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Perceptions of Government Service Delivery
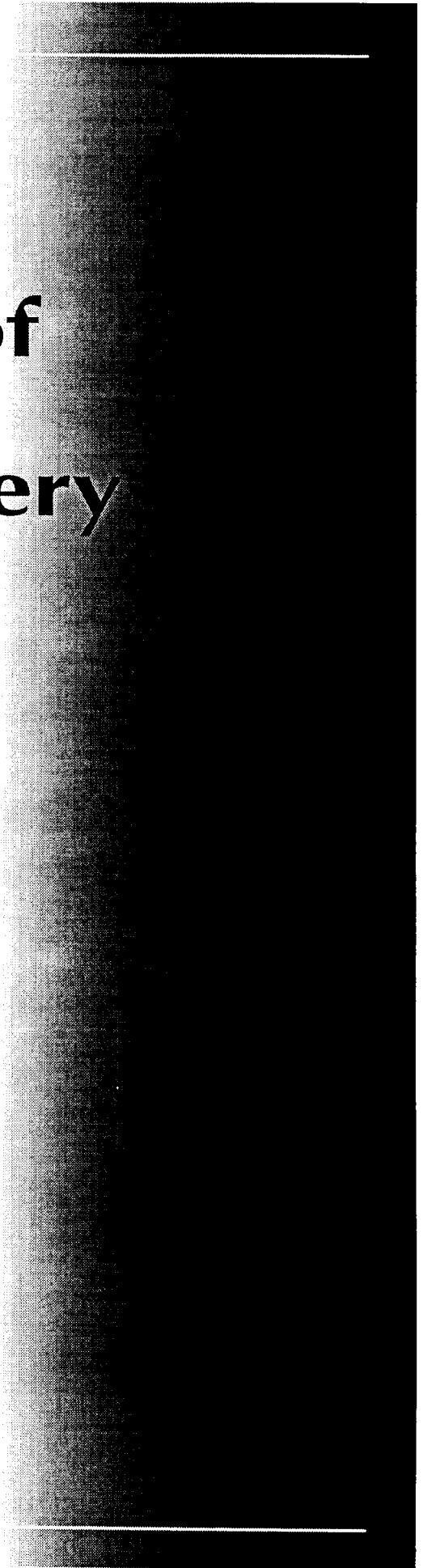
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OVERVIEW

Smiling as You Bail: Service in An Era of Hostility and Restraint

There is little need to deliver a further body blow to the reeling institution of government in Canada. Yet the current research on internal and external perceptions of service vividly reinforces the thesis that there is a crisis characterising the relationship between citizens and governments. There is strong evidence that the fundamental breakdown between citizens and governments evident in recent years continues unabated. In this research project we examine the citizen-government relationship through the lens of "service delivery". Although there are some difficulties in reducing the citizen-government connection to the realm of a service transaction there are some important insights on this problem, and the deeper problem of citizen disconnection.

The research examines the nature and quality of service interactions from the perspective of both public servants and the clients they serve. It includes a random sample of 1,200 federal public servants representing the front line, middle management and senior management. It also includes a parallel sample of 700 "clients" of these same departmental staff composed of both individual citizens and representatives of organizations (public and private sector) who have recently dealt with the departments included in the staff survey. In addition to extensive telephone surveying there were also 12 qualitative focus groups conducted with clients and public servants. Finally, these results are situated in the context of broader findings drawn from our ongoing Rethinking Government project.

Resilient Commitment to Service: A Two-Edged Sword

The surveys reveal a mixture of positive and negative findings. Running throughout this research is a disturbing gap between the views of public servants and the clients they serve. Although the gap often favours a flattering self-

image of public servants — and particularly the quality of their service efforts — there are important exceptions where public servants maintain exaggerated notions of client antipathy. A number of crucial gaps characterise this area: gaps between self-rating and client-ratings; gaps between client expectations and client experiences; and gaps between management and front line views on service. These differences are not merely curious; they define some of the crucial challenges interfering with a healthier client-government correction.

One of the more striking findings of the study is the apparent strength of the commitment to excellent service to the public. In several survey items, and in the focus groups, we found public servants united in a virtual consensus that service to the public was the essence and *telos* of their job. This notion that serving the public is what their job is all about is also linked to a conviction that, given the practical constraints, they (personally) are doing an "excellent" job of serving the public. This strong service ethic appears to be resilient compared to our 1990 Service to the Public (STP) study. In fact there is some evidence that public servants feel that service to the public, and their commitment to client service, have improved in the past several years. Other survey indicators suggest that public servants believe that they are more open and transparent and placing more emphasis on consultation than in our 1990 research. This commitment to service is clearly genuine. There are, however, some non-trivial problems underlying this broad service ethic.

There is a growing sense that the public servants feel themselves under seige. The broad based hostility to governments which has become an entrenched public mood in the nineties has clearly registered on public servants. Worse, public servants have seriously exaggerated public hostility to public servants such that almost eighty per cent believe that their clients think of them as "lazy and uncaring". In fact, slightly less than one in five clients really hold this view. Our most recent public research suggests that while public servants are not immune to the broad resentment to government, the greatest anger and alienation from government is directed to politicians and the entire institution of government. In fact, trust in federal public servants is significantly higher than trust in politicians. About 60 per cent have little trust in politicians versus only 25 per cent who have little trust in federal public servants (29 per cent have little trust in provincial public servants, suggesting that federal public servants are slightly more trusted than their provincial colleagues).

In addition to perceived public hostility, public servants are acutely aware of the impacts of retrenchment and restraint. Downsizing and other resource constraints are salient concerns raised in group discussions. All of these forces have coalesced to produce a significant decline in the overall morale of the public service. Yet in spite of these difficulties commitment to service has remained strong and perhaps even strengthened. Nearly 90 per cent of public servants agreed that "providing excellent service is what my job is all about". Many focus group participants took it as a point of honour or pride that they maintained this focus despite the travails of

public service. There was a sense that many public servants, particularly at the front line and in the regions were transferring allegiance from their Minister, Deputy or manager to their client or the public.
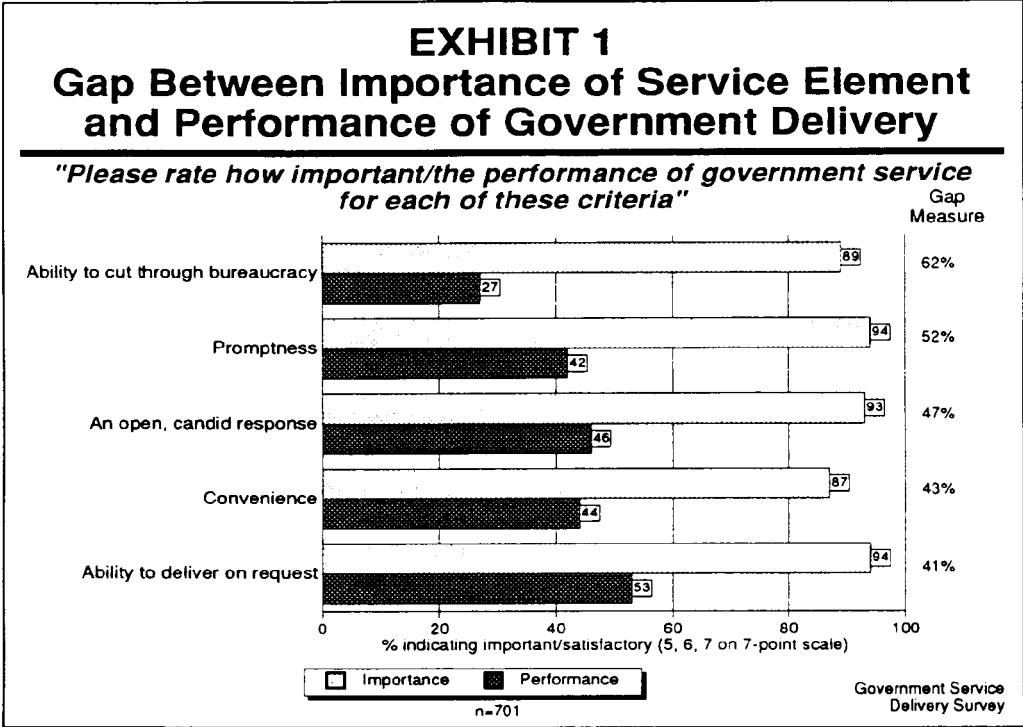
The Client Perspective: A Reality Check

Although it is impressive that this service ethic is so resilient there is also reason to be concerned by this finding. The key problem is that *the current system is not working*. Despite the sense within the public service that progress is occurring, and that service performance is great given constraints, clients do not share this flattering self-image. For whatever reasons we find that the experiences of clients mirror broader public disaffection with government as an institution. Most clients do not agree that public servants are doing an excellent job — even recognising resource constraints. In fact, when comparing client expectations on the key dimensions of the service transaction rated by clients, there is a huge gap between recent experiences and going in expectations (Exhibit 1). Clients place a premium on cutting through red tape, timeliness, transparency and openness and getting results. On all of these crucial dimensions of the service transaction client satisfaction levels are depressingly low (25 to 50 per cent satisfaction).

Without exploring demographic variations in satisfaction with government in any depth here (see the full report), it is important to note a particularly strong and disturbing age effect. Younger Canadians have a *much* more

negative view of the federal government, and the quality of service delivery. In past research we speculated that lower rates of contact and political literacy may have accounted for this antipathy. It is disconcerting to note that in a sample of clients who have recently dealt with the federal government, the negativity of young clients of the federal government may be even more pronounced (than those who have not recently dealt with government).

Even when comparing satisfaction levels on these same dimensions with the concrete example of one's last visit to a bank we note a sizable deficiency (about 30 per cent lower satisfaction). Recognizing that banks are not the most popular institutions in Canada today it is quite discouraging to note this wide performance gap. Some of the gap can be attributed to the paper burden and accountability requirements of government but this can't explain all of this shortfall (or any of the 21 per cent shortfall on "courtesy").

It is possible to chart the gap between client expectations and the record of real world delivery in greater depth. It is, however, also important to note that if only two per cent of public servants rate their personal service performance as less than "excellent" this may be an obstacle to fixing the problem. There should be no doubt about the nature and severity of the problem itself. The public perspective on the federal government, whether judged from the specific vantage point at the last service episode, or from the broader perspective of public attitudes, reveals a level of disaffection which can only be characterised as a crisis. This crisis cannot be addressed, much less solved, in a world where it is seen

EXHIBIT 1
Gap Between Importance of Service Element and Performance of Government Delivery

"Please rate how important/the performance of government service for each of these criteria"

Gap Measure

Service Element	Importance	Performance	Gap Measure
Ability to cut through bureaucracy	89	27	62%
Promptness	94	42	52%
An open, candid response	93	46	47%
Convenience	87	44	43%
Ability to deliver on request	94	53	41%

% indicating important/satisfactory (5, 6, 7 on 7-point scale)

☐ Importance   ■ Performance

n=701

Government Service
Delivery Survey

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as unavoidable and unrelated to the efforts of public servants.

Linking Morale, Planning and Innovation: Creating an Organizational Service Edge

It is useful to examine the internal connections between service and other human resource and organisational issues. Beginning with the issue of morale we offer the unsurprising but clearly documented conclusion that poor departmental morale is a ubiquitous feature of the current federal public service (with some very sizable variation across different departmental settings).

Morale in the public service was examined on both a departmental and a personal basis. Only 35 per cent of participants feel that morale in their department is good. Middle managers are particularly pessimistic in their view of departmental morale (Exhibit 2). Departmental morale varies significantly across government departments.

It is also possible to make conclusions on the state of personal employee morale and where it is going. Only a minority (26 per cent) of participants indicated that if faced with the same career decision they would not choose to become a public servant. However, tracking this question from the 1990 Service to the

Public survey reveals a significant increase in the percentage of both front line staff and middle managers indicating that they would not choose to become a public servant if given the same career decision.

It is instructive to note that while morale has clearly declined according to this indicator it also appears to be somewhat higher than for the average ratings across all other occupational groups. In a recent national survey, 30 per cent of Canadians agreed that they would *not* choose their career area again (Exhibit 3). Of those currently in employment the number is 29 per cent which is still higher than for federal public servants.

Technology, Innovation and Human Resources

There is a strong constellation of recurring organizational features which tend to appear together. This bundling of planning and human resource factors is linked to organizational settings which reveal both higher morale and a stronger service ethic. The 1990 Service to the Public research referred to these features as the PVK factor (for *p*eople *k*nowledge and *v*alues). Once again, we find a similar virtuous organizational circle at work.

EXHIBIT 2
Morale in the Public Service
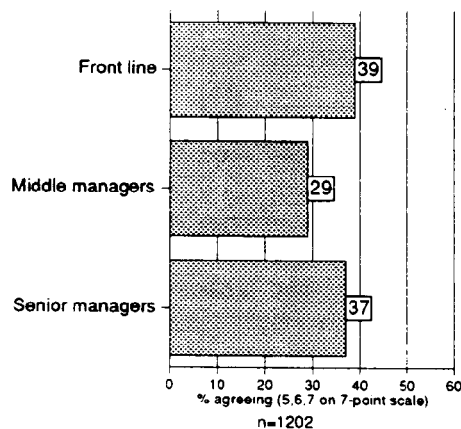
"Morale in my department is good"

"If faced with the same career decision again, I would NOT choose to become a public servant"

Front line — 39

Middle managers — 29

Senior managers — 37

0 10 20 30 40 50 60
% agreeing (5,6,7 on 7-point scale)
n=1202

Front line — 28 / 18

Middle managers — 26 / 19

Senior managers — 22 / 22

0 10 20 30 40 50 60
% agreeing (5,6,7 on 7-point scale)

☐ 1996 (n=1202)   ■ 1990 (n=1248)
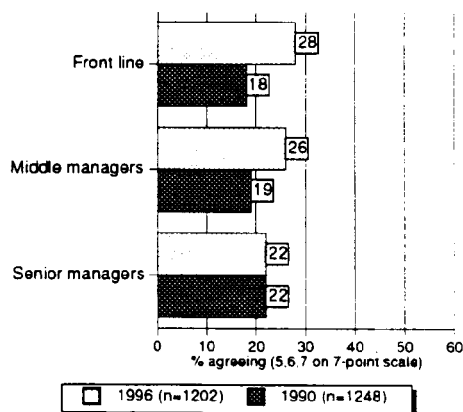
Government Service
Delivery Survey

EXHIBIT 3
Satisfaction with Career Choice

"If faced with the same career decision again, I would NOT choose to become a public servant"

"If faced with the same career decision again, I would NOT choose the career I am currently pursuing"

Agree, 26%
Neither, 12%
Disagree, 61%

n=1202

Government Service
Delivery Survey

Agree, 30%
Neither, 14%
Disagree, 52%

n=922

Rethinking Government 95-3
(preliminary spring data)

Public sector organizations which place a greater premium on innovation, technology, consultation and formal planning for better service tend to feature these elements in a mutually reinforcing pattern. Furthermore, these elements are linked to better departmental morale and a higher service ethic in our analysis of the current survey.

There are opportunities for making further gains because many of these elements are either underdeveloped or non-existent in many departments. For example, 40 per cent of departments do not have a written service plan. In itself a written plan will not transform underperforming departments into high performance organizations. On the other hand, formal planning is part of a relatively

clear constellation of better service culture ingredients. We should be seeding these practices and cultures more broadly in the public service, and reinforcing them where they are already rooted.

The Technology Dilemma

Another theme emerges from the research. The demographic skew to an older public service workforce is also linked to a mixed level of comfort and commitment to the use of new information technologies. The surveys show that public servants recognize the advantages of new technologies in improving service delivery. The research also shows that

there has been a significant expansion of technology-driven service and an expectation that this trend will continue.

There are, however, some tensions interfering with the move to more modern delivery systems. The public service is now dominated by aging survivors. Although they are not particularly technophobic this cohort does carry notions of ideal service delivery which are increasingly anachronistic. For example, the vast majority of public servants believe that in-person service is the model *par excellence* of ideal service. All other models are seen as pale emulations and most public servants believe clients would prefer in-person service (even if it is slower or more expensive).

It is the case that most clients do prefer in-person service *but* their preference is much weaker. Eighty-seven per cent of public servants believe the general public would rather deal with a person than a computer or voice mail even if it means slower service; only 68 per cent of the general public actually express such a preference. Furthermore, this preference for in-person service weakens for younger, more technologically comfortable clients (63 per cent for under 30 versus 83 per cent for over 60 years of age). It should also be noted that clients comparatively rated their last service episode at a bank much more highly than with the federal government, notwithstanding the fact that many of these transactions were with Automated Banking Machines.

There is an uneasy mixture of interests and values at work here. The notion of in-person service as the reference standard reflects the culture of an era which is passing. There is

also the recognition that new information technologies are alternatives for human labour (47 per cent of public servants are concerned that recent technological advances in servicing the public could result in their losing their job). It is not surprising that one's enthusiasm for new service technology may be muted by the recognition that the new electronic kiosk may replace you next year.

Next Steps: Repairing the Structure and the Surface

Clearly all is not well in the world of government. It is important to note that the specific transactions between citizens as clients and the federal government generate the same general reactions as the overall impressions of government as a whole. With little difference overall reactions/approval of the federal government are the same whether based on general impressions or most recent transaction.

Service in the Public Sector

The concept of service is at the heart of this discussion. The term is often treated as a primitive, a concept which is fundamental and somewhat obvious. After all government is synonymous with civil or public service. Most employees agree that service to the public is the essence of their job. But is the concept that obvious? Are discussions of service in this context somehow different than in other settings?

The answer is both yes and no. The key transactional elements of modern service are fairly obvious. They really don't vary that much whether we are talking about mufflers, fast food or legal advice. The key transactional service model is basically common to the modern consumer society. The research shows that both clients and public servants agree on the dimensions of the service model (if not the performance achieved). As the single greatest expenditure area citizens should expect at least as much of this sort of service when they visit their government office as they do when they deal with a restaurant, a courier or a bank. Clearly against these yardsticks, the results are woefully deficient.

There is, however, no doubt that there is a crucial additional element of public service which is fundamentally different than other parts of modern consumerism. The essence of public service is representing the public interest. This is the basis of Hegel's notion of the historical shift from a mercantile to civil society. According to Hegel the essence of civil society was the focus on *public interest* and the rise of a new universal class, the civil service. Clearly a more prescient notion of a universal class than Marx's proletariat, Hegel's civil service was focused on public interest and knowledge, not property, was the basic fuel of this model. Interestingly, civil servant was defined broadly to include the professional class (e.g., doctors). We find the notion of an impersonal, rational bureaucracy developed into a much more chilling conception in Weber's notion of the "iron cage". The modern world has seen a remarkable growth in the influence of the civil service. There is, however, mounting evidence that the influence

of modern bureaucracy and statism may be in decline in the post-modern world.

This post-modern era shows government and public service to be undergoing a fundamental transition. There is widespread hostility and disaffection with government. But it remains the case that the state plays a universally important role in the post-modern world and the essence of this role still revolves around the notions of public interest, reason and knowledge. The future of government may be smaller, but not necessarily less significant. Our broader research shows that Canadians remain committed to the goals of government but not the results (or value for money equation).

Is service essentially about results or the quality of the transaction? From the public's perspective both are important and they fail to see these as choices. Nearly 90 per cent of Canadians believe that "higher quality customer service" is important to producing a "result-oriented" federal government. "Accountability for measured results" is seen as the most important criteria of a list of five ideas that might improve governance in Canada (transparent decision-making was second most important).

A Foundation of Core Values and Roles

It is also important to recognize that results/goals mean something different in the minds of the public than they do in the minds of the senior decision-makers running the show. The public continues to look to the federal

government as a source of moral community. Goals and values like freedom, health and security are at the top of the public's list of core values for government. For those in charge the problem is seen in more rational and economic terms. Perhaps this is why about 85 per cent of Canadians agree that government leaders are disconnected from the values of ordinary Canadians. Any attempt to rebuild confidence in the federal government must broach the normative rupture which continues to alienate citizens from government.

Improvements to service delivery systems are important. They must be built on a solid foundation of core values and roles. Ironically, the public are less attached to the federal government as a delivery agent. As governments begin to row less and steer more they must ensure that they preserve the core roles that the public sees as crucial — guardian-protector (of public interest); partner-broker (coordinating different sectors/players); goal-setting (in cooperation with other players); and economic steward. New alternative service delivery systems must approach the client in recognition of these core roles for the federal government.

Further Suggestions

Turning to the more specific problems of service delivery it is possible to offer some more specific recommendations:

(i) The overall service culture needs a major shake-up. The system needs to be shocked out of its current state of complacency and resignation. The ubiquitous image of excellent performance (given constraints) has become a comfortable illusion. Coupled with an exaggerated sense of public hostility this work ideology is preventing recognition of the severity of the problem.

(ii) The service problems are systemic in nature and will require a radical transformation of organizational culture and delivery technologies. It is important to recall that the study shows the most alarming service shortfalls are in the areas of red tape, timeliness, openness and results. These problems are reflective of the current culture of the bureaucracy and possess enormous organizational inertia. We suggest broadening the virtuous circle of innovation, formal service planning and measurement, and openness. Top-down leadership and stressing the value and power of individual employees are also crucial elements of this transformation. Corrections to flagging employee self-esteem, and a sense of possible progress to measurable goals are part of the solution.

(iii) Benchmarking and monitoring of service performance is essential. Vague nostrums about service commitment and performance are unhelpful. This study provides a reasonable (global) benchmark of current performance levels. The government should use this as a foundation for charting improvements in service performance. These performance reports should be shared with staff and the public. They should include a real diagnostic capacity to identify causes of both poor and distinguished performance.

(iv) The government should initiate a high profile youth internship program. There are a number of compelling reasons for doing so. First, there is alarming evidence of youth disconnection from the federal government. A youth hiring program will help redress the current demographic skew to greying survivors. Young federal employees can bring vitality and innovation, technological agility and a more credible perspective on the problems of younger Canadians. Younger Canadians brought in in sizable numbers will help in shocking the system out of some of its inertia and antiquated delivery systems. Younger workers are also cheaper and contain greater representation of key equity groups. It also will render federal appeals to corporate conscience in youth hiring more credible.

CHAPTER

1

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Background and Study Objectives

The Task Force on Service Delivery Models — one of six Deputy Minister Task Forces established by Privy Council Office to address issues facing the federal public service — has a mandate to explore new ways of delivering government services to citizens. The present research was conducted to support the Task Force's examination of models of government service delivery. Specifically, the primary purpose of this study was to examine federal public servants' understanding and perceptions of client service, in order to determine what these perceptions are, the influences that shape them, and whether perceptions have changed or evolved in any way in recent years, particularly since Public Service 2000. A comparison with client views about service and their interactions with public servants rounded out this exploration.

Examinations of public service delivery date back to the 1960s when it was suggested that policy making and service delivery are different activities. In light of the current fiscal situation, this differentiation is of even greater significance for the public service of the 1990s.

Recently, the Public Service 2000 (PS 2000) initiative placed a strong emphasis on the provision of better service to the public as a part of public service renewal. In our 1990 *Survey of Public Service Perceptions of Service to the Public*, conducted for PS 2000, we found that the federal public service exhibits several key elements of a strong service culture. For instance, the survey results indicated: a strong level of commitment to serving the public, particularly among front line staff; considerable departmental support for serving the public, though the notion of exceeding clients' expectations for service quality was not widely encouraged; and strong support among managers for consultations with the public. On the other hand, there was evidence to suggest that: the communication of departmental values regarding service (from senior management down to middle management and front line staff) was not consistently effective; there was some confusion regarding *who* public servants serve (the public versus their Minister and the government) and uncertainty with respect to the best strategies for improving service; and there was a lack of clear departmental standards and systems for evaluating quality of service and client satisfaction.

Moving beyond the PS 2000 initiative, political and fiscal pressures have demanded both increased efficiency and better service, as well as a rethinking of the role of the federal government in service delivery. Ekos' recent research indicates an openness on the part of the Canadian public to new forms of government service delivery. Single wicket offices, some forms of user pay and sectoral partnerships are three of a series of innovations which are quite acceptable to citizens (*Rethinking Government* 1994). Subsequent research suggests that Canadians' expectations of the federal government are declining and that Canadians expect the federal government to form smarter partnerships with the provinces, businesses, and other players. Indeed, when asked who should be primarily responsible for various activities traditionally performed by government (i.e., determining policy and goals, providing funding, providing services) across 13 priority areas (e.g., unemployment, health care, job training), Canadians assigned a high level of responsibility to non-traditional

players, such as business, non-governmental organizations and individual citizens (*Rethinking Government* 1995).

These findings suggest that other levels of government and non-traditional players have an important role to play in improving the efficiency and effectiveness of service to the public. The findings also indicate that a rethinking of traditional public service delivery systems is necessary and that new models, relationships and partnerships are required. A shift in attitude must be made with respect to public service delivery which focuses efforts on the client. This involves changing both structure and reward systems in the public service to create an environment which cuts across departmental and jurisdictional boundaries and provides services from a client point of view.

In trying to achieve this horizontal, client-focused service environment, the Task Force on Service Delivery Models can draw upon the models already in place in both the private and the public sectors. The experiences of retail and manufacturing firms in the area of service delivery (e.g., Total Quality Management, Integrated Checkouts) can be instructive. Recent initiatives in the public sector, such as special operating agencies and single window offices, can also offer useful information in the Task Force's quest for superior public service.

In addition to drawing on the many experiences and lessons about service delivery models already in existence, there was a need to collect data on federal public servants' attitudes toward service, and whether these perceptions have changed in recent years. In this research, the views of public servants were compared with the perceptions of a sample of clients of public sector service, and any gaps between those providing and those receiving government service were identified. The specific issues examined in this study are presented in the next section.

1.2   Study Issues

The Task Force on Service Delivery Models required research to support a thorough examination of the following issues:

❑ public servants' and clients' personal understanding of elements of service to the public;

❑ elements of service that are encouraged by management within government departments;

❑ commitment, values and attitudes toward service to the public;

❑ perceptions of senior bureaucrats, middle managers, and front line staff regarding public sector service;

❑ expectations and key service criteria of the public/clients of government service, and the degree to which these are congruent with the expectations and criteria of public servants;

❑ changes in perceptions of client service since 1990;

❑ morale and self-perceptions of public servants, the public's perceptions of public servants, and their effect on service delivery;

❑ forces that help or hinder the development of a client service culture in the federal public service; and

❑ visions of the future of government service delivery, including the role of technology, the one-stop shopping concept, partnerships and other models of service delivery.

CHAPTER

2

METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this research involved a telephone survey of 1,202 federal public servants and 701 clients of government service, as well as 12 focus group discussions with public servants and clients. The methodological approach for the surveys and focus groups is described in this chapter of the report. A more detailed account of the survey methodology can be found in Appendix A.

2.1   Surveys

Two (2) survey instruments were designed (although considerable overlap exists between them): one (1) for the three levels of the public service examined in this study (i.e., senior and middle managers and front line staff), and one (1) for the general public/clients of government service. These questionnaires are presented with annotated results in Appendix B. The instruments were designed on the basis of the issues outlined by the Task Force. In addition selected items from our 1990 PS 2000 Service to the Public (STP) survey instruments were reproduced in the present research to track changes in perceptions and expectations regarding government service. An initial meeting with the client helped us refine the study issues and led to the development of the draft survey instruments. The survey

instruments were designed to last an average of approximately 20 minutes. Each questionnaire was thoroughly tested prior to commencement of the survey. Both surveys were conducted during February and early March 1996.

Eight federal government departments considered to be heavily involved in service delivery were targeted for inclusion in the study. These are also departments which were prominently featured in the sampling for the 1990 study. These departments are:

- ❏ Revenue Canada;
- ❏ Human Resources Development Canada;
- ❏ Industry Canada;
- ❏ Health Canada;
- ❏ Transport Canada;
- ❏ Environment Canada;
- ❏ Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada; and
- ❏ Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

The Deputy Minister in each respective department was sent a letter from the consultant, providing information about the objectives of the study and the proposed methodology, and asking for departmental support for the exercise. Once approval was received by each department, Ekos worked closely with departmental representatives throughout the design and data collection phases.

(a) Survey of Public Servants

For the purposes of sampling federal government employees, the Official Languages Information System (OLIS), maintained by Treasury Board was accessed. Although this data base had been recently discontinued (March 1995), it was still a fairly current source of information related to employees in a position of serving the public. All employee classifications were sampled, in both the National Capital Region (NCR) and all other regions of the country.

Senior managers were defined primarily as those holding EX positions. Middle managers were defined according to Treasury Board's management or mid-level classifications (Appendix A presents a full listing of middle management classifications included in the initial sample). Front line staff were defined according to Treasury Board's classification of junior positions (see Appendix A). These are also the group definitions used in the 1990 study.

Public servants with classifications defined as either senior and middle management were oversampled to ensure a sufficient number of cases in the analysis. Of the 1,202 interviews conducted, 241 were with senior managers, 388 with middle managers and 573 with front line staff.

The survey also stratified cases by department, again to ensure sufficient cases from each for the analysis. Since telephone numbers were unavailable on the OLIS data base, the consultant relied on federal government directory listings, as well as internal listings from each department. In some departments, employees were more difficult to locate than in other departments, which affected the final sampling distribution. In addition, there were communications difficulties within Revenue Canada which resulted in a comparatively small number of cases from this department. The final distribution of public servants in the survey, by department is:

❑ Industry Canada 236
❑ Human Resources Development Canada 201
❑ Health Canada 163
❑ Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada 162
❑ Transport Canada 151
❑ Environment Canada 126
❑ Citizenship and Immigration Canada 93
❑ Revenue Canada 70

❑ TOTAL   1,202

(b) Survey of Clients/General Public

Clients were defined in the broadest sense as anyone outside of the federal public service. This included (1) members of the general public, and (2) organizations from the private sector, non-profit sector, or local or provincial government. In the case of members of the general public, considerable difficulties were encountered in trying to access client listings from departments because of privacy issues. In order to circumvent these difficulties and avoid asking departments to release personal information about individuals, a random selection of clients was interviewed through a process of screening the general public. Members of the general public were included in the client survey only if they had had dealings with a federal government department — either in-person, by telephone, by mail, through the INTERNET or kiosks — in the last two years. Most general public respondents were clients of Revenue Canada, Human Resources Development or Citizenship and Immigration. While most client organizations were contacted through targeted lists provided by Transport Canada, Health Canada, Environment Canada and Industry Canada[1], all organizations selected were exposed to the same screening criteria (i.e., contact with a federal government department within the last two years). A total of 701 clients were interviewed, including 348 client organizations and 353 members of the general public.

2.2   Focus Groups

We conducted 12 focus group sessions, including groups with middle and senior managers in the public service, front line staff, and the general public/ clients. Typically, the group discussions involved 10 participants and lasted for two hours. Discussions were held in Ottawa, Toronto, Montreal, Halifax and Vancouver.

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1. Clients of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada were screened from general listings of businesses within the farming, food manufacturing and food processing industries.

Three moderator's guides were designed based on the study issues, one for each of the three types of participants (see Appendix C). All guides had a prominent forward looking component designed to encourage participants to delineate their future vision of government service delivery. The guides were also designed to probe for more detail and explanation underlying the survey results, as well as to allow a comparison of views on key study issues across the three participant types.

Potential participants were sought during the telephone survey interviews, during which respondents were asked if they would be interested in attending a group discussion on the topic of government service delivery. Outside the NCR, the survey sample was supplemented with additional names of employees drawn from the government directory.

All focus group sessions were audio tape recorded and summary notes prepared. The analysis of the findings was qualitative. The notes were reviewed and synthesized to present the major themes in participants' responses to questions. Quotations illustrative of major points of view were noted. The overall findings from the focus groups are presented where appropriate in the next two chapters to supplement and help explain the survey results.

CHAPTER

3 PUBLIC SERVANT PERCEPTIONS

This chapter details the findings from the survey of public servants. Findings from the focus groups with public servants are also presented to help illustrate and explain the survey results. A variety of issues are examined in this chapter (e.g., understanding of service, the influence of technology on service delivery, morale in the public service, innovations in government service). The findings are broken down across a number of demographic and attitudinal characteristics (i.e., different levels of government, level of education, personal and departmental morale, etc.). For purposes of comparison, selected findings from the survey and focus groups with clients/the general public are also presented in this chapter (the remainder are discussed in the following chapter). In addition, selected findings from the 1990 Service to the Public (STP) study[2] are highlighted to allow a comparison of perceptions and practices in 1990 with those in 1996.

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2. *Survey of Public Service Perceptions of Service to the Public — Final Report.* Ekos Research Associates, 1990.

3.1 Behavioural Profile

Respondents were first asked what percentage of their work time is devoted to dealing with the public. In interpreting these findings, it must be noted that the survey sample of public servants was designed to *over-represent* staff involved in service delivery. Overall, respondents reported spending 49 per cent of their time serving the public (compared to 33 per cent in the 1990 STP study). Average time spent providing service to the public is greatest for front line staff (57 per cent), followed by middle management (50 per cent) and senior management (26 per cent). Involvement in service delivery, as reported in the 1990 STP research, was similar to the present findings for front line staff and senior managers (50 per cent and 22 per cent, respectively) but substantially lower among middle managers (28 per cent in 1990 compared to 50 per cent in 1996). Respondents from outside the National Capital Region, those with less education, and those with a written plan for service delivery devote the greatest amount of time to dealing with the public.

Similar to the results of the 1990 STP study, the most frequent type of contact with the public is over the telephone (58 per cent), followed by direct face-to-face contact (23 per cent), and written contact (15 per cent). These findings are displayed in Exhibit 1. Front line staff, those with less education, and those who do not have a written plan for service delivery are the most likely to interact with the public through the telephone.

Public servants who participated in the focus groups identified a major trend away from personalized service towards the use of the telephone and other electronic media in dealing with the public. Many agreed that one of the challenges they face in managing this change is in making the most of the few remaining opportunities for face-to-face contact. For some, meeting this challenge means isolating those points in the service delivery transaction in which face-to-face contact is most desirable to the client and most effective for both parties: "We use to always meet our

EXHIBIT 1
Contact with the Public

"In your work what type of contact do you most often have with the public?"

Telephone 58
Direct face-to-face 23
Written contact 15
Contact using information technology 3

0 10 20 30 40 50 60

n=1202

Government Service
Delivery Survey
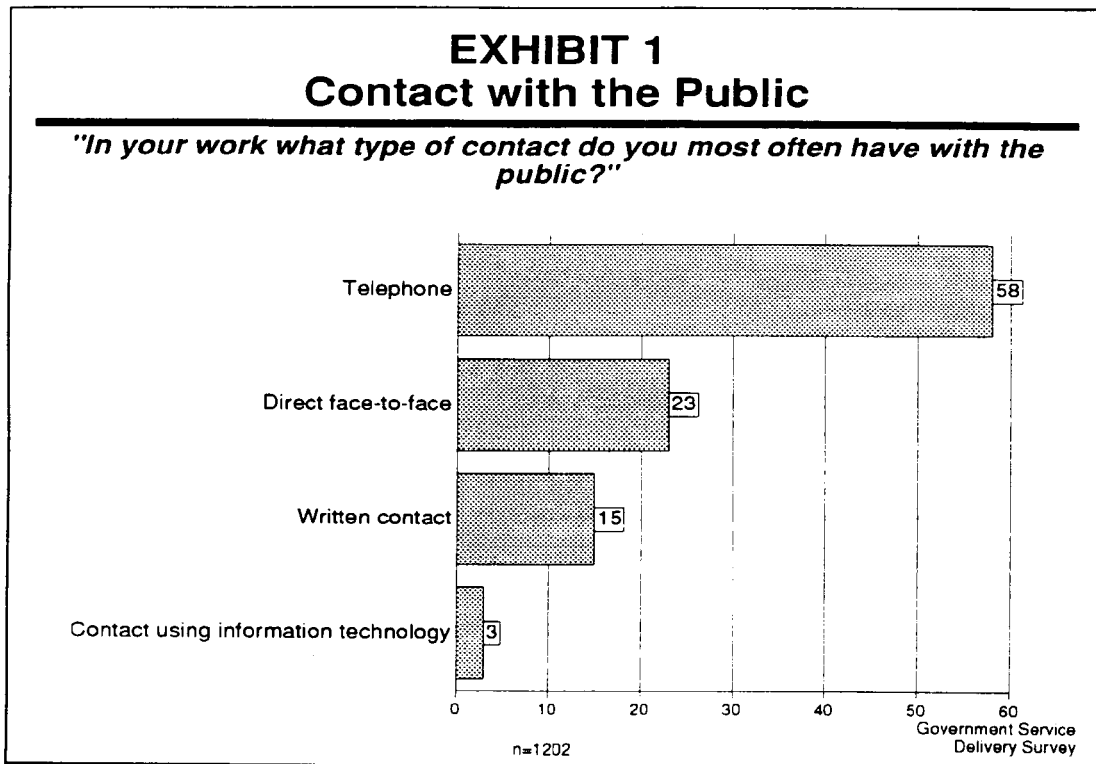
clients each time they wanted to discuss something with us, but this was expensive because we had to fly. We now use tele-conferencing a lot. We see them less, but when we do see them the meetings are more important and productive". (Middle manager — Montreal)

Participants were also asked what type of service they most often provide to the public. Information, advice or data services are provided most often to the general public (Exhibit 2). Few sub-group differences were observed with respect to those most likely to offer information, advice or data support; however, senior managers are much more likely than their counterparts to provide consultation, negotiation or complaint resolution services (34 per cent).

Sixty per cent of respondents indicated that their unit has a written plan for service delivery. Front line staff, respondents with less education and those with higher morale, both on a personal basis (e.g., more likely to disagree that if faced with

EXHIBIT 2
Type of Service Delivered

"In your work, what type of service do you most often provide?"

Information, advice or data	48
Consultation, negotiation or complaint resolution	23
Regulatory services, licensing or enforcement	22
Financial service or cheques	5

0   10   20   30   40   50

Government Service
Delivery Survey

n=1202
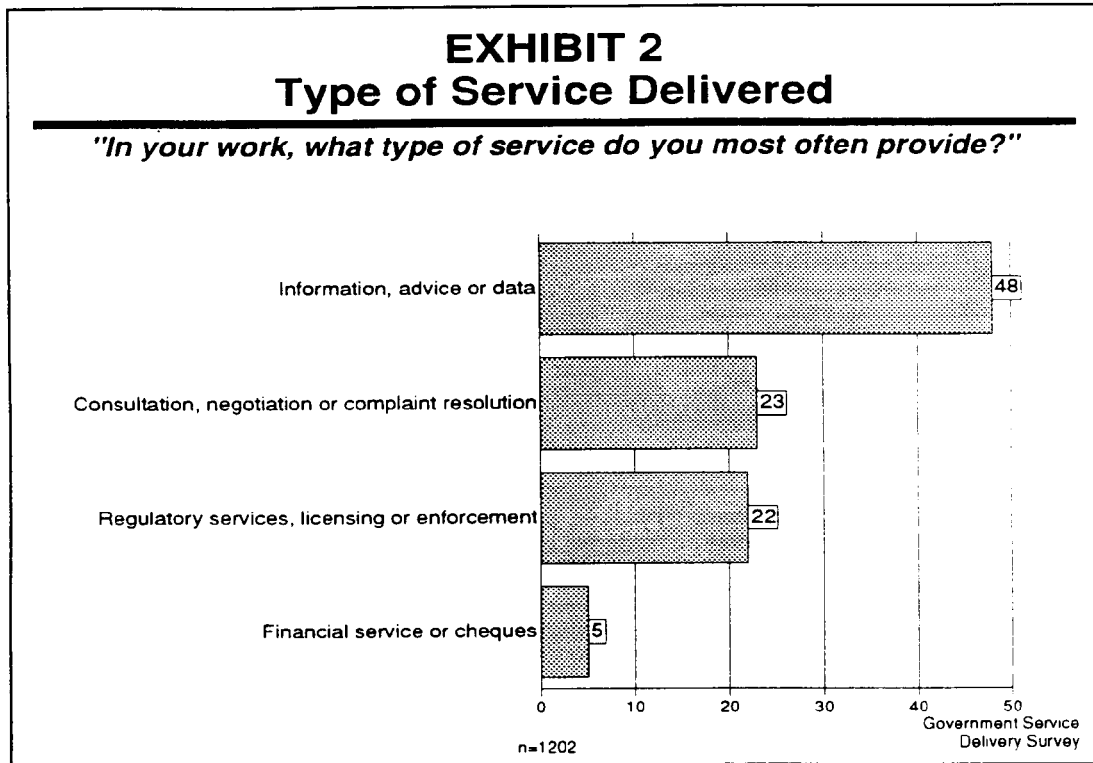
the same career decision they would not choose to become a public servant) and on a departmental basis (e.g., more likely to agree that morale in their department is good) are the most likely to indicate their department has a written service delivery plan. As will be demonstrated throughout this report, the presence of a written plan for service delivery, and an innovative service delivery mechanism (described in detail in Section 1.5) are strong predictors of service ethic, beliefs about support from management and higher morale in the public service.

The existence of a written plan varies greatly across the eight departments included in this study. (The departments are labelled A, B, C, D, E, F, G and H in order to preserve the confidentiality of the findings.) Fully 74 per cent of respondents from department B indicated that their unit has a written plan for service delivery; in department D only 48 per cent reported having such a plan. All other departments fall in between these two extremes. Further departmental variations are presented throughout the chapter.

3.2 Understanding of Service to the Public

Front line staff were asked to rate the importance of a variety of elements (i.e., reliability, courtesy, etc.) to their understanding of service to the public in government (Exhibit 3).

EXHIBIT 3
Tracking Elements of Service to the Public
(Front Line Staff Only)

"Following is a list of qualities which some people see as elements of service to the public in the public sector. For each quality, could you please rate its importance to your personal understanding of service to the public in government."

Element	1996 (n=573)	1990 (n=425)
Courtesy	93	95
Promptness	87	84
Ensuring clients understand the program or policy affecting them	86	89
Responding in an open, candid way	86	76
Ensuring service is convenient and accessible	82	85
*Exceeding the client's expectations for service delivery/quality of service	78	56
Empathy or putting yourself in the public's shoes	76	74

% indicating important (6,7 on 7-point scale)

* Question wording changed — comparability questionable

Government Service Delivery Survey

Most of the items presented were rated as very important by the majority of respondents, suggesting that front line staff share a common understanding of what comprises good service. Moreover, these results are similar to client/general public views on elements of service (presented in the next chapter), indicating that public servants and clients have a shared model of good service. These findings on public servants' understanding of service are fairly consistent with those found in the 1990 STP study, with the exception of exceeding client expectations for service delivery/

quality of service, which has increased greatly in importance since 1990 — from 56 per cent to 78 per cent (although it should be noted that the term "service delivery" was used in the 1996 survey rather than "quality of service" which was used in 1990).

Few differences were exhibited with respect to sub-group breakdowns across these elements, except that less educated respondents were more likely than their counterparts to indicate that each of the elements is important to their understanding of service.

In the focus groups, public servants reflected different perspectives when defining their understanding of service to the public. In most cases, this was a function of the type of activity they were involved in (e.g., enforcement vs. information provision). Whatever their perspective, however, a number of key common points emerged across the focus groups. They included the following:

❑ Public servants are confident that they know what quality service consists of.

❑ Over the past decade or so, a service ethic has taken hold in their group.

❑ Public servants in general, and front line staff in particular, are more likely to approach a transaction from a client perspective than before: "As auditors, we use to enforce the rules and regulations and that was it. Our job was to catch people. Now we see our job as helping business comply with the rules. Seeing these people as clients now is different and some people still are not use to it, but it's worked out pretty well." (Middle manager — Halifax)

3.3 Support for Service to the Public

In order to get a sense of any gaps between management and front line staff with respect to support for the various elements of service to the public, both front line staff and managers were asked to rate the extent to which management encourages each of the elements of service (Exhibit 4).

EXHIBIT 4
Support for Service to the Public

"To what extent does your management/do you and other managers encourage this type of behaviour in staff contacts with clients?"

Courtesy	87 / 90
Reliability	82 / 89
Promptness	78 / 78
Responding in an open candid way	67 / 77
Ensuring clients understand the program as policy affecting them	74 / 78
Ensuring service is convenient and accessible	72 / 72
Empathy or putting yourself in the public's shoes	61 / 63
Exceeding the client's expectations for service delivery	60 / 55
Regular reviews of service standards	48 / 34

0   20   40   60   80   100
% indicating important (6,7 on 7-point scale)

☐ Front line   ■ Management

Government Service Delivery Survey

n=1202

As can be seen, for the most part front line staff strongly believed that these elements are encouraged by management. However, only a minority felt that regular reviews of service standards are encouraged by management.

Few changes have occurred over the past several years with respect to management's support for the elements of service to the public (Exhibit 5); however, encouragement for responding in an open, candid way has increased modestly over the past five years — from 65 per cent to 77 per cent. (Exhibit 5)

In the focus groups, discussion around the issue of responding in an open and candid way produced interesting results. A consensus emerged on two facets of this question. First, participants at all levels agreed that service delivery today is conducted in a significantly more open and transparent manner than before. Participants gave numerous examples to illustrate how employees do not limit themselves to responding to a request in a narrow or minimal way. Rather, they aim

EXHIBIT 5
Tracking Support for Service to the Public
(Front Line Staff Only)

"To what extent does your management/do you and other managers encourage this type of behaviour in staff contacts with clients?"

Category	1996	1990
Courtesy	87	85
Promptness	78	78
Responding in an open, candid way	77	65
Ensuring clients understand the program or policy affecting them	74	77
Ensuring service is convenient and accessible	73	75
Empathy or putting yourself in the public's shoes	61	55
Exceeding the clients' expectations for service delivery/quality of service	60	54

0   20   40   60   80   100

☐ 1996 (n=1202)   ▩ 1990 (n=1248)

Government Service
Delivery Survey
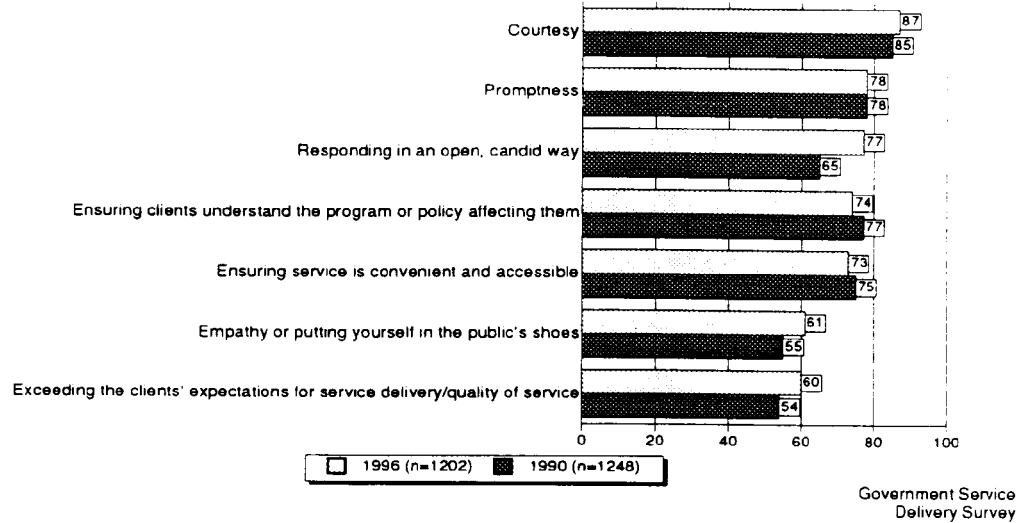
to respond in a manner which allows the client to *understand why*, for example, a certain decision was made. The second point of consensus revolved around the question of openness as it relates to managing client expectations. Front line staff and middle managers in particular expressed frustration and concern at not being able to explain to clients/the general public that service levels and quality have been negatively affected due to budget cuts: "We have half the staff we did three years ago and the same amount of calls. People want to now why they have to wait longer for their call to be answered, but we are not allowed to tell them about the [budget] cuts. It makes *us* look bad and it's demoralizing!" (Middle manager — Vancouver)

Respondents were also asked a variety of attitudinal questions aimed at examining management's support of service to the public (Exhibit 6). Public servants indicated that, generally speaking, they are supported by their managers in efforts to serve the public, particularly with respect to listening to employees' views and encouraging suggestions about how to improve service to the public.

EXHIBIT 6
Support for Service to the Public

My manager is interested in hearing about my views on how to improve service to the public

This department encourages employees to make suggestions aimed at improving service to the public

Managers treat employees in the same courteous, respectful manner in which they expect employees to treat clients

I am encouraged to make on-the-spot decisions to ensure my clients feel well served even if it means departing from conventional procedures

My department supports an entrepreneurial spirit when it comes to delivering service

Regular meetings are held in my unit to discuss methods of service delivery

Managers establish clear performance goals for service delivery in this department

This department has clear complaint-management procedures and guidelines

In this department good work is recognized on a frequent and timely basis

0   20   40   60   80   100

■ DK/NR   ■ Disagree (1-3)   ▨ Neither (4)   ▢ Agree (5-7)

n=1202

Government Service
Delivery Survey

Senior management, those with less education, those with higher personal and departmental morale, those with a written plan for service delivery and those with an innovative service delivery mechanism expressed the most positive attitudes about support from management.

The focus group findings suggest that front line staff and middle managers feel that they receive strong support for serving the public from their immediate supervisor and senior manager. In contrast, many identified a lack of support from the most senior departmental officials, their department and the federal government.

3.4 Commitment, Values and Attitudes Toward Service to the Public

(a) Service Ethic and Self-Rating of Quality of Service

There is evidence of a strong service ethic in the federal public service (Exhibit 7). Overall, fully 95 per cent of respondents felt that given available resources, they are doing an excellent job of serving the public. Eighty-eight per cent felt that providing excellent service to the public is what their job is all about. Eighty-four per cent indicated that given available resources, their department is doing an excellent job of serving the public.

EXHIBIT 7
Basic Attitudes and Self-Rating of Quality of Service

Given available resources, I think I am doing an excellent job of serving the public

1 2 95

For me, providing excellent service to the public is what my job is all about

5 6 88

Given available resources I think my department is doing an excellent job of serving the public

9 7 84

0   20   40   60   80   100

■ Disagree (1-3) ▨ Neither (4) ☐ Agree (5-7)

n=1202

Government Service
Delivery Survey

Ekos Research Associates Inc., 1996

Generally, across all three questions the following sub-groups were the most likely to express a commitment to service to the public:

- ❏ front line staff;
- ❏ respondents from outside the National Capital Region;
- ❏ less educated;
- ❏ non-anglophones;
- ❏ higher morale (both departmental and personal);
- ❏ those who have a written plan for service delivery; and
- ❏ those with an innovative service delivery mechanism.

The survey findings were mirrored in the focus groups. Front line staff and middle managers pledged their commitment to serving the public, while senior managers concurred that their employees are very devoted to serving the public: "Frankly, given all of the changes and cut backs that have gone on, I'm sometimes astounded that [the level of commitment] is so high." (Senior manager — Ottawa) Public servants explained their high level of commitment as stemming from "pride", "representing Canada" and from the positive feedback they received from satisfied clients. In fact, positive client feedback was identified as a major source of motivation in the relative absence of extrinsic rewards such as pay raises and promotions: "There havn't been raises in five years and the possibility of advancement is pretty limited right now, so the main reward I get is the satisfaction from helping my clients."

Despite the positive commitment to service expressed by respondents, there is evidence that these views of public service delivery are somewhat self-lionizing. The clients of the public servants (the general public) were far less likely to feel that the public service espouses this strong service ethic. These gaps in service performance are discussed in complete detail in the next chapter of this report.

Commitment to public service also varies somewhat by department. Fully 96 per cent of respondents from department B indicated that providing excellent service to the public is what their job is all about, whereas just 82 per cent of respondents from department H expressed the same degree of service ethic.

(b) Positive Influences on Service to the Public

A range of positive influences on service to the public exist in the federal public service, as summarized in Exhibit 8.

EXHIBIT 8
Positive Influences on Service to the Public

I have a very clear understanding of exactly who my clients are

I try to think about customer service from the point of view of the client rather than the perspective of the department

I do not have the resources necessary to provide clients with good service

Getting my job done within the available time and budget must take priority over serving the public

Gung-ho service to the public is likely just another passing fad in the public service

In this department, providing service to the public is more lip service than a real priority

I find it irritating to deal with enquiries from the public which should have nothing to do with me

Legend: ■ DK/NR ■ Disagree (1-3) ▦ Neither (4) ☐ Agree (5-7)

n=1202

Government Service
Delivery Survey

Participants believe they have very clear understanding of exactly who their clients are and that they try to think about customer service from the point of view of the client rather than the department. Participants strongly disagree that they are irritated with enquiries from the public which should have nothing to do with them. Public servants also disputed the notion that providing service to the public is more lip service than a real priority.

Generally, across all of these positive influences, the following sub-groups were the most likely to agree with the propositions:

❏ senior management;
❏ less educated;
❏ higher morale (both department and personal);
❏ those who have a written plan for service delivery; and
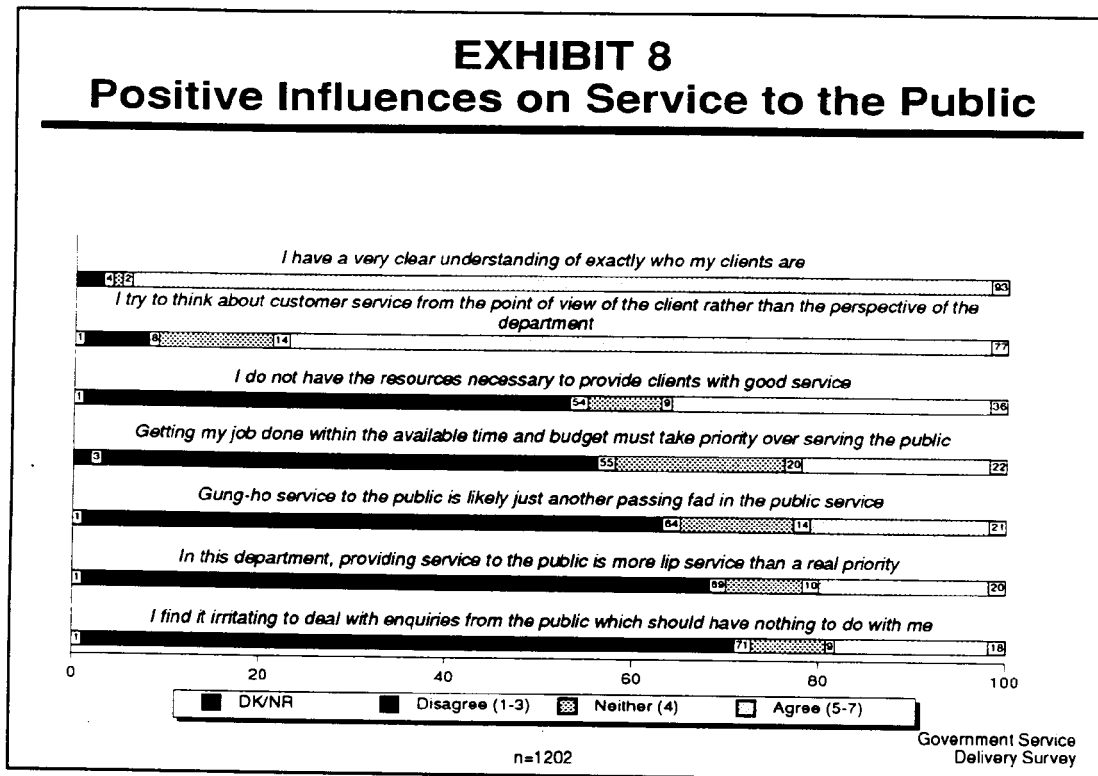❏ those with an innovative service delivery mechanism.

These positive influences were found to be significantly correlated with morale in the public service, both departmental and personal.

A number of the issues highlighted in Exhibit 8 were also discussed in the focus groups. As in the survey, participants indicated that they have a solid grasp of who their clients are. For the most part, the client was identified as the Canadian public at large (e.g., in the case of regulators/inspectors) and/or the individuals with whom they have contact. Several participants noted that they often get telephone enquiries that are not within their area of responsibility, and that an important aspect of good service is to help direct the person to the appropriate government contact.

(c) Troubling Forces/Threats to Service to the Public

In addition to positive influences, the findings reveal a number of troubling forces which may impede service to the public (Exhibit 9).

Three in four respondents believed that many members of the general public stereotype public servants as lazy and uncaring. This belief was particularly pronounced among front line staff (78 per cent), less educated respondents, those with lower morale (both departmental and personal), and those whose department uses a traditional service mechanism (87 per cent).

EXHIBIT 9
Troubling Influences/Threats to Service to the Public

My sense is that many members of the general public stereotype public servants as lazy and uncaring

| 14 | 9 | 77 |

Unnecessary forms, rules and bureaucratic thinking are being eliminated in this department

| 33 | 15 | 50 |

0　　　20　　　40　　　60　　　80　　　100

■ Disagree (1-3)　▨ Neither (4)　☐ Agree (5-7)

n=1202

Government Service
Delivery Survey
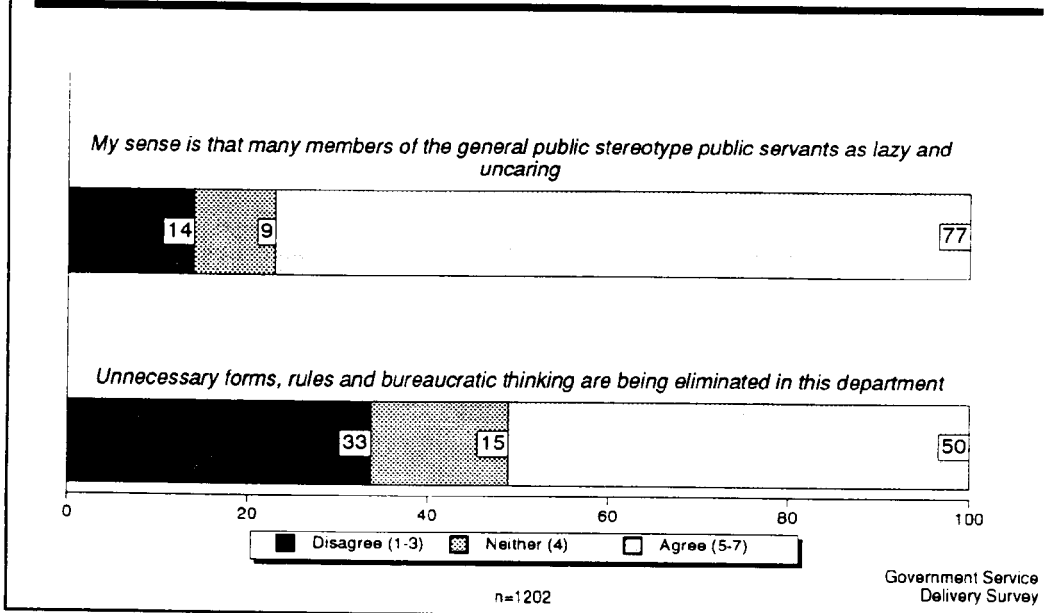
In the focus groups, public servants spoke about this issue in more subtle terms. While they tended to agree that the popular conception of public servants is largely pejorative, they were also quick to note that the majority of their clients and members of the public with whom they deal do not harbour this stereotypical view. This finding was generally corroborated in the discussions with members of the public, where participants were more likely to describe specific transactions with federal public servants in more positive terms, compared to their general negative impression of government services and public servants.

Another troubling finding is that only about half (48 per cent) of front line staff believed that unnecessary forms, rules and bureaucratic thinking are being eliminated in their department. Senior management (61 per cent), less educated respondents, those with higher morale (both departmental and personal), those who have a written plan for service delivery (53 per cent), and those with an innovative

service delivery mechanism (59 per cent) were the most likely to believe that bureaucratic procedures and thinking are being eliminated in the government.

The existence of too many unnecessary forms, rules and bureaucratic processes was identified by focus group participants as a key barrier to the development of innovative service delivery models and the improvement of existing systems. Public servants at all levels, but particularly middle managers, said there are too many internal requirements to "feed the bureaucracy". In the regions they spoke of having to meet the requests of Ottawa, while in Ottawa they referred to sometimes onerous and often seemingly superfluous central agency requirements. The requirements and process for submitting travel claims and the need to obtain signing authority from a number of levels in order to proceed with fairly ordinary tasks were given as mundane examples of this key barrier.

(d) The Influence of Technology

Respondents were asked a variety of questions aimed at determining their views about how technological advances have influenced their ability to serve the public. These findings are displayed in Exhibit 10.

Respondents expressed positive views about the influence of technology on service delivery. Over three in four believed that technological advances have greatly improved their ability to deliver service, and that a commitment to training exists to ensure employees have the skills to use all the technology available to serve the public. As many disagreed as agreed with the notion that technological advances could result in personal job loss. Respondents with higher personal and departmental morale, a written plan for service delivery and an innovative delivery mechanism, younger respondents and those owning a computer, fax or modem were the most supportive of technological advances. On the other hand, less educated respondents, those with lower personal morale, and those without a computer, fax or modem were the most likely to feel threatened by technological advances.

EXHIBIT 10
The Influence of Technology

I believe the general public would rather deal with a person than a computer or voice mail, even if it means slower service

```
8  4                                                    87
```

Recent technological advances have greatly improved my ability to deliver service to the public

```
12    10                                                77
```

There is a commitment to training employees in this unit to ensure/employees in this unit have the skills to use all available technology, techniques and tools in the department to serve their clients

```
16    7                                                 76
```

I am concerned that recent technological advances in servicing the public could result in my losing my job

```
42        11                                            47
```

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0        20        40        60        80        100
```

■ Disagree (1-3)   ▨ Neither (4)   ☐ Agree (5-7)

n=1202

Government Service
Delivery Survey

The views expressed in the focus groups are consistent with these findings. Most participants acknowledged that technological advances have helped them bridge the gap between sustained demand and reduced resources, and were convinced that technology would have an increasing role to play in the delivery of services. In this vein, automated voice systems were often provided as a current example of technological impacts on service delivery, while many expected the INTERNET to play a major role in the near future. Concern was expressed, however, about the impact that relying increasingly on technology would have on service delivery. Generally, participants agreed that the public prefers human interaction over self-directed automated interaction: "We are leaving communities and leaving technology behind". (Senior manager — Vancouver). Moreover, it was noted that a technology like automated voice systems is unsuitable for elderly people. As mentioned earlier, for many participants the challenge is to make the most of the remaining opportunities for human interaction.

Comparing public servants' beliefs about public preferences related to technology with the actual preference of the general public reveals a sizable gap between the two groups. Eighty-seven per cent of public servants believed the general public would rather deal with a person than a computer or voice mail even if it means slower service; only 68 per cent of the general public actually expressed such a preference.

(e) Morale in the Public Service

Morale in the public service was examined on both a departmental and a personal basis. Overall, only 35 per cent of participants felt that morale in their department is good; middle managers were particularly pessimistic in their view of departmental morale (Exhibit 11).

EXHIBIT 11
Morale in the Public Service

"Morale in my department is good"

Front line	39
Middle managers	29
Senior managers	37

0 10 20 30 40 50 60
% agreeing (5,6,7 on 7-point scale)
n=1202

"If faced with the same career decision again, I would NOT choose to become a public servant"

Front line	28	18
Middle managers	26	19
Senior managers	22	22

0 10 20 30 40 50 60
% agreeing (5,6,7 on 7-point scale)

☐ 1996 (n=1202) ▓ 1990 (n=1248)

Government Service
Delivery Survey

Ekos Research Associates Inc., 1996

Departmental morale tends to be higher among front line staff, less educated respondents, those who have a written plan for service delivery, and those with an innovative service delivery mechanism. Departmental morale also varies across government departments. Fully 71 per cent of respondents from department H disagreed that morale is good (compared to 50 per cent overall). Respondents from department A were the most likely to feel that morale in their department is good (41 per cent).

Only a minority (26 per cent) of participants indicated that if faced with the same career decision they would not choose to become a public servant. However tracking this question from the 1990 STP survey reveals a significant increase in the proportion of both front line staff and middle managers questioning their career decision (Exhibit 11). Front line (28 per cent) and middle management (26 per cent), more educated respondents, those with lower departmental morale (35 per cent) those whose department uses traditional service mechanisms (39 per cent), and those with no written plan for service delivery (27 per cent) expressed the least desire to repeat their career path.

Similar findings emerged from the focus groups. Almost everyone agreed that morale in their group is low and many specified that morale is "at an all time low". Participants identified a number of explanatory factors to account for low morale:

1) *Employees do not feel valued.* That the organization does not value employees was conveyed to participants in number of ways: the five year wage freeze, public derision, pejorative comments from MPs and even some members of the government (e.g., the reference in the last budget about government inspectors stepping on each other's toes), having to give priority to serving senior officials and the minister over serving the public, and a lack of adequate tools and resources.

2) *A pervading climate of uncertainty.* Many participants, particularly those in "most affected departments", spoke of a seemingly never ending state of change. This has depressed morale in two ways. First it breeds insecurity about job loss: "We have created massive instability within

delivery by the necessity to plan layoffs 12-18 months ahead." (Senior manager — Vancouver) Second, it creates confusion among staff about their purpose, mission and direction: "Things have changed so much I don't even know what our mandate is any more." (Front line — Halifax) "It's death by initiative." (Middle manager — Halifax)
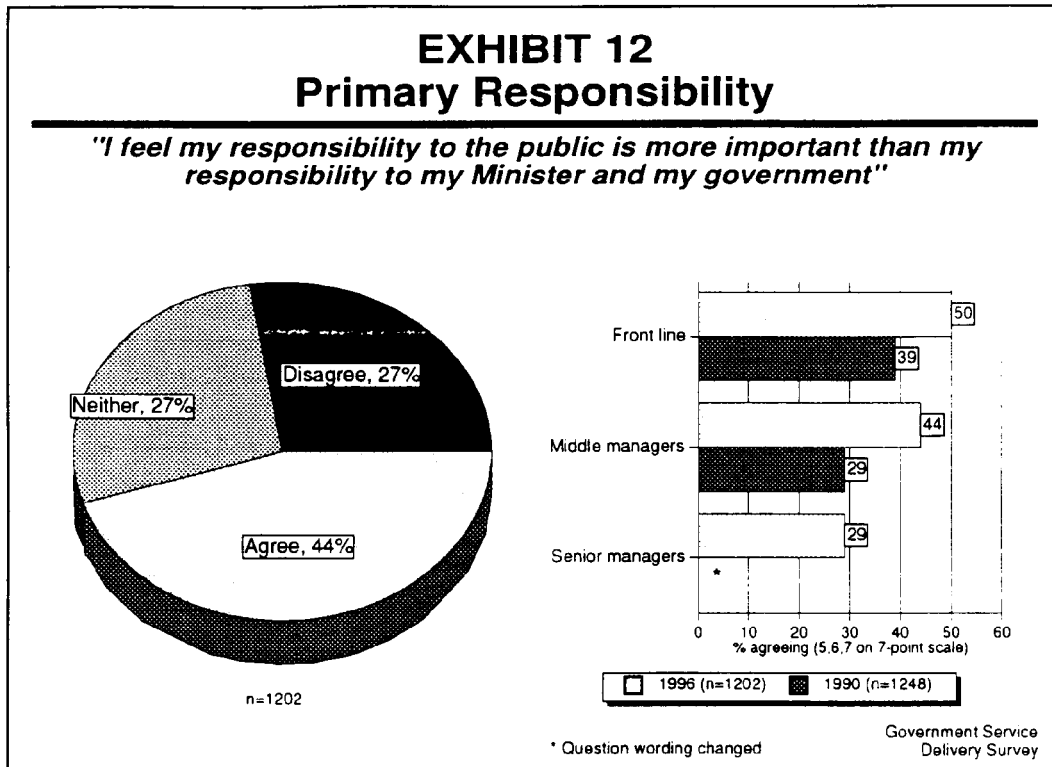
3) *Having to meet client needs and expectations with diminishing resources.* Most public servants who participated in the focus groups felt that client expectations remain high. This demand, coupled with diminishing resources, results in higher levels of stress and frustration. A number of managers and front line staff described the situation in their group as nearing the breaking point: "You can call it service delivery, but I call it crisis management". (Middle manager — Montreal)

(f) Mixed Allegiances

Respondents were asked if their primary responsibility is to the public or to their Minister and government (Exhibit 12).

The responses suggest that there is some confusion as to where public servants' primary responsibility lies. On an overall basis, 44 per cent agreed on the priority of serving the public and 27 per cent disagreed. Front line staff (50 per cent), middle managers (44 per cent) and respondents from outside the National Capital Region (52 per cent) were more likely than their counterparts to indicate a primary responsibility to serving the public. This commitment, while somewhat mixed, has improved over the past five years (Exhibit 12).

This confusion between serving the public and serving the Minister was echoed in the focus group sessions. In many cases, public servants talked of having external and internal clients (e.g., DM, Minister). Here, probing revealed that for many participants serving the needs of the Minister and senior officials must take precedence over serving the public. While for most, having to meet this type of internal need is relatively rare, a significant amount of concern was expressed about the issue because participants feel it detracts from their ability to focus on serving the public. What

EXHIBIT 12
Primary Responsibility

"I feel my responsibility to the public is more important than my responsibility to my Minister and my government"

n=1202

Front line — 50 / 39
Middle managers — 44 / 29
Senior managers — 29 / *

0 10 20 30 40 50 60
% agreeing (5,6,7 on 7-point scale)

☐ 1996 (n=1202) ■ 1990 (n=1248)

* Question wording changed

Government Service Delivery Survey

Disagree, 27%
Neither, 27%
Agree, 44%

bothers participants is not the occasional need to respond to a Minister or senior official's request, but the inflated degree of urgency which surrounds those requests. "We are expected to drop everything." (Middle manager — Halifax)

Focus group participants described how the natural tension in government between serving the public and responding to political imperatives is increasingly dominated by the latter function as one moves up the departmental hierarchy and from the regions to Ottawa. In the eyes of participants, this results in dissonance at the departmental and ministerial levels, where senior officials can be heard singing the praises of client service, but given their proximity to the centre and resulting concern with political issues, do not appear to be genuinely committed to service based on their actions. To many participants, this lack of commitment from the top of the organization is exemplified by budget cuts which affect service delivery (while sparing other functions) and by the immediate response required to requests

from senior officials and the Minister's office: "They talk the talk, but they expect us to walk it." (Front line — Toronto)

(g) Territorialism and Consultation

Middle and senior managers were asked several questions addressing how territorialism in the public service and consultation with the public are viewed with respect to service delivery (Exhibit 13).

EXHIBIT 13
Attitudes Toward Territorialism and Consultation (Management Only)

I think all levels of government should be willing to give up some of their turf in order to help coordinate their efforts to better serve the public

5 | 7 | 87

I think all federal government departments should be willing to give up some of their turf in order to help coordinate their efforts to better serve the public

5 | 7 | 86

Thorough consultation with my clientele is mandatory for successful policy and program development

5 | 6 | 86

This department places a high priority on consultation with the public

8 | 10 | 81

0   20   40   60   80   100

■ Disagree (1-3)   ▨ Neither (4)   ☐ Agree (5-7)

n=623

Government Service
Delivery Survey

Managers, particularly senior managers (94 per cent), strongly endorsed the idea that all levels of government should be willing to give up some of their turf in order to coordinate their efforts to better serve the public. Similar findings were observed with respect to the willingness of all federal government departments to

become less territorial. Few other consistent sub-group differences were found across these questions.

Managers also strongly supported thorough consultation with their clientele, and indicated that their department places a high priority on consultation. Senior managers, those with higher education, higher personal and departmental morale, a written plan, and an innovative delivery mechanism were particularly likely to feel that their department accords a prominent position to consultation with the public.

Comparing this consultation data to the 1990 STP survey, middle managers are now somewhat more likely to feel that their department places a high priority on consultation (from 70 per cent to 78 per cent), and are slightly more likely to feel that thorough consultation with the public is mandatory (from 80 per cent to 85 per cent). Senior managers show virtually no change (80 per cent to 83 per cent) with respect to the priority of consultation, or with regard to the necessity of close consultation with their clientele (89 per cent to 87 per cent).

Public servants who participated in the focus groups agreed that consultation is increasingly a priority in their group. About one half tend to rely on informal means of consultations and/or by taking corrective action in response to complaints. Other participants spoke of having instituted more systematic consultative mechanisms, such as surveys and focus groups with clients, as well as meetings and calls specifically related to consultation/gathering feedback. A number of participants also indicated that their group or department had set-up consultative committees with representation from both public servants and clients (e.g., industry representatives).

In a somewhat different view, some senior managers argued that more sophisticated methods of consultation with the public would be increasingly required as the federal government focuses more on governance, policy development and macro-level coordination, as opposed to direct service delivery. In this context, core

challenges identified by participants were: ensuring that public and stakeholder views are well reflected in public policy decisions, and effectively communicating government direction and policy back to Canadians; and convincing partners that the federal government can still play a useful role even if it comes to the table with less or no funding.
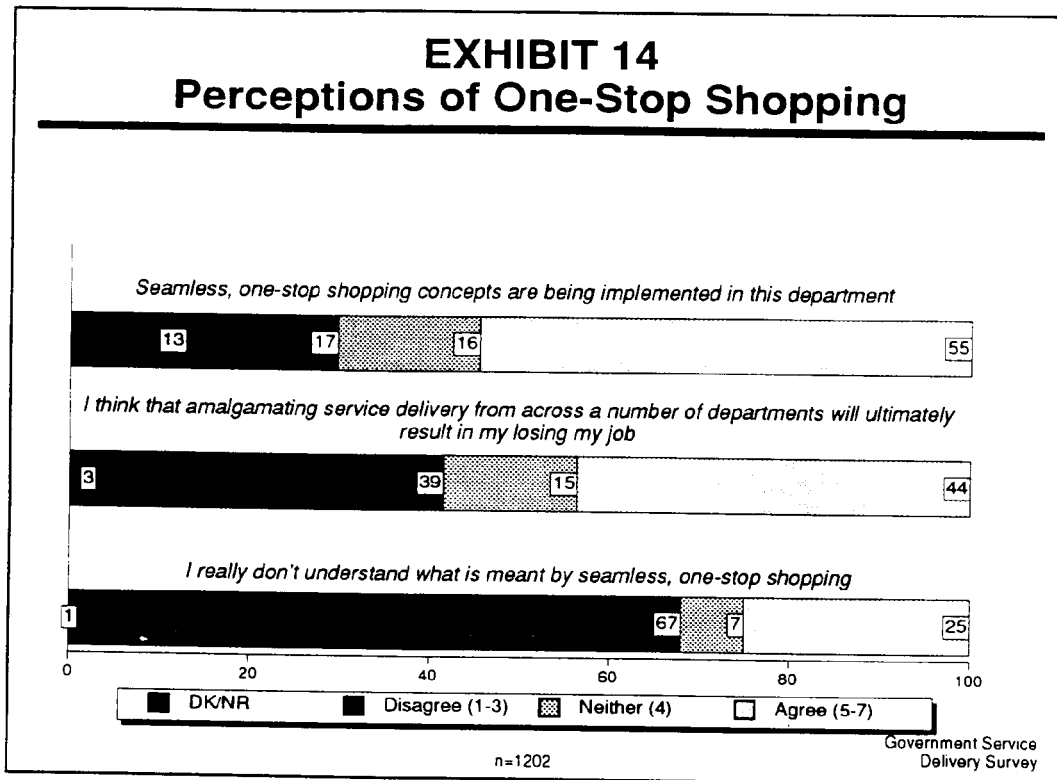
The perceptions of managers in the public service concerning consultation and partnership were compared with those of the general public. Findings from this comparison suggest that the general public do not share public servants' conviction regarding the prominence given consultation by the government. Only 37 per cent feel that government places a high priority on consulting with the public in order to provide a higher quality service (compared to 81 per cent of public servant management). Despite cynicism about governments' commitment to consultation, a strong majority of the general public (81 per cent) feel that governments should be looking for new ways to better to serve the public through partnerships with business and community organizations.

(h) Perceptions of One-Stop Shopping

Respondents were asked several questions about one-stop shopping concepts as a way delivering service to the public (Exhibit 14).

The majority of respondents (67 per cent) indicated that they understand the meaning of one-stop shopping. On an overall basis, only a slight majority (55 per cent) believed that these concepts are being implemented in their department; however, this percentage is influenced by the fact that one-third of respondents do not know what is meant by one-stop shopping concepts. Of those public servants aware of one-stop shopping concepts, 67 per cent indicated that the concepts are being implemented in their department. Front line staff (33 per cent), less educated, and francophone (32 per cent) respondents were the most likely to indicate *not* understanding the meaning of one-stop shopping. Respondents working outside of the National Capital

EXHIBIT 14
Perceptions of One-Stop Shopping

Seamless, one-stop shopping concepts are being implemented in this department

| 13 | 17 | 16 | 55 |

I think that amalgamating service delivery from across a number of departments will ultimately result in my losing my job

| 3 | 39 | 15 | 44 |

I really don't understand what is meant by seamless, one-stop shopping

| 1 | 67 | 7 | 25 |

0   20   40   60   80   100

■ DK/NR   ■ Disagree (1-3)   ▦ Neither (4)   ☐ Agree (5-7)

Government Service
Delivery Survey

n=1202

Region, those with higher education, those with higher departmental morale, and those whose department has a written plan for service delivery and employs an innovative service delivery mechanism were more likely than their counterparts to believe that one-stop shopping concepts are being implemented in their department.

A plurality (44 per cent) of front line staff believed that amalgamating service delivery from across a number of departments will ultimately result in their losing their job. These feelings were particularly pronounced among those working outside of the National Capital Region, those with less education and those with lower personal morale.

The one-stop shopping approach to service delivery was noted as a key trend by public servants in the focus groups. Most saw both advantages and disadvantages inherent in this model of service delivery. On the positive side, they recognized the convenience for the client of having to make fewer contacts to obtain

government services and products. The main drawback was felt to be the loss of expertise resulting from having clients/members of the public deal with "a generalist".

3.5 Perceptions of Innovation in Delivery of Government Service

Respondents were asked to rate how innovative their service delivery mechanism is in relation to other areas of government, as well as the private sector. Overall, a majority (67 per cent) of public servants believe that their department delivers innovative service. Senior management (74 per cent), those with higher morale, both personal (71 per cent) and departmental (81 per cent) were particularly likely to feel that their department is innovative. As mentioned earlier, this variable strongly influences beliefs about support from management as well as morale and service ethic.

The focus group results suggest that in most quarters innovation is more likely to be seen as something which is in the offing, as opposed to a reality. Current service innovations described by participants include: self-directed work teams; new partnerships with provincial governments, community organizations and the private sector; published service standards; decentralizing decision-making to the lowest possible level in the organization; and formal client feedback mechanisms. Participants seemed to share the view that further innovation is possible and desirable. While some expressed concern stemming from a fear of the unknown, most who commented on this issue expressed optimism about the development of innovative service delivery models. Some middle managers and front line staff saw in innovation the possibility of more secure and satisfying employment.

Most senior managers also realized the promise of innovation. In fact, quite a few commented on how well their group had been able to maintain quality service delivery in the midst of cut backs by reorganizing and re-designing systems and procedures. However, many also voiced concern about insufficient information

(e.g., case studies, sample agreements, best practices, practical advice) and insufficient support from the most senior levels of their department for them to feel secure in designing further innovations in service delivery. One participant suggested: "An inventory of expertise or a speakers tour or an extension of a CCMD-kind of program where they bring in people who have done something useful to share it. I would like to see that extended out across the country so I can have an opportunity to send my staff to a presentation by somebody who has put it all together." (Senior manager — Vancouver)

3.6 Government Service Delivery — Past and Future

Public servants felt that service delivery has improved over the past five years, and that it will continue to improve over the next five years (Exhibit 15). Senior managers, those with higher morale (both departmental and personal), those with a written plan for service delivery and those with an innovative service delivery mechanism were particularly optimistic about improvements made over the past few years, as well as the continuation of these improvements in the future.

These optimistic perceptions about government service delivery were not shared by the general public. Only a minority (39 per cent) of public respondents felt that government service has improved over the last five years; and an even smaller proportion (30 per cent) believed that service delivery will improve over the next five years.

3.7 Improving Service to the Public

Front line staff were asked to rate the importance of a range of initiatives in improving service to the public (Exhibit 16). Across all but one of the areas listed (financial incentives to reward people who serve the public well) at least three in four

EXHIBIT 15
Government Service Delivery — Past and Future

"Would you say that the delivery of service in your department is improving or declining, compared to what it was five years ago?"
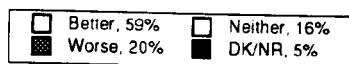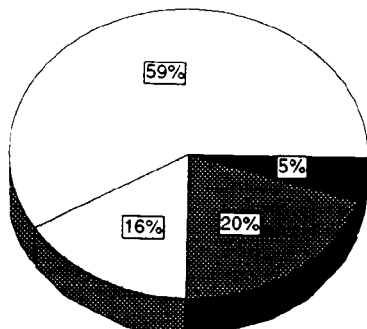
"Would you say that the delivery of service in your department will probably have improved or declined five years from now?"

59%

5%

16%

20%

	Better, 59%		Neither, 16%
	Worse, 20%		DK/NR, 5%

54%

14%

4%

28%

	Better, 54%		Neither, 14%
	Worse, 28%		DK/NR, 4%

n=1202

Government Service Delivery Survey

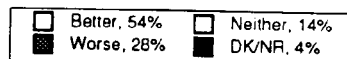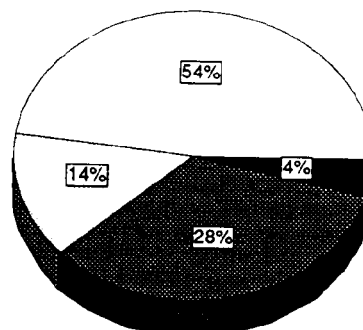believed that implementation of the initiative would improve service. Training, support from management and feedback about client satisfaction were the areas most strongly endorsed by front line staff. In general, those with higher departmental morale and an innovative service delivery mechanism were the most fervent in their support for these initiatives.

It is instructive to note that while 81 per cent of front line staff felt that a communications plan explaining the various elements of service standards expected in the department would improve service to the public, only 64 per cent indicated having such a written plan in their unit.

Many focus groups participants, including employees at all levels, suggested that their department institute a 1-800 number which would allow inquiries from the public to be efficiently and accurately routed to the appropriate group within the department: "We still receive a lot of calls from people asking about things that we

EXHIBIT 16
Improving Service to the Public
(Front Line Staff Only)

"How important are each of the following areas to improving service to the public in your department?"

Effective training on how to better serve the public

Having an organizational culture which genuinely supports and values good service to the public

Access to routine feedback about client satisfaction

Getting a genuine, long-term commitment from senior management to serve the public better

A communications plan explaining the various elements of service standards expected in the department

More support from your immediate manager

Having service to the public as a consideration in performance appraisals

Financial incentives to reward people who serve the public well

0   20   40   60   80   100

■ Extremely unimportant   ▨ Neither   ☐ Extremely important

Government Service
Delivery Survey

n=572

have no idea about. We try to steer them in the right direction, but [a 1-800 number] would make sense." (Front line — Toronto)

3.8   Service Delivery Culture

Respondents were asked to rate the degree to which their department undertakes a variety of initiatives related to service delivery (Exhibit 17).

Respondents were quite positive in their assessment of the implementation of these initiatives by their department, particularly with respect to supporting a continuous learning environment and meeting the needs of clients. Those most positive in their assessment were senior management (middle management were the most negative), those with less education, those with higher morale (both departmental and personal), those who have a written plan for service delivery and

EXHIBIT 17
Service Delivery Culture

"To what degree does your department do each of the following?"

Support a continuous learning environment — 75

Continuously meet the needs of clients while managing their expectations — 72

Cultivate a "people-first" environment where teamwork is valued — 66

Accept the risk associated with innovation — 65

Ask our clients to identify their needs and expectations — 64

Provide visible leadership for employees — 63

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80
% indicating a great degree (5,6,7 on 7-point scale)

n=1202

Government Service
Delivery Survey

those with an innovative service delivery mechanism.

Focus groups participants tended to agree that a service culture has developed in their group and throughout the government. They also felt that there is still much room for improvement. A key barrier to the further development of a service culture was identified — the persistence of a strong aversion to risk-taking in the corporate culture. Linking this trait to the need to "protect the Minister", many focus group participants characterized the prevailing ethos as one which "avoid[s] making mistakes". In the eyes of most participants, such an attitude stifles empowerment and the development of truly innovative service delivery models: "Sure we are encouraged to innovate, 'just don't make a mistake'". (Middle manager — Halifax)

CHAPTER

4

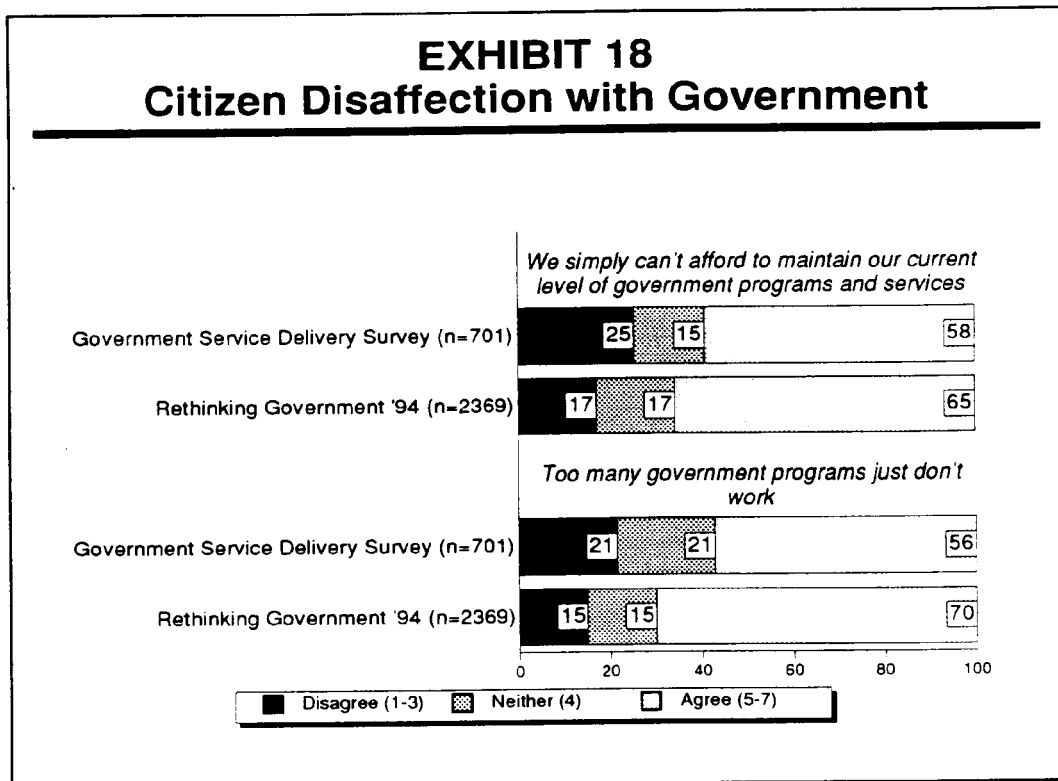# CLIENT/GENERAL PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS

The chapter presents the findings from the survey of clients of public service (i.e., organizations, the Canadian public), as well as the findings from the focus groups with members of the general public. Many of these findings are compared with those of the public servant survey to examine the degree of congruence between public servants' perceptions and the views of their clients. The findings are broken down across a variety of demographic and usage characteristics (i.e., age, education, income, contact with government, etc.) as well as by the type of client of public service (i.e., household or organization).

This chapter also draws on data from the *Rethinking Government*[3] study to position the present survey results in a broader societal context.

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3.   *Rethinking Government*. Ekos Research Associates, 1994, 1995.

███████

4.1   Citizen Disaffection with Government

Findings from the *Rethinking Government* study suggest that Canadians' expectations of government have diminished over the past decade. This decline is produced by growing recognition of a deficit crisis, disillusionment with the efficacy of government intervention, and a consensus that citizens cannot rely solely on government to solve the range of problems that government was expected to solve in the past. Data from the current study further chart Canadians' disaffection with government (Exhibit 18).

EXHIBIT 18
Citizen Disaffection with Government

We simply can't afford to maintain our current level of government programs and services

Government Service Delivery Survey (n=701)	25	15	58
Rethinking Government '94 (n=2369)	17	17	65

Too many government programs just don't work

Government Service Delivery Survey (n=701)	21	21	56
Rethinking Government '94 (n=2369)	15	15	70

0   20   40   60   80   100

■ Disagree (1-3)   ▨ Neither (4)   ☐ Agree (5-7)

A majority of clients believed that we cannot afford to maintain our current level of government programs (58 per cent), and that too many government programs do not work (70 per cent). These views were particularly pronounced

among those who have not contacted government in the last three months, those who are employed and those with higher education. Comparing the present results with findings from the *Rethinking Government* study suggests that members of the broader general public are even more disaffected with government than those (in the present study) who have had more contact with government service.
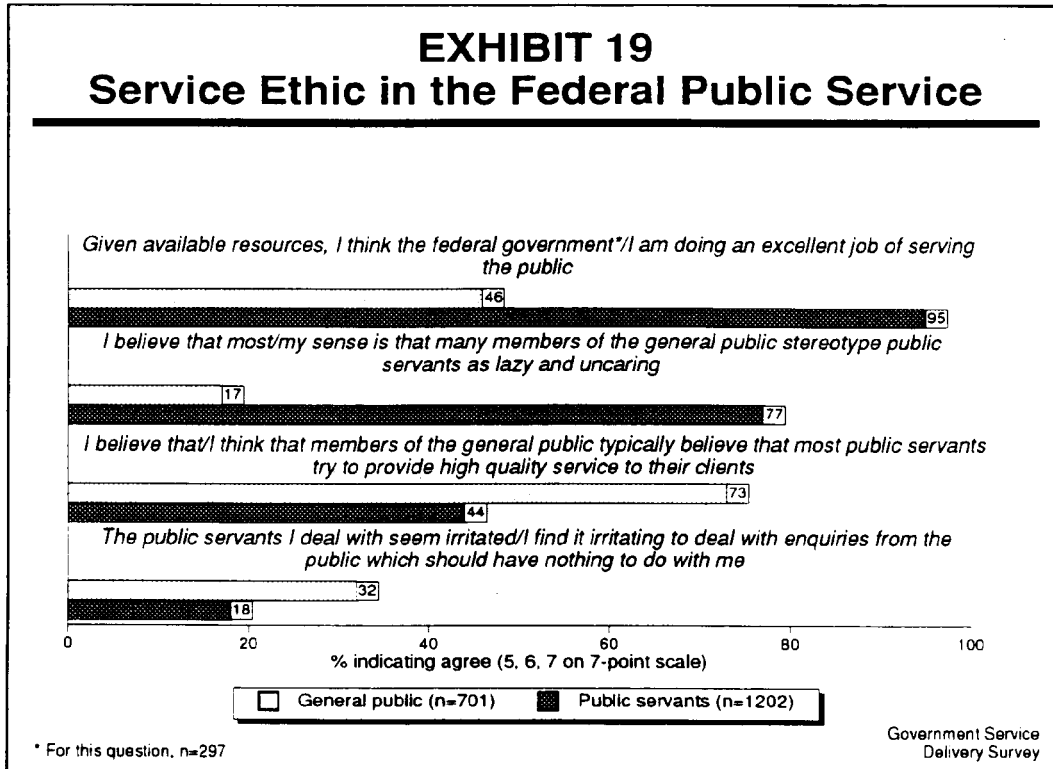
In the focus groups, members of the general public tended to put forward two interrelated views concerning their expectations of government. First, most participants readily acknowledged that it is "unrealistic" to expect the status quo in government service in times of fiscal restraint. Rather, they expect ranges in service delivery, including more self-service and computerized approaches. At the same time, however, they rejected the idea that a deterioration in service quality is inevitable under the current circumstances, particularly in the case of personal contacts with public servants.

With the exception of most senior managers, the majority of focus group participants believed that the public's expectations have remained high. Four contributing factors were identified: 1) the public/clients are more "sophisticated and aware"; 2) cost-recovery has raised the expectations of clients because they are paying for service; 3) generalized public frustration and antipathy towards governments; and 4) improvement in private sector service has "raised the bar for government".

4.2 Service Ethic in the Federal Public Service

A comparison of public servant perceptions of their service ethic to the views of the general public suggests that public servants are both self-lionizing and self-deprecating (Exhibit 19). Public servants were much more likely than the general public to feel that given available resources, they are doing an excellent job of serving the public. At the same time, they strongly believed that the general public thinks they
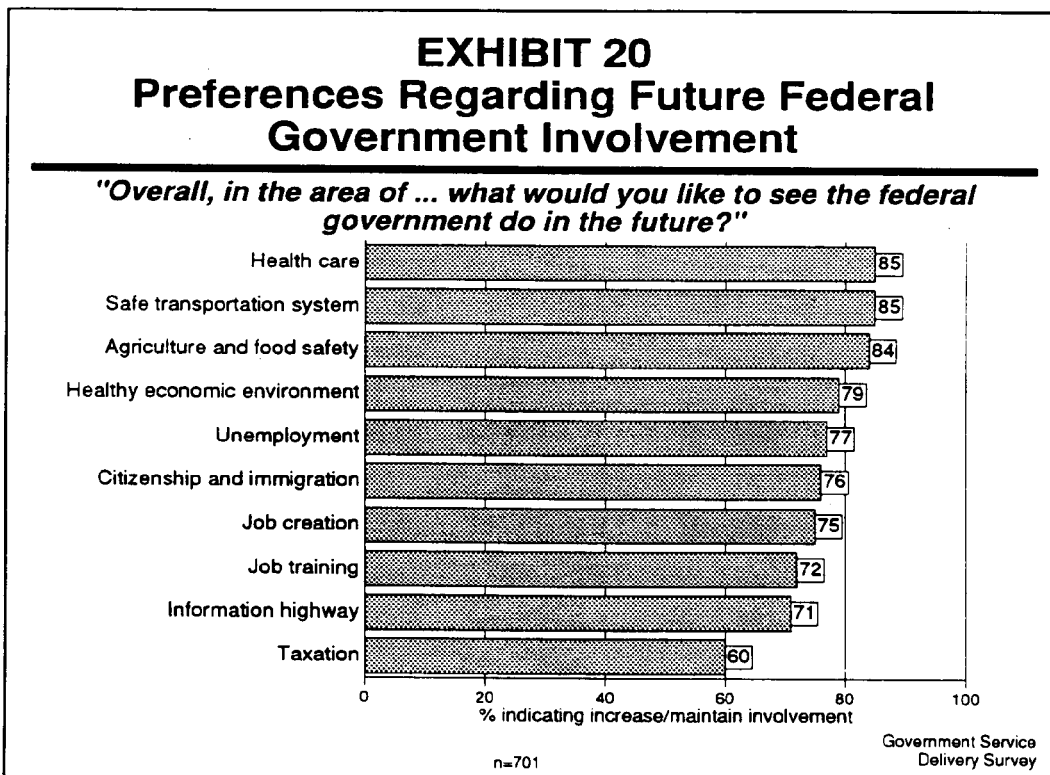
are lazy and uncaring; in reality, only a small minority of the general public reported feeling this way about public servants.

EXHIBIT 19
Service Ethic in the Federal Public Service

Given available resources, I think the federal government*/I am doing an excellent job of serving the public

I believe that most/my sense is that many members of the general public stereotype public servants as lazy and uncaring

I believe that/I think that members of the general public typically believe that most public servants try to provide high quality service to their clients

The public servants I deal with seem irritated/I find it irritating to deal with enquiries from the public which should have nothing to do with me

% indicating agree (5, 6, 7 on 7-point scale)

☐ General public (n=701) ▓ Public servants (n=1202)

* For this question, n=297

Government Service
Delivery Survey

Survey respondents from households, those who have not contacted the government over the past three months and those aged between 18 and 29 harbour the most negative views of public servants. Young people hold particularly negative views of public servants, and this finding is another example of young people's disconnection from and hostility towards broader society — a finding documented throughout our *Rethinking Government* study (e.g., appallingly low government literacy, and pessimism regarding the influence of social programs on Canada's quality of life). This more recent data suggests that this disconnection and hostility among youth continues unabated. Organizations, respondents with a higher contact rate with government, older respondents and those with university education tend to hold more positive views about public servants.

4.3   Preferences Regarding Future Federal Government Involvement

Despite a growing disaffection with government, findings from this survey suggest that there is no real desire for federal government withdrawal from Canadian economic and social life. When asked what they would like to see the federal government do in the future (increase its involvement, maintain its current involvement, reduce its involvement, or eliminate its involvement altogether), fully 76 per cent of clients/the public indicated that the federal government should increase or maintain its involvement. Respondents were particularly likely to want federal involvement in areas pertaining to health care and safety (Exhibit 20).

EXHIBIT 20
Preferences Regarding Future Federal Government Involvement

"Overall, in the area of ... what would you like to see the federal government do in the future?"

Area	% indicating increase/maintain involvement
Health care	85
Safe transportation system	85
Agriculture and food safety	84
Healthy economic environment	79
Unemployment	77
Citizenship and immigration	76
Job creation	75
Job training	72
Information highway	71
Taxation	60

% indicating increase/maintain involvement

n=701

Government Service
Delivery Survey

Across the majority of areas assessed, particularly human investment areas such as training and job creation, the following sub-groups were more likely than their counterparts to desire increased or maintained government involvement:
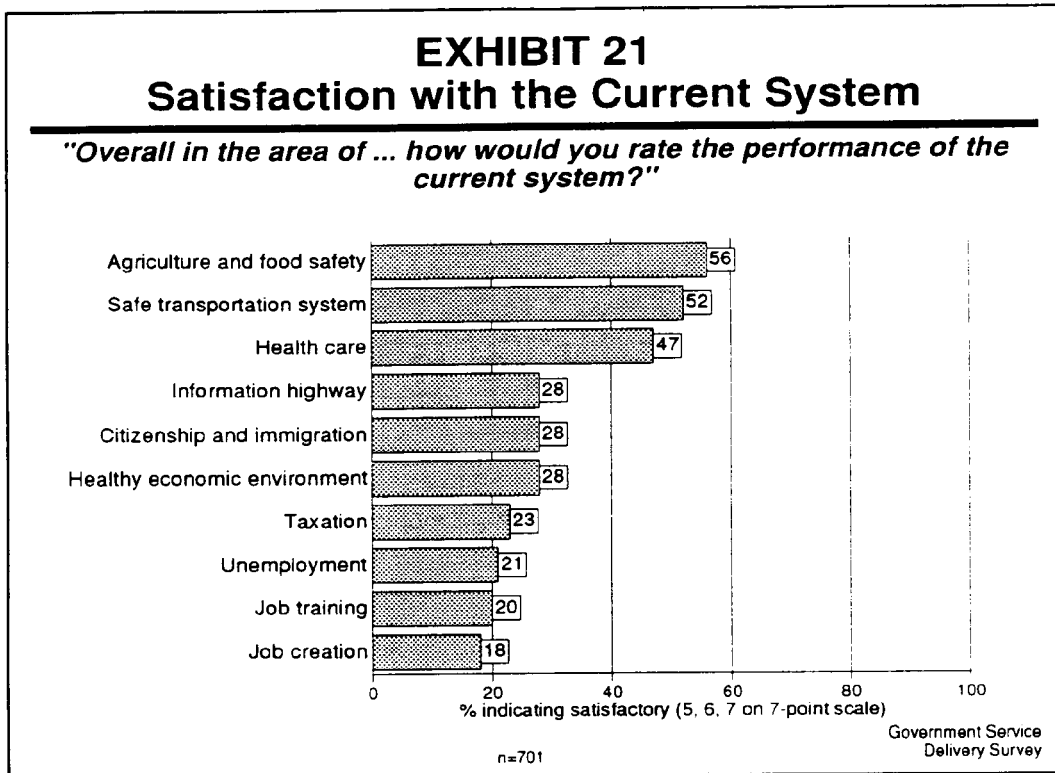
- households;
- those who have not contacted the government in the last three months;
- those who do not own a computer, fax or modem;
- younger (18-29);
- less educated; and
- lower income.

Like the survey respondents, those who participated in the focus groups felt quite strongly that the federal government should maintain an active presence in areas related to health and safety (e.g., health care, transportation safety, food and drug inspection). This opinion was based on a preference for maintaining national standards and universal access. In most other areas, participants indicated that they were looking mainly for efficiency. While some voiced concern that having a reduced federal presence in some areas might "weaken the country", the majority of participants agreed that many of the services currently delivered by the federal government should be devolved to other levels of government and the private sector if this translates into an improvement in service and/or reduction in costs.

4.4 Satisfaction With Current System

The *Rethinking Government* study suggests that Canadians are disappointed with the current performance of government across a variety of priority areas. Respondents from the present study were also asked to rate the performance of government in each of several areas (Exhibit 21).

Linked with the other attitudinal questions described above, it seems that Canadians remain dissatisfied with the current system. Only agriculture and food safety, and a safe transportation system were rated as satisfactory. Similar to the
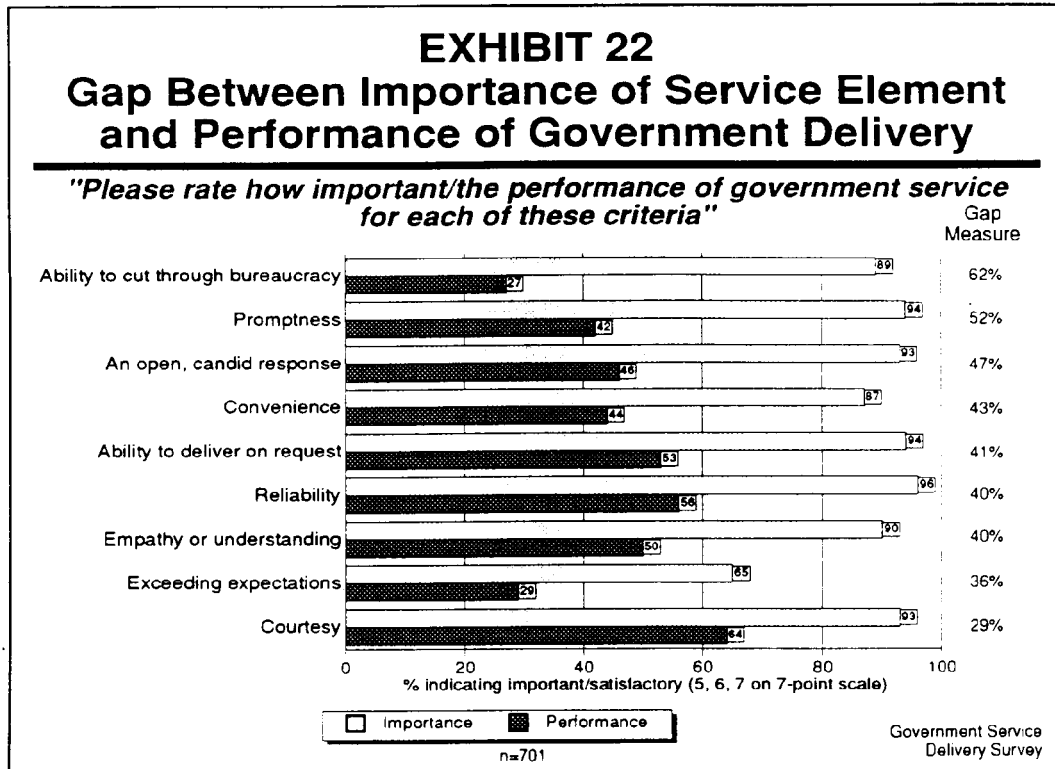
EXHIBIT 21
Satisfaction with the Current System

"Overall in the area of ... how would you rate the performance of the current system?"

Category	Value
Agriculture and food safety	56
Safe transportation system	52
Health care	47
Information highway	28
Citizenship and immigration	28
Healthy economic environment	28
Taxation	23
Unemployment	21
Job training	20
Job creation	18

% indicating satisfactory (5, 6, 7 on 7-point scale)

Government Service Delivery Survey

n=701

Rethinking Government findings, human resource areas (job training, unemployment and job creation) were rated the most poorly. Households, respondents who have not contacted the government over the last three months, those without a computer, fax or modem, and those with less education and less income were particularly disappointed with the system's performance in the human resource areas.

4.5 Gap Between Importance of Service Elements and Performance of Government

Respondents were asked to rate both the importance and performance of government service delivery across a variety of service elements. The general public/clients accorded a high priority to virtually all elements of service listed, but

were very negative in their assessment of public servants' performance in delivering on these elements (Exhibit 22).
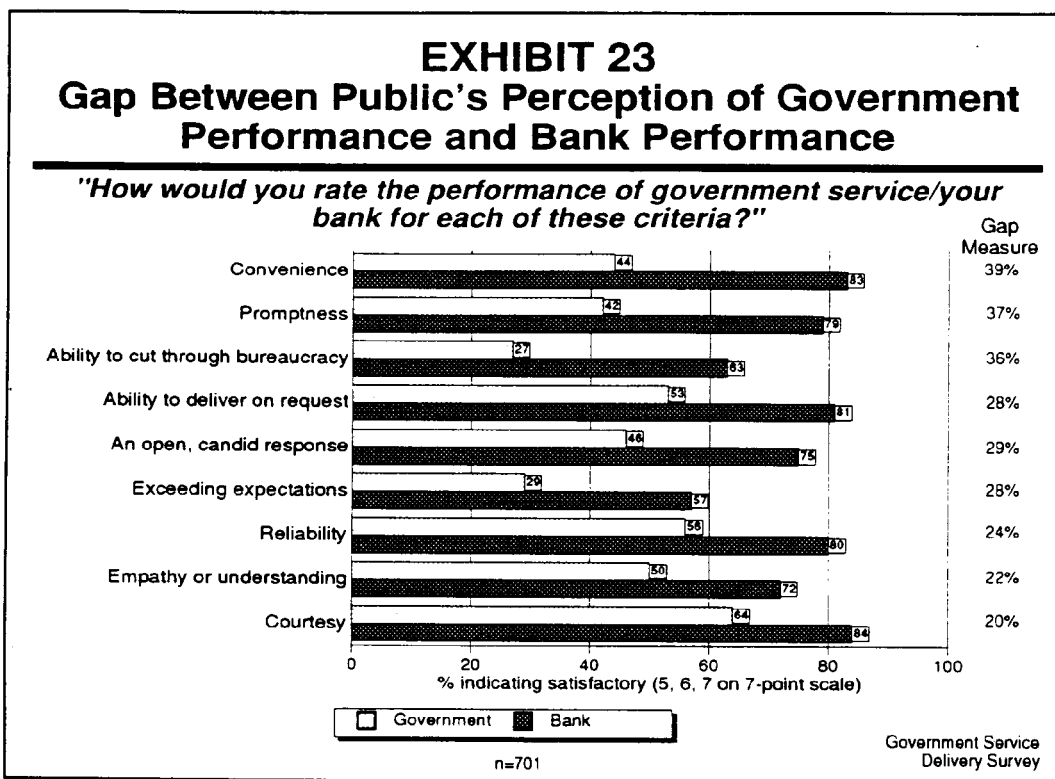
EXHIBIT 22
Gap Between Importance of Service Element and Performance of Government Delivery

"Please rate how important/the performance of government service for each of these criteria"

Gap Measure

Service Element	Importance	Performance	Gap Measure
Ability to cut through bureaucracy	89	27	62%
Promptness	94	42	52%
An open, candid response	93	46	47%
Convenience	87	44	43%
Ability to deliver on request	94	53	41%
Reliability	96	56	40%
Empathy or understanding	90	50	40%
Exceeding expectations	65	29	36%
Courtesy	93	64	29%

% indicating important/satisfactory (5, 6, 7 on 7-point scale)

☐ Importance ▓ Performance

n=701

Government Service Delivery Survey

The gap between importance and perceived performance was largest for the ability to cut through bureaucracy (62 per cent) and smallest for courtesy (29 per cent). Few sub-group differences were observed with respect to the importance of each of the elements. In terms of satisfaction with each of these service elements, the following sub-groups were, generally speaking, the most satisfied:

❏ organizations;
❏ older (60 years and older);
❏ not employed;
❏ less income; and
❏ do not own computer, fax or modem at home.

4.6 Gap Between Government Performance and Bank Performance

Respondents were asked to compare how government service delivery compares to that of a bank (or some other private sector company). The general public/clients were much more likely to rate banks' performance across all service elements as superior to that of government (Exhibit 23).

EXHIBIT 23
Gap Between Public's Perception of Government Performance and Bank Performance

"How would you rate the performance of government service/your bank for each of these criteria?"

Criteria	Government	Bank	Gap Measure
Convenience	44	83	39%
Promptness	42	79	37%
Ability to cut through bureaucracy	27	63	36%
Ability to deliver on request	53	81	28%
An open, candid response	46	75	29%
Exceeding expectations	29	57	28%
Reliability	56	80	24%
Empathy or understanding	50	72	22%
Courtesy	64	84	20%

% indicating satisfactory (5, 6, 7 on 7-point scale)

☐ Government ■ Bank

n=701

Government Service Delivery Survey

This finding is particularly troubling given public antipathy towards banks. The perceived gap between bank and government performance was greatest for convenience (39 per cent) and smallest for courtesy (21 per cent). Although satisfaction with a bank's performance varied considerably by service element examined, across all elements, older and higher income participants were generally more satisfied with a bank's performance than their counterparts.

In the focus groups this issue was discussed in the broader context of comparing federal government service delivery with the service delivered by the private sector. Participants were more or less divided about who provided better service. Essentially, federal government service delivery was described as more consistent, while experiences with the private sector were more likely to be characterized by peaks and valleys.

CHAPTER

5 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Smiling as You Bail: Service in An Era of Hostility and Restraint

There is little need to deliver a further body blow to the reeling institution of government in Canada. Yet the current research on internal and external perceptions of service vividly reinforces the thesis that there is a crisis characterising the relationship between citizens and governments. There is strong evidence that the fundamental breakdown between citizens and governments evident in recent years continues unabated. In this research project we examine the citizen-government relationship through the lens of "service delivery". Although there are some difficulties in reducing the citizen-government connection to the realm of a service transaction there are some important insights on this problem, and the deeper problem of citizen disconnection.

The research examines the nature and quality of service interactions from the perspective of both public servants and the clients they serve. It includes a random sample of 1,200 federal public servants representing the front line, middle management and senior management. It also includes a parallel sample of 700 "clients" of these same departmental staff composed of both individual citizens and representatives of organizations (public and private sector) who have recently dealt with the departments

included in the staff survey. In addition to extensive telephone surveying there were also 12 qualitative focus groups conducted with clients and public servants. Finally, these results are situated in the context of broader findings drawn from our ongoing *Rethinking Government* project.

5.2 Resilient Commitment to Service: A Two-Edged Sword

The surveys reveal a mixture of positive and negative findings. Running throughout this research is a disturbing gap between the views of public servants and the clients they serve. Although the gap often favours a flattering self-image of public servants — and particularly the quality of their service efforts — there are important exceptions where public servants maintain exaggerated notions of client antipathy. A number of crucial gaps characterise this area: gaps between self-rating and client-ratings; gaps between client expectations and client experiences; and gaps between management and front line views on service. These differences are not merely curious; they define some of the crucial challenges interfering with a healthier client-government correction.

One of the more striking findings of the study is the apparent strength of the commitment to excellent service to the public. In several survey items, and in the focus groups, we found public servants united in a virtual consensus that service to the public was the essence and *telos* of their job. This notion that serving the public is what their job is all about is also linked to a conviction that, given the practical constraints, they (personally) are doing an "excellent" job of serving the public. This strong service ethic appears to be resilient compared to our 1990 Service to the Public (STP) study. In fact there is some evidence that public servants feel that service to the public, and their commitment to client service, have improved in the past several years. Other survey indicators suggest that public servants believe that they are more open and transparent and placing more emphasis on consultation than in our 1990 research.

This commitment to service is clearly genuine. There are, however, some non-trivial problems underlying this broad service ethic.

There is a growing sense that the public servants feel themselves under seige. The broad based hostility to governments which has become an entrenched public mood in the nineties has clearly registered on public servants. Worse, public servants have seriously exaggerated public hostility to public servants such that almost eighty per cent believe that their clients think of them as "lazy and uncaring". In fact, slightly less than one in five clients really hold this view. Our most recent public research suggests that while public servants are not immune to the broad resentment to government, the greatest anger and alienation from government is directed to politicians and the entire institution of government. In fact, trust in federal public servants is significantly higher than trust in politicians. About 60 per cent have little trust in politicians versus only 25 per cent who have little trust in federal public servants (29 per cent have little trust in provincial public servants, suggesting that federal public servants are slightly more trusted than their provincial colleagues).
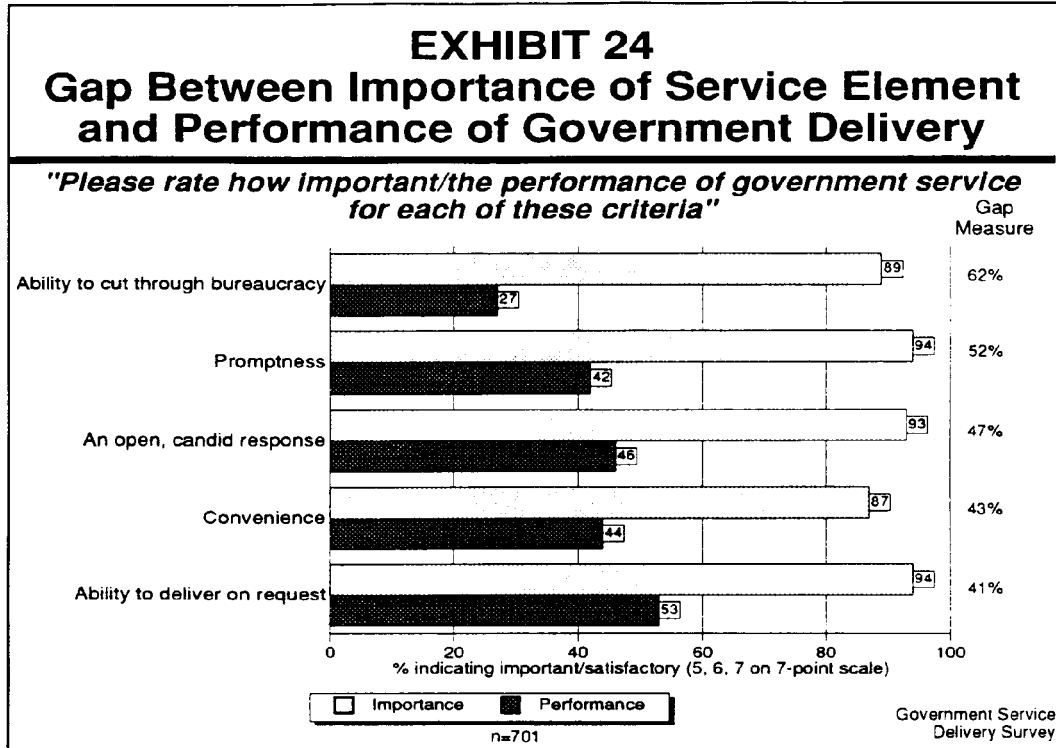
In addition to perceived public hostility, public servants are acutely aware of the impacts of retrenchment and restraint. Downsizing and other resource constraints are salient concerns raised in group discussions. All of these forces have coalesced to produce a significant decline in the overall morale of the public service. Yet in spite of these difficulties commitment to service has remained strong and perhaps even strengthened. Nearly 90 per cent of public servants agreed that "providing excellent service is what my job is all about". Many focus group participants took it as a point of honour or pride that they maintained this focus despite the travails of public service. There was a sense that many public servants, particularly at the front line and in the regions were transferring allegiance from their Minister, Deputy or manager to their client or the public.

5.3 The Client Perspective: A Reality Check

Although it is impressive that this service ethic is so resilient there is also reason to be concerned by this finding. The key problem is that *the current system is not working*. Despite the sense within the public service that progress is occurring, and that service performance is great given constraints, clients do not share this flattering self-image. For whatever reasons we find that the experiences of clients mirror broader public disaffection with government as an institution. Most clients do not agree that public servants are doing an excellent job — even recognising resource constraints. In fact, when comparing client expectations on the key dimensions of the service transaction rated by clients, there is a huge gap between recent experiences and going in expectations (Exhibit 24). Clients place a premium on cutting through red tape, timeliness, transparency and openness and getting results. On all of these crucial dimensions of the service transaction client satisfaction levels are depressingly low (25 to 50 per cent satisfaction).

Without exploring demographic variations in satisfaction with government in any depth here (see the full report), it is important to note a particularly strong and disturbing age effect. Younger Canadians have a *much* more negative view of the federal government, and the quality of service delivery. In past research we speculated that lower rates of contact and political literacy may have accounted for this antipathy. It is disconcerting to note that in a sample of clients who have recently dealt with the federal government, the negativity of young clients of the federal government may be even more pronounced (than those who have not recently dealt with government).

Even when comparing satisfaction levels on these same dimensions with the concrete example of one's last visit to a bank we note a sizable deficiency (about 30 per cent lower satisfaction). Recognizing that banks are not the most popular

EXHIBIT 24
Gap Between Importance of Service Element
and Performance of Government Delivery

**"Please rate how important/the performance of government service
for each of these criteria"**

Gap
Measure

Criteria	Importance	Performance	Gap Measure
Ability to cut through bureaucracy	89	27	62%
Promptness	94	42	52%
An open, candid response	93	46	47%
Convenience	87	44	43%
Ability to deliver on request	94	53	41%

% indicating important/satisfactory (5, 6, 7 on 7-point scale)

☐ Importance ■ Performance

n=701

Government Service
Delivery Survey

institutions in Canada today it is quite discouraging to note this wide performance gap. Some of the gap can be attributed to the paper burden and accountability requirements of government but this can't explain all of this shortfall (or any of the 21 per cent shortfall on "courtesy").

It is possible to chart the gap between client expectations and the record of real world delivery in greater depth. It is, however, also important to note that if only two per cent of public servants rate their personal service performance as less than "excellent" this may be an obstacle to fixing the problem. There should be no doubt about the nature and severity of the problem itself. The public perspective on the federal government, whether judged from the specific vantage point at the last service episode, or from the broader perspective of public attitudes, reveals a level of disaffection which can only be characterised as a crisis. This crisis cannot be

addressed, much less solved, in a world where it is seen as unavoidable and unrelated to the efforts of public servants.
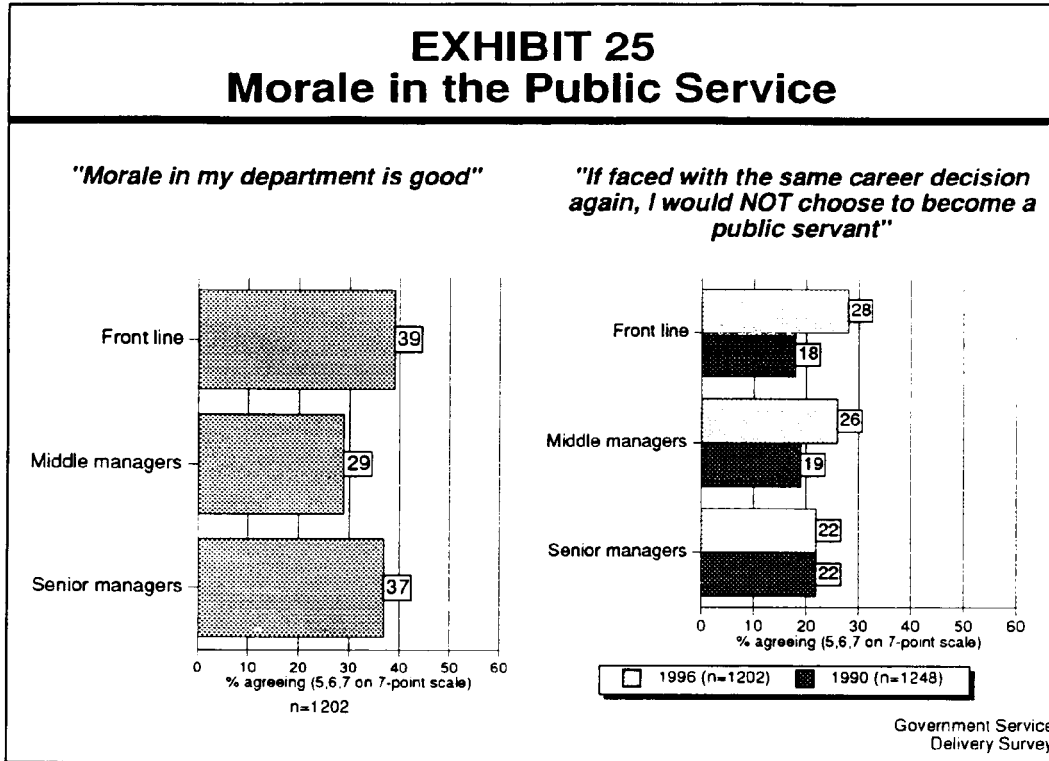
5.4 Linking Morale, Planning and Innovation: Creating an Organizational Service Edge

It is useful to examine the internal connections between service and other human resource and organisational issues. Beginning with the issue of morale we offer the unsurprising but clearly documented conclusion that poor departmental morale is a ubiquitous feature of the current federal public service (with some very sizable variation across different departmental settings).

Morale in the public service was examined on both a departmental and a personal basis. Only 35 per cent of participants feel that morale in their department is good. Middle managers are particularly pessimistic in their view of departmental morale (Exhibit 25). Departmental morale varies significantly across government departments.

It is also possible to make conclusions on the state of personal employee morale and where it is going. Only a minority (26 per cent) of participants indicated that if faced with the same career decision they would not choose to become a public servant. However, tracking this question from the 1990 Service to the Public survey reveals a significant increase in the percentage of both front line staff and middle managers indicating that they would not choose to become a public servant if given the same career decision.

It is instructive to note that while morale has clearly declined according to this indicator it also appears to be somewhat higher than for the average ratings across all other occupational groups. In a recent national survey, 30 per cent of Canadians agreed that they would *not* choose their career area again (Exhibit 26). Of
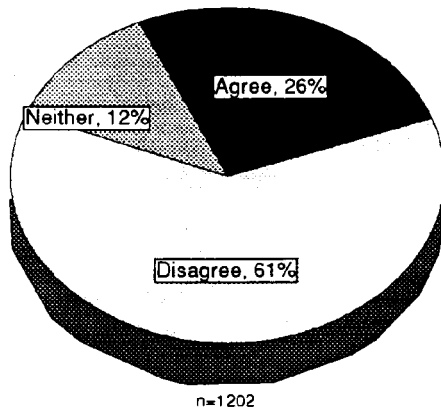
EXHIBIT 25
Morale in the Public Service

"Morale in my department is good"

"If faced with the same career decision again, I would NOT choose to become a public servant"

Front line — 39

Middle managers — 29

Senior managers — 37

0 10 20 30 40 50 60
% agreeing (5,6,7 on 7-point scale)
n=1202

Front line — 28 / 18

Middle managers — 26 / 19

Senior managers — 22 / 22

0 10 20 30 40 50 60
% agreeing (5,6,7 on 7-point scale)

☐ 1996 (n=1202) ■ 1990 (n=1248)

Government Service
Delivery Survey

those currently in employment the number is 29 per cent which is still higher than for federal public servants.

5.5   Technology, Innovation and Human Resources

There is a strong constellation of recurring organizational features which tend to appear together. This bundling of planning and human resource factors is linked to organizational settings which reveal both higher morale and a stronger service ethic. The 1990 Service to the Public research referred to these features as the PVK factor (for *people knowledge and values*). Once again, we find a similar virtuous organizational circle at work.

EXHIBIT 26
Satisfaction with Career Choice

"If faced with the same career decision again, I would NOT choose to become a public servant"

"If faced with the same career decision again, I would NOT choose the career I am currently pursuing"

Agree, 26%

Neither, 12%

Disagree, 61%

n=1202

Government Service
Delivery Survey

Agree, 30%

Neither, 14%

Disagree, 52%

n=922

Rethinking Government 95-3
(preliminary spring data)

Public sector organizations which place a greater premium on innovation, technology, consultation and formal planning for better service tend to feature these elements in a mutually reinforcing pattern. Furthermore, these elements are linked to better departmental morale and a higher service ethic in our analysis of the current survey.

There are opportunities for making further gains because many of these elements are either underdeveloped or non-existent in many departments. For example, 40 per cent of departments do not have a written service plan. In itself a written plan will not transform underperforming departments into high performance organizations. On the other hand, formal planning is part of a relatively clear constellation of better service culture ingredients. We should be seeding these practices and cultures more broadly in the public service, and reinforcing them where they are already rooted.

5.6 The Technology Dilemma

Another theme emerges from the research. The demographic skew to an older public service workforce is also linked to a mixed level of comfort and commitment to the use of new information technologies. The surveys show that public servants recognize the advantages of new technologies in improving service delivery. The research also shows that there has been a significant expansion of technology-driven service and an expectation that this trend will continue.

There are, however, some tensions interfering with the move to more modern delivery systems. The public service is now dominated by aging survivors. Although they are not particularly technophobic this cohort does carry notions of ideal service delivery which are increasingly anachronistic. For example, the vast majority of public servants believe that in-person service is the model *par excellence* of ideal service. All other models are seen as pale emulations and most public servants believe .clients would prefer in-person service (even if it is slower or more expensive).

It is the case that most clients do prefer in-person service *but* their preference is much weaker. Eighty-seven per cent of public servants believe the general public would rather deal with a person than a computer or voice mail even if it means slower service; only 68 per cent of the general public actually express such a preference. Furthermore, this preference for in-person service weakens for younger, more technologically comfortable clients (63 per cent for under 30 versus 83 per cent for over 60 years of age). It should also be noted that clients comparatively rated their last service episode at a bank much more highly than with the federal government, notwithstanding the fact that many of these transactions were with Automated Banking Machines.

There is an uneasy mixture of interests and values at work here. The notion of in-person service as the reference standard reflects the culture of an era

which is passing. There is also the recognition that new information technologies are alternatives for human labour (47 per cent of public servants are concerned that recent technological advances in servicing the public could result in their losing their job). It is not surprising that one's enthusiasm for new service technology may be muted by the recognition that the new electronic kiosk may replace you next year.

5.7 Next Steps: Repairing the Structure and the Surface

Clearly all is not well in the world of government. It is important to note that the specific transactions between citizens as clients and the federal government generate the same general reactions as the overall impressions of government as a whole. With little difference overall reactions/approval of the federal government are the same whether based on general impressions or most recent transaction.

5.8 Service in the Public Sector

The concept of service is at the heart of this discussion. The term is often treated as a primitive, a concept which is fundamental and somewhat obvious. After all government is synonymous with civil or public service. Most employees agree that service to the public is the essence of their job. But is the concept that obvious? Are discussions of service in this context somehow different than in other settings?

The answer is both yes and no. The key transactional elements of modern service are fairly obvious. They really don't vary that much whether we are talking about mufflers, fast food or legal advice. The key transactional service model is basically common to the modern consumer society. The research shows that both clients and public servants agree on the dimensions of the service model (if not the performance achieved). As the single greatest expenditure area citizens should expect at least as much of this sort of service when they visit their government office as they

do when they deal with a restaurant, a courier or a bank. Clearly against these yardsticks, the results are woefully deficient.

There is, however, no doubt that there is a crucial additional element of public service which is fundamentally different than other parts of modern consumerism. The essence of public service is representing the public interest. This is the basis of Hegel's notion of the historical shift from a mercantile to civil society. According to Hegel the essence of civil society was the focus on *public interest* and the rise of a new universal class, the civil service. Clearly a more prescient notion of a universal class than Marx's proletariat, Hegel's civil service was focused on public interest and knowledge, not property, was the basic fuel of this model. Interestingly, civil servant was defined broadly to include the professional class (e.g., doctors). We find the notion of an impersonal, rational bureaucracy developed into a much more chilling conception in Weber's notion of the "iron cage". The modern world has seen a remarkable growth in the influence of the civil service. There is, however, mounting evidence that the influence of modern bureaucracy and statism may be in decline in the post-modern world.

This post-modern era shows government and public service to be undergoing a fundamental transition. There is widespread hostility and disaffection with government. But it remains the case that the state plays a universally important role in the post-modern world and the essence of this role still revolves around the notions of public interest, reason and knowledge. The future of government may be smaller, but not necessarily less significant. Our broader research shows that Canadians remain committed to the goals of government but not the results (or value for money equation).

Is service essentially about results or the quality of the transaction? From the public's perspective both are important and they fail to see these as choices. Nearly 90 per cent of Canadians believe that "higher quality customer service" is important to producing a "result-oriented" federal government. "Accountability for

measured results" is seen as the most important criteria of a list of five ideas that might improve governance in Canada (transparent decision-making was second most important).

5.9   A Foundation of Core Values and Roles

It is also important to recognize that results/goals mean something different in the minds of the public than they do in the minds of the senior decision-makers running the show. The public continues to look to the federal government as a source of moral community. Goals and values like freedom, health and security are at the top of the public's list of core values for government. For those in charge the problem is seen in more rational and economic terms. Perhaps this is why about 85 per cent of Canadians agree that government leaders are disconnected from the values of ordinary Canadians. Any attempt to rebuild confidence in the federal government must broach the normative rupture which continues to alienate citizens from government.

Improvements to service delivery systems are important. They must be built on a solid foundation of core values and roles. Ironically, the public are less attached to the federal government as a delivery agent. As governments begin to row less and steer more they must ensure that they preserve the core roles that the public sees as crucial — guardian-protector (of public interest); partner-broker (coordinating different sectors/players); goal-setting (in cooperation with other players); and economic steward. New alternative service delivery systems must approach the client in recognition of these core roles for the federal government.

5.10   Further Suggestions

Turning to the more specific problems of service delivery it is possible to offer some more specific recommendations:

(i)   The overall service culture needs a major shake-up. The system needs to be shocked out of its current state of complacency and resignation. The ubiquitous image of excellent performance (given constraints) has become a comfortable illusion. Coupled with an exaggerated sense of public hostility this work ideology is preventing recognition of the severity of the problem.

(ii)   The service problems are systemic in nature and will require a radical transformation of organizational culture and delivery technologies. It is important to recall that the study shows the most alarming service shortfalls are in the areas of red tape, timeliness, openness and results. These problems are reflective of the current culture of the bureaucracy and possess enormous organizational inertia. We suggest broadening the virtuous circle of innovation, formal service planning and measurement, and openness. Top-down leadership and stressing the value and power of individual employees are also crucial elements of this transformation. Corrections to flagging employee self-esteem, and a sense of possible progress to measurable goals are part of the solution.

(iii)   Benchmarking and monitoring of service performance is essential. Vague nostrums about service commitment and performance are unhelpful. This study provides a reasonable (global) benchmark of current performance levels. The government should use this as a foundation for charting improvements in service performance. These performance reports should be shared with staff and the public. They

should include a real diagnostic capacity to identify causes of both poor and distinguished performance.

(iv)   The government should initiate a high profile youth internship program. There are a number of compelling reasons for doing so. First, there is alarming evidence of youth disconnection from the federal government. A youth hiring program will help redress the current demographic skew to greying survivors. Young federal employees can bring vitality and innovation, technological agility and a more credible perspective on the problems of younger Canadians. Younger Canadians brought in sizable numbers will help in shocking the system out of some of its inertia and antiquated delivery systems. Younger workers are also cheaper and contain greater representation of key equity groups. It also will render federal appeals to corporate conscience in youth hiring more credible.

APPENDIX A

Details of Survey Methodology

DETAILS OF SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The field work for this survey was comprised of 1,202 interviews with federal public servants and 701 interviews with clients of federal government. This appendix provides a description of the field logistics and response-rates.

A.1   Survey of Public Servants

Ekos assembled at team of 24 interviewers. Their training included a review of the sampling procedure, the survey questionnaire items, as well as telephone interviewing techniques and survey adminstration procedures relevant to the study.

Up to four call-backs were made to each public servant in the sample for whom initial attempts at contact were unsuccessful (but for whom we understood the telephone number was correct). Each number was given a "rest" of at least three hours before a second contact was attempted. The subsequent calls were made on separate days. Appointments were made with potential respondents who expressed a wish to participate at a more convenient time.

The survey spanned a 17-day period, between February 5th and March 12th, 1996. The interview required 21 minutes on average to complete. Daily records were kept of all calls made, whether successful (i.e., interview completed or appointment made), or not. A supervisor was on hand at all times to monitor the progress of all work including interviewer performance, contact records and data quality. The supervisor was also available to address any concerns of the respondents. In order to assure respondents of the legitimacy of the survey, the supervisor provided contact names and telephone numbers for each of the participating departments so that a respondent could confirm the study, if he/she wished. The supervisor reported directly to the survey manager on a daily basis.

Table A.1 provides details of the disposition of the sample, including attrition and the functional sample. Reasons for attrition include: invalid numbers (numbers not in service ory employees for whom no telephone number could be found); ineligible respondents (those who fell outside the sampling criteria); strata

filled (the quota definition was filled); and others (duplicate numbers or persons deemed unable to complete the survey because of language difficulties). Attrition amounted to 63 per cent of the initial sample. The remaining functional sample is comprised of completions and non-completions (incomplete interviews, not reached, unavailable for duration of survey, refusals, etc.). The response-rate for the survey (i.e., proportion of completions in the functional sample) was 49 per cent.

TABLE A.1
Public Servant Survey: Sample Disposition and Response-Rate

Disposition	Results
Total Sample	6,534
Attrition	
Invalid number	2,892
Ineligible respondents (spend less than 25% of their time with clients)	567
No longer employed with the Government	161
Strata filled	453
Other	18
Total Attrition	4,091
Functional Sample	2,443
Completions	1,202
Non-Completions	
Contact unavailable	114
Require communication from their department before responding	28
Not reached	908
Unable to spend 20 minutes on phone answering survey	64
Refusals	127
Total Non-Completions	1,241
Response-Rate	49 %

Annex A (presented at the end of this appendix) provides a listing of the public service job codes classified as front line staff, middle managers and senior managers for purposes of the survey.

A.2   Survey of Clients/General Public

Ekos assembled at team of 44 interviewers. Many of these were the same individuals working on the public servant portion of the study. Training included a review of the sampling procedure and the survey questionnaire items.

Up to four call-backs were made to each person in the sample (i.e., household resident or organization representative) for whom initial attempts at contact were unsuccessful (but for whom we understood the telephone number was correct). The survey spanned a 25-day period, between February 26th and March 22nd, 1996. The interview required 21 minutes on average to complete. All sampling tracking procedures decribed for the public servant survey also applied to the client survey component.

Table A.2 provides details of the disposition of the sample. Reasons for attrition include: invalid numbers (numbers not in service); ineligible respondents (government organizations, private citizens who were not 18 years of age or not a resident of Canada, or companies not located in Canada); strata filled (the quota definition was filled); random public household numbers that were not followed-up with full call-back procedures because the final sample target had been attained; persons deemed unable to complete the survey because of language difficulties; and others (duplicate numbers). Attrition totalled 58 per cent of the initial sample. The remaining functional sample is comprised of completions and non-completions (incomplete interviews, person not reached on final follow-up, unavailable for duration of survey, refusals, etc.). The response-rate for the client survey was 21 per cent. While this is considerably lower than the public servant response-rate, it is not unusually low for this type of survey.

TABLE A.2
Client Survey: Sample Disposition and Response-Rate

Disposition	Results
Total Sample	8,163
Attrition	
Invalid number	1,609
Ineligible respondents	498
Not followed-up	2,292
Language difficulties	234
Strata filled	97
Other	15
Total Attrition	4,745
Functional Sample	3,418
Completions	701
Non-Completions	
Contact unavailable	229
Incomplete survey	9
Not reached	487
Refusals	1,992
Total Non-Completions	2,717
Response-Rate	21%