable knowledge and perspectives about how to work effectively; that is, how to design processes, structure tasks, create effective teams, communicate ideas, lead and reach goals.<sup>9</sup>
  - Dialogue between different peoples also promotes understanding of others. This is a necessary building-block of social cohesion.

- Dialogue allows people to better understand ideas that come from a different context and that reflect different cultural experiences. This kind of understanding is vital if the public service is to fashion messages that are persuasive to a diverse audience.<sup>10</sup>
- By bringing new perspectives to the learning process, diversity compels public servants to confront their own preconceptions and hidden assumptions. The public service must be able to draw fully on this wealth of talent and reap the benefits of bringing together a range of approaches, skills and ideas.

*...Effective Management of Interdependence...*

- Given increasing globalization and the pressures of change at the turn of the 21st century, the issues affecting society are growing more complex and interdependent. An issue such as climate change, for example, affects many interests both domestically and internationally, requires a long policy lead time, and contains a large element of scientific uncertainty.
- The public service must use learning to better understand the implications of public issues at the local, provincial, national and international levels, and develop innovative policy options that take account of the challenges posed by global integration.

*...and a Change in Organizational Attitude*

- The competition for talented people has reached an all-time high. To make the public service a workplace of choice, public servants must be given a sense of greater purpose. They must be provided an environment in which they can grow as leaders and innovators, as well as the abilities and support to apply their inventions.
- Learning in this context is understood as not just something that happens in a formal classroom setting, but is integrated into the public service's day-to-day operations. It is a change in cultural orientation — a change in organizational attitude.
- This new organizational attitude rewards curiosity, creativity, new perspectives and approaches to doing things, and the sharing and discussion of ideas. It is about instilling an ethos of learning and leadership at every level in the public service.



### 3. What Would a Learning-Centred Public Service Look Like?

#### *Organizational Learning Has Too Often Been Understood as a Parallel Activity...*

- Over the past decade, the Public Service of Canada has been the home of numerous discussions about organizational learning.
- Unfortunately, the term has too often been associated solely with parallel activities such as training sessions, open houses, new software to make available databases at one's desktop, or luncheon sessions to share insider knowledge with others in the organization.
- While such activities are important, they treat organizational learning as something apart from the real day-to-day work of the organization. As a result, the term "learning organization" has in some sense been misused, and its potential has not been fully realized.
  - In fact, organizational learning has become something of a buzzword that has been the subject of both hype and cynicism. There is a need to dispel a number of myths attributed to the concept.<sup>11</sup>
  - In particular, there are no technological fixes to organizational learning. While attempts to create an electronic communications infrastructure within the Public Service of Canada have helped improve communication and the processing of information, they alone are not sufficient to generate organizational learning.

#### *...Rather than as a Necessary Process of Cultural Change*

- Knowledge should be seen as the product of relationships and, as such, treated as contestable, imperfect and in need of constant revision. Accordingly, the creation of knowledge is fundamentally about building relationships between public servants that facilitate inquiry, dialogue, and the sharing of knowledge.<sup>12</sup>
- Knowledge is not static but created and re-created in a process of open dialogue and deliberation, in an environment in which public servants are able to speak truth to power by not withholding ideas out of fear of authority and retribution.

- Relationships of this kind are not created through structural change but require an attitudinal shift among public servants and an extensive change in the shared organizational culture.<sup>13</sup>

***Organizational Hierarchy Is Required for Accountability,  
but Need Not Dictate How Work Is Actually Carried Out***

- Organizational hierarchies are clearly necessary to ensure accountability for some things, particularly in the public service context, where the government must account for the dollars of taxpayers.<sup>14</sup>
- However, there are few reasons why the various levels of authority within a department should dictate who actually performs the work. In this sense, issues of hierarchy and authority are cultural barriers to learning.
- Learning processes in the public service were designed to deal with very different challenges than the new ones found in the 21st century:
  - Today’s stove-piped hierarchies were designed to deal with a less diverse, hurried, and complex past.
  - Existing accountability relationships do not adequately reward teamwork and the work that spans organizational boundaries.
  - The public service’s culture discourages individual leadership from taking place at every level within the hierarchy. Without this leadership you lose the inquisitiveness, open dialogue, and initiative that are now essential to learning.
- The downsizing and restructuring efforts of the past 20 years, in particular Program Review, have contributed substantially to deficit reduction and to making government more responsive and efficient. In addition, there has been significant work over the past five years to restore the government’s policy capacity, build horizontal linkages among departments, and integrate service delivery. As a result, there is much more debate and discussion of issues across traditional departmental boundaries than was the case in the past; this is particularly true at the more senior levels of government.
- In many federal departments, however, the chain of command continues to dictate that information must flow along restricted pathways from the top to the bottom of the organization, or vice versa.

- The junior analyst working deep within an organization may have access to the Internet at his or her desktop, and may attend numerous “learning events” each year, but may still face barriers to presenting a good idea because of old conventions of authority.

### ***Characteristics of the Learning-Centred Public Service***

- The learning-centred public service is not about discrete, disconnected initiatives to facilitate learning, but rather a systematic and holistic public service-wide approach to renewal. The defining features of the learning-centred public service fall at three different levels of analysis:
  - At the *level of knowledge*, public servants need a new approach to understanding and manipulating ideas.
  - At the *personal and interpersonal level*, public servants need new ways of creating and exchanging important ideas.
  - At the *organizational level*, a new culture must be developed to cultivate and energize the learning process.
- Here are more fulsome descriptions of these defining characteristics:

A Different Way of Approaching Knowledge: Public service should not treat knowledge as purely objective and absolute, or accept received ideas without scrutiny. Knowledge is about subjects, not objects. This suggests at least four things about the process of knowledge generation and learning:

- *Open Dialogue and Deliberation Are Encouraged* – Conflict should not necessarily be avoided since it can play a creative role, providing a means of challenging assumptions, revealing biases, scrutinizing evidence, and making arguments persuasive.
- *Diversity Is Embraced* – Diversity provides the learning process with new perspectives, and compels public servants to confront their own preconceptions and hidden assumptions. A more meaningful dialogue is possible with a diversity of views.
- *Knowledge Is Treated with Humility* – Public servants should be less enthralled by the knowledge they have and more humbled by the vast amounts of knowledge they do not have. Inquiry should be premised on an acknowledgment of ambiguity, uncertainty, and inadequacy within our present knowledge and analytical tools.

- *Teaching and Learning Are Ways of Seeing* – Profound learning is a continuous process and a way of seeing the world. For this to take place, public servants need to develop the intellectual tools to learn how to learn, teach what they know, and integrate important lessons into their daily work practices.

Relationships and Learning – The learning-centred public service is more than the sum of the learning of individual public servants. It is about the relationships between public servants that facilitate inquiry, dialogue, and the sharing of knowledge. Everyone in the public service is involved. There are at least four ways in which relationships play a role in the learning process:

- *Motivating and Engaging Public Servants* – The public service is a complex web of relationships and interdependencies. Learning requires the identification of these interdependencies and the creation of new forms of active engagement that bring public servants together in a common cause. There is also a need to cultivate a sense of interest and motivation among public servants, particularly those who have not actively participated in renewal efforts in the past.
- *New Soft Competencies Are Required* – Since learning is heavily reliant on relationship building, and since people now rely more on teams and networks, new interpersonal skills are required. These skills include the ability to debate, engage in constructive dialogue, negotiate, communicate ideas effectively, and manage conflict and change.
- *Leadership at Every Level* – Learning does not take place in designated centres or at the top of the hierarchy; it takes place throughout the public service. Such a learning process recognizes the knowledge and ability found within public servants at all levels in the hierarchy. The process also empowers individuals to inquire, make decisions, and lead regardless of their formal role within the Public Service of Canada.
- *An Accountability System That Rewards Teamwork* – Organizational learning in many cases requires new organizational forms, such as more horizontal organizations, networks, and teams. Existing accountability systems reward primarily individual initiative and promote career development. More attention needs to be placed on rewarding cooperation within teams and networks, as well as across boundaries. If learning takes place through relationships, then accountability systems should reflect this.

Organizational Culture – A learning-based public service requires an attitudinal shift among public servants and an extensive change in the shared organizational culture. This shift includes:

- *Dialogue That Creates* – Words, metaphors and images do more than describe — they animate and frame important subjects. The language and stories used by public servants need to make arguments meaningful and persuasive to a wider audience. The public service is less able to control information in an increasingly interconnected world and, instead, needs to take a leadership role in framing issues and developing easily understandable frameworks for interpreting information.
- *Transmission of Energy* – Important information and knowledge is given a sense of importance. The energy and enthusiasm generated during the creation of important knowledge need to be transmitted to all those who use it.
- *Instilling Shared Value and a Sense of Community* – Learning involves instilling shared values among public servants and the generation of a sense of community and common purpose. This requires trust, loyalty, respect, and cooperation. It also requires the spanning of boundaries of various kinds within the public service in order to develop a government-wide perspective.
- *Learning Is Directed Towards the Solution of Important Problems* – Learning should not simply be about improving the way isolated tasks are performed. Learning needs to be used to solve important problems and, in so doing, fulfill the public service’s primary roles: serving democratic representatives, improving delivery of services to citizens, and helping to build social cohesion and common purpose among Canadians.

#### **4. *What New Competencies Are Required to Bring About a Learning-Centred Public Service?***

*Building a Learning-Centred Public Service Begins with a Focus on Individuals...*

- Attempts to implement organizational learning too often lose momentum because they are premised on vague and highly abstract interpretations of

learning and cultural change. What is required is greater clarity about what specifically drives the transition towards a learning culture.<sup>15</sup>

- The changing nature of workplace relations — less command and control authority, more diverse and interdependent relationships, and the new premium placed on knowledge — requires a new focus on individuals as the drivers of change. The recent emphasis on structural change has tended to downplay the contribution made by individuals.
- Effecting change through individuals does not simply require a new investment in their professional knowledge, skills and abilities. More importantly, it requires that individuals acquire a sophisticated blend of personal and interpersonal competencies as well.

### *...and the New Competencies That Drive Learning and Cultural Change*

- Competencies are those identifiable characteristics of individuals that underlie effective performance or behaviour in the workplace.<sup>16</sup>
  - This definition of competencies is broader than just knowledge, skills and abilities. It also includes those individual attributes that relate more directly to organizational culture (such as personality traits, values, attitudes, styles, aptitudes, and interests).
  - This definition is also not strictly focused on improving an organization's bottom-line performance. It also includes competencies that shape culture and improve the quality of working life in the public service (such as job satisfaction, a sense of contributing to the greater public good, and career choices).
- Competencies serve several important functions in the development of the learning-centred public service.
  - Competencies help individuals reflect on their own intellectual development and seek out opportunities for growth. As self-assessment tools, competencies provide a new way of scrutinizing one's internal sources of motivation, methods of learning, and ongoing relationships with others. Gaps in one's competencies can be continually identified and filled by the individual.
  - Competencies help managers build the best teams and networks. As a tool to capitalize on the strengths of staff, competencies provide managers with a way to assemble the best people for a particular job.

- Competencies help managers become effective teachers. As a tool to overcome the weaknesses of staff, competencies provide managers with an opportunity to teach important lessons, cultivate a sense of curiosity, and bring out the full learning potential of staff.
- Competencies drive cultural change by providing the personal and interpersonal characteristics that help give communities cohesion. Public servants' competencies can be analyzed and compared to a list of competencies that promote public service learning. The gap between the two reveals new opportunities for the promotion of learning and a shift in organizational attitude.
- For competencies to serve these functions, the specific competencies that promote public service learning must be identified and explored. Managers and staff must be given analytical tools to allow them both to assess and to apply competencies on a continual basis. And accountability arrangements must be designed in a way that reinforces and rewards investments in learning competencies.

***While the Private Sector Has Long Recognized the Importance of Competencies...***

- The movement to recognize the importance of personal and interpersonal competencies has grown within the private sector since the late 1960s and 1970s. The academic literature, though oriented towards the private sector, addressed the importance of leveraging a broader array of individual competencies, the problems caused by competency gaps, and new methods of assessing competencies.<sup>17</sup>
- By the 1980s, competencies became a popular notion that gained broader acceptance among private enterprises. The aftermath of organizational delayering and technological change, in particular, reinforced the perception that individuals and their competencies make an important contribution to organizational learning.

***...the Public Sector Has Only Begun to Explore Its Application***

- The Public Service of Canada only began to address the issue of competencies in earnest during the 1990s. Over the past decade, there have been a number of exercises aimed at identifying core public service competencies, particularly competencies for senior managers.

- This public sector work on competencies has gone a long way to improve our understanding of leadership among senior officials. However, there is still a need to identify those competencies that specifically promote learning and cultural change, and to understand how competencies specifically drive such changes.

### *Competencies of the Learning-Centred Public Service*

- Competencies in the learning-centred public service do not just help individuals fulfill a particular job. Nor should competencies be used to slot individuals into simplistic categories.<sup>18</sup> Instead, individuals should be treated as complex, whole persons, and competencies are the means for promoting learning within a broader public service context.<sup>19</sup>
- While some competencies are more job-specific (such as technical competencies) and others are seen as particularly important for senior managers (or other defined categories of public servants), there is a set of competencies that cuts across job functions and hierarchical levels and which is necessary for building a learning-centred environment and thriving therein. These include such competencies as the following:
  - *Cosmopolitan/World View* – Public servants must be able to take the wider view of issues and draw from a diversity of perspectives, cultures and experiences in formulating solutions to problems.
  - *Creativity and Continuous Learning* – Public servants must be able to generate new ideas and move beyond off-the-shelf methods. There is a need for flexible thinking and the ability to integrate information from diverse sources. Reflection should take place on a continual basis.
  - *Teamwork* – Since learning increasingly takes place in teams, public servants should have the interpersonal characteristics that promote collaboration, mutual respect, and selflessness. Relationships help individuals to grow when they share each other's ideas and personal strengths. Public servants must understand team dynamics and, when part of a team falters, know how to help pull things together to further the collective interest.
  - *Teaching* – Teaching is more than the ability to relate knowledge and communicate effectively. It is about a sharing relationship that generates curiosity, supports inquiry, and provides the guidance that is necessary to give ideas substance. Public servants should be able to see the underlying potential in others and then cultivate their talents.



- *Visioning* – Public servants need to situate themselves within a broader context, see interconnections, and think about the future. They should also reflect on the environment and articulate visions that can provide a coherent guide for others. Those who view public service activities as a sequence of isolated events should be shown how the system is coupled together into a larger whole.
- *Interpersonal Relations* – It is important that public servants interact with peers, superiors, subordinates and new acquaintances in a respectful, appreciative and meaningful fashion. This includes the ability to use conflict in a constructive manner and to engage in meaningful dialogue.
- *Cognitive Capacity* – Public servants need to be able to perceive, understand and process (clarify, organize, analyse and judge) information and knowledge. Individuals should have these abilities in order to become effective learners and problem solvers.
- Individuals who possess these talents are able to thrive in the new environment by exercising self-determination and the ability to integrate, doing so without reliance on rigid structures. A system needs to be put in place so that such individuals are actively recruited, rewarded, instilled with a sense of belonging within the public service, and given the opportunity to further develop their talents. These are the people who serve as role models and catalysts for change.

## **5. How Will the Roundtable Move Us Towards Our Goal?**

- The CCMD Action-Research Roundtable on the Learning Organization is mandated “...to take stock of what is known about learning organizations, to translate this information into practical guidance, and to identify approaches that can be used by leaders to help transform their organizations into continuous learning organizations.”
- There are several previous and ongoing initiatives exploring organizational learning within the Public Service of Canada. The roundtable process is intended to complement those initiatives and lead to an exchange of ideas. As a next step in the evolution of this process, the roundtable will focus on the development of a vision and strategy by which a cultural change can be

achieved. To this end, the roundtable is expected to meet at least three or four times.

- The roundtable will also point to future avenues for research and action in pursuit of the learning-centred public service.

***Dialogue Will Not Be Focused on Technical Fixes***

- In an environment characterized by accelerated change, narrow and rigid solutions grow stale quickly. As well, given the diversity of organizations within the Public Service of Canada, overly technical or stylized solutions do not capture important details and nuances particular to many individuals and organizations. Thus, roundtable deliberations should not be focused on technical fixes. Instead, the roundtable should devote itself to a more holistic approach to generating cultural change.

## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> This roundtable complements a number of previous and ongoing attempts to understand organizational learning in the public sector.

### ***Drawing Lessons from Previous CCMD Research***

The roundtable builds on lessons learned from previous CCMD efforts, in particular:

- Canadian Centre for Management Development, *Continuous Learning: A CCMD Report*, CCMD Report No. 1, Canadian Centre for Management Development, May 1994; and
- R. Bruce Dodge, "Learning in an Organizational Setting: The Public Service Context," Management Practices No. 2, Canadian Centre for Management Development, June 1991.

### ***Drawing Lessons from Previous Public Sector Research***

The roundtable also draws from previous government research and government-sponsored research, in particular:

- The Changing Maps Roundtable (1990–97) drew many important connections between the role of government and organizational learning. For further details, see Steven A. Rosell, *Renewing Governance: Governing by Learning in the Information Age* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1999).
- The Public Service Commission has also made important strides in the field over the last decade; see Eton Lawrence, "Some Thoughts on Turning a Government Organization into a Learning Organization," Policy Research and Communications Branch, Public Service Commission, 1998.

### ***Complementing Ongoing Research Efforts within Government***

The roundtable's work also recognizes and complements a number of parallel initiatives currently under way within the Government of Canada, in particular:

- The Task Force on an Inclusive Public Service is making important inroads into the need for a more diverse public service; see Task Force on an Inclusive Public Service, *2000@2000* [brochure] (Ottawa: Treasury Board of Canada, Secretariat, 1999).
- A number of important initiatives are exploring the related field of "knowledge management"; see Interdepartmental Knowledge Management Forum, "Leveraging Public Sector Knowledge," Background Document, Knowledge Management Workshop, Ottawa, May 5, 1999; Dawn Nicholson-O'Brien, "Knowledge Management in the TBS and the Federal Knowledge Landscape," Discussion Paper, Corporate Renewal and Knowledge Management Office, Treasury Board Secretariat, April 1999; and Public Service Commission of Canada, "Leveraging Knowledge at the Public Service of Canada: A Discussion Paper," Public Service Commission of Canada, May 25, 1998.

- <sup>2</sup> There are a variety of approaches to the topic of organizational learning. This particular study emphasizes the role played by leadership, culture, interpersonal relations, and public sector governance.

For an overview of the broader organizational learning literature, see Carole K. Barnett, "Organizational Learning Theories: A Review and Synthesis of the Primary Literature,"

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- Academy of Management Review* (forthcoming); Mark Easterby-Smith, Robin Snell, and Silvia Gherardi, "Organizational Learning: Diverging Communities of Practice," *Management Learning*, vol. 29, no. 3, 1998: 259–72; Mark Easterby-Smith, "Disciplines of Organizational Learning: Contributions and Critiques," *Human Relations*, vol. 50, no. 9, 1997: 1085–1113; Mark Dodgson, "Organizational Learning: A Review of Some Literatures," *Organizational Studies*, vol. 14, no. 3, 1993: 375–94; and B. Levitt and James March, "Organizational Learning," *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 14, 1988: 319–40.
- <sup>3</sup> For empirical research documenting the effect of technology on the nature of work, see Gordon Betcherman and Kathryn McMullen, "Impact of Information and Communication Technologies on Work and Employment in Canada," Discussion Paper, No. W | 01, Canadian Policy Research Networks, 1998. For a more fulsome description of how the nature of work has changed, see James W. Cortada, ed., *Rise of the Knowledge Worker* (New York: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1998).
- <sup>4</sup> For a review of the empirical evidence documenting the decline of traditional instruments of governance, in Canada and elsewhere, see Leslie Pal, "Alternative Instruments of Governance: Models, Trends and Implications for Income Security Policy," Working Paper, Project on Governance Implications of Labour Market Polarization, Statistics Canada, 1997. For a broader discussion of the limitations of traditional instruments, see Leslie Pal, *Beyond Policy Analysis: Public Issue Management in Turbulent Times* (Scarborough: Nelson, 1997). For a review of the new approaches to governance that are gaining popularity, see B. Guy Peters, *The Future of Governing: Four Emerging Models* (Lawrence, KA: University Press of Kansas, 1996).
- <sup>5</sup> See Neil Nevitte, *The Decline of Deference: Canadian Value Change in Cross-National Perspective* (Scarborough: Broadview Press, 1996); and Ronald Inglehart, "Postmodern Values and the Erosion of Institutional Authority," in Joseph S. Nye Jr., Philip D. Zelikow, and David C. King, *Why People Don't Trust Government* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).
- <sup>6</sup> Examples of these new attitudes towards civic responsibility abound, including such things as products and services marketed as being ethical in design (e.g., ethical mutual funds); new forms of certification and auditing that reassure customers that products and services conform to certain societal standards (e.g., the protection of the environment, the prohibition against animal testing, etc.); and new forms of self-regulation to safeguard consumer privacy (e.g., privacy protection policies on e-commerce Web sites).
- <sup>7</sup> Peter Herriot and Carol Pemberton, *Competitive Advantage Through Diversity: Organizational Learning From Difference* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1995).
- <sup>8</sup> Donald G. Lenihan, "From Representativeness to Diversity: Toward a More Inclusive Public Service," unpublished manuscript, Kaufman, Thomas & Associates.
- <sup>9</sup> Thomas, David A. and Robin J. Ely, "Making Differences Matter: A New Paradigm for Managing Diversity," *Harvard Business Review*, vol. 74, no. 5, 1996.
- <sup>10</sup> William Isaacs, *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together* (Toronto: Currency, 1999).
- <sup>11</sup> Donald A. Schön, "Two Views of Organizational Learning in the Public Sector," in Steven A. Rosell, *Renewing Governance: Governing by Learning in the Information Age* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 274–91.

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- <sup>12</sup> Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998).
- <sup>13</sup> Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: the Art & Practice of the Learning Organization* (Toronto: Currency Doubleday, 1990).
- <sup>14</sup> Peter Aucoin, "The Design of Public Organizations for the 21st Century: Why Bureaucracy Will Survive in Public Management," *Canadian Public Administration*, vol. 40, no. 2, 1997: 290–306.
- <sup>15</sup> Paul G. Thomas, "Beyond the Buzzwords: Coping with Change in the Public Sector," *International Review of Administrative Science*, vol. 62, 1996, pp. 20ff. Thomas points out that initiatives premised on culture are too often exercises in abstract symbolism and overbearing attempts to create attitudinal homogeneity among public servants. This paper builds on Thomas' critique and avoids such simplistic attempts to influence culture.
- <sup>16</sup> Len W. Slivinski and Jennifer Miles, *The Wholistic Competency Profile: A Model* (Ottawa: Public Service Commission of Canada, Personal Psychology Centre, 1996), p. 2.
- <sup>17</sup> Mary Felice, *Human Resources and Competencies Over Time* (Ottawa: Public Service Commission of Canada, Policy, Research and Communications Branch, 1998).
- <sup>18</sup> John G. Burgoyne, "The competence movement: Issues, stakeholders and prospects," *Personnel Review*, vol. 22, no. 6, 1993, pp. 6–13.
- <sup>19</sup> Len W. Slivinski and Jennifer Miles, op. cit.