

Clerk of the Privy Council and  
Secretary to the Cabinet



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Ottawa, Canada  
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July 13, 2000

**LETTER FROM THE CLERK OF THE PRIVY COUNCIL,  
HEAD OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE, AND SECRETARY TO CABINET**

Each day the Public Service of Canada contributes to keeping Canada the number one country in the world in which to live. I want to make sure that the United Nations report gives Canada this title, year after year, and that the Public Service is doing its part to achieve this result. In an age where globalization, technical innovation and demographic change are providing exciting opportunities for more creative ways to serve Canadians, this means having the right people with the right skills doing the right things.

Last year, I created three Deputy Minister committees to address the people-oriented priorities of recruitment, workplace well-being (retention), and learning and development in the Public Service. These committees were asked to take stock of what is being done now and to look ahead at what we could do to make the Public Service an even better place to work for those who serve today and those who will serve in the future.

The attached report covers learning and development in the Public Service. Many of the ideas in this report — from individual learning plans to creating platforms for sharing knowledge and ideas; from job shadowing to scanning for best practices — can be implemented right now. If these ideas make sense in your situation, you should just go ahead and take action in your area of responsibility. Other recommendations will require further consideration as they may involve changes to corporate practices and/or more resources directed to these priorities.

To build upon the work of the committees, I recently invited all Deputy Ministers to write to me about the progress in their departments in the areas of recruitment, workplace well-being, and learning and development. In response to this call letter, they provided me with an impressive list of initiatives that are already under way and they told me what is not working and what needs to be improved.

The committees' work and the responses from Deputy Ministers show that there are clear links between recruitment, workplace well-being, and learning and development. Accordingly, I will work with my colleagues to develop an integrated action plan that will set out the corporate priorities that we will focus on together to get results.

The input of managers and employees to this ongoing work will be important. I would encourage you to access my Web site < [www.pco-bcp.gc.ca](http://www.pco-bcp.gc.ca) > to read the other two reports and to contact any one of the committee members to share your ideas and suggestions. This action plan will be as much yours as it will be mine. My Deputy Minister colleagues and I are committed to achieving positive results. In turn, we look to managers and employees for their full commitment and action.

Yours sincerely,



Mel Cappe



Government  
of Canada

Gouvernement  
du Canada



**A public service  
learning organization:  
from coast to coast  
to coast**

**A Policy  
Discussion Paper**

**June 2000**

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**A Discussion Paper**

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## **A Discussion Paper**

### **Purpose**

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The purpose of this discussion paper is to establish a foundation for a Policy Framework to support the Public Service of Canada in its journey to transform itself into a Public Service learning organization. This paper is one of two intended to assist the transformation process.

This paper summarizes and explains the theoretical underpinnings of the learning organization concept. It describes the general context of the current initiative and it explores the normative foundations as well as the practical implications of the learning organization model. It provides a statement of intent for transforming the Public Service into a learning organization to better serve Canadians in the knowledge age. It expounds the rationale and key principles which should guide this collective undertaking and illustrates the benefits citizens, elected officials and public servants will reap by promoting organizational learning at all levels.

The companion document, entitled *Directions for the Future*, identifies concrete actions, some of which are found within the body of this document, destined to move toward becoming a learning organization, in a cohesive and incremental manner. It is the result of vast consultations across Canada under the Chair of the Deputy Minister

Committee on Learning and Development, in partnership with the Canadian Centre for Management Development, The Leadership Network, the Public Service Commission, the Treasury Board Secretariat and the federal regional councils. Numerous other departments and agencies, including the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions, Western Economic Diversification, Veterans Affairs Canada and Natural Resources Canada also contributed time, energy and resources to support this effort.

The two documents should be examined together as they are mutually reinforcing.



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## **Foundations of Organizational Learning**

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The role of learning in organizational life has a long history and contains several distinctive characteristics. It is useful to explore the foundations of the concepts of organizational and lifelong learning in the academic literature.

### ***An historical perspective***

The period between the late 1950s and early 1970s brought a new-found recognition that organizations and systems could develop learning qualities. This was not simply the sum of learning among individuals within an organization, but the capacity of a collective to adapt incrementally to new information and challenges. By the late 1970s, this came to be called “organizational learning”, a distinct field of academic inquiry. This area of research began to look beyond incremental and routine forms of learning to more profound departures in thinking. Over time a wider array of social and technological considerations were included. In the late 1970s and 1980s, researchers looked at the role of social routines, organizational politics, and the need to continually reflect on practice. By the early 1990s, a broader array of social activities was looked at, including the role of

organizational culture, leadership, and the subtleties of interpersonal relations.

While the study of organizational learning was evolving, unprecedented advances in information and communications technology were taking place. By the late 1960s, the field of information management had achieved a level of maturity. Slowly, computer engineers and information managers began to look more closely at how people interact with new technologies. By the late 1980s information managers were exploring how to tailor the use of technology to an organization's particular circumstances. It is at this point that the field of knowledge management emerged as a set of technologies and management techniques designed to make better use of untapped knowledge within an organization.

After the Second World War, with the expansion of post-secondary education, attention was turned to finding new ways to improve teaching and learning among individuals. Initially, this took the form of new teaching and study techniques. By the 1970s, research revealed that individuals have particular teaching and learning styles and that one-size-fits-all techniques had serious limitations. It became gradually clear that learning involved challenging established ways of thinking. People needed the ability to think beyond conventional wisdom and practices in order to become more effective and innovative learners. They also needed approaches to learning that were tailored to their personal needs.

Changes in the labour market since the 1970s further necessitated a more holistic approach to learning. Individuals no longer made a "clean break" from school to work. Furthermore, given the need to continually update knowledge and skills, individuals needed a more comprehensive array of personal, interpersonal, and professional competencies in order to succeed. During the early 1970s, psychologists began to look more systematically at the personal characteristics that caused individuals to succeed and fail at work. By the early 1990s, the number of competencies valued by employers

expanded significantly. There was a growing need to assist individuals to acquire and develop an expanded range of competencies needed to achieve personal and professional aspirations.

### ***An academic perspective***

The literature on learning organizations spans several “disciplinary” perspectives, each relying on different methodologies, addressing different problems, and making unique contributions. In his recent work, Mark Esterby-Smith<sup>1</sup> mapped out the various disciplinary perspectives and their contributions.

1. *Psychology and Organizational Development* — Focuses on human development and how individual learning contributes to organizational learning. Individuals and organizations have distinctive learning styles. Communication and dialogue are required to promote learning while overcoming individuals’ defensiveness.
2. *Management Science* — Focuses on systems to gather and process knowledge while emphasizing the acquisition, distribution and interpretation of information and organizational memory. Problem diagnosis requires a system-wide approach. Inquiry fosters continual improvement. Lessons no longer useful must be “unlearned”, while new lessons are drawn from successes and failures.
3. *Sociology and Organizational Theory* — Learning is a social process influenced by interests, power and ideological pressures. Bureaucratic structures and political conflict prevent organizations from learning to their full potential.

4. *Strategy Perspective* — Focuses on how learning creates competitive advantage. Learning is the ability to adapt rapidly to the environment and thrive through innovation. Learning success is dependent on core skills and competencies. Lessons are drawn from experimental trial and error, partnership-building and emulation.

5. *Production Management Perspective* — Explores how learning enhances productivity and efficiency. Lessons are drawn from sources inside and outside the organization. Organizational design influences the way knowledge is shared.

6. *Cultural Perspective* — This concept focuses on values and beliefs. Societal and organizational cultures are both the cause and effect of learning. Cultural meanings are not the same for all members of a community, and thus management styles are crucial to promote cultures that encourage learning.

At its most basic level, a learning organization is characterized by encouraging systematic problem solving, overarching cultures, cyclical mechanisms of feedback, reflection and change, and evolutionary processes. Every discipline has contributed useful ideas and insights to the further refinement of the concept of a learning organization.



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# **A Canadian Perspective on Learning in the Public Service Organization**

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Learning has gradually emerged as a priority in Canada's Public Service renewal efforts. Since it builds on many past and ongoing initiatives, it is useful to map out the contributions made by earlier efforts.

Although many studies on organizational learning were published during the 1960s and 1970s, learning did not emerge as a management priority until the 1980s. An explicit commitment to learning can first be traced to the PS 2000 Task Force on Training & Development (1989) calling for a "culture of continuous learning."

The report recommended setting up a Steering Group on Continuous Learning. CCMD initiated a research project which led to a publication entitled "*Continuous Learning*". During the same period (1990-97), a forum known as the *Changing Maps Roundtable* began exploring the potential for a "more distributed, learning-based governance system." This Round table, sponsored by several Federal government departments and private sector partners, raised the profile of organizational learning.

The Program Review exercise (1995) led to an extensive re-evaluation of the way the Canadian government operates. In its aftermath, attempts to understand and promote learning have taken many different paths. La Relève gives rise to over a thousand initiatives to build a modern and vibrant institution able to fully use the talent of Public Service employees. It signals an unprecedented priority to human resource management at the corporate, departmental and regional levels. La Relève provides a point of reference for human resource and career development planning, accelerated executive development, prequalification of potential assistant deputy ministers and support for professional communities.

Many departments, such as CIDA, DFO, Canadian Heritage, Transport Canada, Public Works and Government Services as well as agencies like Statistics Canada have launched ambitious organizational learning initiatives involving innovative planning and assessment frameworks. Indeed, it is difficult to find an organization within the Public Service that has not been touched by the organizational learning ethos. However much remains to be done. On November 10, 1999, the results of the *Public Service Employee Survey* were released. The survey results provided a foundation from which to identify areas where improvements are needed, at both the corporate and departmental levels. The survey recognizes, for example, that while the Public Service does well at training for the job, learning and career development are areas of greater weakness.

In its 1999 *Speech from the Throne*, the Government recognized the importance of serving Canadians in the knowledge age, announced the Government On-Line initiative and stated that the Public Service should affirm itself as a learning organization “to provide Canadians with the highest quality of service into the 21st Century”. Among its priorities, the Government committed itself to focus on “... the recruitment, retention and continuous learning of a skilled federal workforce”. In order to shape a management agenda for the Public Service that will respond to the

challenge laid out in the *Speech from the Throne* and the issues identified in the employee survey, three Deputy Minister level committees have been created on Recruitment, Workplace Well-Being and Learning and Development. They have each been asked to develop action plans that will address priorities over the coming year and ensure continued progress over the next five years.

The Learning and Development Committee is comprised of Deputy Ministers and Associate Deputy Ministers and is chaired by the President of CCMD. The Committee is pursuing a comprehensive work plan including:

- 1) the development of a framework for a learning organization, a statement of principles clarifying the commitment to learning across the Public Service; and
- 2) a governance system which addresses roles, responsibilities and accountabilities at the individual, organizational and corporate levels.

#### **Pursuing the Canadian model by...**

- Fostering a learning organization
- Promoting knowledge management
- Supporting lifelong learning

**... each contributing to a professional, non-partisan public service.**

There are both circumstantial and systemic reasons to promote the Public Service as a learning organization. The circumstances created by the Government On-Line initiatives require that a deliberate and coherent learning policy and agenda be put in place to assist federal public service employees deliver effective advice and services in sync with the reality of the knowledge economy and digital society.

There are also systemic reasons for the Public Service to put a premium on the learning organization. A recent study commissioned by CCMD as part of its governance research

program, compares the history of public sector reform in Canada with the experiences of other countries. Peter Aucoin, a prominent public administration scholar, observes that the Canadian model of public sector reform affirms the primacy of a professional public service. While other public sector reforms have been marked by politicization, privatization and performance measurement, “the Canadian approach assumes that a professional public service constitutes public value because such a service is managed as a learning organization, that is, an organization that continuously learns to provide the quality of policy advice and quality of service delivery demanded by the requirements of governance.”<sup>2</sup> Learning is thus an integral part of Canada’s system of governance, within which a professional Public Service plays an essential role.



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## **Elements of a Policy Framework**

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At its most basic level, the process of learning is the acquisition of new information, knowledge, and ideas that change the way one understands, acts or views the world. While learning is often made more efficient through formal instruction, such as the type that takes place within a classroom setting, it is an activity that is far more integral to individuals' day-to-day lives. Learning is a continuous process of drawing new lessons from the interpretation and reinterpretation of experience — one's own experience, as well as the experience of others. It is also a cumulative process whereby new lessons build upon or supplant old ones.

While learning is familiar to us all, what needs to be further clarified, is how learning relates to the Public Service of the future. In order to understand this relationship, it is necessary to consider learning at the level of the individual and at the level of the organization.

## Core Definitions

**Learning Style:** The way an individual prefers to (or is predisposed to) acquire and process new information and ideas.

**Learning Plan (Individual):** A method of focusing future learning efforts to better reflect an individual's learning needs, interests, and style.

**Learning Plan (Organizational):** A method of forecasting an organization's learning needs so that steps can be taken to ensure that all those needs are met.

**Training:** A formal procedure for acquiring the knowledge, values, skills or abilities that are required for successful performance in a job or occupation.

**Professional Development:** The process by which one undertakes personal improvements to achieve career plans or goals.

**Personal Development:** The process by which one seeks intellectual growth to achieve personal and professional aspirations and feel a sense of fulfillment.

**Community of practice:** Groups composed of individuals who assume roles based on their personal expertise and interests, as opposed to formal titles and hierarchical stature.

**Knowledge Management:** The process of creating, organizing and leveraging collective knowledge to enhance organizational performance.

At the level of the individual, the ideal approach to learning is called “lifelong learning.” Lifelong learning is an endless curiosity and a commitment to inquiry, discovery and intellectual growth.

Traditionally, the term was used to describe “professional development”, such as the pursuit of professional interests, career aspirations and career plans. In its modern definition, lifelong learning includes both professional development and personal development, the process by which one seeks intellectual growth to achieve personal aspirations and feel a sense of personal and professional fulfillment. While lifelong learning is a concept central to organizational learning, the learning organization cannot be reduced to a cluster of individual learners. In other words, the learning organization is far more than the sum total of individual learners it comprises. While a learning organization will consciously support and encourage lifelong learning among all its employees, it will also design, evaluate and improve all of its processes (including client interface and stakeholder relations) to ensure that both tacit and explicit forms of knowledge are best put to use to achieve its results and accomplish its mission.

At the collective level, what makes the concept of organizational learning in the Public Service so worthwhile? There are several reasons. First, the focus is placed on people. At the heart of the learning organization is the knowledge, know-how and ability needed to innovate, add value and enable it to achieve its mission. Second, the concept underscores the need to mobilize the power of learning on a broad scale. Continual change is a reality. Yesterday’s solutions grow stale quickly. People throughout the organization must become sophisticated learners in tune with changes at the local, national and international levels as well as across the organization as a whole, to anticipate and constantly adapt to change. Third, the concept of organizational learning highlights the fact that learning is a social activity and a collective activity involving the exchange of knowledge and ideas. A learning organization relies on teams, networks and *communities of practice*, taking on responsibilities on the basis of their

personal and professional expertise and interests, as opposed to the hierarchical structure of the past.

## **A statement of intent**

“The Government of Canada embraces the concept of a Public Service Learning Organization to meet the needs of Canada and Canadians in the knowledge age and to support lifelong learning as a defining characteristic of a professional and non-partisan public service.”

### **Objectives and Results**

The two broad objectives the Public Service of Canada will pursue in order to become a learning organization are:

- 1) take concrete measures and actions to transform the Public Service of Canada into a model Public Service learning organization in all its activities of policy formulation, program implementation, service delivery and internal services to meet the challenges of its time;
- 2) support lifelong learning at all levels to ensure the Public Service of Canada is able to attract, retain and develop the talent it needs in support of its mission.

The time has come for an explicit statement on the part of government and of the Public Service to embrace the concept of organizational learning and lifelong learning. The federal commitment would result in:

- 1) policies and programs that anticipate and are more responsive to the priorities, needs and concerns of Government and contemporary Canadian society;

- 2) more effective and efficient delivery of federal programs and services adding value to society and the economy;
- 3) improved knowledge management practices leading to better policies, programs and services;
- 4) increased relevance to public needs;
- 5) enhanced reputation of excellence and professionalism, both domestically and internationally, for Canada's Public Service;
- 6) enhanced skills, abilities, competencies and experience across the Public Service to better serve Canadians in the knowledge economy;
- 7) enhanced capacity of the Public Service to attract and retain highly qualified employees.

### **Proposed Policy Principles**

Learning has as much to do with relations building and culture as it does management practices and leadership style. The overarching principles proposed below serve to guide the transformation of federal institutions into learning organizations. These principles are intended to provide a normative and adaptable framework, not a prescriptive set of rules. These principles, by design and consequence, are not intended to be mutually exclusive; on the contrary they are meant to be mutually reinforcing. Many practices found under each principle may be also applicable to others.



## **Six basic principles at the hub of a Public Service learning organization**

Values knowledge, ideas and relations building as an integral part of its business.

Learns from past and current experience and from experimentation.

Values people and their diversity of ideas, values, cultures, skills and capabilities.

Integrates learning in its leadership and management practices.

Learns for serving.

Evaluates both the processes and outcomes of learning.

# Six Principles

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## **Principle I**

**A learning organization encourages learning by valuing knowledge, ideas and relations building as an integral part of its business.**

### ***Description of the principle***

An organization which values learning is adept at aligning learning with the achievement of its corporate goals and objectives. Learning is integrated into the corporate mission — how goals and objectives are to be reached is directly related to the skills and capabilities of people in the organization and to their learning needs. Learning permeates all aspects of the organization's culture. An organization that promotes learning values knowledge and new ideas. It enables and encourages its employees at all levels to learn and share learning by using a wide spectrum of tools and processes. It builds on the capacity of people to acquire and develop knowledge and to add value to existing knowledge generated both within and outside the organization. It provides opportunities and incentives for people to learn. By fostering participation and openness, the learning organization encourages people to assess facts, raise questions, search for answers, make systemic comparison through analysis, evaluate outcomes and make judgements on the validity of solutions and results. Through consultation and engagement, it invites participation from citizens, partners and stakeholders in policy development and program design and values their unique contribution.

### ***Possible applications of the principle***

At the *corporate* level, learning should be recognized in all key corporate documents, for example, *Results for Canadians*, the management framework prepared by the

Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat. *Results for Canadians* is centered on four key commitments:

- 1) the need to sharpen the citizen focus in designing, delivering, evaluating and reporting on activities as well as to improve service and expand partnerships with other governments and the private sector;
- 2) the need to be guided by a clear set of professional and ethical values, respectful of democracy;
- 3) the need to manage to achieve results and develop the means to report results to elected officials and Canadians; and
- 4) the need for responsive spending, linking resources to results and demonstrating value-added programs and services.

## **Directions for the Future:**

### **Initiative 7: Business Plans**

To reinforce the importance of investing in people, Treasury Board guidelines for developing business plans and performance management reports should first and foremost focus on mission and people.

Business plans should identify the most critical learning needs of the organization to fulfill its mission and to meet government priorities in light of skills, knowledge and demographic profiles of the employees of the organization. The business plan should outline strategic investments required to develop the necessary knowledge, knowledge transfer, knowledge infrastructure and human capital. Performance reports should monitor and measure progress.

Provision of such information could help create a constructive dialogue with Parliamentarians on a department's knowledge gaps and the options available to remedy the situation. It could also help create a more favourable context to discuss how departments learn from experience and past successes and failures.

Recognizing that learning is a *sine qua non* to the achievement of the four management commitments would help illustrate the commitment to Public Service organizational learning.

At the *organizational* level, concrete measures should be adapted to the circumstances of each organization. Deputy Heads should help integrate learning in the business planning and performance reporting processes. Business plans and Reports on Plans and Priorities should focus on the need for new knowledge to achieve the departmental vision, mission and key results. They should typically include, as a central component, an “investment in people” strategy. Key investment decisions should be supported by a learning strategy (e.g. what type of learning is anticipated, how the learning will be collected and shared, etc.) Business plans should clearly allocate time and resources in support of learning, thereby ensuring that sufficient resources (time, access and budgets) are provided to support organizational learning.

At the *individual* level, people need to become actively engaged and take responsibility for learning. Nurturing the “learner” attitude for oneself and encouraging it in others, attitudes that encourage learning such as openness, receptivity, willingness to provide constructive challenges and humility, are key to the promotion of a learning culture.

# Six Principles

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## **Principle II**

**A learning organization learns from experience**

### ***Description of the principle***

A Public Service learning organization captures and uses existing knowledge by drawing on past experiences and incorporating best practices and lessons learned. Learning from experience has two components: the ability to draw from past and current knowledge and learning from experimentation to explore new avenues and to gain new knowledge.

Learning from what we know implies a capacity for sharing the knowledge of those who have experience; the insights of those we serve (citizens, parliamentarians) and of those with whom we work (other government departments, other governments, private sector, non-governmental organizations, etc). Creating knowledge requires a working environment open to experimentation. Experimentation in the public sector must be carried out in a manner that maximizes learning while minimizing the risks to the public. The results of our experimentation should be shared as broadly as possible with elected officials, citizens, partners and stakeholders.

## Directions for the Future:

### **Initiative 8: Preserving Corporate Memory**

A Public Service learning organization must preserve and share existing knowledge and best practices, while at the same time shedding knowledge that is obsolete and no longer of value to the organization.

Many individuals nearing retirement in the Public Service have a wealth of knowledge and experience that they are eager to share. A system of "elders" would allow such individuals, at various levels, to progressively step out of their regular duties and use pre-retirement years to document best practices, preserve corporate memory, transfer knowledge within and outside the department and help prepare those who will take over their responsibilities.

A system of "elders" would aim to retain the services of a limited number of people recognized inside and outside of the organization for their mastery in a field of activity of critical importance to the Public Service. To play their role, they would receive proper training in mentoring and would be used as a corporate resource.

## ***Possible application of the principle***

At the *corporate* level, we should encourage measures that systematically seek feedback from users and employees. For example, the *Citizen-Centred Service* initiative seeks to incorporate citizens' concerns at every stage of the service design and delivery process. It provides a framework for public servants to test and experiment with new ways of delivering services. The emphasis on on-going citizen feedback allows for new knowledge and insights. The *Risk Management Policy Framework* offers a sound platform for the pursuit of opportunity through prudent risk-taking. It acknowledges that to identify opportunities, there is a need to promote inquisitiveness and "exploratory learning". The focus on horizontal management, through the leadership of Federal Regional Councils, opens a fertile ground for organizational learning through enhanced communication, coordination and partnerships, building on existing initiatives and experimenting with new avenues of cross-organizational cooperation. Initiatives with a strong citizen engagement component such as Rural Dialogue also offer significant opportunities for cross-departmental learning.

At the *organizational* level, Departments should encourage managers and staff to participate in "communities of practice" to share best practices across organizational boundaries. Individual and team contributions to these communities should be recognized in performance appraisal processes. All major initiatives should involve documenting best practices and lessons learned.

At the *individual* level, employees need to exert a sense of personal responsibility for documenting best practices and sharing the lessons learned. Employees should also identify the needs for experimentation and pilot-testing to improve policies, programs and services. Learning from experience as well as from experimentation should be part of individual and team learning plans.

# Six Principles

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## **principle III:**

**A learning organization values people and diversity**

### ***Description of the principle***

Valuing people and diversity requires that the Public Service foster a culture and environment conducive to openness, participation and inclusiveness. Essential to creating such a culture is respect for individuals, respect for their unique ideas, values, cultures, differences in perspective, skills and capabilities. A learning organization provides opportunities where debate can take place, a safe place to challenge entrenched assumptions and the *status quo*, where people are comfortable voicing opinions and feel free to fully contribute their knowledge, experience and values.

This principle is at the hub of the learning organization. Without respect for value pluralism, there cannot be a sustainable learning organization in which people, from different cultures, backgrounds and disciplines share and enrich each others' perspective for better policies, programs and services. In an environment which reflects and values diversity, people should feel comfortable to express their views and to debate diverging views. Understanding one's own biases, using collaborative approaches and facilitating consensus are competencies needing particular attention.

### ***Possible application of the principle***

At the *corporate* level, a cogent response to the Task Force on the Participation of Visible Minorities in the Federal Public Service, and to the upcoming Task Force report on inclusiveness of the Public Service should seize the opportunity provided over the next five years to better reflect the diversity of the Canadian society and to prepare managers and employees to serve in a cross-cultural and pluralistic environment. Furthermore, Central Agencies and Departments need to create "safe spaces" for dialogue and

debate on highly contentious issues. Multi-disciplinarity in team composition at the cross-departmental, management and operational levels needs to become the norm.

## Directions for the Future:

### **Initiative 21: Reflecting Societal Diversity**

Special efforts will be needed over the next five years to change the face of the Public Service to better reflect the diversity of Canadian society. The Public Service Commission will have a crucial role to play in identifying qualified people and building an *inventory of pre-qualified candidates* to meet departments' needs as they emerge.

### **Initiative 22: Training Managers to Work with Diversity**

Managers must be trained to work and serve in a cross-cultural environment where diversity (culture, background, age, ideas) is respected and valued. This means learning to set aside one's own biases, to challenge the status quo and to encourage the emergence of new ideas.

At the *organizational* level, managers should use their existing authorities to the fullest in order to ensure that the workforce in their work unit is pluralistic, diversified and representative of the Canadian society. The *modus operandi* of management committees and governing boards and entities may also warrant reexamination to ensure that meaningful dialogue, respectful of diversity, is taking place. Orientation programs for new and existing employees should include a component on valuing diversity. Special attention should be given to the acquisition of basic skills for working in a cross-cultural and value-pluralistic environment.

At the *individual* level, learners must become aware of their own biases toward diversity. Individual self awareness is a critical aspect of working and learning in a value-pluralistic and cross-cultural environment. It is also a precondition to actively fight prejudice and discrimination in the workplace.

# Six Principles

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## **principle IV:**

**A learning organization integrates learning into management practices**

### *Description of the principle*

In a learning organization, the leadership and management styles throughout the organization are key to encouraging learning. Managing in support of learning means that departments have an explicit policy on lifelong learning, that time and resources are allocated in support of learning, that the commitment to learning is reflected in the day-to-day management practices, and finally, that results are monitored on an on-going basis. While each Department and Agency should adapt its learning policies and practices to meet its specific needs and circumstances, some consistency is necessary if the goals of horizontal management and lateral cooperation are to be met.

The allocation of time and resources are essential to give life to a commitment to learning. Just as we work to ensure program integrity through appropriate capital and operational investments, the Public Service of Canada should ensure that it is replenishing and developing the human capital of its people. Making funds available for investments in public servants is a fundamental step in becoming a learning organization. Committing resources to learning and adhering to this, even in the face of daily pressures, are important features of leading and managing in a Public Service Learning Organization.

## Directions for the Future:

### **Initiative 28: Departmental Learning Policy**

Many departments and agencies, such as Public Works and Government Services Canada and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada have an explicit learning policy committed to lifelong learning at all levels. This approach should be encouraged in every department and agency. To achieve the desired results, *learning policies must be supported by an explicit commitment of time and resources* — a commitment which should be reflected in the organization of work and the work schedules of all employees. Accountability for implementation of learning plans and results must also be established within a policy statement.

### **Initiative 29: Individual Learning Plans**

Individual learning plans are the key instrument to ensure that the organization does not live off the existing human capital of its people. *Learning is a shared responsibility between managers and their employees.* Learning plans are built on the commitment of employees to learn and reflect the collective undertaking to support their learning needs by investing corporate resources to ensure that their knowledge remains at the leading edge in their area of expertise and that they are able to reach their full potential. Investing in individual's learning is the key to providing them with a sense of security and to encouraging mobility inside and outside the Public Service. Learning plans must include formal training, opportunities to learn through experience and to share knowledge with others. They should exist at all levels — in particular, supervisors and senior managers, including Deputy Ministers, need to serve as an example to others if the importance of learning is to permeate the organization.

## ***Possible applications of the principle***

At the *corporate* level, refunding departmental investments in formal corporate learning undertaken outside the home department, by using a portion of annual lapsing funds would send a powerful signal.

There is also a need to encourage functional communities, eg. Science and Technology, Information Technology, Comptrollership, Human Resources, etc. to become “communities of practice” with the explicit objective of generating knowledge and fostering learning both within and across their respective fields.

The roles and responsibilities of Training and Development Canada, The Leadership Network and CCMD in support of departmental learning needs, also need to be clarified.

A strategic alliance of all federal websites contributing to learning to ensure greater synergy among content, tools and approaches should be developed.

At the *organizational* level, ensure that individual and team learning plans are an integral part of the performance management regime. Achievable and measurable learning objectives should be incorporated in the performance plans of each employee.

At the *individual* level, people in leadership and management positions need to affirm their personal commitment to learning by committing to their own learning plans, their teams’ and their employees’ as “key” commitments. Performance pay should take account of learning objectives as they relate to the business results. Under existing delegation of authority, recognition, rewards and incentives should be used to encourage individual learners for generating, applying and sharing knowledge.

# Six Principles

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## **Principle V:**

**A learning organization learns for serving**

### ***Description of the principle***

Becoming a learning organization in the Public Service context, means to create and sustain a working environment conducive to learning tied directly to the business of the organization. It does not mean to engage into never ending activities of “learning for learning’s sake”. Learning is critically important to the ongoing relevance of the Public Service in serving Canada and Canadians in the knowledge age. Learning is essential to the quality of service we provide and the advice we give. It is key to ensuring the wellness of our workplace. It is also closely tied to a sustained capacity to meet service standards. An organization that focuses on serving must clearly be able to understand and respond to the needs of citizens and of those who are elected to represent them. Responsiveness requires collecting, analyzing and interpreting input and feedback from a variety of sources, both internal and external. Much of the knowledge resides with citizens and means must be found to ensure that this knowledge is best put to use in serving the public interest.

## Directions for the Future:

### **Initiative 35: Scanning for Best Practices**

Departments should be capable and adept at scanning for best practices linked to the mission, inside and outside of government. This may include the development and use of "knowledge prospectors", people expected to search beyond the organization for new knowledge pertinent to the organization and the delivery of its mission.

### **Initiative 36: Benchmarking**

Services provided should be benchmarked against the best in Canada and in the world.

### **Initiative 37: Feedback from Citizens**

Systematic feedback should be sought about the services provided, from citizens, clients and elected representatives. Mechanisms must also be in place to respond to concerns, issues raised.

### ***Possible applications of the principle***

At the *corporate* level, any effort to alleviate the lack of time due to an ever increasing workload, the most serious impediment to organizational learning, will go a long way to sustain an environment conducive to learning. Managing the workload will also improve the wellness of our organization, a *sine qua non* to learning. Following through on the proposals from the Workplace Well-Being Committee will lay building blocks to improve and sustain corporate wellness throughout the Public Service. Many of the implementation suggestions discussed above (i.e. allocating time and money for learning as part of the business plan cycle) will contribute to the wellness and allow us to fully reap the benefits of learning. Further, the implementation of Government-on-line initiatives must be integrated into a broader learning framework — including the development of citizen engagement practices.

At the *organizational* level, the momentum to move to citizen-centred services and initiatives should be maintained. Processes that allow public servants to periodically re-discover those they serve, either directly or indirectly, are conducive to organizational learning that leads to better service. Benchmarking against “best in class” organizations is also a useful learning device for improving service.

At the *individual* level, the process of seeking and acting on citizens’ feedback and being actively engaged in continuous improvement requires that the organizational commitment be matched by an equally strong personal commitment from all employees. Focusing on serving is as much a factor of personal attitude and sense of agency supported by a positive organizational culture as it is of processes, systems and methods. Such a commitment results from leadership exercised at all levels, a willingness to “work to one’s limit of authority” and to develop the skills and competencies to engage into well defined experimentation and sharing both positive and negative results. It also requires the determination to continuously improve services and programs by examining their relevance, challenging their underlying assumptions and actively looking for better modes of operation.

# Six Principles

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## **principle VI:**

**A learning organization evaluates both the process and outcomes of learning**

### ***Description of the principle***

A learning organization evaluates on an ongoing basis both the process and the results of its strategic investments in learning. The most important learning is the ability to reflect on the underlying assumptions, philosophical influences and mental constructs that frame the world around us, and then learn to develop new and insightful frames of reference that lead to a better understanding of reality. Evaluating learning requires a careful examination of the tools, mechanisms and processes by which organizational learning is fostered throughout the organization. It also means examining the extent to which all existing management processes (human resources, financial, technology, citizen engagement, stakeholder relations, etc.) contribute to organizational learning.

The Public Service Employee Survey of 1999 made an important step in establishing a baseline of public servants' attitudes on learning needs, training expectations and professional development aspirations. The 1999 data reveal that there are significant differences in perceptions between departments and agencies depending on their mandate. The data also show important variances between the executive and non-executive cadres of employees. The 1999 survey will provide useful baseline information against which to track and measure progress on learning, both at the organizational and corporate levels. Many questions can be used as proxies for perceptual indicators in order to develop an attitudinal index of the Public Service as a learning organization.

Performance measurement must, however, go beyond collecting, analyzing and interpreting attitudinal data. It must also address the difficult task of ascribing “value” to learning investments and determining reliable performance indicators obtained from robust and verifiable methodologies.

## Directions for the Future:

### **Initiative 39: Evaluating Overall Learning Processes and Outcomes**

Based on departmental business plans and performance reporting documents, *the Learning and Development Committee could be asked to monitor, evaluate and report annually on departmental performance on learning*. The Annual Report to the Prime Minister on the Public Service of Canada could be used to report overall progress on both process and outcomes.

### **Initiative 40: Evaluating Individual Learning Processes and Outcomes**

Managers, in partnership with their employees, should also be accountable for their effectiveness in identifying and addressing learning needs for employees and the organization. The results of learning initiatives should be monitored and evaluated in terms of tangible indicators (e.g., productivity), as well less measurable indicators (e.g., quality of advice and service provided).

## ***Application of the principle***

At the *corporate* level, the current thrust to foster horizontal management will help to share best practices and lessons learned on learning practices, through such mechanisms as the Regional Councils and the Functional Communities. Central Agencies also have an important role to play in ensuring that learning is a predominant feature of all management processes including review, audit, performance recording and comptrollership. Further, the design and delivery of management development programs that incorporate methods of evaluating learning will also improve learning practices.

At the *organizational* level, the process of evaluating the process as well as the outcomes of learning can take many forms: from formal to informal means, from periodic reviews to on-going monitoring. The focus of any effort to evaluate should not only be retrospective but equally be prospective (e.g. by anticipating learning needs and requirements).

At the *individual* level, again the principle is multi-faceted. Evaluating the effectiveness of a learning plan should examine both aspects: the process as well as the outcomes. A key consideration is to examine the extent to which the learning plan is enclosed in the departmental mission and aligned with its priorities. Applying a relevance test such as “how will citizens and elected officials we serve benefit from the proposed learning?” is crucially important.



**A public service  
learning organization:  
from coast to coast  
to coast**

## **A Discussion Paper**

# **The Governance of Learning**

A brief discussion of governance measures which may advance the importance of learning is presented below. Clarification of roles, responsibilities and accountabilities will also need to be addressed.

### ***“Learning Champion”***

This measure involves assigning the leadership role for learning to a senior official. The Chief Learning Officer (CLO) would ensure that best practices are documented and emulated as well as coordinated. The function would also champion learning across the Public Service. The CLO should be supported by a small team to provide a central point of reference, provide leadership and rally managers at all levels by engaging them in capacity building efforts in support of organizational learning.

A number of private enterprises have designated Chief Learning Officers, including General Electric, Coca-Cola, Motorola and Monsanto. Others have Chief Knowledge Officers (CKO), such as IBM Consulting, Ernst & Young, and Coopers & Lybrand.

## **Three governance measures to consider:**

A “**Learning Champion**”, at the organizational level, to serve as catalyst and central point of reference for learning advocacy, action and accountability

A “**Learning Nerve Centre**” for system-wide participation in the learning agenda and to capitalize on and value ‘communities of practice’

A “**Distributed Learning Network**” to ensure broad-based participation, across organizational boundaries, by generating and sharing learning and ensuring transfer of knowledge between and among communities.

*... in the true Canadian tradition, a renewed governance framework for learning could be a hybrid drawing from the best attributes of different measures. All of which doesn't preclude the necessity of clarity in basic roles and responsibilities in the current institutional framework.*

## ***“Learning Nerve Centre”***

When the authority for learning is divided among several bodies, a coordinated approach to policy and service delivery is required.

The “nerve centre” provides such a system-wide governance structure. A high level committee such as the *Learning and Development Committee* could ensure overall policy cohesion in learning investments and parameters. A nerve centre operates as a hub-and-spoke architecture: that is, a one-stop-shop for getting information on the various learning initiatives within the organization, while offering a few select services.

The approach is conducive to the development of communities of practice, since there is a central meeting place (virtual and/or physical). It also offers a great deal of flexibility to provide overall direction and monitor progress.

## ***“Distributed Learning Network”***

A distributed learning network would be a confederation of groups, units and communities of practice dedicated to learning in and across their respective milieus. The purpose of a distributed learning network would be to emulate best practices both within and across network members. Cutting across organizational boundaries, the network would also promote self-help by ensuring a free-flow of information and knowledge and engaging participants in constructive dialogue. The network would represent an agora for generating and exchanging innovative ideas and engaging in collective problem-solving. *Directions for the Future* contains key initiatives that will assist the Public Service of Canada to create and sustain a distributed learning network.

# Directions for the Future

## **Initiative 20: Virtual Networks**

An Internet-based virtual network of public servants could be used to pool and share talents and ideas. Discussion fora and other interactive technology could be used to introduce new ideas, share thoughts and comments on ideas and issues under consideration. A strategic alliance among all Public Service websites supporting learning could be established, in effect, creating a consortium of learning information in the government. The Government On-Line initiative could be used to ensure that those who serve have access to the infrastructure they need to connect to each other in the same fashion as they are expected to connect to citizens. *Investing in infrastructure must also include an investment in the skills of people, to ensure they are able to use the technology effectively.*

## **Initiative 34: Networks**

A key to facilitating access to new knowledge is the ability to multiply the channels that are available to interact and network. The development and use of networks at all levels (e.g., regional, interdepartmental, middle managers, functional communities) should be encouraged to develop communities of practice, with the explicit objective of fostering learning both within and across fields.

A network of "Public Service correspondents" could be designated on a rotational basis to communicate and disseminate corporate initiatives within departments and in the regions and to better inform central agencies on emerging regional and departmental issues or of the need to adjust corporate initiatives.

## ***Looking ahead***

As noted by the federal Human Resources Council as well as in the consultations leading to the determination of a Learning Agenda, the governance of learning needs to be examined, disentangled and clarified within the broader context of accountability for integrated resource management (including human, financial and technological). In the current institutional framework, the roles and responsibilities for promoting and supporting learning are shared among several stakeholders. The “division of labour” among actors will need to be reviewed carefully as the Policy Framework and actionable initiatives are further refined and implemented.

Looking ahead however, the worth and reality of the learning organization will be demonstrated to public servants, elected officials and citizens through the actions, initiatives and concrete measures taken by individuals and organizations. As comprehensive, principle-based and grounded in research the Policy Framework may be, the Public Service learning organization will be created and sustained by an ongoing commitment to action, at all levels of the organization. Otherwise, the Policy Framework will represent a string of words expressing lofty principles and idealized practices. This is why the initiatives identified in Directions for the Future, the companion document to the Policy Framework, are so critically important to making the learning organization a reality.

## ENDNOTES

1. Mark Easterby-Smith, Robin Snell and Silvia Gherardi, "Organizational Learning: Diverging Communities of Practice?" *Management Learning*, vol. 29, no. 3, 1998: 259-272.

2. Peter Aucoin, The Public Sector as a Learning Organization: Maintaining the Momentum in Public Sector Reform, A paper prepared for Governance Research Project, CCMD, April 15, 2000