



2019-2020 ANNUAL REPORT TO THE DEPUTY MINISTER



OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN FOR MENTAL HEALTH



Illustration by Yves Morissette, PSPC employee

To send questions, comments, testimonies or suggestions, or to schedule an appointment with the Ombudsman:

Address:

Office of the Ombudsman for Mental Health
Public Services and Procurement Canada
Place du Portage III, 9C2-112
11, Laurier Street
Gatineau, Quebec K1A 0S5

Business hours:

8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (Eastern Standard Time)

Telephone: 1-844-278-1126

Email: tpsgc.ombudsm-ombudmh.pwgsc@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca

mySource (PSPC intranet site):

<https://masource-mysource.spac-pspc.gc.ca/eng/osm-omh/Pages/default.aspx>

PSPC website:

<https://www.tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca/osm-omh/rapports-reports/2018-2019-eng.html>

GCconnex:

<https://gcconnex.gc.ca/groups/profile/34614807/the-office-of-the-ombudsman-for-mental-health>

Catalogue No: P1-37E-PDF

The illustrations featured in this report are original works by Yves Morissette, artist and Public Services and Procurement Canada employee. Yves graciously donated his time and considerable talent to bring a personal touch to this report. The cover page artwork signifies the following:

Stand under your umbrella and catch your breath through the rainfall. The Office of the Ombudsman for Mental Health is a safe space to weather the storm. Shield your mental health as it is at the centre of your heart.

2019-2020 IN BRIEF

- More than **480** confidential meetings with employees
- Met with **605** employees
- **14** regional visits across Canada
- **18** cities visited
- **6** workplace assessments recommended informally by the Ombudsman to senior management
- **8** employees inducted into the Ombudsman's Inspiring People **Honour Roll**
- **3** major events with PSPC and external guests

REPORT SUMMARY

The Office of the Ombudsman for Mental Health (the Office) of Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC) is pleased to present its Annual Report to the Deputy Minister for the period from April 1, 2019, to March 31, 2020.

OBJECTIVES

This report aims to:

1. Provide a situation overview with respect to psychological health in the workplace at PSPC based on the Ombudsman's meetings and consultations with employees and additional sources of information
2. Review recommendations for improvement while reporting on achievements
3. Outline the Office's main initiatives and activities to further support departmental and federal workplace psychological health and related commitments

KEY OBSERVATIONS

Over the last twelve months, the Office heard about a broad spectrum of workplace issues ranging from management styles, workload and workplace well-being to performance evaluation, lack of civility and perceived harassment and/or bullying. The frequency of these recurrent workplace issues remains a primary concern of many employees, and these issues are associated with the following themes:

1. leadership
2. workload
3. lack of civility and respect

RECOMMENDATIONS

This year's observations relate to issues and behaviours that are not new to the Office. Should these issues and behaviours persist, we risk slowing down the pace of progress made to date or having that progress regress. The Deputy Minister voiced on numerous occasions the importance of leadership competencies along with leading and serving with clear expectations and effective behaviours. To continue on our path toward success, the Ombudsman is reiterating six past recommendations:

1. Establish a mandatory on-boarding program for managers
2. Provide training for remote management
3. Improve recruitment, development and evaluation practices for supervisors, managers and executives
4. Create a centralized coaching program for managers and executives, and a directory of mentors in each branch and region for employees
5. Develop tools to further promote civility and respect in the workplace
6. Conduct exit interviews.

INITIATIVES AND ACTIVITIES

Office leadership completed numerous initiatives and activities, including:

1. launching a second **mental health survey**
2. advancing the **mental health performance measurement tool**, which will eventually allow all departments to adopt an evidence-based approach to monitoring and improving psychological health and safety in the workplace
3. inducting an additional eight people into the **Inspiring People Honour Roll**
4. organizing a number of **communication and outreach activities** to educate employees about the importance of promoting and protecting mental health
5. delivering **PSPC's Let's Talk Mental Health Day**
6. participating as a **guest speaker in numerous mental health sessions and panel discussions** hosted by third-party organizations including non-government entities, universities and other federal departments.

The year ahead looks promising and offers great opportunities to continue this important work, in which we put people first.



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THE STORY OF A WHALE NAMED PAT!

If you've ever wondered where the little whale you see on the material produced by the Office of the Ombudsman for Mental Health comes from, this story is for you.

In February 2017, the federal public service's very first Office of the Ombudsman for Mental Health was launched right here at PSPC. On his first day on the job, the Ombudsman met with an employee named Patrice, who presented him with a wood carving of a whale. Months earlier, Patrice had lost his father and met with an [Employee and Organization Assistance Program](#) counsellor, who suggested doing something that reminded Patrice of his father to help deal with the loss. Patrice accepted the advice and took up wood carving, fashioning, among other things, the little whale.

Of course, the whale had to be called Pat! Pat the whale became the official symbol of the Office, displayed prominently in its ninth-floor office at Portage III in Gatineau.

Since Pat's arrival, whale images have been used in the Office's official branding, including on event posters, on its [intranet page](#) and on the mental health surveys. Whale images also appear in the beautiful artwork created for the Office's [2018-2019 Annual Report to the Deputy Minister](#) by PSPC's own Véronique Nadeau Froislie, from the Communications Sector's Creative Services team.

So that's the story of a whale named Pat! He's making big waves at PSPC and reminding us all that the Ombudsman and his team are here to help provide us with a safe space where we are free to speak without fear of reprisal or judgment.



MESSAGE FROM THE OMBUDSMAN FOR MENTAL HEALTH



Dear Mr. Matthews,

I am pleased to submit my most recent annual report, covering the period from April 1, 2019, to March 31, 2020.

Over three years ago, the Department established the position of Ombudsman for Mental Health. Since then, the Office has forged a relationship of trust with the Department's employees, both in the National Capital Region and in the regions. That trust is still central to this Office's needs. Equally important is the continued support from our senior management for the services provided by my Office. That support is essential for the continuity of our services. In addition, it further promotes the organizational message that the mental health of everyone in the workplace is essential.

The Office has become a well-established service. However, I also note the ever-growing need of employees, managers and executives to receive confidential and impartial services in a safe space. That safe space is the core of our service, as it provides a quiet shelter where individuals can express themselves freely and without judgment and can feel listened to and understood.

Our department continues to make a mark in the government community and is positioning itself as a leader by making workplace mental health a priority and continuing to incorporate it into our work methods and practices.

My Office recently released the results of a second survey that more closely examined the cumulative effects of a number of changes carried out within a short time at PSPC. The results pointed to a clear connection between these changes and a number of aspects of work, including workload and individuals' psychological health. Our survey provides some interesting avenues to examine further.

We cannot talk about the past year without mentioning the COVID-19 crisis. It is an unprecedented crisis that continues to challenge us to be resilient. Whether contributing to the Department's essential and critical services or juggling office activities with children at home, whatever the situation, we have all turned to new ways of doing things and, in the process, learned more about ourselves.

The Ombuds who actively participate in the Government of Canada's Interdepartmental Committee of Organizational Ombuds (ICOO) have met on several occasions during the crisis to share their views

in order to identify common issues and come up with solutions that support people first. Our work was shared with our respective departments as well as the central agencies, and was greatly appreciated and very well received.

The Ombuds role does not come with a playbook. It falls to each occupant of the position to shape the work according to their own experience, by harnessing their deep desire to continuing to actively contribute to improving the organizational culture. This is what I have tried to do over the past three years, and I am grateful for every moment when discussions with employees help to identify issues and often come up with solutions to improve our work environments.

In closing, I would like to thank the people I work with every day. All of them positively contribute daily to making this office a place where people can express themselves freely and feel understood.

André



ABOUT THE OFFICE

The Office was created in February 2017 following a decision by Marie Lemay, former Deputy Minister of PSPC. She was determined to create a culture that would break the silence and help employees develop their full potential, focusing not only on actions and results, but also on the ways in which results are achieved and actions are carried out. Today, Deputy Minister Matthews is an inspiring advocate for the Office's work and strongly believes in providing a safe space for employees.

MANDATE

The Office's mandate is to provide employees with a **safe, independent forum** where they can speak freely about various issues that impact their mental health, and request help when they need it. The Office's work is guided by four overarching principles: **independence, confidentiality, neutrality/impartiality and informality** (see the definitions in **APPENDIX A**).

ROLE

The role of the Ombudsman is to:

1. **GUIDE EMPLOYEES BY LISTENING TO THEIR CONCERNS AND DIRECTING THEM TO AVAILABLE RESOURCES**
2. **FACILITATE DISCUSSIONS** between parties in conflict through informal interventions
3. **MAKE OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMEND CHANGES** to the Deputy Minister in order to ensure employees' mental health in the workplace.

VISION

The Office's vision is to create a workplace where people come first and where their dignity is respected. People are the organization's most valuable asset: **PEOPLE FIRST**, as the Office's motto states.

The Ombudsman has **MORAL AUTHORITY** and **PERSUASIVE POWER** and does not make binding decisions. He cannot order an action. If he did, that would encroach on managers' authority and have an impact on labour relations.



“Common threads run through the conceptual fabric of every Ombudsman's office – all aim to humanize administration, to support fairness, accountability, and equity. All Ombudsmen can be approached in confidence. **No Ombudsman has enforcement or disciplinary powers.** All depend on the power of persuasion, as well as the credibility of the office which leads individuals to trust it. Although the process in achieving objectives of fairness and accountability may differ, the product is the same: a chance for ordinary people, those without power or prestige, to be heard and to get fair treatment.”

Carolyn Steiber, *57 Varieties: Has the Ombudsman Concept Become Diluted?* (2000), pp. 56-57.





SITUATION OVERVIEW

CONFIDENTIAL MEETINGS

The Ombudsman, accompanied by one of his team members, meets with Department employees at all levels, individually or in groups, at their request. The Office provides a safe, judgment-free space where employees can speak from the heart. The Ombudsman listens attentively to understand the situation that prompted the meeting and helps employees explore potential paths. Often, the Ombudsman will suggest contacting an internal program such as the Workplace Conflict Management Services, or an external program or service such as a support group within a national organization.

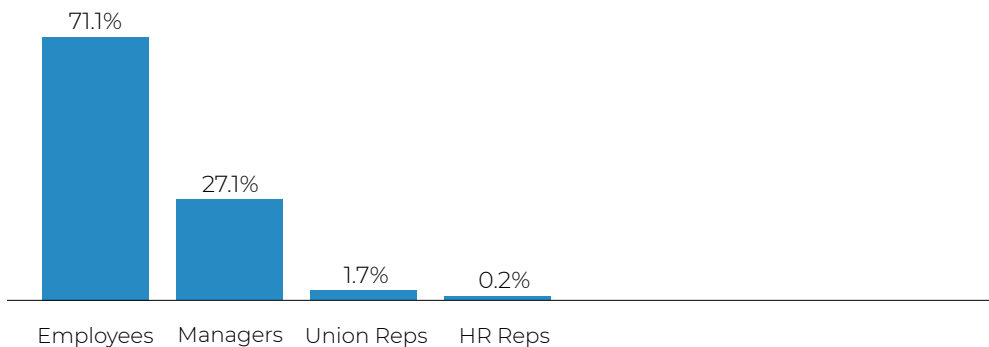
All meetings are confidential. However, the Ombudsman may disclose information if, in his judgment, there is an imminent risk of serious harm to the person or to a third party.

CONFIDENTIAL MEETINGS: THE NUMBERS



This year alone the Ombudsman met with **MORE THAN 600** employees, for a total of **480** cases (some were group meetings).

PERCENTAGE OF INDIVIDUALS MET BY CATEGORY BASED ON 480 CASES



REGIONAL VISITS

For the Ombudsman to have a clear and complete picture of how things are at PSPC, he visits with employees from coast to coast. These regional visits helped the Ombudsman keep his “ear to the ground” at most of the Department’s 180 work locations. Meeting employees face-to-face is a way to earn trust and, in return, open a window into their very specific realities. It also serves as a reminder to employees and management that mental health in the workplace matters to the Department.



In Sydney, Nova Scotia, at the Victoria Mine Water Remediation Plant. Bret Campbell (left), Electrician, with the Ombudsman (right).



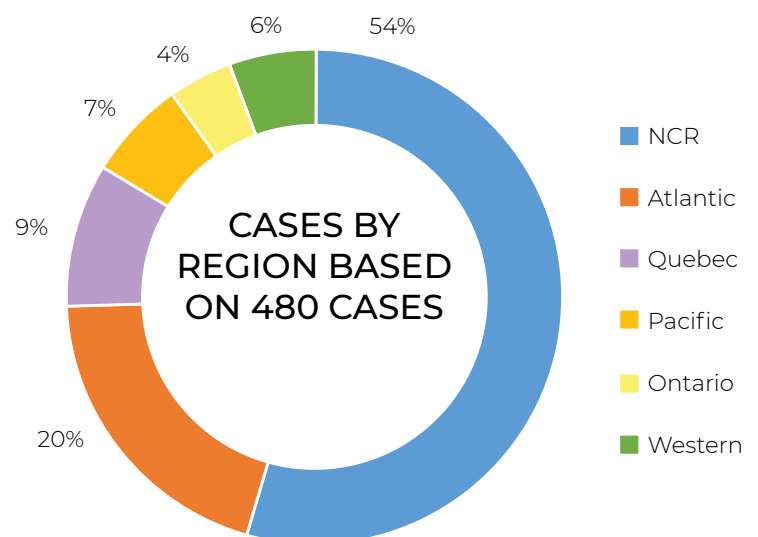
The Ombudsman in PSPC's regional office in St. John's, Newfoundland.

REASONS FOR MEETINGS

Fear is what often keeps many employees from speaking about their situation in the workplace. Meeting with the Ombudsman confidentially helps them explore potential solutions and determine their best option.

While some employees look for advice, others want to speak, be heard and have their experience acknowledged by a person who represents the best interests of the Department while remaining neutral.

Many managers and executives meet with the Ombudsman. They approach him as a sounding board for specific situations. He offers his experience to help validate strategies for untying tight knots and creating work environments that respect the dignity of all.



INFORMAL INTERVENTIONS

The Ombudsman may **intervene informally** on behalf of employees who:

- ▶ may not be psychologically prepared to make use of formal mechanisms
- ▶ have tried in vain to solve their problems through various formal and informal means
- ▶ do not know what resources and recourse are available to them
- ▶ are afraid of reprisal

Such informal interventions can play a key role in preventing conflict by enabling some situations to be resolved before they escalate.

The Ombudsman exercises judgment and discretion when bringing issues to the attention of senior management or when acting as a facilitator at the request and with the consent of the employee. The information provided by the Ombudsman enables senior management to act informally and to mitigate situations brought to their attention.

Interventions carried out by the Ombudsman have taken various forms. The following are a few examples of situations where employees spoke up about issues that were having a negative impact on their mental health, and where the Office either directly or indirectly facilitated a change. There are many more examples, but these are some we find especially moving as they speak to our need to feel included and valued.



**TOP FIVE
INFORMAL
INTERVENTIONS
BY THE OMBUDSMAN
IN 2019-2020**

FROM SOCIAL ISOLATION TO INCLUSION

When life has dealt you limited mobility, it had better also deal you an extra portion of grit and determination. This is certainly the case for one PSPC employee who contacted the Office of the Ombudsman for Mental Health.

The employee explained how they had had to fight for inclusion all through school and university—how accessibility had always been a challenge, but how they had managed to overcome and succeed time and time again.

It was a sense of social isolation, above all, that prompted the employee to call the Office. Physical impediments were part of their day-to-day life, but this was the first time the employee felt their mental health was being challenged, as the loneliness of working remotely from home as part of a team that interacted socially and professionally in an office in another city began to take its toll. It didn't help that the work wasn't aligned with the employee's diploma, talents or career aspirations.

To hear this strong individual tell their story of pushing past barriers only to lose hope when they had come so far was very moving. The Office made a few calls on behalf of the employee, but, in the end, the conversations with the Office were enough to empower the employee to take the matter into their own hands. A heart to heart chat with their manager resulted in a job offer closer to home and right within the employee's area of expertise and interest.

The employee's follow-up email ended with "thank you for everything you have done for me," but we know that they did it for themselves. In fact, empowering employees to show up for themselves is the most gratifying part of what the Office does.

A LAST RESORT FOR LINGERING PAY ISSUES



"Thank you again for your help in a time when I really felt between a rock and a hard place!"

That was the conclusion of one employee's interaction with the Office of the Ombudsman for Mental Health—one that had begun weeks earlier with a long and emotional email about lost pay due to issues with the pay system.

The Office replied to the employee with a request for additional information and intervened on the employee's behalf by contacting PSPC's HR-to-Pay team, whose manager quickly escalated the case and had it resolved within three pay periods.

The surveys have shown that, overwhelmingly, PSPC employees love their jobs, but that doesn't mean we don't want to be paid accurately and on time. The Ombudsman is grateful to the HR to Pay team for their quick and professional handling of the pay situations that employees bring to his attention.

FACILITIES FOR THE NEW WORLD ORDER

It can't be easy being a woman working in a predominantly and traditionally male environment—and having no private changing facility wouldn't make it any easier. One PSPC employee knows this for a fact.

When the Ombudsman learned of this situation, he immediately spoke with the director of the workplace, and a women's change room and bathroom were built for the employee and all the women who will be walking in her brave footsteps.

Inclusion, diversity, accessibility—check, check, check.



“The great leaders are not the strongest; they are the ones who are honest about their weaknesses. The great leaders are not the smartest; they are the ones who admit how much they don't know. The great leaders can't do everything; they are the ones who look to others to help them. Great leaders don't see themselves as great; they see themselves as human.”

– Simon Sinek

OBSERVATIONS: WHAT THE OMBUDSMAN FOUND

THE YEAR AT A GLANCE



“I am very grateful to have a resource I can talk to about the situation I am facing and get advice on how to proceed in an environment in which there are many players and where I feel alone. The conversation with André (and team) helped me to understand my options. We have access to great resources at PSPC to listen to us and provide us with advice.”

2019–2020 was another eventful and exciting year for the Office. Building on the work of previous years, we increased our presence and completed a record number of activities and presentations, effectively reaching more employees than ever before through:

- ▶ a total of **480** confidential meetings
- ▶ **92** group presentations
- ▶ **14** regional visits





"The Office of the Ombudsman is an excellent tool for expressing your views about senior management and receiving info and contacts regarding the services offered at PSPC to get help when you need it. The Office of Ombudsman is a direct link between employees and senior management. It's an effective method for senior management to learn how managers treat their employees in terms of mental health."

As an office that deals with a broad spectrum of workplace issues, we endeavour to apply a mental health lens to these and other issues in order to seek and find opportunities that will not only benefit the individuals that share with us their experiences, but the organization as a whole. Topics raised during confidential meetings included, but were not limited to:

- ▶ Leadership, including skills development, turnover management, management styles and "walking the talk"
- ▶ Workplace well-being
- ▶ Social and psychological support
- ▶ Workload
- ▶ Staffing processes
- ▶ Performance evaluations
- ▶ Civility and perceived harassment and/or bullying
- ▶ Telework
- ▶ New workspaces
- ▶ Accommodation
- ▶ Pay issues
- ▶ Seeking advice or simply looking for a sounding board



"You deserve 5 stars on each question (of our feedback questionnaire) because you were very interested in what I had to say and put me at ease. And I greatly appreciate that, for you, there is no difference as to the level a person may be at within the organization; you listen to everyone. KUDOS for your organization. I'm very pleased with how my session went. I also like to see that you follow up. Thanks again."

We also collectively engaged in a range of responses, actions and other interventions designed to raise, aid, address and/or redress the issues presented to our Office, through:

- ▶ Consulting and/or collaborating with other services
- ▶ Discussing how to navigate the system
- ▶ Intervening directly
- ▶ Providing information and/or resources
- ▶ Recommending a workplace assessment
- ▶ Referring to other internal services
- ▶ Suggesting training
- ▶ Providing upward feedback
- ▶ Acting as a sounding board for proposed approaches

KEY OBSERVATIONS, ISSUES AND INSIGHTS

1. LEADERSHIP



“What we need from our leaders is less scrutiny and more support!”

In 2019–2020, the Office of the Ombudsman for Mental Health dealt with a substantial number of cases and consultations relating broadly to the issue of leadership. While we certainly heard about and witnessed many examples of excellent leadership and supportive managers throughout the organization, the issue of leadership writ large is one that we believe can be better understood, developed and leveraged for the benefit of all. More specifically, we heard about leadership that:

- ▶ Lacked presence and support
- ▶ Lacked clear, consistent and coherent guidance and communication
- ▶ Failed to address psychologically harmful conditions, even after being reported
- ▶ Could be characterized by disrespectful or uncivil behaviour
- ▶ Exhibited mistrust in the professionalism of team members (e.g. micromanagement, disempowerment)
- ▶ Basically failed to “walk the talk” on mental health in the workplace



Leadership is arguably the single greatest contributing factor to a healthy and prosperous organization. Whether it be dealing with a crushing workload, a difficult colleague or a personal problem that is affecting the workplace, an approachable, empathetic and flexible manager can often have a significant mitigating effect on the stress levels that employees experience as result of these and other common workplace challenges.

Managers are not expected to have all the answers or to be experts in [psychological health and safety in the workplace](#); however, positive, supportive leadership does begin from a place of **compassion, sensitivity and empathy** that recognizes the full potential of our people. In contrast to some of these less-than-ideal forms of leadership, we also heard from many employees who, throughout the course of the year, expressed enormous appreciation for managers who took the time to listen to them and their challenges, showed a willingness to support and accommodate them through their period of difficulty, and treated them as a human being rather than just a part in an assembly line.

We've all probably heard the expression, "People don't leave organizations; they leave their managers." Good leadership benefits the entire organization because it gets the best out of our people through **motivation, engagement** and **inspiration** rather than control, fear and obedience. The latter approach tends to result in a lack of trust, whereas the former moves us from a state of mere compliance to a state of deeper commitment. From there, employees are happy to offer what's often referred to as discretionary effort, which is where employees go above and beyond because they genuinely believe in the organization and its overarching mission.

However, another common complaint frequently heard at the Office of the Ombudsman for Mental Health is that of micromanagement. Nothing kills the spirit of a willing and enthusiastic employee faster than a controlling and stifling work environment that does not afford employees the opportunity to grow and flourish. Such behaviour undermines trust in the professionalism of employees and actively works against their empowerment. Ultimately, micromanagement leaves little room for creativity and innovation, which can seriously impede an organization from achieving its full potential.

We are all hearing a great deal about mental health in the workplace these days, and perhaps never more so than during the current pandemic period. People everywhere have been exposed to unprecedented levels of stress, uncertainty and anxiety. While this in part refers to ensuring that colleagues living with mental illness are free from stigma and get the support and understanding they so deserve and need, it also—and perhaps more importantly—refers to ensuring that good mental health in the workplace practices are truly embedded into our daily business practices. Unfortunately, we at the Office of the Ombudsman for Mental Health see many missed opportunities on the part of some supervisors, managers and executives to be a force for this kind of positive cultural change. When presented with various issues and challenges that inevitably arise in any organization, we see far too many of our leaders taking the path of least resistance by clinging to familiar policies and procedures rather than adopting a more human centred approach. Managing through a mental health lens means making sound business decisions that simultaneously recognize and elevate the inherent value of our people.

It is important to understand that it cannot always be business as usual. Because as [Jack Welch](#) so wisely said,



“Before you are leader, success is all about growing yourself. When you become a leader, success is all about growing others!”

2. WORKLOAD



“I used to love my job, but now (because of workload and the administrative burden) I dread coming to work.”

A significant number of employees continue to come speak to us about workload issues. While onerous workload levels can be found right across the organization, we have observed that this rather intractable problem appears to affect certain areas of the organization more than others. Our Office has written rather extensively about the problem of workload in the past (see our previous [Annual Reports](#)), and the challenges that some areas of the organization face in this regard have been well known to us for some time now. We also know and understand that certain intrinsic factors tend to create higher workloads.

However, it's probably fair to say that when employees come speak to us about their workload issues, they are not expecting immediate, overnight solutions to such a complex issue. And, by and large, they understand that their managers alone cannot unilaterally implement measures to eliminate the problem. Rather, what the Office has observed this past year (as in previous years) is that employees would greatly appreciate a response from their managers and other key decision-makers that:

- a) acknowledges the problem
- b) demonstrates understanding and compassion for the challenges they are facing
- c) demonstrates a willingness to, at the very least, explore solutions that benefit both the organization and the employee (i.e. seek win-win scenarios)
- d) recognizes that not all requests are priorities

While there is no doubt that varying levels of workload can objectively exist from workplace to workplace and that sustaining a high workload over a long period of time can take a serious toll on our mental health, we know from research and from our experience here at the Office that the issue of workload can be highly contextual. This is precisely why some busy workplaces can be exciting, stimulating environments while others can

become oppressive and debilitating. As [Craig Dowden](#) argued in [Maximizing Employee Engagement](#), two effectively identical workplaces can elicit very different levels of employee engagement when one possesses the key ingredient of meaningful work. As our employees have repeatedly told us, it is difficult, if not impossible, to find meaning and dignity in our work when all we can do is try to keep from drowning in a pool of repetitive, menial and uninspiring tasks that don't adequately leverage the unique abilities, strengths and talents of our people.

Furthermore, misuse of the Employee Performance Management Agreement (EPMA) tool can often exacerbate feelings of disengagement resulting from a high workload. Unfortunately, many employees came to us this past year about EPMA experiences which they have described as punitive in intent, aggressive in tone and often demeaning in result. Through this harmful "weaponization" of the EPMA tool and process, something designed to support professional growth has turned into a wholly unpleasant experience for many, resulting in varying degrees of psychological injury such as elevated levels of stress and anxiety for some, and medical leave for others. We can and must do better as a collective when it comes to the EPMA process. We believe that with the right level of awareness, education and sensitivity, we can ensure the EPMA process becomes what it was always intended to be—an opportunity for genuine discourse, constructive feedback and growth for all.

3. CIVILITY AND RESPECT



"We cannot deliver, if we don't care for each other and don't respect each other."

Like the issue of workload, we continue to hear from employees and managers alike on an all too frequent basis about cases of incivility and disrespect occurring in the Department, ranging from less severe incidents of rudeness and micro-aggressions to claims of bullying and harassment. Needless to say, incidents such as these can be highly destructive to an organization's culture, as well as to an individual's mental health, and can serve to undermine much of the good work that is being done, from both a cultural and a purely operational perspective.

As [Christine Porath](#) astutely pointed out in [The Hidden Toll of Workplace Incivility](#), "Hurtful workplace behavior can depress performance, increase employee turnover, and even mar customer relationships." We've heard in numerous meetings that employees resort to leaving their teams or the Department altogether as a means of coping with issues.

Not all incidents of disrespectful behaviour in the workplace occur from managers toward employees; however, according to the most recent [Public Service Employee Survey \(PSES\)](#) data, of the 11% of PSPC employees who reported experiencing some form of harassment, 64% indicated that the harassment came from "individuals with authority over them," which is slightly higher than the public service average. This clearly erodes the level of

trust in an organization and makes incidents of incivility between colleagues more likely, according to the findings of our [first departmental mental health survey](#).

Trust can also become seriously eroded when employees muster the courage to speak up about incidents of disrespectful or even violent workplace behaviour, but perceive that no subsequent action has been taken. And we at the Office of the Ombudsman for Mental Health have all too often heard from employees who feel that such complaints have gone unanswered, some of whom reported having further experienced various forms of reprisal. In contrast, we have also seen firsthand the highly beneficial effects of having someone genuinely listen to them, take action and treat those individuals raising legitimate concerns with empathy and diligence.

If we are to truly become the healthy, thriving workplace and the employer of choice across the federal public service that we want to be, we will need to be vigilant in creating and maintaining a respectful culture that is not afraid to honestly confront and address incidents of incivility and disrespect. We will also need to instill and support psychologically healthy processes that also effectively address bullying and harassment. While the forthcoming [Bill C-65](#) and its accompanying regulatory framework can, at least in part, be viewed as a direct response to addressing these ongoing problems, no legislative measure will serve as a panacea to ensuring respectful workplace relationships and conditions if we don't also take the critical step of transitioning to a more human-centred culture.



Did you know?

Information sessions and workshops on performance management are offered to Department employees on request. To request one, write to the Talent and Performance Management team at rcnpgre.ncrepmp@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca.

The Canada School of the Public Service also offers a series of [performance management courses](#)

4. POSITIVE CONSULTATIONS – LOOKING TO IMPROVE OUR WORKPLACE



“My goal here is to help anyone who is reading this, who sees themselves, who can relate and who might be suffering in silence to reach out and ask for help. Like me, no matter what your circumstances, no matter what your story (and we all have one), none of it is your fault.”

We at the Office would be remiss if we didn't take the opportunity to highlight in this report the many consultations and discussions we had throughout the last year with a view to ultimately improving our workplace environment. The caring manager who consults with our Office to be able to better support their employee living with mental illness, the employee who is concerned about their colleagues' stress levels and the senior executive who wants to know how to operationalize the organizational recommendations arising from the Office's annual reports, all share the common objective of promoting mental health in the workplace and improving the psychological health and safety conditions of our workplace.

We are fortunate to be able to travel across this great country and organization and to speak with colleagues directly in their working environments. So many of the conversations we have and the stories we hear from them about all their incredible contributions to improving their workplaces are sources of inspiration for us. Regional mental health committees across the organization ought to be commended for their many innovative practices based on local, tailored mental health frameworks and needs. People at all levels of the organization are stepping forward and dedicating their precious time to improving the relationships and culture in their work environments; individuals are courageously sharing their personal stories of survival and resilience to connect with those who may otherwise feel alone in their struggles; some are speaking out about the injustices they witness toward others, sometimes at risk to themselves; while others want to know how they too can dedicate their professional lives to improving psychological health and safety in the workplace.

After more than three years of service and thousands of confidential consultations, we feel that the significant and growing number of management advisory consultations this Office is currently engaging in is an important milestone in our organization's evolution. The notion of a healthy workplace culture is being successfully woven into our cultural fabric. In fact, for the first year ever, management and executive consultations is our largest category of cases. We have also received a record number of requests for presentations by the Ombudsman. By no means does this indicate that our work here is done, as the above observations clearly show. However, we do believe that we have arrived at a critical point where we can fully transition and mature into a leading organization that truly puts our People First!



"People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care."

– John Maxwell



Did you know?

The [Employee and Organization Assistance Program](#) offers a workshop called "Keeping Anxiety at Bay." To find out more, send an email to tpsgc.mieuxetre-wellbeing.pwgsc@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca.

MENTAL HEALTH SURVEY – THE STORY BEHIND THE DATA

The Office was also pleased to provide you with the results of our second mental health survey focused on workplace changes and workload. This second survey, along with the first survey and all surveys hereafter, aim to help the organization gauge the psychological health of employees at all levels, and to identify potential areas for improvement as we strive to enhance workplace climate and culture. A united culture, or “One PSPC,” as stated by our Deputy Minister on several occasions, requires that we work together to bring about such improvements and that we not only message our organizational values of *respect*, *integrity*, *excellence* and *leadership*, but actually live them in our day-to-day actions. In other words, it requires that we put people first, that we walk the talk on mental health, and that leadership supports and inspires trusting relationships based on honesty, curiosity, empathy and humility.

Throughout hundreds of one-on-one and group meetings with the Ombudsman since the Office’s inception, recurrent themes for improvement have been observed, including interpersonal relationships, workload and too many changes over too little time. It was therefore determined early on that the Office’s mental health surveys would focus on garnering additional information pertinent to these recurrent themes.

With this in mind, the second survey was designed to gather more information on the cumulative, and potentially detrimental, impacts of multiple changes that took place within a short timeframe (12 months). More specifically, impacts on workload, perceptions vis-à-vis change management practices, overtime compensation, individuals’ sense of competency in facing changes, levels of presenteeism (how mentally present an individual is at work) and psychological distress were examined.

Results from both qualitative and quantitative survey data highlight clear relationships between a person’s sense of competency in facing changes at work and that person’s workload, the extent of the impacts on that person’s work, the level of support provided to that person during the changes, and that person’s perception of the organization’s ability to manage change effectively. More importantly, and correspondingly, results show that the more changes a person reported experiencing within a short 12-month span, the more they also reported greater impacts on their work, an unmanageable workload, a poorer view of their supervisor’s/manager’s and organization’s ability to manage change effectively, greater levels of presenteeism and psychological distress, and a poorer view of their own ability to manage change effectively. While approximately 70% of respondents reported being confident in their ability to manage change effectively, 30% did not express such confidence.

Amongst the types of changes respondents indicated experiencing within this 12-month span, management turnover rates were by far the most striking finding, reaching as high as 77% in certain branches. Such levels of turnover can be detrimental to an organization

and to teams. They at times undermine performance, engagement, commitment, and trust. More importantly, they set up a domino effect leading to increased workloads, a diminished ability for managers and employees to manage changes effectively and erosion of the social fabric of the organization, all leading to higher levels of presenteeism and psychological distress that subsequently fuel turnover rates and resistance to change.

Survey results further indicate that managers bore the brunt of the impacts during the 12-month span examined. They reported a poorer sense of competency in facing changes, higher levels of presenteeism and psychological distress, and lower levels of support from their immediate manager. Employees who reported a change in manager and/or director also reported a poorer perception of their supervisor's/manager's ability to manage change effectively.

The following are other key findings from the survey:

- ▶ 67% of respondents felt their immediate supervisor or manager was receptive to feedback and endeavoured to address it in order to facilitate change
- ▶ 66% of respondents felt their immediate supervisor or manager endeavoured to correct problems as they arose
- ▶ 69% of respondents felt their immediate supervisor or manager acknowledged the successes of staff
- ▶ 40% of respondents felt they could claim overtime for work accomplished
- ▶ 31% felt they had enough time to complete their work tasks
- ▶ 42% of respondents felt it was difficult to determine when changes ended and began, and 62% felt that they always seemed to be experiencing change
- ▶ levels of presenteeism found related to workload manageability, a personal sense of competency in facing changes at work, the extent of impacts of changes on one's work, the level of support received during changes, the frequency of changes and an individual's perception of the organization's ability to manage changes effectively
- ▶ individuals who self-identified as being part of the LGBTQ group or the persons with disabilities group reported more psychological distress than other diversity groups or individuals who did not self-identify as being part of a diversity group
- ▶ comments received highlighted two primary issues:
 - change management practices, including not sufficiently taking into account employee feedback, insufficient support for both employees and new managers during and following changes, and lack of communication and clarity
 - workload, including feeling unable to claim overtime for work accomplished, uneven and unfair distribution of work, and unreasonable timelines

SATELLITE OFFICE – MEETING YOU WHERE YOU ARE

With more and more employees moving from the Place du Portage (PDP) complex to downtown Ottawa buildings, the Office took steps to ensure greater access to the Ombudsman's one-on-one services.

On February 19, we opened the doors to a new, satellite office in the mezzanine of Esplanade Laurier (LEL). The two-hour open house was well-visited by more than 60 employees interested in learning more about the role of the Office and seeing the new office space.

The Office would like to extend a special high-five of gratitude to our Corporate Accommodation colleagues who collaborated with us every step of the way and delivered a very attractive and functional workspace for the Ombudsman's team.



INSPIRING PEOPLE HONOUR ROLL

The Office of the Ombudsman for Mental Health launched its very own Inspiring People Honour Roll as a way for the Office of the Ombudsman for Mental Health to help recognize PSPC employees who put people first in their workplace. These employees play a key role in creating and maintaining a psychologically healthy, inclusive and safe work environment. They are the people who:

- ▶ share knowledge about mental health issues with their co-workers
- ▶ listen with compassion and empathy
- ▶ offer guidance
- ▶ direct their co-workers to available resources



Mélanie Boisvert

THE PERFECT BOSS!

Mélanie is the outstanding manager of the Financial and Payroll Accounting Division (FPAD) team. Despite all the work she has to do, her door is always open (and she keeps chocolates in her office). She is always ready to hear us out when we feel the need, and she encourages us to stick with it. She makes the rounds to check up on her gang every day and makes sure that everything is going smoothly. She brings in cookbooks, cookies and desserts, and shares her stories to assist her employees.

She helps employees who are struggling, be it at home or at work. She is an amazing manager who makes time for her employees. Given that payroll analysis and Phoenix system reconciliation provide their share of daily challenges and create a lot of stress, Mélanie is always there to support her employees and see them through any Phoenix-related adversity. Thank you for being there for us, Mélanie!



Jonathan Brulotte

AN INSPIRATIONAL LEADER

Jonathan Brulotte is a truly inspirational manager and leader. He leads by example and follows through on his dedication and commitments to his team members. Not only does he regularly check in with his employees at bilateral meetings and ask about how they are coping mentally, but he also works with his employees when required to put together an action plan to tackle any stressors that may be impacting their work or their lives. In addition, he is extremely accommodating and sympathetic toward the work-life balance of his employees, which has led to a healthier, more committed and productive team.

He often not only pushes for mental health awareness, but also acts on it through training and team activities to boost our spirits when most needed. He also supports the team in leading happy, healthy work and personal lives.

Above all, he possesses a high level of emotional intelligence, which makes him kind, approachable and empathetic. His team looks forward to seeing him at work because he brings a lot of energy, cheerfulness and positivity to the group . . . and likes to test out some jokes here and there—the success rate isn't perfect, but the effort is! Either way, he doesn't care and keeps trying.

He is an extraordinary person, a coach, a role model and a champion for mental health. Because of this and more, he deserves to be recognized through the Inspiring People Honour Roll.



David Stevens

A CARING AND FIRM LEADER

Dave started in the mailroom at the Pension Centre several years ago. He has spent the majority of his career at the Pension Centre, most recently as Director General since 2009.

Dave is a caring and firm leader. He puts people first and truly walks the talk. I believe that he is in his position because that is who he is, a leader. And, as we like to say near the coast, he's a Captain—a very fitting title for this passionate sailor. He's the one at the helm. The one who goes to bat for us. Many times I have heard him say and do that. With his direction and advice, he is continuously positioning his people and his business to be the best, to aim for excellence and to shine!

Dave is a champion for wellness. He wants people to connect in a meaningful way in the workplace, and to find and build trust. That, to me, is the most powerful message a leader can give. That message is contagious and makes the Pension Centre what it is today: a family, a community, dedicated to our wellness and to serving our clients the best we can—every day, every person behind the file, every phone call.



Marcelle Gauthier

POSITIVE ATTITUDE AND GREAT DETERMINATION

Marcelle Gauthier's resilience and determination inspire the people around her to challenge themselves and see the bright side in every situation. She began her career as a nurse—an experience that was demanding but also very meaningful and rewarding.

After gaining some experience in administration, she decided to pursue her dream to go back to university and made a drastic career change that led her to begin a career in the federal public service in finance. Despite the numerous challenges brought by this career change, Marcelle managed to make her family a priority and raise her two beautiful children, with very little time left for herself. Marcelle has faced those challenges with a positive attitude and great determination. She's always willing to help and go the extra mile.

Her journey is a great example of how far you can go when you set yourself personal goals and focus on the things that really matter to you.





Kata Kitaljevich

AN INSPIRATION

Kata is an inspiration to her colleagues at the Policy, Planning, and Communications Branch. She is an advocate for integrating physical and mental wellness in the way we work. She initiates major workplace culture changes that result in paradigm shifts in how we approach mental health at work.

With a fierce passion for wellness, she has created a physical space—“Le Spot”—for colleagues to exercise and connect with one another, as well as a virtual space for taking “pauses-santé” and practicing self-care. We are encouraged to participate in five-minute stretching sessions twice a day at “Le Spot,” and colleagues’ birthdays and achievements are always celebrated at “Le Spot” with her delicious homemade cake. More importantly, she has created a virtual space for us to comfortably discuss mental health challenges. Both the physical and virtual spaces have improved team productivity and morale while reducing stress and anxiety.



Robert Laszlo

A MODEL OF CONSISTENCY AND WORK ETHIC

When one thinks of flashy, zealous or otherwise conspicuous employees at Policy, Planning and Communications, Robert Laszlo’s name may not immediately spring to mind. In fact, Robert is so quiet that sometimes his cubicle neighbors aren’t even sure he’s at his desk.

But Robert is indeed at his desk. Every day of every week, from 7:45 a.m. to 3:45 p.m., Robert is there doing his job. And you know what? He’s terrific at it. Robert is a model of consistency and work ethic for this branch. In a contemporary work environment teeming with human resource churn and change management issues, Robert stands tall as a key pillar of corporate knowledge. Yet Robert is more than just reliability and loyalty. He’s also extremely good-natured and approachable. Need to take a mental health day, work from home, or even depart for a vacation? Robert won’t interrogate your decision, and he’ll be the first to support it. Have any questions about things that happened at PPCB before you started (which is probably relatively recently)? Robert’s there to help. Robert won’t be standing up to deliver a Miracle on Ice-style motivational speech to his team any time soon. But we can save that for the movies. When I think of outstanding PSPC employees who belong on the Honour Roll, I think of Robert Laszlo.



Ryan Peach

A PEOPLE PERSON

Introducing Ryan Peach: He's a new addition to the Public Services and Procurement Canada office in St. John's, Newfoundland. Actually, he's new to the government. Period. But just because he hasn't been around long doesn't mean he hasn't already had an impact.

Ryan is a people person—a bit of a Jedi. Interpersonal relationships are among his many talents and as soon as he detects a disturbance in the force, he sets to work restoring harmony.

Ryan has shown courage and leadership where others might have chosen to stick their heads deep in the sand. He leads with his heart and values.

Here's hoping that Ryan will create and maintain a happy home for himself at PSPC, because we need people like him to move up through the ranks, motivated by the well being of the organization and not by personal gain.

One person can make all the difference—good or bad—in the workplace. It is up to each of us, every day, to choose who we want to be. Ryan's choice is clear to everyone who has had the heartwarming pleasure of meeting him: He's here to make things better, and there's an undeniable ripple effect.

Group hug, Ryan? Thank you for choosing PSPC!



Lyson Bujold

LYSON BUJOLD LOVES LIFE!

Lyson is a ray of sunshine and always looks for the positive in her surroundings, her work and her challenges, but especially in the people she meets every day. She is a role model for us here at the Pension Centre in Shediac. She openly shares her ways of living with mental illness. She has given several information sessions here and her energy and love of life are contagious. She welcomes everyone with open arms, without prejudice and with a smile that melts away the darkness that often seeks to surround us.

Lyson is an emotional woman who loves life, and, above all, who is inspiring. She gives us all hope that mental health is achievable and that, if we look for them, we will find ways to defeat this monster!

I would like Lyson to be part of this honour roll because I don't know anyone else who is this dedicated to advancing this cause in their personal life, community and workplace! To inspire others, she even wrote a book entitled *À ma façon, mon bonheur, revu et apprivoisé* [In my own way, my happiness, reviewed and tamed].



“Leadership is not a rank or a position, it is a choice – a choice to look after the person to the left of us and the person to the right of us.”

– Simon Sinek



INTERDEPARTMENTAL COMMITTEE OF ORGANIZATIONAL OMBUDS

The Interdepartmental Committee of Organizational Ombuds is continuing to grow its membership and strengthen its sphere of influence within the public service. Entering its second year, this growing federal community continues to lay a solid foundation for healthy workplaces. The Committee consists of organizational Ombuds from multiple federal departments who meet on a bi monthly basis to discuss various issues, challenges and opportunities of common interest and concern. In the past year, the group has grown from 13 to 21 members, with new organizational Ombuds being appointed in such organizations as FINTRAC, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Public Safety and Fisheries and Oceans Canada.

Along with providing one another with moral and professional support, the group has blazed a trail of best practices that are ultimately serving to promote and advance psychological health and safety in the workplace. Among its many noteworthy achievements this past year, the group collaborated extensively on the development of a common professional standards and practices document, modelled on the principles of the International Ombudsman Association and intended to ensure that the highest standards of organizational Ombuds services are being maintained across the federal public service of Canada.

The group also continues to exert its leadership and vision in a number of key areas. For example, in the past year, the Committee has met with representatives from the Federal Community of Informal Conflict Management Practitioners to ensure the continued viability of their community and foster collaboration; consulted with Health Canada's Employee Assistance Services to introduce their newly proposed Ombuds-like service

line; and met with key stakeholders from Treasury Board Secretariat of Canada to propose avenues for extending the Public Service Health Care Plan in ways that are commensurate with greater employee well-being.

The Committee's inclusive collaboration approach has proven highly effective and, moving forward, the group will be looking to forge new relationships, including with the national Joint Learning Program, as well as to implement various best practices, such as Compassion Fatigue training to ensure the long-term health and viability of this critically important function and community.

The community has grown into a positive leading force on the federal landscape, and one which is exerting considerable influence in helping to improve organizational culture in the federal public service.



“As the Chair of the Interdepartmental Committee of Organizational Ombuds for the federal public service, André and his team are committed to the success of the Ombuds function across departments. From onboarding discussions, to collaborating on key issues and sharing information and resources, they play an instrumental role in ensuring the function's success for the benefit of all public servants.”

– Manda Noble-Green, Ombudsman, Public Safety Canada

MENTAL HEALTH PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT TOOL

This past year saw the Interdepartmental Committee on Mental Health Performance Measurement making significant progress on developing an organizational mental health dashboard, which will be made available to the whole of the federal public service of Canada and ultimately allow all departments to adopt an evidence-based approach to monitoring and improving psychological health and safety in the workplace.

In June 2019, a team of senior methodologists at Statistics Canada completed a factor analysis study and confirmed that the PSES is a scientifically validated method of measuring the 13 psycho-social workplace factors according to the National Standard on Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace.

In October 2019, we presented our findings, model and approach to the Public Service Management Advisory Committee (PSMAC). With the help of Les Linklater, PSPC's Associate Deputy Minister, we received enthusiastic interest in the project and, more importantly, broad support to continue this important work.



Chris George (IRB), Karl Chastko, (STATCAN) and Emy Bourdages, (STATCAN)

A Mental Health Dashboard Hackathon took place in February 2020 and was a great success! A total of nine interdepartmental teams developed and designed a truly impressive array of dashboard prototypes. The selection panel, composed of senior executives from ISED, OCHRO and the RCMP, were given the difficult task of selecting a winner, but ultimately made an excellent choice in selecting the winning dashboard named “Dashing Through the Snow” (the event took place during a snowstorm, after all!). Their design featured departmental scores on key organizational health metrics, benchmarking against other organizations, trend analyses and, perhaps most ingenious of all, actionable initiatives to help address areas of concern.

This mental health dashboard has garnered interest from many corners of industry and academia, as well as the Conference Board of Canada. The dashboard will undoubtedly prove instrumental in adopting a common approach to evidence-based decisions and actions right across the federal public service in this critical area of workplace mental health. The project, co-chaired by André Latreille, has now grown to include nearly 100 participants from 18 departments.

Currently, the Interdepartmental Committee on Mental Health Performance Measurement is conducting a critical mapping exercise in order to identify key questions from the 2017 and 2019 PSES questionnaires that will serve to measure the 13 psychosocial workplace factors in a consistent and meaningful way moving forward. And building upon the brilliant work that emerged from the mental health dashboard hackathon, the Centre of Expertise on Mental Health at Treasury Board Secretariat will shortly be leveraging the exciting data visualization application in order to deliver a robust tool that promises to transform how we approach mental health in the workplace.

As stated by Wesley Yung, Director, Economic Statistics Methods, Statistics Canada, and Co-chair, Interdepartmental Committee for Mental Health Performance Measurement, “It is important to note here that we are looking to change organizational cultures to make our workplaces more psychologically healthy. What we now have is a ‘tool’ to identify actions to embed into our daily business practices that will improve the psychological health of our organizations and thus our employees.”



“If management doesn’t know what is going on, they can’t do anything about it, but if they do know that something is going on and they act, they are breaking the culture of silence and showing real leadership.”

– André Latreille, Ombudsman for Mental Health, PSPC, Civility in the Workplace Video

RECOMMENDATIONS

[In the first three reports](#), the Ombudsman presented the Department with 16 departmental recommendations. These recommendations served as a compass to continue fostering inclusive and healthy management practices that support a people-first culture. Over the last twelve months, we observed recurring workplace issues associated with leadership, workload and lack of civility and respect, which remain barriers to a psychologically healthy and safe workplace. As these issues and behaviours persist, we need to reiterate the importance for all to continue striving toward a healthy workplace. In response to this year’s observations, the Ombudsman has decided to revisit corresponding past recommendations. As we look ahead, further efforts will be necessary to address and improve the current situation.

From the moment an employee joins an organization, their journey is affected by many touch points throughout a day. People management skills that are inclusive and focus on people first will potentially shape that journey positively. Leadership style often makes or breaks the employee experience, and either precludes or enables moments that matter enormously to the employee. For leaders to better understand the expectations of clear leadership and create those important moments for employees, they need to be equipped with the right management skills that build cohesive teams and nurture respectful relationships. They need to incorporate leadership values that guide change through a mental health lens and adopt behaviours that uphold integrity and respect. This will ultimately benefit the organization as a whole.

Based on previous recommendations, and following this year’s observations, the Ombudsman believes that it is essential to continue actively investing in our middle management to establish a mandatory on-boarding program that includes training on remote management and to improve recruitment, development and evaluation practices for supervisors, managers and executives. Action on these three recommendations together could address many concerns and mitigate any potential harm to employee mental health in the workplace. Too often we hear from employees that some managers are ill-equipped to manage in a constantly changing environment, and still others are missing key leadership skills to foster a supportive and empathic work environment or dedicated time to do so in light of a heavy workload. A mandatory, comprehensive and

integrated on-boarding process for managers provides a solid foundation for a sound understanding of organizational expectations and available resources in support of leadership competencies. People management skills should be at the heart of our talent acquisition and development programs for people leaders, as these qualities can greatly influence team behaviours expressed in trust, commitment, accountability and results. They are important factors in employee and organizational achievements, as they can increase employee engagement, enhance organizational results and markedly improve long-term employee retention. The National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace ([the Standard](#)) lists as part of their 13 factors for establishing a psychologically healthy and safe workplace, the importance of clear leadership and expectations. This factor promotes the benefits of aspiring to leadership practices that are transformational in nature, as they support managers who can motivate and inspire their employees.



“Transformational leaders are seen as change agents who motivate their followers to do more than what is expected. They are concerned with long-term objectives and transmit a sense of mission, vision, and purpose. They have charisma, give individual consideration to their workers, stimulate intellectual capabilities in others, and inspire workers.”

– (the Standard, page 20)

In our current COVID-19 environment, self-awareness through the development of Emotional Intelligence competencies along with training on remote management should be at the forefront of sound people management practices. These competencies should be leveraged to provide additional management tools to support our people leaders. Being self-aware can often lessen the gap between what we do and what we say and consciously align with practices supporting a healthy environment. In his [previous report](#), the Ombudsman furthered his recommendations on leadership development by introducing recommendations to create a centralized coaching program for managers and executives and a directory of mentors in each branch and region for employees to participate in and access. Paired with effective on-boarding training, mentorship can instill a powerful leadership blueprint that can greatly impact an organization’s makeup and day-to-day operations while inspiring innovation and growth. Peer learning and coaching programs can also prove highly beneficial to an organization by supporting greater involvement and influence. Such programs enhance social and professional connections, support network development and provide opportunities to encourage a culture of learning. These four recommendations from previous Ombudsman for Mental Health reports should be given particular attention and woven into existing organizational processes, practices and fora as they speak to building the capacity of our workforce—our most important asset.

The adverse effects of a sustained, heavy workload on employee mental health has been studied for decades now. Findings clearly demonstrate that such a workload can lead to burnout and depression and significantly undermine one’s ability to effectively manage other stresses at work. In fact, the Office’s last mental health survey results examined the

effects of a heavy workload and cumulative change on employee mental health and offer important insights that can and should be leveraged across the entire organization. As discussed in the [survey results \(link\)](#), this type of environment creates a set of conditions that results in higher levels of presenteeism and psychological distress and an erosion of a personal sense of competency in facing changes at work. When experiencing multiple and cumulative changes within an organization, it is important to consider and manage the people side of those changes. Seeking and including employees' voices and integrating a user design approach are key, integral elements of any successful change management experience. Equally important for employees is the ability to explore solutions and to identify "win-win" scenarios when facing multiple demands. We have been seeing employees coming to our Office in great distress as a result of their workload for several years now. The issue has been attributed to many factors, including business planning, long and cumbersome staffing processes, lack of resources or high turnover, to name only a few. Acknowledging that workload issues exist builds transparency and trust between employees and managers, within teams and across the entire organization. Choosing to do something about it tangibly demonstrates that we value our employees' mental health. It also fosters a work environment where employees feel that they are being provided with genuine psychological support.

After more than three years of service and thousands of confidential consultations, including an array of regional visits, the Office is starting to see a shift toward workplace behaviours and values that support a people-first culture. We often hear from employees, managers and executives for whom putting people first is top of mind. Many are practicing active listening, are willing participants in finding solutions, and are taking advantage of existing tools and services offered by the Department. To further support this critical shift, additional work, effort and commitment will be needed in the area of civility and respect, with a focus on finding the root causes of this issue. A lack of civility and respect in the workplace is a sensitive issue that understandably elicits strong emotional reactions from all sides. All employees have the right to be treated with respect, dignity and fairness, and people leaders have a duty to ensure and protect a civil work environment.

In his [previous report](#), the Ombudsman recommended conducting exit interviews as an important mechanism to capture intelligence to gauge the health of the Department. It is an informal and proactive practice that allows for a better understanding of existing workplace issues, including turnover rates and root causes that are sometimes missed as a result of employees leaving the organization quietly. As this COVID-19 new world order persists, exit interviews are an important source of intel that should be leveraged to provide an accurate snapshot of what is happening on the ground in the NCR and in the regions. Furthermore, to support this shift toward a better workplace, the Ombudsman recommended having tools developed to promote civility and respect in the workplace. This year alone, we met with many employees who were not aware of existing procedures for reporting inappropriate conduct and did not know or understand what they could do to address the situation. The fear of reprisal was very present and for some, paralyzing. These two recommendations can support the organization in doing more to prevent future reprehensible acts and to raise awareness in this area. As stated in [the Standard](#), a lack of civility and respect in the workplace can lead to emotional exhaustion among employees and is associated with increased conflict and the threat of more grievances.

Even in an organization where there may only be pockets of employees experiencing behaviours perceived as uncivil, disrespectful or offensive (all the way through to bullying and harassment), any efforts to establish an overall work environment where employees feel safe and supported will be severely undermined by the persistence of such behaviours. Notwithstanding the fact that these situations can often be complex in nature, maintaining a culture of civility and respect starts with each and every one of us!

PROGRESS ON RECOMMENDATIONS

In his [first three reports](#) (2017 Mid-Year Report, 2017–2018 Annual Report and 2018–2019 Annual Report), the Ombudsman presented 16 departmental recommendations for improvement to help the organization exert leadership in continuing to build healthy workplaces. These recommendations were accepted by PSPC's Deputy Minister and integrated into an action plan developed by the Human Resources Branch (HRB). The Ombudsman is pleased to highlight some of the milestones and encourages additional effort to fully address the recommendations.

RECOMMENDATION

Improve recruitment, development and evaluation practices for supervisors, managers and executives, with a focus on people management.

ACTION TAKEN

The Human Resources Branch has completed a series of consultations to review the Leadership and Management Excellence Development Framework. While the analysis is still ongoing, a number of commitments are very promising. These include developments in upward feedback and common commitments that foster a healthy workplace and employee engagement in evaluations.

OMBUDSMAN COMMENT

The review of PSPC's Leadership and Management Excellence Development Framework is an important step toward integrating people management-focused commitments. The Ombudsman congratulates the Department on taking the initiative to consult with its employees and encourages the organization to continue its commitment to aligning with key leadership competencies and expected behaviours through a people-first lens.

RECOMMENDATION

Conduct exit and stay interview.

ACTION TAKEN

HRB has made progress on designing a survey tool to capture employee data when conducting online exit interviews. After one year of data collection, the results will be reviewed and analyzed in depth, as well as leveraged to identify potential survey gaps in relation to mental health.

OMBUDSMAN COMMENT

Conducting systematic exit interviews is key to improving employee retention and engagement. The Ombudsman, who continues to conduct exit interviews on an ad hoc basis when requested by employees, reiterates the importance of leveraging insights from those interviews with a more hands-on approach. To be able to fully capture and appreciate the employee experience, it is essential to create a safe space for the collection of stories and data, which will help the organization develop and incorporate lessons learned into existing staffing and evaluation processes. This process can inform professional development and help the organization address workplace issues. The Ombudsman will actively pursue this initiative in 2020–2021.

RECOMMENDATION

Put in place a function for reviewing and assessing departmental projects through a mental health lens.

ACTION TAKEN

The last fiscal year yielded concrete steps to including mental health factors in the strategic planning process. Through the Workplace Well-being Directorate, Organizational Development Services provided internal organizations and groups with services during times of change and transformation in order to help teams strategically plan their next steps; consider upcoming changes to their team structure, environment or membership; determine how to respond to new directives or limitations from leadership; or encourage innovation in processes or outputs.

OMBUDSMAN COMMENT

As stated in the recommendation section, the Office has noticed a shift whereby people leaders have become more aware of the importance of applying a mental health lens to projects or management practices. The Ombudsman is pleased with this shift and encourages the organization to continue incorporating a mental health lens into its business practices and processes.



RECOMMENDATION

Conduct a psychological risk profile evaluation.

ACTION TAKEN

The Occupational Health and Safety Directorate has launched the Electronic Hazard Prevention (EHP) application to replace paper- or PDF-based occupational profiles. The application allows managers, on behalf of their employees, to create electronic profiles that are unique to each individual employee and his or her specific work situation.

For more information:

<https://masource-mysource.spac-pspc.gc.ca/eng/services/rh-hr/santesecuritetravail-occupationalhealthsafety/risques-hazard/Pages/employee-hazard-risques-employe.aspx>

Application portal: <http://ehp-pre.pwgsc-tpsgc.gc.ca/>

And, in March 2020, as a direct result of the Ombudsman's recommendation, 19 psychosocial risk factors were added as possible hazards for managers to include in their employees' profiles.

OMBUDSMAN COMMENT

The Ombudsman is heartened to see the results that can be achieved through sound leadership. From the moment this recommendation left the Office, the Occupational Health and Safety team has worked hard to make changes to the Hazard Prevention Program and include the psychological hazards to which employees are exposed in their work. Furthermore, the approach demonstrates respect for individuals' personal perception of psychological risk rather than imposing a "one-size-fits-all" list of factors that may or may not apply or be fully inclusive. The Ombudsman is very much encouraged by this people-first perspective.

RECOMMENDATION

Appoint regional well-being coordinators.

ACTION TAKEN

Some branches and regions have led the way when it comes to implementing the Ombudsman's recommendation to appoint full-time well-being coordinators. These include Real Property Services, the Parliamentary Precinct Branch, the Acquisitions Branch and the Atlantic, Western and Pacific regions.

OMBUDSMAN COMMENT

The Ombudsman commends the regions and branches that have, to date, embraced his recommendation and appointed well being coordinators. He has seen first-hand the benefit of having full-time resources dedicated to mental health and well being in the workplace, and hopes to see more join the fold this year.

RECOMMENDATION

Set up a multidisciplinary support team for the Miramichi Pay Centre that would offer support for:

- internal procedures
- internal communications
- well-being programs

ACTION TAKEN

This action was completed within the first year of the recommendation. The Pay Centre still has a specific team in place to address employee engagement and well-being programs.

OMBUDSMAN COMMENT

With every visit, the Ombudsman is increasingly heartened to see the improvements in morale at the Pay Centre. He knows, as well as many do, that the Pay Centre got off to a rough start and that the roll-out of Phoenix turned everything upside down. Yet, the people of the Pay Centre are a gritty, resilient bunch who love what they do and have chosen to stay put and be part of the solution. The Ombudsman is wishing the Pay Centre strong wind in its sails going forward. It certainly deserves it.

The Recognition Committee and the Mental Health Committee, as well as the many other groups that engage employees' hearts and creativity, are a big part of growing the resilience that the people of the Pay Centre and regional satellite offices have had to tap into again and again. Hardworking people working for each other and all of us at PSPC.

RECOMMENDATION

Provide mental health training to employees and members of management.

ACTION TAKEN

The Workplace Well-being (WWB) Directorate has created an inventory of easy-to-access tools for employees and managers, which are available on GCconnex (<https://gcconnex.gc.ca/groups/about/49768572>), as well as on GCcollab during the pandemic (<https://gccollab.ca/file/group/4076183/all#4109410>).

The Workplace Well-being Directorate has created the WWB generic mailbox (Mieuxetre / Wellbeing (TPSGC/PWGSC)) TPSGC.mieuxetre-wellbeing.PWGSC@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca), which provides assistance and guidance to the right resources. Also, all learning events are coordinated with the branches and regions through this address.

The Employee and Organization Assistance Program has developed an optional Mental Health Workshop for PSPC Managers, which is now available through Alto.

See here for information about the launch of the workshops: <http://intranet.tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca/dlc-ink/cdg-mc/2020-02-27-00-eng.html>.

OMBUDSMAN COMMENT

Mental health training is widely available in our Department through the efforts of the Workplace Well-being Directorate and our partnership with the Joint Learning Program; in the federal government through the Canada School of Public Service; and through accredited organizations like the Mental Health Commission of Canada and The Royal. There is no shortage of high quality instruction, especially at a time like now, when almost all learning opportunities are available online.

Once again, it is up to our leaders to model desired behaviours by taking the time to complete these courses themselves and encouraging their team members to do the same. The more people who become fluent and comfortable with the basic terminology used in discussions about mental health, the greater their capacity will be to have discussions about struggles and to break through stigma and self-stigma.

RECOMMENDATION

Introduce the Deputy Minister's Award of Excellence for Mental Health.

ACTION TAKEN

The Departmental Awards of Excellence now feature a new category recognizing those who demonstrate tangible efforts to increase well-being in their workplace.

OMBUDSMAN COMMENT

In September 2019, the Deputy Minister's Awards of Excellence were handed out to their hardworking and dedicated recipients at a gala event. One of the award categories was "well-being." I was delighted to read the category description and to be part of a Department that values people who put forward these extraordinary efforts.

RECOMMENDATION

Develop tools for promoting civility and respect in the workplace.

ACTION TAKEN

To continue promoting civility and respect in the workplace, HRB offers half-day workshops on this topic, while the Office of Conflict Management offers charters and specific training on fostering collaborative conversation. HRB also provided the branches and regions with tools, resources and best practices to use and implement in promoting civility and respect in the workplace.

OMBUDSMAN COMMENT

Civility and respect—when these two behaviours are present, we hardly notice them, but we thrive. When they are nonexistent, we may spiral into discomfort and even distress. These two behaviours need to be everyone's focus, and I am pleased they are getting the

attention they deserve, as maintaining a culture of civility and respect takes ongoing effort and commitment. The Ombudsman encourages the branches and regions to make use of the existing tools developed by HRB.

Our first mental health survey (on interpersonal relationships) found that there is a direct correlation between uncivil behaviours demonstrated by management toward employees, and increased incivility among employees. Bullies create more bullies by showing that such behaviour is acceptable—or even necessary—in management circles. Every conversation and training opportunity that reflects our values counts. It all starts and stops with sound leadership.

RECOMMENDATION

Consider introducing a clause, or alternate means, to allow employees to report inappropriate, harassing or aggressive behaviour by co-workers, clients, partners or suppliers.

ACTION TAKEN

To align with the new Bill C-65, which brings harassment and violence together under the *Canada Labour Code, Part II*, HRB is reviewing the intake and response process and creating a new departmental centre of expertise for the prevention of violence and harassment in the workplace. This centre, which intends to open in fall 2020, will provide a better focus on ensuring that violence and harassment in the workplace are addressed promptly and effectively, in a manner that best meets employees' needs.

OMBUDSMAN COMMENT

The Ombudsman is dedicated to informing the people of PSPC about existing mechanisms and remains available to informally discuss situations where employees feel they are the victims of harassment or bullying. Whether formally or informally, these situations must be addressed. "The standard you walk past, is the standard you accept." We must break the silence by stopping and shining a light on the behaviours that we do not want to condone as part of our corporate culture.

The Ombudsman applauds the commitment to offer a new violence and harassment centre where employees can access services that support healthy workplaces in a time-sensitive manner.

RECOMMENDATION

Systematically provide the On-boarding and Orientation Program for new employees and students throughout the Department and include the "psychological health" component in the mandatory occupational health and safety course.

ACTION TAKEN

PSPC conducted a series of workshops across the Department to gauge the needs of employees through their on-boarding journey. The consultations were key to developing

an on-boarding experiment designed for employees, by employees. To support this initiative, a gap analysis phase is being conducted and will establish a vision for the future on-boarding process to be delivered across the Department and the regions.

OMBUDSMAN COMMENT

Leveraging employees’ experiences and needs are key steps toward building an inclusive on-boarding process. The Ombudsman looks forward to the full implementation of this recommendation.

RECOMMENDATION

Create a centralized coaching program for managers and executives.

ACTION TAKEN

The Executive Group Strategies and Programs Sector, under HRB, made coaching services available to all PSPC employees, managers and executives throughout the year. This initiative took the form of coaching circles delivered by certified coaches, as well as individual sessions.

OMBUDSMAN COMMENT

The Ombudsman thinks that the current offering is excellent and reiterates the need for a broader, more comprehensive program that could be offered on a wider basis. The opportunity for people managers to “tool up” and learn through coaching can elevate management practice fundamentals.

RECOMMENDATION

Create a directory of mentors in each branch and region.

ACTION TAKEN

HRB actively provided support for many departmental mentorship activities and produced a handbook to guide employees in choosing a mentor. HRB intends to continue its work to support a mentor directory, engaging in sustained research on software options that could manage a central repository.

OMBUDSMAN COMMENT

The Ombudsman is in favour of potentially operationalizing a directory of mentors. This would support a learning culture and help with guiding change across the organization.

RECOMMENDATION

Establish a mandatory on-boarding program for managers.

ACTION TAKEN

HRB conducted an environmental scan of the tools currently used within the organization. This exercise will serve to identify a way forward, taking into account existing gaps.

OMBUDSMAN COMMENT

The Ombudsman stresses the importance of continuing to invest in the professional development of our middle managers, as they are an integral part of the feeders group for talent management processes.



"I strongly believe that investing time and energy on properly onboarding our middle managers is key to building a more effective, respectful, healthy and connected workforce".

– Marc-Andre Massie, Former Director, Managers' community

RECOMMENDATION

Provide training on remote management.

ACTION TAKEN

HRB has made good progress on remote management training by incorporating new remote management learning principles into an existing course offered by Labour Relations. The amended course integrates virtual team management concepts and will be piloted with the Pension Centre.

OMBUDSMAN COMMENT

The Ombudsman applauds this initiative, especially in the context of COVID-19 and beyond.

RECOMMENDATION

Create an email distribution list for the entire Department and keep it up to date.

ACTION TAKEN

HRB, in partnership with Shared Services Canada, has worked to identify industry best practices for a departmental distribution list.

OMBUDSMAN COMMENT

The struggle to create and maintain a complete and up-to-date distribution list for the Department is real, and the frustration with not having one is shared by many, as this prevents us from engaging all employees. The Office realizes that it is a big task, but also knows that other government departments and agencies have come up with solutions.



COMMUNICATIONS, OUTREACH AND AWARENESS

LEARNING TOGETHER – EVENTS AND OUTREACH IN 2019–2020

Since the Office of the Ombudsman for Mental Health opened its doors in February 2017, it has been clear that communications and outreach are vital to helping the Office transform the Department's culture into one that puts people first. Through our panel discussions, impromptu kiosks and other outreach activities, we have seen that people are listening and watching, keen to learn and to decide for themselves whether the Department is walking the talk when it comes to creating an environment that supports mental health. We have noticed more requests for one-on-one discussions with the Ombudsman after our events. This speaks to their importance— if we, the people of the Office, and our guests speak up about mental health, it is our hope and belief that it will encourage the employees of the Department to do the same, and ultimately to chip away at the self-stigmatization which keeps us suffering in silence.

The Office has always seized every opportunity to make itself known to the people of PSPC. In fact, we understand that every activity, from our Employee Charitable Campaign bake sales (flying the banner of the Office!), to our participation in government-wide events like the BC Council's panel discussion on mental health in the workplace in Vancouver, is an opportunity to share the Office's vision and mandate and to encourage employees to come forward and speak with the Ombudsman about what they are going through, from within the safe space that the Office provides.

From April 2019 to March 2020, we hosted and organized three panel discussions on subjects that our one on-one discussions ensured us would be of interest to the people of PSPC. The Office was thrilled to see hundreds of employees from across the country show up live or via WebEx to discuss mental health self-care (May 6, 2019), the art of listening (November 5, 2019) and leadership through the lens of mental health (January 21). Maybe you couldn't make it? Below, you will find a few words of wisdom and suggestions for beneficial practices.

PEOPLE FIRST – AND THAT MEANS YOU – MAY 6, 2019

“People First!” is the motto of the Office of the Ombudsman for Mental Health. But how do we put people first in workplace decision-making or, in government-speak, “how do we operationalize it?”

During Mental Health Week, we invited a panel of employees from high-stress environments across the Department to help us understand how they take care of themselves and their employees when the pressure is on.

We asked Maria Lapolla from the Employee and Organization Assistance Program to be our keynote speaker and handpicked an engaging and diverse panel:

- ▶ **Peter O’Neill**, Compensation Advisor and Union Representative, Pay Centre, Miramichi, New Brunswick, NB
- ▶ **Megan Wilkins**, Project Manager, Real Property Services, Moncton, NB
- ▶ **Vickey Habel**, Client Advisor, Translation Bureau, Montreal, QC



MARIA: SELF-CARE?

“There’s a lot of talk about self-care, but, to me, it’s about self compassion and self-awareness. It isn’t a luxury or a privilege, it’s a necessity—something to put at the top of your to-do list. “



MEGAN: CHECK IN WITH YOURSELF

“When I wake up in the morning, I ask myself, “How are you feeling today?” and I adjust my behaviour accordingly. Am I not really feeling like leaving the house? What can I do for myself? Replace my homebrewed coffee with Starbucks for a treat?

And again, at night, I ask myself, “So how was your day?” Is there a way I could make it better?

These little check-ins are a way to show myself that I care about me.”



VICKEY: THIS DOESN'T BELONG TO YOU

"I am a client advisor at the Translation Bureau, arguably one of the most stressful places to work, and I was running myself into the ground trying to please everyone. One day, I overheard a conversation in the lunch room between two colleagues that was a turning point for me.

A translator was overwhelmed and crying, and her co-worker said to her, 'I understand, but all of these external factors that are affecting you don't belong to you. You don't have any control over them. They are not part of your job.'

So take a look at what actually belongs to you and let yourself off the hook for what isn't your responsibility."



PETER: LOOK FOR YOUR MARS BAR

"When my daughter was young, she loved Mars bars. She would come with me to buy my lottery tickets because she knew she might get a Mars bar.

Now, when people come to me with their difficulties, I say, "Look for the Mars bar in your day. I don't know what it is that's special and important and that might make you smile, but searching for it might take your mind off the hard stuff. Look for your Mars bar."



THE ART OF LISTENING – NOVEMBER 5, 2019

In the words of the Ombudsman, “you learn a lot more by listening than you do by talking.” But, if we are honest with ourselves, we may have discovered that listening can be a challenge. It can be hard to remain open to other people’s ideas and experiences. Luckily, it’s a skill that can be learned and, once learned and practiced, can deepen interpersonal relationships—at home and at work. Good listening skills not only help resolve conflict, but they can help prevent it in the first place.

Our panelists shared some of their own experiences, as well as tips to leaning in and listening. For tips on how to practice active listening, see the Office’s tip sheet here:

<https://masource-mysource.spac-pspc.gc.ca/eng/osm-omh/Pages/ecoute-active-listening.aspx>

The Office invited **Denis Veilleux**, an EOAP practitioner and former ICMS counsellor, to tell us about his passionate commitment to listening. He was joined by a panel of three: **Nassima Zobir Bouguerba**, Manager, HR-to-Pay Services; **Gerry Boulos**, Regional Manager, Civil Engineering, Atlantic Region (retired); and **Cynthia Mathieu**, Professor, Organizational Psychology, Université du Québec à Trois Rivières.



NASSIMA: ACTIVE LISTENING SOLVES PROBLEMS

“People are here to be heard, seen, and understood. By actively listening, we are building and adding to our own individual stories. Active listening results in most problems being solved!”



GERRY: SAFE SPACE

“Conversations need to happen in the context of relationships founded on trust. Managers need to provide help and encouragement when needed; to create a safe space for employees.”



DENIS: HUMILITY

“I think that listening requires a certain humility. Also, to listen, you must put your own ego aside to leave space for the other person.”



CYNTHIA: LISTEN TO EMPLOYEES

“Employees need to be heard in order to feel they matter to their managers, to their colleagues and to their organization”

PSPC LET'S TALK MENTAL HEALTH DAY – JANUARY 21, 2020

On January 21, to jump start Bell Let's Talk Day, the Office organized a day for the people of PSPC to focus on themselves and their mental health. Talking about mental health is so very important because, in addition to the stigma that surrounds mental health issues (as opposed to physical health issues), self-stigmatization can often get in the way of people reaching out for help. The more we talk about mental health, the more we normalize it.

We kicked the day off with a workshop on resilience-building by Scott Donald from the Employee and Organization Assistance Program (EOAP). We then invited our Deputy Minister, Bill Matthews, to a chat with Professor Cynthia Mathieu and the Ombudsman, and ended our day on an energetic note with an informative and engaging talk by Marie-Josée Michaud, a motivational speaker within the field of mental health and organizational development.

Summing up everything we learned that day in a couple of sentences would be impossible, but here are a few takeaways from each session to inspire you. They inspired us!





WORKSHOP ON RESILIENCE – SCOTT DONALD (EOAP)

Scott's message reached each and every one of us, and got us thinking about the meaning of resilience in our work and personal lives and how we can build more of it to benefit our overall mental health.

HERE WERE SOME OF HIS SUGGESTIONS:

 Expedition - taking a drive	 Music, singing or dancing	 Laughter or comedy	 Volunteering or helping others	 Exercise-walking, hiking, biking, etc
 Sports or recreational activities	 Spending time with children	 Artistic pursuits	 Vision boards	 Listening to enjoyable podcasts or videos
 Nutrition-increasing healthy food choices	 improving sleep habits	 Talk therapy or journaling	 Massage, reiki or reflexology	 Silence or social interaction
 Spending time with people who are a positive influence	 Games with friends	 Plan a trip	 interacting with pets	 Aromatherapy

PEOPLE LEADING PEOPLE – A TALK ON LEADERSHIP, SUPPORT AND REDUCING STIGMA WITH AWARENESS

On the afternoon of January 21, the Ombudsman for Mental Health invited Deputy Minister Bill Matthews and Dr. Cynthia Mathieu, Organizational Behaviour Psychologist, to join a discussion on leadership. Hundreds of employees from PSPC and other federal departments tuned in to hear Mr. Matthews and Dr. Mathieu share their experience and research highlights, respectively.



Our Deputy Minister, Bill Matthews, shared with us his thoughts on some of the key leadership skills that are needed in an organization like PSPC. **The three that topped his list were openness and honesty, clear expectations and empathy.**



“If we are going to be really good leaders, we’ve got to be more open.” . . . “For me, the capacity to listen—really stay calm and understand. The number one skill would be listening—not the jump to action, folks. Of course, you need them on your team, too, but what you really need are the people who can listen.”



Second—“. . . people who can be empathetic and really put themselves in their employees’ shoes and try to understand what they are feeling.”



Third—“the ability to be honest with the team. For me, good leaders are people who can give feedback to the team and its members in a way that doesn’t anger people. Be honest about what they need to do better and what they do well. And, you have to give them the chance to tell you the same thing, and that has led to some really interesting conversations.”

Leaders, be clear about what you are asking from your people:



“If we are not clear in our expectations, people will go above and beyond to try to impress us. If you are not clear on what you need, your people who are trying to impress you will go above and beyond, and it will add to stress levels. It’s not true that everything is a priority. You’ve got to choose. Sometimes these choices are made for you, like when you have a young family. There are periods when you’ll do things less well and you’ll have to accept that, and other periods where your career will be the most important thing for you and you’ll be able to invest more time in it.”





CYNTHIA MATHIEU

“Canada is facing a never-before-seen shortage of employees, and the private sector and public sector alike are going to have problems. It has started already. This reality is actually shifting the power in followership and leadership because employees are coming in expecting their leaders to listen more, and you want to keep your talent as they are the heart of your organization. You want to attract good employees and you want to keep them, and leadership certainly is the key to that. And giving room for employees to talk and collaborate. You need a shift in leadership and how it is defined as well. What would actually open the door to other types of leaders—I am completely biased—but women, maybe, or leaders who have different abilities and who will be able to meet the new expectations?”

“Having a healthy workplace is currently one of the top priorities for employees coming in.”

MARIE-JOSÉE MICHAUD – SPEAKER AND AUTHOR

Marie-Josée’s talk began with a reflection on the nature of judgment. She showed us that judgment, although it has a bad rep, doesn’t necessarily have to be negative, but that “what we do with judgment has an effect on our mental health,” so we have to be ready to notice what we are telling ourselves about the experiences in our lives, and be especially vigilant about harsh self-judgment.



“Judgments can be positive and negative, but what we do with our judgment has a big effect on our mental health.”

Don’t let fear transform your dreams of

‘I want to be’ into ‘I have to be’!

You have the right to exist!

Marie-Josée has created a handful of videos about judgment, anxiety, burnout and more. Here’s one: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H78mDiMRShk>

RETHINKING ENGAGEMENT

On March 16, 2020, we were asked to start working from home to stay safe from the novel coronavirus. The Office of the Ombudsman did exactly that, but we didn't stay still for long and started rethinking engagement. Within a few weeks, we had our new, informal Facebook group up and running.

We invited the people of PSPC to join us and connect in the official language of their choice. Right away, we got to work posting relevant information about our new “stay home and try to work” reality. We reached out to hear how our colleagues were doing and encouraged the people of PSPC to do the same.

Before long, the Office launched its Informal Fridays with the Ombudsman (IFO)—a weekly “talk show” with the Ombudsman and a guest from the Department. The formula was simple: A ten- to fifteen-minute chat followed by an open floor for questions from the Zoom audience or the employees following the talk live in our [Facebook group](#).





Through our numerous meetings and encounters across the organization every year, we learn about many promising practices. These encounters provide our organizations with a significant opportunity to examine and integrate practices that support psychological health and safety in the workplace. They are an important part of moving the needle forward on cultural transformation, while offering a breath of fresh air on how we conduct business. We are pleased and excited to share some of these great finds with you.

AWARENESS, TRAINING AND TOOLS TO EQUIP EMPLOYEES – CASTING LIGHT ON PEOPLE FIRST

The Science Parliamentary Infrastructure Branch (SPIB) actively provided employees and management with mental health training and raised awareness around breaking the stigma of mental health in the workplace. They leveraged existing platforms, including the Canada School of Public Service and the Canadian Innovation Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace, to provide employees with opportunities to build capacity for themselves and their team. They took the initiative to deliver the Working Mind workshop to all their managers and have already begun planning a new series of mental health training and workshops to be delivered in the next fiscal year. Some examples of their awareness efforts include monthly employee newsletters featuring educational articles on mental health, on-site kiosks (i.e. Living Books, Listening Ear and Take the Pledge) on World Mental Health Day, internal mental health information stations and promoting events such as PSPC's Let's Talk event.

The Real Property Services Branch (RPSB) offers a Group Mentoring Program to support employees in developing professionally and in acquiring new skills, building confidence and developing a sense of belonging to their branch. Since 2015, the program has welcomed over one hundred and forty mentees and provided mentors and mentees alike with invaluable experience while supporting the branch's ongoing journey toward inclusivity and diversity. One of its mentors, who took part in the 2019–2020 program, gave a testimonial about providing support, especially in the context of COVID: "Our group held sessions even after the start of the lockdown, and we continue to stay in touch. For example, one of my mentees recently informed me that he was looking for a new position and I helped him prepare and promote his CV as well as prepare it for informal discussions." The annual feedback provided by participants continues to highlight the program's ability to cultivate long-lasting relationships.

The Digital Service Branch (DSB) directed its efforts toward connecting employees. It created a directory of mentors in each branch and region that employees can work with to support their growth and development. Formal knowledge-sharing and hands-on training sessions are now a current practice for the various DSB portfolios. Senior staff are invited to actively share their knowledge with staff in a format that combines technical information, theory and practical exercises. Additionally, these sessions provide opportunities for employees to be part of engaging discussions and to grow their influence and involvement in the organization.

The Pay Administration Branch is staying true to its commitment to continuous learning and leadership development as the first cohort of 23 Public Service Pay Centre employees from across the country who completed the Leadership for Coaches Program (LCP) in Miramichi, New Brunswick. After completing this program, participants demonstrated significant progress in their professional and personal development as coaches. Graduates report that the program helped them grow in their role as subject matter experts in pay, specifically by enhancing their abilities through mentoring, coaching, and formal and informal training.



“This program was amazing. Not only did it help me professionally, it has helped me personally. In my speech on January 24, 2020, I said: ‘I am now a leader with the ability to motivate a group of people to act toward achieving common goals.’”

— (LCP graduate)

THE FIRST COHORT OF GRADUATES FROM THE LCP!

Back row: Jen Michouris, Kim Deware, Christopher (Cody) Hare, Charline Bourque, Cara Silliker, Terrance Murphy, Keith De Borja, Aaron MacDonald, Samantha Flieger, Claude Hebert, Diane Murphy, Jenn Rivet, Fiona Payne, Jennifer Swaine

Middle row: Gillian Marie Row, Daphnée Michaud, Stephanie Kirkland, Jeannette Surette, Joetta Dunn, Marcy Comeau, Rupa Roy, Lisa McCray, Joshua Walton

Front row: Karine Gorman, Margaret Cruz, Alain Charly Nzankeu Fouekeng, Carolyn Baker, Mutshara Zanab



The Policy, Planning and Communication Branch developed an on-boarding process to support its hiring managers in welcoming new employees to the branch. The on-boarding kit was widely distributed to managers and senior management and included a series of tools such as a welcome message, links to an on boarding package and team contact information. A well-supported team integration process benefits an organization in many ways, including shortening the learning curve for new employees.

RECOGNITION — AN IMPORTANT BUILDING BLOCK FOR OUR EMPLOYEES

The Policy, Planning and Communication Branch developed, in 2019, a Recognition Program including four recognition awards designed to acknowledge the exceptional work and positive attitudes of employees within the branch. Since then, they have presented a number of recognition awards to individual employees and teams for promoting employee well-being. As part of its recognition practices, the branch features the award recipients in its monthly newsletter.

The Digital Services Branch has created a new award category to recognize employees who are “Promoting Wellbeing, Respect and Diversity in the Workplace.” This award recognizes employees, individually or as a team, who are guided by the values of respect, continuously enhance employee well-being, and promote equity and diversity through their behaviour, actions or achievements. This year, the award was given to DSB employee **Audrey Lee Bogdanski**.

These initiatives are great examples of best practices that help foster a people-first culture. Learning activities and recognition practices such as those featured above are solid steps we can take to support and equip employees, while helping to break mental health stigma in the workplace.

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mean you don't
get afraid.
Courage means
you don't let fear
stop you.

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CONCLUSION

2020-21 OFFICE PRIORITIES

The most important priority for this Office is to continue providing a safe space to meet with PSPC employees. In light of the current COVID-19 situation, the Office has paused its regional visits and found alternative ways to be present within the National Capital Region and the regions. The Office created a Facebook page for employees to connect and find a sense of togetherness in these times of physical and social distancing. It is our intent to continue the Informal Fridays with the Ombudsman as we introduce new ways of learning together through honest, authentic and bold conversations that matter. The Ombudsman will increase his presence by leveraging his participation in presentations during town halls, staff meetings, committees etc. Our sustained effort to promote healthy workplace management practices will carry on through our projects, events and awareness activities. The “People First” vision is, more than ever, at the centre of what we do.

CLOSING REMARKS

As it turns out, 2019–2020 ended in a memorable way. It will be remembered as a year that fundamentally impacted the way we work forever, bringing at times high levels of stress and anxiety, but also opportunities to take care of ourselves and each other. During the COVID-19 pandemic, my Office recognized early on the importance of safeguarding service continuity to support employees in need and address potential impact on their mental health. We continued to offer confidential, impartial and informal virtual services to all employees, using various communication methods to listen to their concerns and to provide advice and guidance during this most turbulent time. We also set about to observe and report on the personal and professional impact of the situation on people. I was uniquely positioned to see first-hand the many struggles faced by employees, and now, in this new, unsteady and uncertain environment, the issues brought forward often express deeper levels of complexities in their lives. In times of isolation and crisis, where the future is creating levels of uncertainties for so many, accessing a safe space where employees can speak openly and receive guidance, support and coaching services is essential.

Since the beginning of the crisis, my team and I have collaborated with many sectors on various approaches, tools and lessons learned based on each of our own observations and situations. This helped us provide our senior leadership with more insightful, high-level and targeted observations.

In these exceptional times I must say that I have heard and observed many examples of exceptional leadership efforts that should be leading practices. Many employees felt connected to their team as their managers used new technology to keep in touch. Some organized online groups to alleviate the impact of isolation and loneliness while sharing mental health and wellness tools. I also heard from managers who were reaching out to seek advice and coaching on how to better equip themselves and better support their team. Additionally, we also heard from employees trying to make the best of this new reality. Some employees integrated self care routines, recognizing the importance of good

mental health, while others saved significant commute time and positively changed some spending habits.

As individuals, we all have experienced or are continuing to experience various phases of stress, and will only determine the full impact of this stress on us and others later on. Regardless of how strong or weak we believe ourselves to be, the pandemic has forced each and every one of us to challenge the way we think, feel, and do the things we used to do.

Promoting and practicing psychologically safe leadership is key to supporting a positive employee experience, whether virtually or on-site. We need to acknowledge the impact of mental fatigue and cumulative stress on our employees, managers and executives in order to be better positioned and engaged in providing the necessary support. Creating and fostering genuine relationships with our people is the number one investment you can ever make for you and the organization. Building authentic relationships and being accountable, honest and transparent are key to building trust. Now more than ever, it is important that we each support and practice compassionate and flexible leadership, which encourages innovative and sustainable approaches and ideas, as much for ourselves as for each other, and our employees—something that we all have the ability to do.

We continue to offer our services to help you deal with virtual or on-site well-being, mental health and workplace challenges or issues. Remember, we are here for you—you are not alone.



SPECIAL REPORT FROM THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN OF MENTAL HEALTH–PSPC’S COVID-19 PANDEMIC EXPERIENCE: A LESSONS LEARNED REPORT

PHASE 1: THE PANDEMIC LOCKDOWN AND ITS IMMEDIATE IMPACT

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization officially declared COVID-19 a global pandemic. Then, on March 16, 2020, a majority of PSPC employees (certain critical services notwithstanding) were instructed to refrain from returning to the workplace immediately and instead to work from home until further notice. Naturally, events of this magnitude resulted in pronounced levels of uncertainty, anxiety and stress, not only for PSPC employees, but effectively for people right around the world.

In a situation like the one we found ourselves in, communicating in a timely and reassuring manner can help mitigate some of the adverse psychological effects of a crisis. Most PSPC employees went home on Friday, March 13, 2020, wondering and uncertain about whether they would be able to return to work the following Monday.

In the weeks following the immediate lockdown period, our Office heard from numerous employees around the country that they were effectively being given a message of “business as usual,” which felt to many employees as profoundly tone-deaf to the gravity of the situation, as well as either unaware or indifferent to the struggles that many employees were understandably experiencing in transitioning to working from home on a full-time basis.

PHASE 2: WORKING FROM HOME – OUR “NEW NORMAL”

The need for timely and supportive communication remains critical throughout the management of a crisis situation. We saw further evidence of this once we entered what may be referred to as the second phase of the pandemic response, when it was determined that the majority of our employees would be working from home indefinitely, by default.

For example, many employees with children reported great difficulty achieving the same level of productivity as they had prior to the pandemic shutdown. Moreover, many of these employees felt guilty for working during the day while their children attempted to keep up with their schoolwork from home. Others reported feeling inadequate or ill-prepared when trying to take on the role of teacher. Many feared that their children were not getting sufficient attention or support, and therefore additionally worried for their children’s mental health. All of this at a time when many adults themselves were experiencing great difficulty processing the events at hand, let alone their children.

Additionally, VPN connectivity compounded with the challenge of remaining efficient resulted in some employees working longer days and/or well into the evening at times. The particular demands brought on by the COVID-19 situation exerted substantial stressors and pressures, leaving some managers vulnerable to burnout or exhaustion. These and other cases point to a need to streamline and/or adjust work level expectations wherever possible, as well as to pay particular attention to our colleagues’ mental health at this time. However, we have observed that the vast majority of our employees have in fact been able to work quite effectively and steadfastly during this highly turbulent period.

Our organization deserves to be commended for all the hard work it has done to support and equip employees while working from home through leading, innovative initiatives such as the establishment of Information Technology Kits, the Digital Services Branch's committed and meticulous work to ensure reliable and effective network capacity, and the development of a [COVID-19 Manager's Guide](#).

As some have astutely observed, "one should never let a good crisis go to waste." While this is in no way intended to minimize the pain, loss and suffering of many as a result of this pandemic, it is meant to encourage seeing opportunities for positive change, including within our workplace. Without question, the awareness and profile of mental health in the workplace has grown exponentially during this crisis period, and we at the Office view this as a positive development. We have all seen the many mental health resources and other tools that have been developed right across governments, NGOs and the private sector. However, it takes more than tips and tricks to support employees who are genuinely experiencing pronounced levels of stress, uncertainty and anxiety.

Our Office's call activity has increased significantly during the pandemic period, and we have heard from many employees lamenting the lack of support, understanding and flexibility they are receiving from some managers. As our Office has observed many times over, when it comes to mental health in the workplace, the only real currency is "walking the talk." This means being available to employees who are stressed and anxious, showing compassion and empathy, and demonstrating flexibility and, yes, even innovative thinking, in being open to new and possibly better ways of working.

In spite of the many challenges brought on by this pandemic, there may never be a better opportunity than the present to embrace real, meaningful, positive changes that will contribute to a psychologically healthier and safer workplace. As David Stevens, Director General of the Pension Centre in Shediac, New Brunswick stated during one of our Informal Fridays with the Ombudsman sessions, "We are proving that we do not have to go back to our old ways of working to be productive—we can take care of our people while taking care of business!"

Our Office has also observed pronounced levels of employee stress and anxiety, as well as other adverse mental health affects during the pandemic period. These observations are borne out by [new Canadian mental health data](#) confirming that Canadians' mental health has, on aggregate, deteriorated markedly during this time. As a result, some observers have been sounding the alarm on a looming mental health crisis.

It should be noted that in light of this major crisis, which has virtually upended all aspects of our "normal" way of life, our Department has largely coped admirably by rapidly transitioning to telework by default, which is keeping our employees safe while maintaining an impressive rate of productivity. With a workforce that has been able to consistently maintain a rate of capacity of approximately 90%, the Department and the vast majority of its employees have demonstrated an impressive ability to adapt and to remain both agile and nimble under the most trying of circumstances.

However, we are not all “hard-wired” the same, nor do we all respond in the same way to change. Understandably (and as previously stated), there has been a precipitous drop in some employees’ levels of productivity during the lockdown period. There are, of course, very good and legitimate reasons for this. For one, with schools and other places of work being closed, the home has become both a sanctuary and a “grand central station” for many families, making the prospect of working in such a busy, hectic and congested environment a highly tenuous one at best. For another, people have very different work styles. Some require an office environment with people around them in order to feel “plugged in” and engaged, while others require absolute quiet and stillness in order to concentrate. The point is, it’s inherently unfair and unrealistic to expect all employees to thrive equally under these highly restrictive circumstances.

As this novel situation continues to evolve and present us all with a steep learning curve, we are seeing different responses from different managers. While some are demonstrating understanding, flexibility and empathy, others are either refusing to adjust their work level expectations or not providing their employees with the guidance and support they need in order to succeed. Setting employees up for success rather than failure is a fundamental component of what it means to be a manager, and the current COVID 19 situation is certainly no exception to this rule.

Rather than simply “writing off” those employees who have not been able to transition seamlessly to full time telework, managers are encouraged to understand that different employees have different cognitive and work styles; take the time to talk to employees who are struggling and ask them what it is they need; and demonstrate flexibility in allowing employees to work in a manner that suits, reflects and validates their own style and talents. In so doing, we may find that the few employees who are currently struggling will be able to join the vast majority who are continuing to perform important and impressive work at a time that is critical for all Canadians.

Current challenges over work level expectations are also emerging in the context of the Employee Performance Management Agreement (EPMA) process. The Department has wisely adopted the position that there should be a moratorium on EPMA discussions during the pandemic period. However, it appears that some have not heeded this sound advice and have nonetheless held EPMA discussions virtually or remotely. In many cases, this has resulted in highly heated and contested annual performance reviews.

Human communications are a highly fraught endeavour at the best of times. However, along with the aforementioned challenges around calibrating work level expectations fairly at this time, discussing a sensitive topic such as an employee’s performance in a virtual setting, without the additional advantages of proximate and fulsome non-verbal communication cues, elevates the risk of mistrust, misunderstanding and conflict. As our Office has been saying for quite some time now (see our [Annual Reports](#)), it is imperative that the EPMA process be used as it was always intended—not as a weapon to punish recalcitrant employees, but as a tool (among many) to ensure regular, ongoing discussion with employees about their career development, growth and success.

PHASE 3: RETURN TO THE WORKPLACE

Our inevitable transition back to the workplace will almost certainly come with further challenges, disruption and some degree of difficulty. We will all need to exercise patience and understanding with each other as we all try to adjust to this new normal. However, we have an opportunity to successfully leverage the experience and lessons of the first two phases to help lead the way.

Prompt, timely and fulsome communications heading into and throughout the third phase will continue to be of paramount importance. We support the continuation of the highly successful and much appreciated virtual town hall initiative throughout the return-to-the-workplace phase, as this will allow employees to remain informed and connected and help alleviate feelings of uncertainty or anxiety. While we understand that this may require significant time and effort, we encourage approaching this not necessarily with the idea that our senior leadership should have or provide all the answers, but to simply be present, listen and prepared to engage in authentic discourse. As our Office is well aware through the work that we do on a regular basis, sometimes all people really need is the opportunity to feel heard.

Furthermore, we would like to take this opportunity to both acknowledge and commend the many managers and other leaders among us who have responded to this unique situation in truly innovative ways. Their approaches have included holding virtual coffee breaks with their teams, creating branch or directorate mental health support sites or portals, conducting pulse checks to gauge what their team members are experiencing and—perhaps more importantly—what they need moving forward, and many other creative ideas we are seeing emerge at this time in order to buoy spirits and instill a sense of connectedness among colleagues. This, we believe, is leadership at its finest!

We should also realize and acknowledge that, although a majority of our employees have been able to work from home during this time, a small but significant percentage of our employees have been incurring a higher degree of risk by going into the workplace throughout the pandemic period to provide Canadians with critical services. Some of these employees have told us that they have felt somewhat forgotten, as most of the support and response efforts have been directed toward the majority of employees who are working from home.

This points to the importance of considering the diverse needs, realities and experiences of our workforce as a whole and ensuring that none of our employees are made to feel neglected, ignored or left out. And moving forward, this insight will prove critical for managers who want to keep their teams engaged and united throughout the return-to-work phase by exploring and identifying new and innovative communication strategies that resonate with all employees.

Clearly, the physical safety of our employees should continue to be of the utmost importance as we prepare to return to the workplace. A great deal of hard work is currently taking place to ensure that our office work environments will be safe for all employees. This work is to be acknowledged and commended. Through the fault of no one in particular, guidelines and recommendations around PPE, social distancing and other safety

practices have been highly fluid, at times variegated, and constantly evolving, which has understandably resulted in some degree of uncertainty and distress among employees. While acknowledging that this is an entirely new situation for which there is no real precedent, reassuring employees that we will continue to follow the best of science and public health guidelines to ensure their safety will undoubtedly reduce those levels of fear, anxiety and uncertainty to a great degree, while also helping to instill greater trust in the organization.

PSPC's COVID-19 Playbook, which was recently developed to facilitate a safe and successful transition back to the workplace, is a testament to all the hard work, research and commitment that is going into this endeavour. It is a highly exhaustive and detailed set of guidelines to support managers and other employees in responding effectively to every conceivable situation that may occur as result of the COVID 19 situation. We are reassured by the fact that the development of this Playbook appears to be a highly iterative process that has been open to feedback and other suggestions. We feel that herein lies an excellent opportunity to build a new kind of workplace, one that preserves the best of our past, but embraces the hard-won lessons of our present in order to build a better workplace for all our employees in the future. As Kay Sargent argued in [*What Will Covid-19 Mean for Workplace Culture*](#),



“We’ve been handed a really unique, once-in-a-decade or maybe even once-in-a-career opportunity to think about what we really want the office to be, and about how we create spaces that are human-centric. If we end up going backwards, we’ll be doing everyone a disservice.”



OBSERVATIONS RECOMMENDATIONS	
Initial “business as usual” messaging perceived as tone deaf and distressing for some employees	Ensuring supportive, flexible and sensitive responses and communications, including streamlining business practices wherever possible
Once determined that we would be working from home for the long term, some employees remained unclear and uncertain with regard to their equipment needs	Providing employees with the tools and equipment they need in a timely manner in order to continue working safely and effectively
An increase in aggregate levels of employee stress, fear and anxiety	Providing employees with the patience, empathy and mental health support they need, including being well positioned for a potential future mental health crisis
The government’s position on PPE and other physical safety measures remained fluid, evolved frequently and engendered conditions of uncertainty	Ensuring everyone’s physical safety above all else while explaining that our Department is committed to identifying and gathering all relevant facts during a highly evolving situation
Some EPMAs conducted against the departmental recommendation to postpone until after the pandemic period	A clear and consistent moratorium on EPMAs during the lockdown period or, alternatively, at the written consent of both employee and manager
Work level expectations not appropriately adjusted in light of current circumstances	Engaging in priority setting exercises that sensibly acknowledge the additional challenges of the current work environment
Heightened levels of employee guilt and remorse for not performing to maximum capacity	Concerted communication efforts emphasizing a concern for employee well-being above all else, e.g. “We’re all currently at home trying to work rather than simply working from home”
Some employees in positions deemed essential and required to go into the workplace felt that the majority of support efforts were directed toward those employees working from home	Ensuring inclusive interim policies, practices and safety measures in the context of the pandemic response, but also in regard to all future, ongoing employee support initiatives
The presence of innovative, agile and creative responses from some managers to maintain the communication, morale and engagement levels of team members	Implementing ideas such as virtual coffee breaks, online mental health support resources, pulse checks, branch- or directorate-level Facebook pages, etc.
The current situation of telework and virtual teams by default has identified the need for new and different sets of management skills	Providing managers with the training and other necessary resources to manage teams successfully in this new virtual context



Did you know?

For all pay issues or support with a general pay inquiry, **PSPC employees** can contact **My HRResource** at 1-844-641-5882, Monday to Friday, 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. (eastern Standard Time) or at tpsgc.dgrhmaressourcerh-hrbmyhrresource.pwgsc@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca

This group is able to identify the source of the problem and direct employees to the right resources if the situation cannot be corrected by the group.



Did you know?

PSPC has an [Office of Internal Disclosure](#).

As mandated under the Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act, employees can report possible wrongdoing to the Office of Internal Disclosure.

Contact the Office of Internal Disclosure:

Telephone: 819-956-9816 or 1-855-570-8338

Email: tpsgc.divulgations-disclosures.pwgsc@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca



A-WHAT DOES “PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST” MEAN?

“An organization’s success depends on the people who work there. It’s important to stop and think about the employees and interpersonal relations.”

Stress can quickly take over when employees are faced with a heavy workload, tight deadlines and priorities that are difficult to reconcile. However, it is important to remember that behind every email, phone call or conversation, there is a person who may also have to deal with pressures outside of work.

When we hire an engineer, a translator or an architect, we are first and foremost hiring a human being, a person who must feel from day one that he or she is part of the organization. For that reason, it is essential to:

- ▶ **establish a performance agreement that contains clear, measurable objectives**
- ▶ **inform employees of their responsibilities and what is expected of them**
- ▶ **provide employees with tools, resources, coaching and support**

Communication, feedback and support are at the heart of a relationship that helps the employee to move forward.

PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST also means that we must:

- ▶ **be flexible in order to encourage work–life balance**
- ▶ **show interest in employees’ objectives and potential**
- ▶ **promote learning and professional development**
- ▶ **facilitate and support access to alternative work arrangements** (compressed work hours, reduced work week, telework) when possible
- ▶ **create an environment where people have the right to make mistakes, and where respect, civility and collaboration prevail**
- ▶ **recognize employees’ contributions and give credit where credit is due**

“A happy employee in a psychologically healthy workplace will perform better and be more creative and more motivated. People must be the central focus of our concerns if we want our organization to be high-performing and an employer of choice. We need to remember that our greatest asset at PSPC is our employees.”

— André Latreille, Ombudsman for Mental Health, Public Services and Procurement Canada

B – THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN FOR MENTAL HEALTH

The Office of the Ombudsman for Mental Health at PSPC adheres to the [Standards of Practice](#) and the [Code of Ethics](#) of the International Ombudsman Association (IOA). The following excerpt from the IOA Standards of Practice clarifies the scope of practice for the profession:

“The Ombudsman functions on an informal basis by such means as: listening, providing and receiving information, identifying and reframing issues, developing a range of responsible options, and – with permission and at Ombudsman discretion – engaging in informal third-party intervention. When possible, the Ombudsman helps people develop new ways to solve problems themselves.”

THE OFFICE’S WORK IS GOVERNED BY FOUR MAIN GUIDING PRINCIPLES:

1. **Independence:** The Ombudsman is an independent resource of the Human Resources Branch who reports directly to the Deputy Minister. He carries out his mandate at arm’s length, i.e., the Deputy Minister does not get involved in the Ombudsman’s day-to-day activities or interfere in any way with his professional judgment and objectivity.
2. **Confidentiality:** The Ombudsman protects the confidentiality of information entrusted to him and does not disclose it without authorization from the person concerned. The only exception is in situations involving an imminent risk of serious harm to the person or a third party.
3. **Neutrality and impartiality:** The Ombudsman provides neutral and impartial guidance and advice.
4. **Informality:** The Ombudsman provides informal guidance and advice, as he does not have decision-making authority.

C– SEVEN TOOLS AND RESOURCES MANAGERS CAN USE TO ENGAGE EMPLOYEES ON THE ISSUE OF MENTAL HEALTH

“You are not alone!”

This is a message we often hear in connection with helping a person who is experiencing a mental health problem. But what can you, as a manager, do to reinforce this message within your team? How can you create a safe space to encourage an ongoing conversation about mental health at work? To help you create and maintain a psychologically healthy workplace, here are seven tools and resources, available at little or no cost, which will enable you to effectively engage your teams in a conversation that encourages respect and mutual support.

1. [Awareness activities](#) – **Normalize discussions about mental health.** Every year, awareness activities are scheduled for specific days or weeks, such as Bell “Let’s Talk” Day, National Mental Health Week, Mental Illness Awareness Week, World Suicide Prevention Day, etc. Discussing mental health means allowing employees to sign up for various organized activities at the sector, department or government level.
2. [Federal Speakers’ Bureau on Healthy Workplaces](#) – **Increase awareness and reduce stigmatization.** Public service colleagues relate their own experiences with mental health problems or mental illness and the lessons they learned from their recovery. Invite a speaker from the Bureau to your next all employee meeting to help raise awareness and reduce prejudices through a personal story. The Bureau is expanding to cover other topics related to mental health in the workplace, including accessibility, diversity, inclusion and safe work spaces.
3. [“Keep the conversation going”](#) – **Watch this series of short videos produced by Ottawa Public Health** to learn more about each of the [13 psychosocial risk factors](#) set out in the [National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace](#). Share the links with your employees or watch the videos together to spark conversations throughout the year. By taking action on the 13 psychosocial risk factors, it is possible to make significant changes for improving mental health in the workplace.
4. [“Being a Mindful Employee”](#) – **Add this online course to your learning plans.** This introductory course enables employees to better understand the 13 psychosocial factors that affect psychological health and safety, and what they can do to help themselves and others at work.
5. [“On the Agenda”](#) – **Work together to develop your mental health action plan.** On the Agenda is a series of videos, presentation slides and support documents to help you facilitate team discussions about each of the 13 psychosocial factors. You can select the two or three factors that have the strongest influence on your team and explore solutions together to make your workplace psychologically healthier and safer for everyone. Other valuable resources (strategies, training, evaluation tools, resilience plans, etc.) can be found at the [Great-West Life Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace](#). This site presents a wide variety of resources, strategies, training and tools.

6. [Employee and Organization Assistance Program \(EOAP\)](https://masource-mysource.spac-pspc.gc.ca/eng/osm-omh/Pages/ressources-resources.aspx) – **Discover the full range of services provided by the EOAP** to all employees of Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC). This program offers employees and their immediate family members services that contribute to individual and organizational wellness. For contact information in each of PSPC's administrative regions, see the pocket guides produced by the Office of the Ombudsman for Mental Health: <https://masource-mysource.spac-pspc.gc.ca/eng/osm-omh/Pages/ressources-resources.aspx>.

The EOAP also offers various **educational workshops**: <https://masource-mysource.spac-pspc.gc.ca/eng/services/rh-hr/mieuxetre-wellness/aide-assistance/Pages/ateliers-educ-workshops.aspx>.

7. [Joint Learning Program \(JLP\) workshops](#) – **Organize a workshop**. This partnership between the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) and the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat offers workshops presented jointly by management and the unions to foster psychological health and safety in the workplace.

OTHER USEFUL MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

The **Canada School of Public Service** invites you to discover or rediscover the online courses, videos, reference documents and other useful resources related to mental health on [GCCampus](#) in the “Respectful and Inclusive Workplace” section.

When you maintain an ongoing conversation about mental health with your teams, know that **YOU are not alone**.

(**SOURCE:** Much of the above information comes from the Treasury Board Secretariat's [Centre of Expertise on Mental Health in the Workplace](#).)



Did you know?

The Office of the Ombudsman for Mental Health designed posters on signs of civility and incivility and the effects of uncivil behaviour on people and on the organization.

In addition, the Office also developed a bilingual video that talks about the culture of silence in a workplace, but specifically about incivility: <https://youtu.be/NZqQM6pD8ZY>.

The video was made in collaboration with colleagues from Canada Revenue Agency.

