

Creating a High-Performing Canadian Civil Service Against a Backdrop of Disruptive Change

BY MARK JARVIS

Mowat Centre

ONTARIO'S VOICE ON PUBLIC POLICY

 School of Public Policy & Governance
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



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Author

MARK D. JARVIS

Mark D. Jarvis was Practice Lead, Government Transformation at the Mowat Centre. Prior to joining Mowat, Mark worked for more than a decade in the federal civil service. He has also written and edited a number of books and articles on governance, accountability and democratic reform, including co-authoring *Democratizing the Constitution: Reforming Responsible Government*, the recipient of the 2011 Donner Prize for the best public policy book by a Canadian.

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MOWATCENTRE.CA

@MOWATCENTRE

439 UNIVERSITY AVENUE
SUITE 2200, TORONTO, ON
M5G 1Y8 CANADA




School of Public Policy & Governance
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

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If the civil service is to fulfill its role in delivering public goods and protecting the public interest, it must be more resilient, more efficient and more effective.

INTRODUCTION

It's time for a critical conversation about the civil service.

Canada's civil service has played an important role in building modern society, social cohesion and economic prosperity. This kind of progress depends on the continued work of a high-performing, adaptable civil service.

The civil service itself is already facing new challenges. But, as disruptive as globalization, digitization, decreased trust in institutions, the polarization of politics, changing demographics and ongoing austerity have been, the world is going to change a lot more.

For too long, the Canadian civil service has remained largely immune to disruption and transformation, in part because it hasn't faced imminent threats from competitors in the same way that a private company or a not-for-profit organization might or even other levels of government have faced. This insulation has had predictable results. Past reform efforts have often fallen short of their objectives, because there were no clear consequences when reform failed.

This failure to sufficiently modernize has slowly eroded the civil service's ability to meet the needs of Canadians.

If the civil service is to fulfill its role in delivering public goods and protecting the public interest, it must be more resilient, more efficient and more effective, and it must deliver outstanding results. The good news is that we know that civil servants themselves are eager to adapt and be more nimble in responding to the context in which it operates.

This report focuses primarily on the federal civil service in Canada, but many of the challenges and opportunities that are discussed – and the recommendations that are made – can be equally applied to other orders of government. Civil servants at all levels of government exercise substantial authority and often have a significant impact on the lives of Canadians. The public sector economy is a substantial sector in its own right, accounting for nearly a quarter of our national employment and gross domestic product.¹ Its efficiency and effectiveness are central to Canada's economic performance.

It is worth noting that the civil service does not work for the public. Nor does it work for Parliament. The civil service is purposefully under the political control of the government of the day through a

¹ Ontario Chamber of Commerce. (2014). *Unlocking the Public Service Economy in Ontario: A New Approach to Public-Private Partnership in Services*. <http://www.occ.ca/Publications/UnlockingPublicServiceEconomyOntario.pdf>.

The civil service is purposefully under the political control of the government of the day through a hierarchical structure, with authority delegated from ministers down.

hierarchical structure, with authority delegated from ministers down the departmental chain from superior to subordinate, with commensurate accountability from subordinate to superior. This establishes the democratic control over systems of public governance and administration, with ministers – as the heads of government departments – ultimately accountable to Parliament and voters.²

The Mowat Centre and KPMG’s Shifting Gears research series has reviewed the trends and challenges facing Canadian governments and provided strategic recommendations for navigating them. Past reports have focused on supporting an emerging civil service model that is more citizen-centred, engaged with partners, digitally-enabled and focused on results.

As the next step in this work, the Mowat Centre has undertaken research and built a dialogue with experts and practitioners, in order to make recommendations for civil service reform and to articulate the next steps needed to realize that reform.

A Test for Reform

The reforms proposed in this report are not ends unto themselves. Others will have their own preferred measures. The merits of all reforms can – and should – be debated in terms of how the civil service will be improved by their implementation. At a minimum, any reforms should be realistically likely to lead to positive changes to the status quo. But that alone is not sufficient.

We suggest four core questions that ought to be considered in proposing any reforms:

1. Does each specific reform help to enhance the civil service’s ability or capacity to deliver on one and/or more of its core responsibilities:
 - a) advising and informing the government;
 - b) implementing the government’s decisions;
 - c) delivering services; and/or;
 - d) administering programs and operations?
2. Are the proposed reforms likely to diminish trust between the civil service and the government or the public?
3. Does each reform have a clear objective against which progress can be measured?
4. Are the proposed reforms politically feasible?

These questions serve as an important touchstone for helping to ensure future civil service reforms are focused and successful.

² Jarvis, M. D. (2014). “Hierarchical Accountability.” *The Oxford Handbook of Public Accountability*, 405-420.

1 THE SIX KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF A HIGH-PERFORMING CIVIL SERVICE

Three lines of research inform this report.

First, we convened an expert advisory panel. It was composed of a number of former senior public servants and other practitioners, former politicians and senior political staff, and a number of leading scholars and other expert observers from Canada and abroad. The advisory panel discussed the challenges facing the civil service, deliberated on what reforms are necessary and considered if and how reforms could actually be accomplished.

Second, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 20 individuals from different levels of government. Participants were identified by advisory panel members and through other as parts of the research process.

Third, we reviewed existing literature.

Based on these three lines of research, we identified six characteristics of a high-performing civil service: innovation, transparency, accountability, collaboration, evidence-informed analysis and public and political commitment. Many of these will be familiar from our earlier *Shifting Gears* work. ‘Public and political commitment’ is an important addition. Members of the advisory panel identified this as a necessary pre-condition to making progress on a reform agenda.

While the opportunity and limits to moving in these directions will vary by type of organization³ and the ideological perspectives of the government of the day regarding the role of the civil service, we believe these characteristics are the hallmark of a modern, forward-looking civil service.

1. INNOVATION

To meet the changing circumstances facing government, the civil service needs the capacity and skill to develop new approaches to policy development and service delivery. A strong culture of innovation goes beyond a policy on innovation or focusing on a particular project or initiative on a one-off basis. Instead, it requires a broader cultural shift. This could include the introduction of structures and incentives that lead to greater experimentation and a renewed focus on continuously finding better ways to do things. Innovation needs to become a core competency of the civil service.

2. TRANSPARENCY

With very limited exceptions, the civil service should operate based on a foundational presumption of transparency. Instead of a reactive approach that centres on releasing data, documents and other information prepared for

³ Kernaghan, K., Borins, S.F. and Marson, B. (2000). *The new public organization*. Toronto: Institute of Public Administration of Canada.

public consumption or for which no exceptions exist, the default should be to proactively disclose all civil service analysis and advice unless it meets a very narrow set of exceptions.

3. ACCOUNTABILITY

At a minimum, meaningful accountability must accomplish three things. First, it needs to help civil servants learn, so that they can improve their performance on a day-to-day basis. Second, it needs to reward good performers and to effectively deal with poor performers. Third, it requires a credible reporting mechanism to inform parliamentarians and the public that individuals are actually being held accountable for their performance, decisions and behaviour.

4. COLLABORATION

Collaboration is about how governments work. Past efforts to improve collaboration in government have often been project specific rather than government-wide. New ways of working within departments, across departments and with outside partners are needed. Ideally, new collaborative approaches would leverage expertise, experience and skills from diverse partners – both to deliver better services to the public and to avoid unnecessary duplication.

5. EVIDENCE-INFORMED ANALYSIS

Policies, programs and services should be informed by relevant, timely and robust evidence. The objective should be to provide the best information possible in order to enable the government to make informed decisions about the effectiveness of programs and the value of expenditures. If a government wishes to make its decisions based on what works – while avoiding what doesn't – evaluation of policy and program impact must be at the centre of policy and program development.

6. PUBLIC AND POLITICAL COMMITMENT

Without an engaged public and committed politicians, the civil service will be limited in its capacity to deliver the services Canadians need. Engaging the public in a dialogue is necessary – both to foster an understanding of the role of the civil service and to reinforce the expectation that the government of the day ought to manage all its resources well, including the civil service.

Political commitment is also needed. Without sufficient political will, it will be difficult for the civil service to have the authority, independence and resources needed to have a positive impact on economic prosperity and the quality of life of Canadians.⁴

While each of the six characteristics is discrete, they are also interrelated, mutually reinforcing and potentially in tension with one another. Greater transparency provides a strong imperative for using evidence in decision-making. Improved accountability can incentivize civil servants to innovate and collaborate. Trust from citizens can support a culture of innovation that tolerates failure. Reform in any of the six characteristics can lead to improvements in others, including building greater public support for, and political commitment to, an empowered, independent and appropriately resourced civil service.

⁴ Lau, E. (2000). *Government of the future*. Paris: OECD

2 CANADA'S RECORD OF REFORM

There has been no shortage of attempts to reform the civil service. One estimate suggests that between the 1960s and the early 1990s there was one new major push for reform every three to five years,⁵ including the Royal Commission on Government Organization (Glassco Commission) and the Royal Commission on Financial Management and Accountability (Lambert Commission).

There has been no slowing down since that time. Following the launch of PS2000 in the early 1990s, several major reform efforts have been undertaken such as *La Relève*, *Results for Canadians*, the Task Force on Public Service Values and Ethics, the Public Service Modernization Act, the Advisory Committee on the Public Service and, most recently, *Blueprint 2020*.

The impact of these costly and time-consuming initiatives is not entirely clear. On the one hand, these initiatives and other more targeted reform efforts have unquestionably led to “progress in a number of respects,”⁶ including the adoption of innovative practices where wholesale structural reform was not achieved or intended. Indeed,

Canada has, at times, been a world leader in areas such as access to information, service delivery and digitization. This has led some to conclude that “although not all of the initiatives have been equally successful general improvement has been realized.”⁷

At the same time, there is broad consensus that most past reform efforts have not had the transformative impact that they were expected to deliver. Systematic examination suggests that reforms have at best “yielded only marginal change.”⁸ This is especially true in key areas such as improving service to the public, enhancing accountability for results, strengthening policy capacity and modernizing human resources management. Worse, incomplete implementation has at times resulted in “a bewildering series of overlapping and only loosely coordinated initiatives.”⁹

5 Johnson, A.W. (1992). *Reflections on Administrative Reform in the Government of Canada 1962-1991*. Office of the Auditor General, Ottawa.

6 Office of the Auditor General of Canada. (2001). *Public Service Management Reform: Progress, Setbacks and Challenges*. Ottawa. http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/meth_gde_e_10222.html#0.2.RRFY3S.WMBIYG.I3CW9G.E

7 Charko, P. (2013). “Management improvement in the Canadian public service, 1999–2010.” *Canadian Public Administration*, 56(1), 91-120.

8 Office of the Auditor General of Canada. (2001). *Public Service Management Reform: Progress, Setbacks and Challenges*. Ottawa. http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/meth_gde_e_10222.html#0.2.RRFY3S.WMBIYG.I3CW9G.E

9 Pollitt C. and Bouckaert, G. (2004). *Public management reform: A comparative analysis*. Oxford University Press. For a discussion with respect to accountability reforms see Jarvis, M. and Thomas, P. (2012). “The Limits of Accountability: What can and cannot be Accomplished in the Dialectics of Accountability?” From *New Public Management to New Public Governance*, 271-313.

Despite the rate with which reform efforts have been introduced, Canada has been a more cautious modernizer than the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Australia and others. For example, it did not go as far or as fast as some other jurisdictions with major reform initiatives such as the New Public Management (NPM).¹⁰ Some have suggested that this approach has maintained the capacity for a more balanced model of public administration.¹¹

There is broad consensus that most past reform efforts have not had the transformative impact that they were expected to deliver.

At times, Canada has benefited from waiting for others to dive in (and fail) first. Some 'early adopter' jurisdictions such as New Zealand are now scaling back and/or dismantling some NPM reforms.¹² And post-reform evidence from the UK suggests some NPM reforms have decreased fairness and consistency and led to more

expensive government.¹³ While most governments have improved transparency and customer satisfaction,¹⁴ there have also been concerns about the impact of past NPM reforms, including separating policy from delivery, inhibiting learning and accountability and reducing important levels of control.¹⁵

Notwithstanding the benefits of being cautious and avoiding faddish reforms, our research found that past reform initiatives did not effectively address the core challenges confronting the civil service. Nor have past reform efforts set the civil service on solid footing to effectively respond to the scale of disruption currently taking place.

It is important to ask why current and past successes have been successful and why some past successes are no longer successful. Three key obstacles to reform can be identified from past efforts:

FOCUSED AND SUSTAINED IMPLEMENTATION

As well-intentioned as past reforms efforts have been, too often they have lacked clear objectives, a concrete strategy for meeting objectives and/or benchmarks for determining whether the initiative has been successful. Even where reform efforts have been tangible, there has often been a lack of follow-through on implementation. A lack of effort to track progress on implementation and to evaluate impact has often led to zombie-like initiatives that neither realize reform nor ever quite die, even as interest wanes.

10 Aucoin, P. (1995). *The new public management: Canada in comparative perspective*. Montreal: Institute for Research on Public Policy; Borins, S. (2002). "Transformation of the public sector: Canada in comparative perspective." *The handbook of Canadian public administration*, 3-17.

11 Dwivedi O.P. and Halligan, J. (2004). "The Canadian public service: balancing values and management." Halligan, J. (ed.), *Civil Service Systems in Anglo-American Countries*. Edward Elgar Publishers.

12 Duncan, G., and Chapman, J. (2010). "New millennium, new public management and the New Zealand model." *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 69(3), 301-313.

13 Hood, C., and Dixon, R. (2015). "What We Have to Show for 30 Years of New Public Management: Higher Costs, More Complaints." *Governance*, 28(3), 265-267.

14 OECD (2005). *Modernising Government: The Way Forward*. Paris: OECD.

15 Lodge, G., and Kalitowski, S. (2007). *Innovations in Government. International Perspectives on Civil Service Reform*. London: Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR).

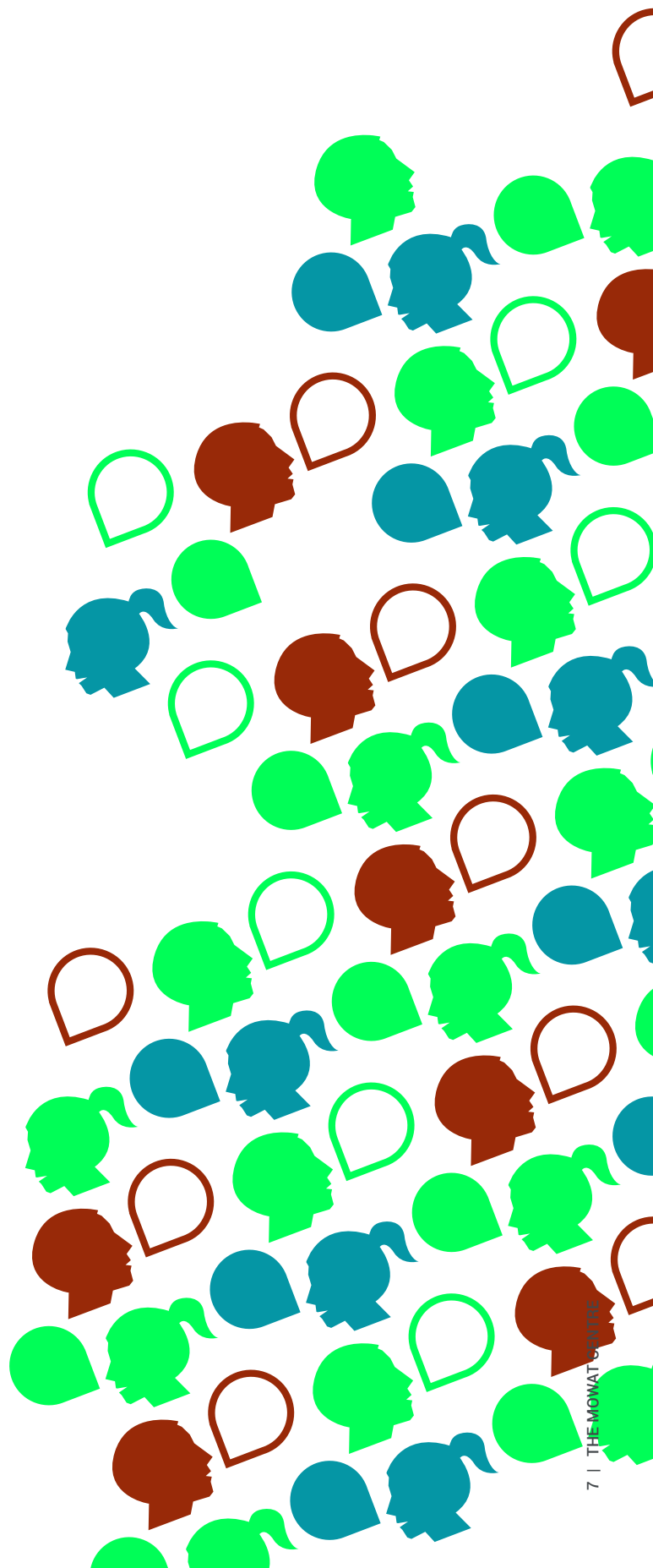
INCENTIVES FOR SUCCESS AND CONSEQUENCES FOR FAILURE

To date, when reform efforts have lost steam or failed to realize the objectives they set, there have been few or no repercussions. In other organizations, repeated failure to modernize would be met with some kind of sanction or market correction. The civil service does not face same kind of competition or other external pressures that drive modernization with the same force in other organizations.

DEMAND FOR REFORM

As discussed later in this report, Canada lacks a popular public and political discourse around policy and public administration and the importance of civil service reform. While the civil service is often a target of criticism, complacency and a lack of demand for reform from political actors and the broader public has reinforced the status quo. In short, while important constituencies may complain about the civil service, no constituency cares enough to do anything about it.

Reforms must not be too modest in their goals and too tame in their implementation. The challenges the civil service faces are real and pressing. Reform should not languish any longer. Even if comprehensive change is not possible, reform – based on an accurate diagnosis and prescription – should be ambitious, focused and prioritized in order to overcome obstacles and to address shortcomings in the characteristics of a high-performing civil service.



Reforms must not be too modest in their goals and too tame in their implementation. The challenges the civil service faces are real and pressing. Reform should not languish any longer.

3 INNOVATION

How is Canada doing?

To successfully meet future challenges, the civil service needs to be more innovative. This means continuously experimenting and learning from others in an effort to find better ways to do things. This will require building skills and greater capacity for innovation within the civil service and having the support to take risks. Innovation in government is most closely identified with improving service delivery, but there is also a need for innovation to play a broader role in improving the efficiency and effectiveness of government more generally.¹⁶

While 63 per cent of civil servants agree (strongly or somewhat) that they are encouraged to be innovative or to take initiative in their work,¹⁷ it is not clear that this has translated into a broader culture of innovation. A cultural shift is needed; without it, the civil service will lack the resilience and flexibility to respond to the disruptive change it has faced and will continue to face.

Compared to other Western governments, Canada has been slow to adopt more

16 Joyce, M., and Kingston, C. (2011). Performance information and innovation in the Canadian government. *Innovations in Public Expenditure Management: Country Cases from the Commonwealth, Institut d'administration publique du Canada*. Toronto: , Commonwealth Secretariat, 13-28.

17 Treasury Board Secretariat. (2014). *2014 Public Service Employee Survey Results by Question for the Public Service*. <http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/ps-es-saff/2014/results-resultats/bq-pq/00/org-eng.aspx>.

innovative approaches. For example, Canada has moved slowly in experimenting with the potential benefits of outcomes-based funding arrangements.¹⁸ This is also true of outcomes-focused approaches such as What Works centres, public sector mutuals and commissioning.¹⁹ Instead, Canada has remained tied to process-driven understandings of accountability as well as traditional grant and contribution funding models to deliver public goods.

Even where Canada has taken positive steps toward becoming more innovative and forward thinking, the impact of those changes is limited by a hierarchical culture that remains steadfastly focused on following rules and procedures.²⁰ While, as acknowledged earlier, there can be a benefit to being second or even tenth “mover”,²¹ this consistently timid approach has not led to meaningful transformation.

18 Gold, J. and Mendelsohn, M. (2014). *Better Outcomes for Public Services*. Toronto: Mowat Centre.

http://mowatcentre.ca/wp-content/uploads/publications/91_better_outcomes_for_public_services.pdf.

19 Gold, J. and Mendelsohn, M. (2014). *Better Outcomes for Public Services*. Toronto: Mowat Centre.

http://mowatcentre.ca/wp-content/uploads/publications/91_better_outcomes_for_public_services.pdf.

20 Howard, C., and Phillips, S. (2012). “Moving away from hierarchy: do horizontality, partnerships and distributed governance really signify the end of accountability?” in Bakvis, H., and Jarvis, M. D. (Eds.). From *New Public Management to New Political Governance: Essays in Honour of Peter C. Aucoin*. McGill-Queen’s University Press.

21 Hoppe, H. C., and Lehmann-Grube, U. (2005). “Innovation timing games: a general framework with applications.” *Journal of Economic Theory*, 121(1), 30-50.

Canada's ability to innovate is also stifled by its weak evaluation capacity and a lack of focus on evidence. A culture of innovation must be tightly wed to an emphasis on active experimentation and rigorous evaluation of the efficacy of different approaches to tackling problems. Understanding what works is central to the success of new service delivery models.²² Evaluation standards applied in recent years have been inadequate, as has the use of evidence to inform policy and program decisions.²³

Moving Forward

THE CIVIL SERVICE SHOULD:

- » Dedicate a fixed percentage of departmental budgets to innovation, including creating innovation incentives for individual middle managers and employees.
- » Create mechanisms and incentives to allow for more fluid exchanges and movement at all career stages between the civil service and other sectors.
- » Adopt a new system of appointments for deputy ministers that will create more independence for civil service leaders and open the door to merit-based external appointments.
- » Strengthen the capacity to evaluate the impact of experimentation and innovation.

22 Gold, J. (2014). *International Delivery: Centres of government and the drive for better policy implementation*. Toronto: Mowat Centre and Institute for Government. http://mowatcentre.ca/wp-content/uploads/publications/97_international_delivery.pdf.

23 Aucoin, P. (2005). *Decision-making in government: The role of program evaluation*. <http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/cee/tools-outils/aucoin-eng.asp# sec1>.

Canada's ability to innovate is also stifled by its weak evaluation capacity and a lack of focus on evidence.

A strong culture of innovation goes beyond focusing on a single project or initiative. While it may not be desirable for all civil servants to innovate in their individual roles, innovation needs to be a core competency of the civil service.

Unfortunately, Canada is far from a leader in this regard. Other jurisdictions have gone farther, and moved faster, in experimenting with new approaches to policy development and service delivery. Around the world there are local, regional and national government innovators who are drawing on human-centred design, user engagement, open approaches to innovation, cross-sector collaboration and using data and evidence to transform governing and policymaking.²⁴

It's true that some governments at all levels in Canada have recently created or partnered with other organizations to create promising innovation or design labs, but compared to others, we are still playing catch-up. Countries such as Denmark (MindLab), the UK (Behavioural Insights Team; What Works Centres; Government Digital Service) and the United States (18F) have moved much more quickly to address a wide range of policy problems.

24 Bason, C. and Colligan, P. (2014). "Look to Government—Yes, Government—for New Social Innovations." *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2014/11/look-to-governmentyes-governmentfor-new-social-innovations>.

These units distinguish themselves from standard government departments in that they reduce unnecessary hierarchy, test different approaches, are predisposed to providing more rapid responses and – perhaps most importantly – allow for failure as part of the process of testing new ideas.²⁵ These organizations are also often empowered with specialized hiring authorities that allow them to bring in external experts quickly.²⁶

Other countries are also experimenting with the creation of public sector mutuals. Public sector mutuals are organizations that have “spun out” – effectively privatizing service delivery – under the control of staff who are former civil servants. The Australian and UK governments have been at the forefront of “commissioning,” of which mutuals are an offshoot.

In the UK, for example, the government has taken an active role in encouraging the creation of public sector mutuals, providing how-to guides and other supports, suggesting they may be attractive to employees who feel they can deliver programs more efficiently or effectively outside government, or those who want more autonomy in their work.²⁷ While the creation of new mutuals has been slower than anticipated – the UK government had set a target of having one million public sector workers working in mutuals by 2015 – more than 70 mutuals have been launched to date.²⁸

None of these approaches should be considered a silver bullet to improving innovation in the civil service. And there are legitimate concerns about the impact on some of these approaches that locate innovative practices outside of the civil service, hollowing out the capacity of the state. But more could be done to experiment with these and other innovative approaches. And, of course, as with all experimentation, a rigorous effort to test the impact should be made.

The greatest obstacle to moving forward is the need for a radical change in the culture of the civil service, starting at the top. Rather than just talking about innovation, civil service leaders need to be seen as providing full and unambiguous support for innovation – both in their own work and the work of their staff.²⁹ This can be accomplished through increased interorganizational collaboration, greater use of information technology, continuous efforts to seek out process improvements, a renewed focus on flexibility and taking more proactive approaches to resolving problems and exploiting opportunities.³⁰

Political support is also essential. While civil service leaders can do more to support innovation within their organizations, their ability to do so is often hindered by a lack of political support.³¹ There is often “zero risk tolerance” for negative news in an environment where governments attempt to issue-manage all

25 Johal, S and Ditta, S. (2015). *Better Collaboration for Better Government*. Toronto: The Mowat Centre. <http://mowatcentre.ca/better-collaboration-for-better-government/>.

26 For example, in the U.S. Schedule A hiring authority allows federal agencies to access a diverse and vibrant talent pool on a non-competitive basis. http://www.dol.gov/odep/pubs/scheduleA/abc_hr_prof_ODEP_508%20compliant.pdf.

27 See: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/public-service-mutuals>

28 Farrow-Smith, D. (2013). “One year on: five lessons for public sector mutual.” *The Guardian*, April 30 <http://www.theguardian.com/public-leaders-network/2013/apr/30/public-sector-mutuals-five-lessons>

29 Joyce, M., and Kingston, C. (2011). “Performance information and innovation in the Canadian government.” *Innovations in Public Expenditure Management: Country Cases from the Commonwealth*, Institut d’administration publique du Canada. Toronto: Commonwealth Secretariat, 13-28.

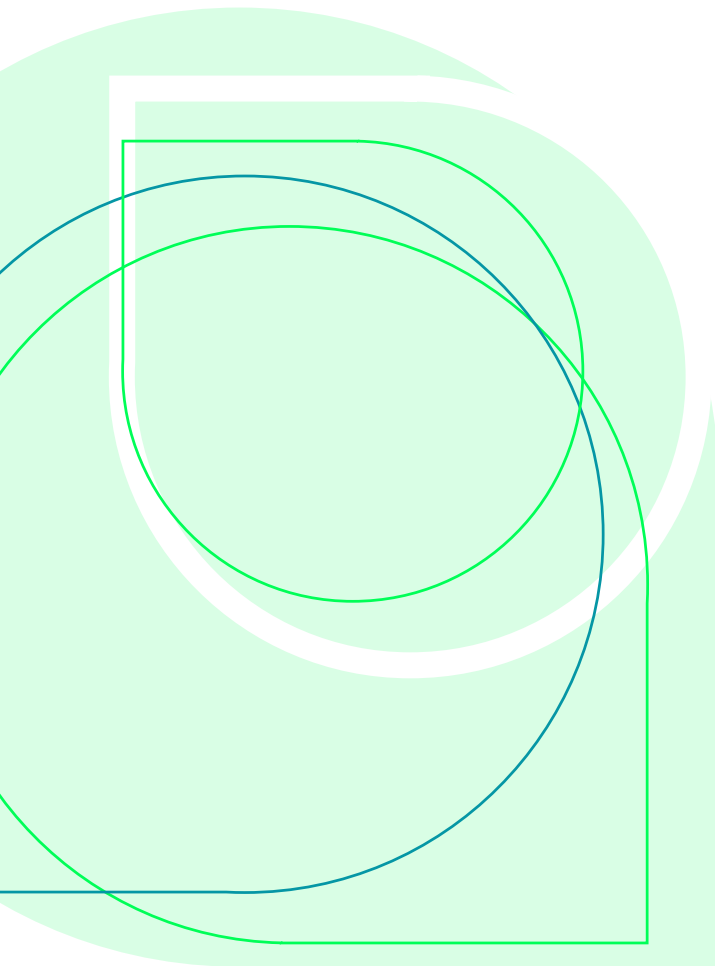
30 Borins, S. (2014). “The persistence of innovation in government: A guide for innovative public servants.” *Innovation Series*. <http://www.businessofgovernment.org/sites/default/files/The%20Persistence%20of%20Innovation%20in%20Government.pdf>

31 Lindquist, E. (2012) “Horizontal Management in Canada Ten Years Later.” *Optimum Online: The Journal of Public Sector Management*. 42(3). <http://www.optimumonline.ca/print.phtml?e=fjtcgvt&id=422>.

aspects of governing.³² Innovation is inherently unpredictable and includes surprises. It is often not known what will work, what benefits – if any – will be achieved and to whom they will accrue, whether or not positive outcomes can be replicated by rolling out the approach more broadly and whether or not innovation will lead to

any perverse or unintended consequences.³³ Without a bold political commitment to innovation, the incentives will remain for the civil service to continue to take a timid approach to innovation. Civil servants could do more to support this kind of shift by better explaining how they want to innovate, what the actual risks are as best they understand them and how they can mitigate those risks, and by ensuring that there is a concrete system of accountability in place for when things go wrong. There should be no expectation that there will be carte blanche for innovation.

Other concrete changes can be taken to support a greater culture of innovation. In addition to strengthening evaluation, more could be done to liberate the civil service from ineffective processes. Traditionally, the civil service has adopted highly formal approaches to accountability and oversight. While recent research suggests that the focus of civil service accountability is already shifting away from process and toward results, there is still room for improvement. This could include placing greater emphasis on outcomes rather than outputs, and ensuring that accountability for measured results cascades down through bureaucratic hierarchies to the individuals deemed responsible for their achievement.³⁴ This has the potential to encourage a degree of greater experimentation – the stated goal of commissioning.



32 Interview with former Prime Minister's Office official conducted Wednesday, March 11, 2015.

33 Perrin, B. (2002). "How to and How Not to Evaluate Innovation." *Evaluation*, 8(1), 13-28

34 Jarvis, M. D. (2014). "The Black Box of Bureaucracy: Interrogating Accountability in the Public Service." *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 73(4), 450-466.

Further, employee empowerment strategies have been used in some jurisdictions to stimulate innovation and improve organizational performance in service delivery.³⁵ More fluid exchanges and movement between the civil service and other sectors at all career stages are also possible. This would allow civil servants to broaden their experience and expertise and apply what they learn in other organizations to the civil service when they return. Some have called on the federal government to devote a fixed percentage of departmental budgets to innovation and the evaluation of results.³⁶

Finally, consideration should be given to ways in which the civil service can be given greater independence. Not only to foster greater innovation, but also to make the civil service more capable of responding to future challenges.

One way to establish greater independence would be to change the appointment process for senior members of the civil service. In New Zealand, for example, deputy minister appointments are recommended to cabinet – rather than just the prime minister – by the Public Service Commission following merit-based competitions. In turn, cabinet can decline to appoint the recommended candidate so long as it makes the rejection and reasons for it public. New Zealand's appointment process is regarded as the most independent process among the Westminster countries.

While the exact design of a more independent appointment process can vary – e.g., whether the recommendation is made by the Committee of Senior Officials or the Public Service Commission, or whether the recommendation is made to the prime minister or to cabinet – two principles from the New Zealand model are essential in ensuring a more independent appointment process. First, all appointments should be the result of an open competitive process; and, second, there should be a public written explanation for any recommendations that are rejected.

Changing the way in which the senior leadership of the civil service is appointed could have a positive impact on innovation. Deputy ministers may be more comfortable taking risks if they do not feel as directly beholden to the prime minister that appointed them. Changes to the appointment process could also have the benefit of allowing for more outside candidates. External hires should, of course, meet the demands of rigorous merit-based competition and possess a deep understanding of the public sector environment, values and structures. But, this could help introduce new ideas, expertise and approaches that facilitate innovation, greater collaboration and strengthening performance.

35 Fernandez, S., and Moldogaziev, T. (2013). "Using employee empowerment to encourage innovative behavior in the public sector." *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 23(1), 155-187.

36 For example, the Social Innovation Generation's submission to the Expert Panel Review of Federal Support to Research and Development suggested each department dedicate one per cent of their budget to innovation. [http://rd-review.ca/eic/site/033.nsf/vwapj/sub100.pdf/\\$file/sub100.pdf](http://rd-review.ca/eic/site/033.nsf/vwapj/sub100.pdf/$file/sub100.pdf).

4 TRANSPARENCY

How is Canada doing?

Canada was, at one time, a world leader in the area of transparency. The Government of Canada was one of the first national governments to adopt an access to information system as a constraint on government secrecy.³⁷ Unfortunately, little effort has been made since then to promote greater transparency in government, and in recent years the effectiveness of Canada's access to information system has diminished.³⁸ In 2011, a study comparing transparency in Australia, Britain, Ireland, New Zealand and Canada found Canada to have the worst record among the five.³⁹ Since then, a number of concerns about deliberate attempts by civil servants and elected officials to obstruct transparency have been raised both with respect to particular scandals and as part of routine operations, such as the use of communications technology (e.g., text-based instant messaging on phones).⁴⁰

Canada's previous government announced efforts to make government more transparent (e.g., Canada's Action Plan on Open Government 2014-16), citing progress such as having made more than 200,000 datasets accessible.⁴¹ Yet this has not silenced critics, who correctly note that at the same time, the government is collecting less data. This has weakened the reliability of what is collected and, notwithstanding gains in some areas, decreased overall transparency.⁴² Decisions to not release other types of information (e.g., background materials that support cabinet discussions) have had a similar effect.⁴³ The result is that policymaking is less transparent than has been expected.

Canada's new federal government has promised to accelerate and expand open data initiatives, and update the Access to Information Act to meet the standard of being open by default.⁴⁴ Whether the government follows through on these commitments remains to be seen. Even without a certain sense of the results that may (or may not) follow, these commitments are

37 Aucoin, P., and Jarvis, M. D. (2005). *Modernizing government accountability: A framework for reform*. Ottawa: Canada School of Public Service.

38 Roberts, A. S. (2012). "Transparency in troubled times." In *Tenth World Conference of the International Ombudsman Institute*, November (pp. 12-35).

39 Hazell, R., and Worthy, B. (2010). "Assessing the performance of freedom of information." *Government Information Quarterly*, 27(4). 352-359.

40 Information Commissioner of Canada (2013) *Access to information at risk from instant messaging*. Ottawa. <http://www.oic-ci.gc.ca/eng/pin-to-pin-nip-a-nip.aspx>.

41 Canada. (2014). *Canada's Action Plan on Open Government 2014-16*. <http://open.canada.ca/en/content/canadas-action-plan-open-government-2014-16>.

42 Kingston, A. (2015). "Vanishing Canada: Why we're all losers in Ottawa's war on data." *Maclean's* <http://www.macleans.ca/news/canada/vanishing-canada-why-were-all-losers-in-ottawas-war-on-data/>.

43 Brown, D. C. (2011). *Coming to terms with information and communications technologies: the role of the chief information officer of the government of Canada*. (Doctoral dissertation, Carleton University Ottawa).

44 Liberal Party of Canada. (2015). *Real change: A fair and open government*. <https://www.liberal.ca/files/2015/08/a-fair-and-open-government.pdf>

important. Transparency provides an incentive for government to do its due diligence in making decisions and to base policy and programs on evidence of what works.

Moving Forward

THE CIVIL SERVICE SHOULD:

- » Mirror jurisdictions like New Zealand and municipal governments in Ontario in proactively disclosing civil service advice and analysis that supports government decision-making.
- » Return to the tradition of publishing “green” and “white papers” on pressing policy issues.
- » Initiate a consultation process to establish new guidelines to clearly define when, where and how various kinds of government information should and should not be made public.

While the civil service serves the government of the day, it can fulfill its policy role in a more publicly oriented manner, including serving citizens and parliamentarians with more transparent, accessible advice.

Open data: refers to government-owned data whose release is not subject to privacy, security or legislative restrictions and which is made available to the public in a structured, machine-readable format with minimal restrictions on its use or re-use. Open data is released proactively whenever possible.

Open information: means government-owned information whose release is not subject to privacy, security or legislative restrictions and which is made available to the public with minimal restrictions on its use or re-use. This includes, but is not limited to, reports, studies, maps, legislation, etc. Open information is released proactively whenever possible.

SOURCE: Government of Alberta Open Information and Open Data Policy.

How can such a shift take place? Simply attempting to update the access to information system will not be sufficient. The existing access to information system is costly and resource intensive. Further, while access to information systems can increase transparency, evidence suggests that they do little to improve government decision-making, to increase the public’s understanding of government decision-making or to foster greater public engagement.⁴⁵

More is required. Leading jurisdictions are now experimenting with open data, open information and digital engagement.⁴⁶ In an interview discussing the differences between the UK’s and New Zealand’s respective civil services, Gabriel Makhoul, the head of New Zealand’s Treasury department and a former member of the UK civil service, argued that the key difference between the two systems was the level of transparency, particularly around policy advice.⁴⁷

45 Hazell, R. and Worthy, B. (2009). *Impact of FOI on central government. Constitution Unit end of award report to ESRC, RES 062 23 0164.* <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/constitution-unit/research/foi/ESRC-end-ofaward-report.pdf>.

46 Ontario. (2014). *Open by Default: A New Way Forward for Ontario.* <https://dr6j45jk9xcmk.cloudfront.net/documents/2428/open-by-default-2.pdf>.

47 Agbonlahor, W. (2015). *Interview: Gabriel Makhoul, Treasury, New Zealand.* <http://www.globalgovernmentforum.com/interview-gabriel-makhoul-treasury-new-zealand/>.

Going forward, a presumption of transparency could serve as the foundation for how the civil service – and government more broadly – works.

New Zealand’s Official Information Act requires that civil service advice to ministers be made public following a decision being taken on the matter, with limited exceptions. This sets New Zealand apart from Canada, as well as the UK. In contrast, in Canada, advice to ministers is generally kept secret. In practice, under the New Zealand system, the amount of time that it takes to release advice can vary, but even on major policy decisions like the budget, advice is routinely made public within a couple of months.⁴⁸

While the dynamics and structure of local governance are considerably different from other levels of government, Ontario municipalities have gone even further. Rather than posting documents meant to support decision-making after decisions have been taken, many Ontario municipalities post reports by impartial municipal civil servants on issues being debated and voted on ahead of council or committee meetings. While a strict reading of the Municipal Act only requires public notice of meetings, this has been interpreted by most Ontario municipalities to require that agenda material also be publicly

accessible in advance of the meeting.⁴⁹ This is meant to allow council, the community, and the media to review, formulate questions and generate ideas for discussion.

Going forward, a presumption of transparency could serve as the foundation for how the civil service – and government more broadly – works. Instead of only releasing documents prepared for public consumption or information for which no exceptions exist, the default could be to proactively disclose all civil service analysis and advice unless it meets a very narrow set of exceptions. This is what it means to be “open by default.” It recognizes that there is a public good in having evidence used in decision-making available for outside use and scrutiny.

Civil service advice to ministers could be published in real time, prior to decisions being taken. When deputy ministers sign off their approval on departmental briefing material and recommendations, the documents and supporting materials could be posted on the departmental website. Limited exceptions will have to be made either in terms of exact timing of releasing advice or in terms of redacting some advice, depending on the issue being considered. Exceptions could be made based on a very narrow list of considerations (e.g., proprietary information; national security considerations) by deputy ministers.

Some will outright dismiss such an approach suggesting that advice needs to be kept secret. Many others will have reservations about such an approach. First, some may raise concerns that disclosing advice will lead to more cautious, conservative advice. However, public scrutiny – and potential criticism – may actually improve the quality of civil service advice. This could also

lead to adopting new innovative ideas from those outside the civil service and greater innovation or collaboration.

Second, an argument can be made that increasing transparency could lead to unintended consequences. For example, there is some evidence that transparency can have a negative impact on trust with the public depending on factors such as prior knowledge, general predisposition toward trust and national culture.⁵⁰ At the same time, exposing the workings of the civil service could demystify and rebuild public trust and provide a basis for a more robust and nuanced public discussion about the different considerations and trade-offs that governments wrestle with when making decisions.

Third, some will suggest this level of transparency will undermine trust between elected officials, their staff, and senior civil servants, particularly when the government chooses not to follow civil service advice. A change of expectations is required. Trust should be predicated on an understanding that it is the role of the civil service to provide robust advice based on systematic analysis that stands up to public scrutiny. Governments are of course free to disregard this advice and to make the decisions that they deem to be most appropriate. This is how our democratic system is intended to work. This “open by default” approach not only demands a new style of political leadership, it also requires that leadership within the civil service be comfortable with, and supportive of, greater transparency.

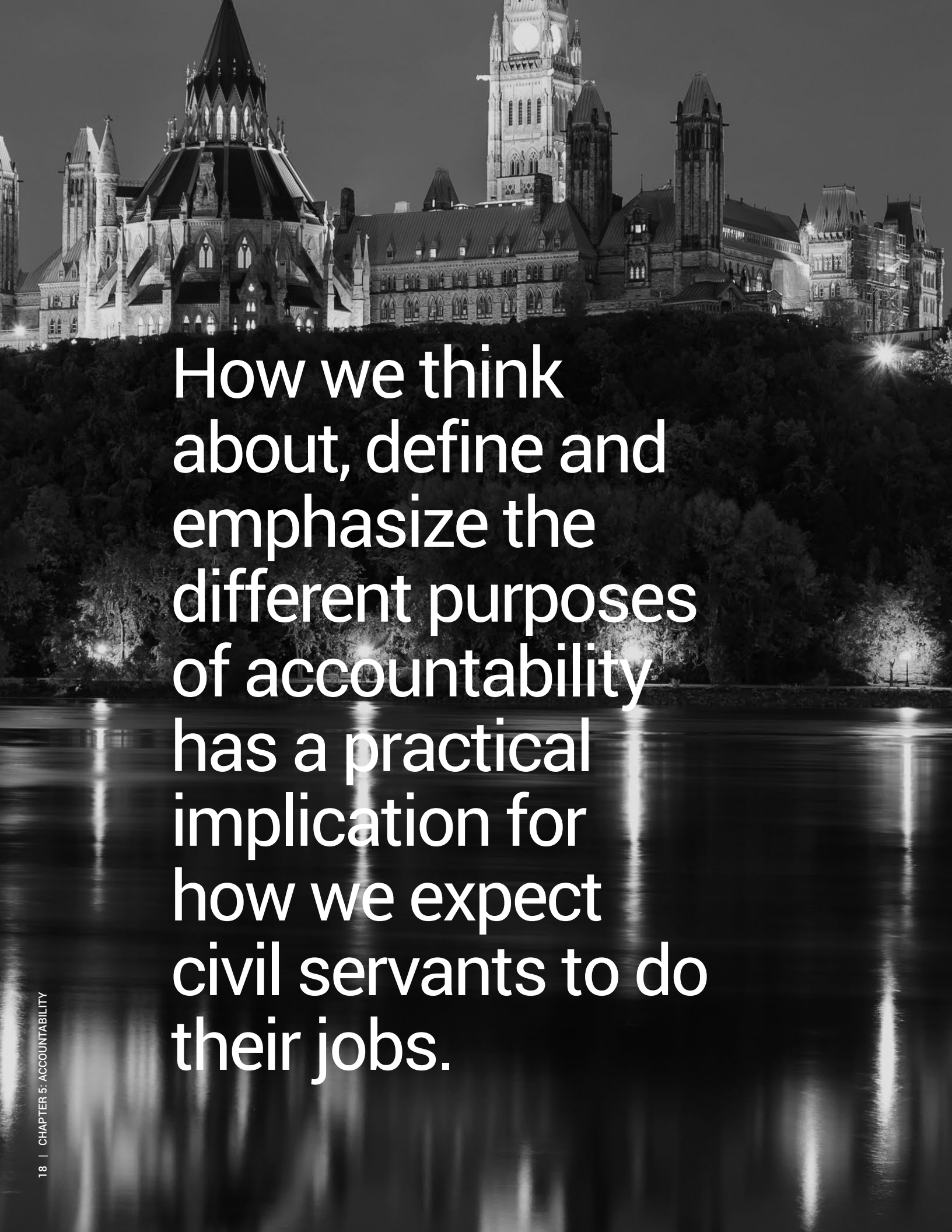
Finally, there is a fear that increasing transparency could lead to more things being done “off the books,” through oral advice or outside the civil service, to avoid scrutiny. No reform is perfect. Opportunities to exploit loopholes will always exist. This is not a sufficient argument in favour of the status quo.

Ultimately, the civil service may not be in a position to decide how transparent it will be. Social expectations may be determinative here. Further, other objectives such as collaboration may require greater transparency. For example, it might not be possible to marry a closed system of advice with co-production or open policymaking.

Different approaches as to what is released could be taken. For example, the inputs to advice (reports, statistical analysis, etc.) could be disclosed by default and the actual advice be shielded. New guidelines for proactive public disclosure could clearly define when, where and how various kinds of information should be made public.

There are a range of other options for how to improve transparency. For example, transparency could be strengthened by a return to traditional practices, such as publishing “green” and “white papers” on pressing policy issues and conducting technical briefings for opposition and media, and perhaps other stakeholder groups as well.

50 Grimmelikhuijsen, S. G., & Meijer, A. J. (2012). “The effects of transparency on the perceived trustworthiness of a government organization: Evidence from an online experiment.” *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 24 (1): 137-157; Grimmelikhuijsen, S., Porumbescu, G., Hong, B. and Im, T. (2013). “The Effect of Transparency on Trust in Government: A Cross-National Comparative Experiment.” *Public Administration Review*, 73: 575–586.



How we think about, define and emphasize the different purposes of accountability has a practical implication for how we expect civil servants to do their jobs.

5 ACCOUNTABILITY

How is Canada doing?

While accountability can serve different purposes – such as democratic control, assurance, learning, results – at a minimum, meaningful accountability for civil servants needs to accomplish three things:

- » help individual civil servants learn in order to improve their performance;
- » effectively address poor performers; and,
- » assure those outside government that civil servants are actually held to account.

Canada is struggling in each of these regards.

First, Canada has not developed a civil service culture that embraces individual accountability as a means of learning and improving performance on a day-to-day basis.⁵¹ While there has been considerable expansion in formal accountability requirements and processes – mostly at the departmental level – this has not led to an effective accountability system focused on improving performance.⁵² Formal performance management approaches do not provide the sort

of rich, regular, ongoing feedback that recognizes good performance and allows individuals to acknowledge and learn from mistakes. Where officials do describe this occurring, it is almost exclusively associated with a particular manager, rather than with the culture of the particular department they work in, or with the culture of the civil service as a whole.⁵³ In this sense, accountability practices are not helping civil servants improve performance as much as they could be.

Second, the civil service suffers as a result of its failure to effectively deal with poor performers. This problem is well recognized by civil servants themselves. Only 33 per cent of federal civil servants agree that unsatisfactory employee performance is managed effectively in their work unit.⁵⁴ Further, only 61 per cent of participants with supervisory responsibilities report that they received necessary support from senior management to address unsatisfactory performance in their work unit.⁵⁵ The difficulty of dealing with poor performers is highlighted by the remarkably low dismissal rate in the civil service.

51 Jarvis, M. D. (2014). "The Black Box of Bureaucracy: Interrogating Accountability in the Public Service." *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 73(4), 450-466.

52 Jarvis, M. D., and Thomas, P. 2012. "The Limits of Accountability: What Can and Cannot Be Accomplished in the Dialectics of Accountability?" In Bavkis, H., and Jarvis, M. D. (eds.), *From New Public Management to New Political Governance: Essays in Honour of Peter C. Aucoin*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.

53 Jarvis, M. D. (2014). "The Black Box of Bureaucracy: Interrogating Accountability in the Public Service." *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 73(4), 450-466.

54 Treasury Board Secretariat. (2014). *2014 Public Service Employee Survey Results by Question for the Public Service*. <http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/ps-es-saff/2014/results-resultats/bq-pq/00/org-eng.aspx>.

55 Treasury Board Secretariat. (2014). *2014 Public Service Employee Survey Results by Question for the Public Service*. <http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/ps-es-saff/2014/results-resultats/bq-pq/00/org-eng.aspx>.

Each year, less than 0.1 per cent of the federal civil is dismissed for performance, according to the government.⁵⁶ Given the lengthy and taxing human resource processes for recruiting, hiring and firing individuals in the civil service, this is not entirely surprising.

Finally, civil service accountability is undermined by its failure to effectively inform those outside of government that civil servants are actually held to account. Care must be taken to respect the privacy rights of individuals, but those outside government are rarely able to tell whether and/or how civil servants are held to account, except when a legal or political controversy ensues.⁵⁷ The civil service lacks a mechanism for effectively assuring parliamentarians, the public, and the media that civil servants are held to account for their performance, behaviour and decisions, including when they are dismissed or otherwise sanctioned.⁵⁸

Canada is not alone in this regard. Recent comparative research suggests that other countries are struggling with these same issues.⁵⁹ For example, while the dismissal rate is higher in both the United States and in Australia, the rates are only marginally higher at 0.6 per cent and 0.1 per cent, respectfully.⁶⁰ This seems no less troubling than the Canadian rate.

56 Clement, T. (2013). Speech from Tony Clement, President of the Treasury Board of Canada, to the Association of Professional Executives of the Public Service of Canada. Ottawa: May 28. <http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/media/ps-dp/2013/0528-eng.asp>

57 Uhr, J. (2014). "Accountable Civil Servants". *The Oxford Handbook of Public Accountability*, 236-241.

58 Aucoin, P., and Jarvis, M. D. (2005). *Modernizing government accountability: A framework for reform*. Ottawa: Canada School of Public Service.

59 Jarvis, M. D. (2014). "The Black Box of Bureaucracy: Interrogating Accountability in the Public Service." *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 73(4), 450-466.

60 Clement, T. (2013). Speech from Tony Clement, President of the Treasury Board of Canada, to the Association of Professional Executives of the Public Service of Canada. Ottawa: May 28.

Moving Forward

THE CIVIL SERVICE SHOULD:

- » Work with unions to develop a new substantive focus on accountability that improves performance and establishes a simplified system of credible incentives and sanctions, including making it easier to dismiss poor performers.
- » Support managers by providing the training and tools needed to deliver meaningful ongoing feedback, in addition to periodic formal performance management processes.

There are more than 210,000 civil servants in the core federal public administration alone, accounting for one of the largest single expenditures in the federal government budget. Civil servants at all levels of government exercise substantial authority and often have a significant impact on the lives of Canadians. They influence how policies are developed, how taxes are spent and how services are delivered.

Improving individual accountability will require a two-pronged approach aimed at dramatically changing the culture of accountability within the civil service.

First, holding individuals accountable for performance must be made a priority for managers. Managers cannot hold their subordinates to account without adequate support, however. This includes supporting the development of necessary skills, creating incentives that encourage greater accountability

and providing managers with more credible rewards and sanctions.⁶¹ Part of these reforms will require structural changes that make it easier to dismiss poor performers – though simply firing poor performers is not sufficient.

Second, greater focus will have to be placed on accountability as a key to “learning in pursuit of continuous improvement in governance and public management.”⁶² Formal approaches, such as performance management, have failed to deliver effective accountability or the kind of improved performance they promised. A number of large private sector firms have now eliminated formal performance reviews in favour of more frequent informal feedback.⁶³ Australian Public Service Commissioner John Lloyd has recently suggested that he thinks that eliminating formal performance reviews may be going too far, but that efforts to provide more meaningful, ongoing feedback are necessary.⁶⁴ More meaningful feedback is often pushed aside in pursuit of short-term pressures to deliver.

Accountability isn’t just about what happens when things go wrong, though that’s obviously important. It’s also about whether day-to-day accountability practices within the civil service meet desired objectives, such as delivering outcomes and ensuring careful management of resources. How we think about, define and emphasize the different purposes of

accountability has a practical implication for how we expect civil servants to do their jobs.⁶⁵ A real focus on learning will need to transcend conventional formal performance management approaches – practices such as periodic check-ins and annual ratings – which are often viewed skeptically by both managers and employees.⁶⁶

Accountability isn’t just about what happens when things go wrong. It’s also about whether day-to-day accountability practices within the civil service meet desired objectives, such as delivering outcomes and ensuring careful management of resources.

61 Jarvis, M. D. (2014). “The Black Box of Bureaucracy: Interrogating Accountability in the Public Service.” *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 73(4), 450-466.

62 Aucoin, P. and Heintzman, R. (2000). *The dialectics of accountability for performance in public management reform*. Canadian Centre for Management Development. Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press.

63 For example see: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/on-leadership/wp/2015/07/21/in-big-move-accenture-will-get-rid-of-annual-performance-reviews-and-rankings/>; http://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/more-us-companies-moving-away-from-traditional-performance-reviews/2015/08/17/d4e716d0-4508-11e5-846d-02792f854297_story.html.

64 http://www.themandarin.com.au/50756-aps-commissioner-eyes-private-sector-hr-lets-bandwagon-pass/#.Ve05qpw4_YE.twitter.

65 Jarvis, M. D. (2014). “The Black Box of Bureaucracy: Interrogating Accountability in the Public Service.” *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 73(4), 450-466.

66 Jarvis, M. D. (2014). “The Black Box of Bureaucracy: Interrogating Accountability in the Public Service.” *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 73(4), 450-466; Peters, B.G. (2014). “Accountability in Public Administration.” *The Oxford Handbook of Public Accountability*, 211-225.

The kind of informal accountability practices and coaching that support day-to-day learning and improvement are not easily observable outside of the civil service. This conflicts with an increasingly cynical public. In order to meet the demand for transparency, a mechanism is needed for informing both Parliament and the public that civil servants are being held to account in a meaningful way.

The United Kingdom benefits from having a parliamentary committee dedicated to examining public administration. A similar committee in Canada would provide a credible venue for the leadership of the civil service to inform Parliament and the public about accountability practices within the civil service, as well as an opportunity to discuss matters of public administration more broadly. It would also give deputy ministers an incentive to ensure that accountability is being taken seriously throughout their organizations.

One of the biggest obstacles to overcome will be a transformation of a human resources regime and unionized culture that protects too many poor performers, with negative consequences for both the system and the vast majority of civil servants, who perform well. While poor performers may account for a small number of civil servants, dealing with them ineffectively has serious internal (e.g., morale) and external (e.g., perception) consequences.

While some might suggest that civil servants themselves may stand in the way of reform, the large number of civil servants who recognize the problem suggests this is not the case.⁶⁷ Collective agreements could provide a basis for more meaningful performance management. To this end, civil service leadership could work with relevant unions to develop a new approach to performance and accountability that both reduces transaction costs associated with dealing with poor performers, and facilitates improved performance for the civil service as a whole. A renewed approach could also lead to credible consequences that discourage unwanted behaviour without the onerous level of effort that currently deters managers from addressing poor performance in a meaningful way.

⁶⁷ Kelman, S. (2005). *Unleashing change: A study of organizational renewal in government*. Brookings Institution Press.

6 COLLABORATION

How is Canada doing?

Collaboration – the process of working closely with internal or external partners – allows governments to leverage expertise, experience and skills, leading to more efficient design and implementation of programs, policies and services.

For at least the past two decades, the civil service has been working toward improving coordination and collaboration, partly in an effort to address those issues that cut across multiple departments or ministries.⁶⁸ As much as the government has done to strengthen collaboration internally and externally, even more will have to be done going forward.⁶⁹

Some promising practices – such as the #w2p network and GCpedia/GCconnex – have emerged, making it easier for digitally-enabled civil servants to collaborate with colleagues across government. For example, GCpedia allows any civil servant to “access, comment on, and edit the same information simultaneously” via the government intranet.⁷⁰ This chips away at

the “siloed” nature of information management approaches that restrict information sharing across, or even within, departments.⁷¹ Proponents suggest this reflects the recognized need “to nurture a more performance-oriented, collaborative and innovative culture.”⁷²

There is less evidence to suggest that a broader culture of collaboration has emerged. More could be done to move past “whole-of-government” approaches, as one example. This would free up civil servants to work more freely with external partners, including not-for-profit groups, private sector partners, academics and the general public.⁷³ While the civil service recognizes the need for greater collaboration and has taken some steps toward realizing that goal – through the greater use of social media, for example – analysis of some of those efforts suggests that results have been more insular than engaging.⁷⁴

68 Juillet, L., and Bakvis, H. (2004). *The horizontal challenge: Line departments, central agencies and leadership*. Ottawa: Canada School of Public Service.

69 Lindquist, E. (2012). “Horizontal Management in Canada Ten Years Later”. *Optimum Online: The Journal of Public Sector Management*, 42(3).

70 Clarke, A. (2014). “One of These Things Is Not Like the Other? ... Information, Collaboration, and the Harper Government.” in Stoney, C. (ed). *How Ottawa Spends, 2014-2015: The Harper Government-Good to Go?*. McGill-Queen’s University Press.

71 Bellamy, C. (2002). “From automation to knowledge management: modernizing British government with ICTs.” *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 68(2), 213-230; Layne K., and Lee, J. (2001). “Developing fully functional E-government: A four stage model.” *Government information quarterly*, 18(2), 122-136.

72 Wouters, W. (2011). *Eighteenth Annual Report to the Prime Minister on the Public Service of Canada*, p. 13. Available at http://www.clerk.gc.ca/local_grfx/docs/18rpt-eng.pdf.

73 Clarke, A. (2014). “One of These Things Is Not Like the Other? ... Information, Collaboration, and the Harper Government.” in Stoney, C. (ed). *How Ottawa Spends, 2014-2015: The Harper Government-Good to Go?*. McGill-Queen’s University Press.

74 Clarke, A. (2014). “One of These Things Is Not Like the Other? ... Information, Collaboration, and the Harper Government.” in Stoney, C. (ed). *How Ottawa Spends, 2014-2015: The Harper Government-Good to Go?*. McGill-Queen’s University Press.

Government has also failed to maximize the potential benefits of partnerships with non-governmental organizations. When forming partnerships, governments can adopt different levels of power sharing, from consultation to collaboration.⁷⁵ While this flexibility has often resulted in beneficial outcomes for specific initiatives, a higher level of collaboration – where partners are fully involved in policy development and implementation – is still the exception rather than the rule. Further, past efforts to reduce rigid and time-consuming administrative approaches to funding, reporting and accountability have not gone far enough to reduce the transaction costs of collaboration. If greater collaboration is to occur, the civil service needs to do more to reduce procedural burdens – both internally and externally.⁷⁶

Moreover, opportunities exist to push forward from past successes. For example, while integrated “single-window” approaches improved service delivery, back-office support has often remained siloed.⁷⁷ Improving “vertical plane” collaboration and integration presents an opportunity to maximize efficiency and realize even better outcomes.⁷⁸

75 Wanna, J. (2008). “Collaborative government: meanings, dimensions, drivers and outcomes.” In O’Flynn J. and Wanna J. (eds.), *Collaborative Governance: A New Era of Public Policy in Australia?* Canberra: Australian National University, 3-12.

76 Levasseur, K. (2012). “In the name of charity: Institutional support for and resistance to redefining the meaning of charity in Canada.” *Canadian Public Administration*, 55(2), 181-202.

77 Gold, J., and Hjartarson, J. (2012). *Integrating Human Services in an Age of Fiscal Restraint: A Shifting Gears Report*. Toronto: Mowat Centre. http://mowatcentre.ca/wp-content/uploads/publications/57_integrating_human_services.pdf

78 Agranoff, R. and McGuire, M. (2004). *Collaborative public management: New strategies for local governments*. Georgetown University Press.

Moving Forward

THE CIVIL SERVICE SHOULD:

- » Redouble efforts to reduce internal and external procedural burdens, especially those that inhibit the effective use of partnerships and collaboration (such as funding, reporting and other accountability requirements).
- » Create a more collaborative culture by expanding on efforts, such as GCpedia and GCConnex, that empower civil servants and provide the tools needed to engage more publicly with a broader range of individuals and organizations.
- » Use more collaborative “results teams” or “results secretariats” that focus accountabilities on the achievement of outcomes, and bring together actors at the highest levels from across departments, governments and sectors.

To make government more effective and efficient, greater internal and external collaboration is needed.⁷⁹ While there are efforts to improve collaboration in government, they are often project-specific.⁸⁰ Strengthening collaboration will require cultural and structural changes.

The Australian Public Service (APS) has gone further than Canada in placing the responsibility for collaboration on senior civil servants. To

79 http://www.ppforum.ca/sites/default/files/Flat%20Forward%20Flexible%20Final%20Report_EN.pdf.

80 Juillet, L., and Bakvis, H. (2004). *The horizontal challenge: Line departments, central agencies and leadership*. Ottawa: Canada School of Public Service.

overcome organizational self-interest, senior civil servants are statutorily responsible for supporting collaboration inside and outside of government.⁸¹ As per the Australian Public Service Act, each Senior Executive Service member is directed to promote “cooperation within and between agencies, including to deliver outcomes across agency and portfolio boundaries” as part of their responsibility to provide “APS-wide strategic leadership of the highest quality.”⁸² Enshrining this responsibility in law is a symbolically significant statement about the importance of collaboration.

Ministerial mandate letters sent by prime ministers and premiers to ministers could also be used as a tool to increase collaboration on cross-cutting files. Beyond their standard use – identifying the expected contribution of ministers to departmental and government-wide priorities – mandate letters could also be used to identify priorities for collaboration.⁸³ Increasing accountability for ministers when it comes to collaboration could have a “trickle down” effect, creating an incentive to ensure that deputy ministers and departments are also engaging in more collaborative approaches.

More could also be done to establish new institutional arrangements and processes to facilitate coordination on cross-cutting issues. This could include strengthening the coordination capacity of central agencies⁸⁴ to ensure a common purpose, insisting on a whole-system approach and sharing power with partners.⁸⁵

81 <http://www.apsc.gov.au/publications-and-media/archive/publications-archive/connecting-government/culture>.

82 Australian Public Service Act 1999, Section 35.3(b) https://www.comlaw.gov.au/Details/C2014C00511/Html/Text#_Toc394926968.

83 Dean, T. (2015). *Building Better Public Services: A Guide for Practitioners*. Toronto: Friesen Press.

84 Juillet, L., and Bakvis, H. (2004). *The horizontal challenge: Line departments, central agencies and leadership*. Ottawa: Canada School of Public Service.

85 <http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/Collaborative%20working.pdf>.

Central agencies could also lead efforts to monitor existing collaborative efforts and consult on opportunities to extend collaboration into other areas.⁸⁶ Clearly defined roles and responsibilities and effective accountability mechanisms are also critical to successful collaboration.⁸⁷ For example, performance agreements can be used to incentivize and define measurable objectives for collaboration.⁸⁸

As with innovation, greater political tolerance for risk will also be required to expand collaboration, particularly with external partners. As discussed, the civil service has recognized that social media offers a greater opportunity to engage with broader audiences. This could foster greater collaboration and innovation by building long-term engagement and trust, and breaking down process-driven barriers to collaboration.⁸⁹ However, given the current level of intolerance for mistakes and risk in most governments, efforts to exploit the potential value of social media and other forms of collaboration are less likely to succeed as they move beyond internal information sharing and involve “the much more publicized, politically sensitive realm of government-citizen interactions.”⁹⁰

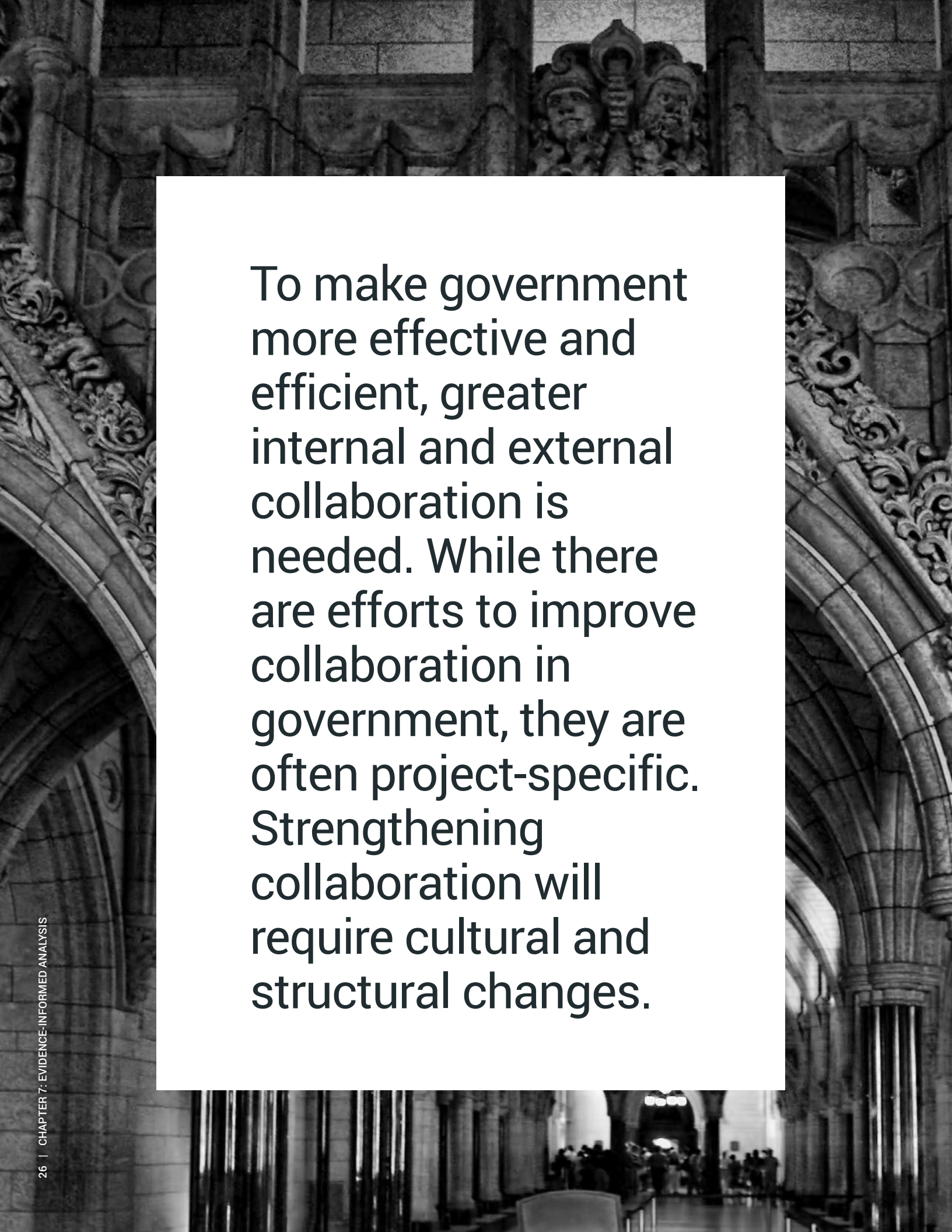
86 Gold, J. and Hjartarson, J. (2012). *Integrating Human Services in an Age of Fiscal Restraint: A Shifting Gears Report*. Toronto: Mowat Centre. http://mowatcentre.ca/wp-content/uploads/publications/57_integrating_human_services.pdf.

87 United Nations (2014). *United Nations E-Government Survey 2014: E-government for the Future We Want*. http://unpan3.un.org/egovkb/Portals/egovkb/Documents/un/2014-Survey/E-Gov_Complete_Survey-2014.pdf.

88 Galley, A., Gold, J. and Johal, S. (2013). *Public Service Transformed: Harnessing the Power of Behavioural Insights*. Toronto: Mowat Centre. http://mowatcentre.ca/wp-content/uploads/publications/78_public_service_transformed.pdf.

89 <http://www.oecd.org/gov/public-innovation/government-and-social-media.htm>.

90 Clarke, A. (2014). “One of These Things Is Not Like the Other? ... Information, Collaboration, and the Harper Government.” in Stony, C. (ed). *How Ottawa Spends, 2014-2015: The Harper Government-Good to Go?*. McGill-Queen’s University Press.



To make government more effective and efficient, greater internal and external collaboration is needed. While there are efforts to improve collaboration in government, they are often project-specific. Strengthening collaboration will require cultural and structural changes.

7 EVIDENCE-INFORMED ANALYSIS

How is Canada doing?

A well-performing civil service is characterized by policies, programs and services that are informed by relevant, timely and rigorous evidence.

Canada's record of using evidence on the effectiveness of programs and policies and departmental performance in allocating resources is substandard.⁹¹ Critics have noted a number of limitations including too much focus on activities and outputs instead of outcomes, a lack of appropriate data and a lack of independent analysis.⁹²

In 2013, the Office of the Auditor General (OAG) found that evaluations still did not properly address policy and program effectiveness due to a lack of appropriate data.⁹³ The OAG is clear about the implications: "Significant weaknesses continue to limit the contribution of program evaluation" and, "as a result, decisions have been made about programs and related

expenditures with incomplete information on their effectiveness."⁹⁴ As noted earlier in this report, lack of a rigorous evaluation function also undermines Canada's ability to be more innovative.

Broader concerns about the policy function of the civil service have also emerged. Concerned observers have suggested Canada lacks the level of analytical policy capacity necessary to engage in more evidence-informed analysis.⁹⁵ They point to a growing preference for empirical evidence – supporting policy decisions that have already been taken by elected officials – overtaking the demand for new policy ideas and options.⁹⁶ This points to a disjuncture between the narrative of the importance of evidence in policymaking and the actual reality. It also points to concerns that politicization and budget cuts have led to an erosion of medium- to long-term policy capacity.⁹⁷ While concerns about the impact of politicization

91 Aucoin, P. (2005). *Decision-making in government: The role of program evaluation*. Retrieved from: www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/cee/tools-outils/aucoin-eng.asp#sec1.

92 Bouckaert, G., and Halligan, J. (2007). *Managing performance: International comparisons*. Routledge.

93 Office of the Auditor General of Canada. (2013). *Report of the Auditor General of Canada to the House of Commons: Chapter 1 Status Report on Evaluating the Effectiveness of Programs*. Ottawa. http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl_oag_201304_01_e_38186.html; Office of the Auditor General of Canada. (2009). *Report of the Auditor General of Canada to the House of Commons: Evaluating the Effectiveness of Programs*. Ottawa.

94 Office of the Auditor General of Canada. (2013). *Report of the Auditor General of Canada to the House of Commons: Chapter 1 Status Report on Evaluating the Effectiveness of Programs*. Ottawa. http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl_oag_201304_01_e_38186.html.

95 Howlett, M. (2009). "Policy analytical capacity and evidence-based policy-making: Lessons from Canada." *Canadian Public Administration*, 52: 153–175.

96 Peters, B.G. and Savoie, D. (2012). "In search of good governance." In Bakvis H. and Jarvis, M. D. (Eds.), *From new public management to new political governance*, 29–45. McGill-Queen's University Press.

97 Aucoin, P. (2012). "New political governance in Westminster systems: Impartial public administration and management performance at risk." *Governance*, 25(2), 177-199.

and austerity measures on impartial civil service policy advice are acute here, they are not unique to Canada.⁹⁸

Moving Forward

THE CIVIL SERVICE SHOULD:

- » Invest heavily in ongoing analytical skills training and development to bolster medium-to-long term policy and evaluation capacity.
- » Centralize evaluation capacity – in the absence of a truly independent external evaluation body – and separate it from policy and program delivery, to enhance the credibility of evaluation findings.
- » Invest in What Works centres – whether internal or external – dedicated to synthesizing and disseminating leading research on the effectiveness and efficiency of different approaches in strategic policy areas.

While evidence is never perfect, more can be done to centralize its role in decision-making. The civil service has a responsibility to provide advice based on the best evidence available – allowing that what constitutes best available evidence may be different in different contexts. There is also a public good in having that evidence available for outside use.

While it will not displace political judgment and the need to balance different interests, evaluation and the use of evidence are fundamental to rigorous policymaking.⁹⁹ Other jurisdictions

98 See for example, Tieman, A. (2015). "Craft and Capacity in the Public Service." *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 74(1), 53-62.
99 Institute for Government. (2011). *Transformation in the Ministry of Justice: Interim Evaluation Report*. London: Institute for Government.

have demonstrated a stronger commitment to integrating more rigorous analytical approaches to improve policy outcomes.¹⁰⁰ In the US, both the executive – through the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) – and the legislative branches – through the Government Accountability Office (GAO) – provide evaluation analysis through a competing system of independent assessment. The OMB is responsible for assisting the Office of the President with budget preparation and administrative oversight of federal agencies, including integrating evidence into budget, management and policy decisions.¹⁰¹ The GAO is an independent, nonpartisan agency reporting to congress with responsibilities that include measuring how well government programs and policies are meeting their stated objectives.¹⁰²

This is not to suggest that the evaluations undertaken by the OMB and GAO do not have limitations. But what is valuable about the US approach is having independent evaluation functions rather than relying solely on the government's own account of its successes. While internal monitoring of programs and performance is important, relying exclusively on self-reporting on impact by departments within government is simply not credible.¹⁰³ As noted in previous *Shifting Gears* work, the incentives in Canadian civil service culture do not favour admitting failure, even as a means of improving performance.¹⁰⁴

100 Bouckaert, G., and Halligan, J. (2007). *Managing performance: International comparisons*. Routledge.

101 Office of Management and Budget. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/evidence>.

102 U.S. Government Accountability Office. <http://www.gao.gov/about/>.

103 Aucoin, P., and Jarvis, M. D. (2005). *Modernizing government accountability: A framework for reform*. Ottawa: Canada School of Public Service.

104 Galley, A., Gold, J. and Johal, S. (2013). *Public Service Transformed: Harnessing the Power of Behavioural Insights*. Toronto: Mowat Centre. http://mowatcentre.ca/wp-content/uploads/publications/78_public_service_transformed.pdf.

A similar model could be achieved in Canada by establishing internal government evaluation capacity that is responsive to immediate management needs and at the same time expanding the mandate of a parliamentary agency (e.g., the Parliamentary Budget Office or the OAG) or by creating a new parliamentary office to assess the impact of policies and programs. This would ensure independence from those directly responsible for the programs being evaluated.

If evaluation is to remain the sole responsibility of government, the conduct of evaluation could be centralized within a single agency (e.g., Treasury Board Secretariat) or other body to provide greater independence from those directly responsible for the delivery of policies and programs. Alternatively, as suggested in Mowat's Public Service Transformed report, civil servants responsible for undertaking evaluations could be hived off, like legal advice where Justice Canada staff work within the departments whose files they are responsible for.¹⁰⁵ In this model, evaluation is not fully centralized. While this approach would not completely overcome the challenge of information asymmetry between those who deliver programs and services and those who scrutinize them, locating central agency evaluation staff within line departments will increase independence based on specific expertise and ensure that more information will flow from the level of delivery to the centre.

Beyond strengthening evaluation, the UK has advanced its commitment to evidence-informed policy analysis by launching the world's first network of What Works centres. While there is considerable variation with respect to resource

allocation, evidence standards, audiences and dissemination approaches,¹⁰⁶ this "Moneyball" approach to analysis is designed to bring high quality evidence to bear on different issues of social policy.¹⁰⁷ The Washington State Institute for Public Policy – which focuses on assessing the effectiveness, cost and probability that different policy options will at least break even against government investment in them – and the UK and EU's Better Regulation initiatives have taken similar approaches to understanding the impact of public policy. While it is too early to determine the impact of the UK centres, they have the potential to positively impact public policy development by drawing on the best available evidence from systematic reviews, robust evaluations and other sources to better understand effective policy and what factors facilitate or impede transferability.

Ontario has taken concrete steps in this regard with the creation of a new Centre of Excellence for Evidence-Based Decision Making announced in the 2015 provincial budget. The purpose of the Centre is "to build capacity to assess how programs are performing, using evidence to inform choices and lead change in critical public services."¹⁰⁸

Measures to ensure that scientific evidence is more systematically integrated into analysis could also be taken. For instance, other jurisdictions such as the United Kingdom and the United States have developed formal protocols for seeking scientific advice. These guidelines

105 Galley, A., Gold, J. and Johal, S. (2013). *Public Service Transformed: Harnessing the Power of Behavioural Insights*. Toronto: Mowat Centre. http://mowatcentre.ca/wp-content/uploads/publications/78_public_service_transformed.pdf.

106 Bristow, D., Carter, L., & Martin, S. (2015). "Using evidence to improve policy and practice: the UK What Works Centres." *Contemporary Social Science*, 10(2), 126-137.

107 Alexander, D., and Letwin, O. (2013). *What Works: evidence centres for social policy*. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/136227/What_Works_publication.pdf.

108 The Honourable Charles Sousa. (2015). "Building Ontario up: Ontario budget 2015." *Ministry of Finance*. http://www.fin.gov.on.ca/en/budget/ontariobudgets/2015/papers_all.pdf.

help to ensure that external scientific advice from individuals and organizations is “politically neutral; focused on the data and its appropriate interpretation; unbiased with respect to its use of data; explicit about what is known and unknown and the quality of the available data; clear in communicating probabilities and magnitude of effect; and, free from real and perceived conflicts of interest.”¹⁰⁹ Guidelines could also provide greater transparency about the use scientific advice, especially “with respect to complex and controversial areas of decision-making.”¹¹⁰

These changes could lead to a substantive shift toward generating evidence to support decisions and openness. But there are, of course, also obstacles to strengthening evidence-informed analysis. Measurement limits will always constrain what we can know.

A more rigorous approach to evaluation and policy will require an investment in medium-to-long term policy capacity. This could be achieved through ongoing analytical skills development to enable more strategic use of different forms of evidence and structural change in how evaluations are carried out and used.

Further, as discussed elsewhere in this report, a lack of tolerance for negative news runs against a more rigorous, credible approach to understanding what works in policy advice. A credible focus on results will also demand a willingness on the part of senior civil servants to deliver advice that doesn’t support – or even contradicts – the policy preferences of elected officials. The willingness of senior civil

servants to do this is not always clear.¹¹¹ Further, central agencies can do more to ensure that the requirement for high quality evidence in the policy process is enforced with concrete consequences for those departments and programs that fail to meet specified standards.

While timely access to quality and relevant evidence, collaboration with policymakers and strengthening analytical skills can facilitate greater use of evidence,¹¹² improving the quality of evaluation and strengthening evidence-informed policy analysis does not guarantee that the resulting information will be used in ministerial or cabinet decision-making.¹¹³ Nor should it. The role of the civil service is not to “win” every policy debate; it is to tender the best possible, analytically sound advice. Policymaking cannot be reduced to a technocratic exercise in measurement. It demands weighing a broad range of considerations. In doing so, as discussed earlier in this report, it is perfectly legitimate for ministers to make decisions that do not follow the advice provided.

But none of these challenges are a sufficient excuse for not having a stronger commitment to trying to understand the effectiveness of policies and programs.

109 Gluckman, P. (2013). The role of evidence in policy formation and implementation: A report from the Prime Minister’s Chief Science Advisor. *Office of the Prime Minister’s Science Advisory Committee, Auckland.*

110 Gluckman, P. (2013). The role of evidence in policy formation and implementation: A report from the Prime Minister’s Chief Science Advisor. *Office of the Prime Minister’s Science Advisory Committee, Auckland.*

111 Savoie, D. (2015). *What is Government Good at? A Canadian Answer.* McGill-Queen’s University Press.

112 Oliver, K., Innvar, S., Lorenc, T., Woodman, J., and Thomas, J. (2014). “A systematic review of barriers to and facilitators of the use of evidence by policymakers.” *BMC Health Services Research*, 14(2). <http://doi.org/10.1186/1472-6963-14-2>.

113 McDavid, J. (2014). “Have we built a system that contains a paradox?” *Canadian Government Executive*. <http://www.canadian-governmentexecutive.ca/category/item/1593-have-we-built-a-system-that-contains-a-paradox?.html>.

8 PUBLIC AND POLITICAL COMMITMENT

How is Canada doing?

Canada lacks a clear, shared understanding of the civil service's purpose and function. In part, at least, this reflects the absence of a critical public and political discussion about the civil service and its importance. The reality is that citizens have "limited knowledge of government and pay scant attention to developments within the governing process."¹¹⁴

We also have limited knowledge about the public's expectations of the civil service. While international benchmarking of citizens' perspectives exists, they provide limited information. For example, Canada ranked in the 95th percentile for public faith in government effectiveness in the World Bank's most recently published data, which measures perceptions of the quality of public services, the quality of the civil service and the degree of its independence from political pressures, the quality of policy formulation and implementation and the credibility of the government's commitment to such policies.¹¹⁵ But this sort of information, by and large, does not disaggregate different levels of government or the civil service from

the government more broadly. Further, different survey indicators (e.g., trust in government, level of corruption) gauge predetermined perceptions and measures of government effectiveness. This does not produce a snapshot of what the public wants and expects from the civil service.

Media coverage of the civil service is also limited. With few exceptions, the little coverage that does exist tends to focus on wrongdoing and scandals, with politicians and journalists "outing" civil servants behaving badly in sensational political communications or media coverage.¹¹⁶ In the short term, sensationalized coverage diminishes public trust. While evidence suggests that this has not eroded public trust in the civil service over the long term,¹¹⁷ this is undermined by the reality that citizens tend not to draw a distinction between the civil service itself and the government as a whole.¹¹⁸

With diminished public expectations of the civil service, politicians lack an incentive to ensure it remains a robust institution. This is made all the more difficult by an increasingly frayed political-

114 Thomas, P. (2014). "Two Cheers for Bureaucracy: Canada's Public Service," in Bickerton, J. and Gagnon, A. G. (eds.), *Canadian Politics (sixth edition)*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

115 World Bank. (2015). *Worldwide Governance Indicators*. <http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/index.aspx#home>.

116 Kernaghan, K., and Langford, J. (2014). *The responsible public servant*. Toronto: Institute Public Administration of Canada.

117 Van de Walle, S., Van Roosbroek, S., and Bouckaert, G. (2008). "Trust in the public sector: is there any evidence for a long-term decline?" *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 74(1), 47-64.

118 Thomas, P. (2014). "Two Cheers for Bureaucracy: Canada's Public Service," in Bickerton, J. and Gagnon, A. J. (eds.), *Canadian Politics (sixth edition)*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

administrative relationship.¹¹⁹ Civil servants are grappling with a world where there is an increased expectation of hyper-responsiveness to the government's partisan actions or agenda, largely driven by the emphasis on the communications function of government,¹²⁰ particularly where civil servants play public roles (e.g., public consultations, appearances before parliamentary committees).¹²¹ The impact of recent cuts has diminished capacity in key areas such as policy advice, research, regulatory enforcement and training.¹²² Not unrelatedly, morale has been low, creating additional pressure in its own right.¹²³ This is not unique to Canada.¹²⁴

Additionally, questions persist as to whether the senior leadership of the civil service has the depth and breadth of experience to lead the civil service in the face of these challenges, or whether a lack of leadership is exacerbating these pressures.¹²⁵ Notwithstanding that a number of the underlying reasons for the current state of the civil service are beyond its control, senior civil servants at least share in the responsibility for these challenges and must do more to address them.¹²⁶

119 Savoie, D. (2015). *What is Government Good at? A Canadian Answer*. Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press.

120 Aucoin, P. (2012). "New political governance in Westminster systems: Impartial public administration and management performance at risk." *Governance*, 25(2), 177-199.

121 Grube, D. (2014). "Responsibility to Be Enthusiastic? Public Servants and the Public Face of 'Promiscuous Partisanship'." *Governance*, 28(3): 305-320.

122 Savoie, D. (2015) *What is Government Good at? A Canadian Answer*. Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press.

123 Savoie, D. (2013). *Whatever happened to the music teacher?: how government decides and why*. McGill-Queen's University Press.

124 See for example, Dawood, S. (2014) "Civil service morale: 'You dread going into work in the mornings'." *The Guardian*. <http://www.theguardian.com/public-leaders-network/2014/nov/04/civil-service-morale-bullying-stress-targets-job-cuts>.

125 Dean, T. (2015) *Building Better Public Services: A Guide for Practitioners*. Toronto: Friesen Press.

126 Savoie, D. (2015). *What is Government Good at? A Canadian Answer*. Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press.

Moving Forward

PARLIAMENT SHOULD:

- » Establish a committee on public administration dedicated to scrutiny and debate on matters related to the civil service and civil service reform with the goal of strengthening public discourse on the civil service.

THE CIVIL SERVICE SHOULD:

- » Establish a clear and accessible charter of civil service as a basis for a shared understanding of the role and importance of a high-performing civil service.
- » Update the Public Service Employment Act (2005) to enshrine the charter in law.

A political commitment is required to ensure the civil service is empowered, independent and appropriately resourced to have a positive impact on economic prosperity and the quality of life of Canadians. This is not to say that the civil service should idly wait for the government of the day, the media or the public to demand change. The leadership of the civil service is ultimately responsible for the health of the institution, whether there is external interest or not.

In the absence of the necessary political commitment, the likelihood that the civil service can achieve the standards for each of the key characteristics set out in this report – innovation, transparency, accountability, collaboration, and evidence-informed analysis – is limited. As noted earlier, ultimately, the civil service is a hierarchical organization under political control. This ensures

democratic control, with accountability ultimately flowing from elected officials to citizens, over the civil service as instrument of representative democratic governance.¹²⁷

This kind of political commitment is unlikely without public demand. A robust public discourse is needed to foster an appreciation of the role of the civil service and to create an expectation that the government of the day manage all its resources – including the civil service – well.

Building a broader public conversation about public administration in Canada will not be an easy feat. In contrast to Canada, other countries have a more engaged dialogue about issues pertaining to public administration, reflecting the importance of the civil service. For example, both the UK and Australia have media publications dedicated to public sector issues. In the UK, The Guardian newspaper publishes the Public Leaders Network, which provides coverage of news related to the civil service and provides an opportunity to engage the public and public sector officials through live chats on different public sector issues. Similarly, Australia has both the Public Sector Informant and The Mandarin. All three outlets cover a range of public sector issues, including policy, programs and public projects, civil service careers and news and government's role in society. While Canada has publications that focus on public administration, they amount to inward focusing trade magazines aimed at civil service executives.

The UK also benefits from having a dedicated parliamentary committee on public administration. The Public Administration Select Committee (PASC) examines the quality and standards of civil service administration

and other related matters. Notwithstanding recent controversies,¹²⁸ PASC has long been considered to be able to set aside partisan considerations and be one of the most effective UK parliamentary committees.

Different actors could take action to jumpstart a conversation about what the civil service is for, its importance and how it can be strengthened. Parliament could create a parliamentary committee on public administration, modeled after the UK's Public Administration Select Committee, to examine the quality, standards and functioning of civil service administration and other related matters. This could lead to sustained parliamentary scrutiny and debate, media coverage and broader public engagement.

The government could also initiate a public conversation aimed at clarifying the role of the civil service. Even if it does not lead to greater public interest, there is still value in the government articulating its vision for the role of the civil service. A more robust dialogue should also include a vital network of private sector companies, think tanks and other non-profit sector organizations that realize the value of a dynamic civil service and engage more effectively in a dialogue about its role, importance and success and failures. Reform of the civil service should not be based solely on an inward conversation with itself.

While there will always be tension and ambiguity in the political-administrative relationship, more can be done to clarify the roles and responsibilities of ministers and civil servants. Calls for greater clarity are not new. Repeated calls have been made for a charter of civil service

127 Jarvis, M. D. (2014). "Hierarchical Accountability." *The Oxford Handbook of Public Accountability*, 405-420.

128 Flynn, P. (2014). "The most successful Select Committee in the last parliament is now the most degraded." <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/the-most-successful-select-committee-in-the-last-parliament-is-now-the-most-degraded/>. May 16.

A civil service charter, and the conversation that could serve as its foundation, could help to more clearly frame relations between elected and non-elected officials and drive a commitment to an empowered, independent and appropriately resourced civil service.

as a means to achieve greater clarity and shared understanding.¹²⁹ Different models exist for the exact nature of such a document (e.g., The City of Toronto’s Public Service By-law; Guelph’s award winning Leadership Charter; New Zealand’s Cabinet Manual). These models highlight different considerations for the form (e.g., legislated or non-legislated), nature (e.g., binding or guiding; nature of enforcement) and content of a charter.

Such a charter, and the conversation that could serve as its foundation, could help to more clearly frame relations between elected and non-elected officials. It could also make an important contribution to strengthening the public and political discourse around the civil service and drive a commitment to an empowered, independent and appropriately resourced civil service.

If such a charter was established, the government could also update the Public Service Employment Act (2005) to include the charter as the preamble and ensure that all elements of the Act are consistent with the preamble and that the Act has the enforcement mechanisms to guarantee that the values it enshrines are upheld.

129 Heintzman, R. (2014). *Renewal of the Federal Public Service: Toward a Charter of Public Service*. Ottawa: Canada 2020. http://canada2020.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/2014_Canada2020_Paper-Series_Public_Service_EN_Final.pdf.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is clear that the civil service model that has existed in Canada for more than 150 years has served Canadians extraordinarily well. But as the 21st century moves on, it is equally clear that the civil service – like the citizens it serves – must adapt to changing times. This means reconciling the tension between protecting the value and benefits of the traditional approach to civil service bureaucracies and the need to meet contemporary expectations and realities for the future of public administration.

Modest efforts at reform will not ensure that the civil service is prepared to meet the challenges it currently faces or that it is resilient and flexible enough to meet the challenges it will confront in the future. Past efforts to reform the civil service have failed, in part, because of a lack of popular public and political discourse about the importance of the civil service and the pressing need for reform. But past reform efforts also failed because they lacked meaningful consequences for failing to modernize. The end result is a civil service that is showing troubling signs of neglect.

The chosen reforms will determine specific next steps, but must have clear objectives that civil servants, the public and elected officials can understand. They must also ensure that the civil service has the capacity and processes in place to actually deliver change.¹³⁰ Strong leadership from the senior civil service will be needed to overcome resistance to change.

Other elements essential to successful reform include measuring progress on implementation, evaluating the impact of changes and transparently reporting on results. Reporting on results is particularly important as it gives internal and external stakeholders an opportunity to provide input, and demonstrates the government and civil service's commitment to following through on implementation commitments.

Despite their best intentions, many governments continue to design and deliver public policies and services based on the internal needs and processes of government rather than the needs of the people they serve. As a result, the civil service is left to consider how to fulfill its core mission, respond to political and environmental changes and meet citizens' expectations that government be more transparent, accessible and responsive.

While Canada consistently ranks among leading industrialized nations in terms of the quality of its public administration, a more comprehensive reform agenda that responds to the disruptive societal change of the past two decades is needed. Without it, Canada's ability to successfully respond to the challenges we all face will further be compromised.

130 Drummond, D. (2012). *Public Services for Ontarians: A Path to Sustainability and Excellence*. Commission on the Reform of Ontario's Public Services. Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario.

Recent Signals of Reform

Canada's new federal government – elected in October 2015 – has made a number of election and post-election commitments aimed at revitalizing the civil service and changing how government works. Some of the proposed measures align with the themes and recommendations made in this report. The commitments range from high level, principled promises to clearly delineated, practical steps, including:



If met, some of these commitments could achieve meaningful progress. It remains to be seen, however, whether the government can sustain sufficient drive, engagement and energy to enact the broad-reaching and systemic reforms required for true transformation.

As this report demonstrates, other countries are evolving. The civil service should be a responsive institution that fulfills its role in more transparent and accountable ways while strengthening evidence-informed analysis, collaboration and innovation to better serve the public interest. Achieving this goal will require both an engaged citizenry and a political commitment that extends beyond just ensuring that the civil service is appropriately resourced; there must also be a renewed commitment not to interfere in the civil service's ability to fulfill its role as a nonpartisan institution.

Summary of Recommendations

INNOVATION

A stronger culture of innovation will allow for greater experimentation with new approaches to policy development and service delivery, while liberating the civil service from processes that don't work. We recommend that the government:

- » dedicate a fixed percentage of departmental budgets to innovation, including creating innovation incentives for individual middle managers and employees;
- » create mechanisms and incentives to allow for more fluid exchanges and movement at all career stages between the civil service and other sectors;
- » adopt a new system of independent appointments for deputy ministers that will create more independence for civil service leaders and open the door to merit-based external appointments; and,
- » strengthen the capacity to evaluate the impact of experimentation and innovation.

TRANSPARENCY

Transparency should be the civil service's default mode. To achieve this, the civil service should:

- » mirror jurisdictions like New Zealand and municipal governments in Ontario in proactively disclosing civil service advice and analysis that supports government decision-making;
- » return to the tradition of publishing "green" and "white papers" on pressing policy issues; and,
- » initiate a consultation process to establish new guidelines to clearly define when, where, and how various kinds of government information should and should not be made public.

ACCOUNTABILITY

An enriched principle of accountability must be meaningfully cultivated at all levels of the civil service. To this end, the civil service should:

- » work with unions to develop a new and substantive focus on accountability that improves performance and establishes a simplified system of credible incentives and sanctions, including making it easier to dismiss poor performers; and,
- » support managers by providing the training and tools needed to deliver meaningful ongoing feedback, in addition to periodic formal performance management processes.

COLLABORATION

A frictionless approach to collaboration that better leverages the expertise, experience and skills of potential partners is needed. To meet this standard, the civil service should:

- » redouble efforts to reduce internal and external procedural burdens, especially those that inhibit the effective use of partnerships and collaboration (such as funding, reporting and other accountability requirements);

- » create a more collaborative culture by expanding on efforts, such as GCpedia and GConnex, that empower civil servants and provide the tools needed to engage more publicly with a broader range of individuals and organizations; and,
- » use more collaborative “results teams” or “results secretariats” that focus accountabilities on the achievement of outcomes, and bring together actors at the highest levels from across departments, governments and sectors.

EVIDENCE-INFORMED ANALYSIS

A more serious approach to policy analysis is needed. The civil service should look to more robust evidence to assess the effectiveness of policies, programs and services, and should specifically:

- » invest heavily in ongoing analytical skills training and development to bolster medium- to long-term policy and evaluation capacity;
- » centralize evaluation capacity – in the absence of a truly independent external evaluation body – and separate it from policy and program delivery, to enhance the credibility of evaluation findings; and,
- » invest in What Works centres – whether internal or external – dedicated to synthesizing and disseminating leading research on the effectiveness and efficiency of different approaches in strategic policy areas.

PUBLIC AND POLITICAL COMMITMENT

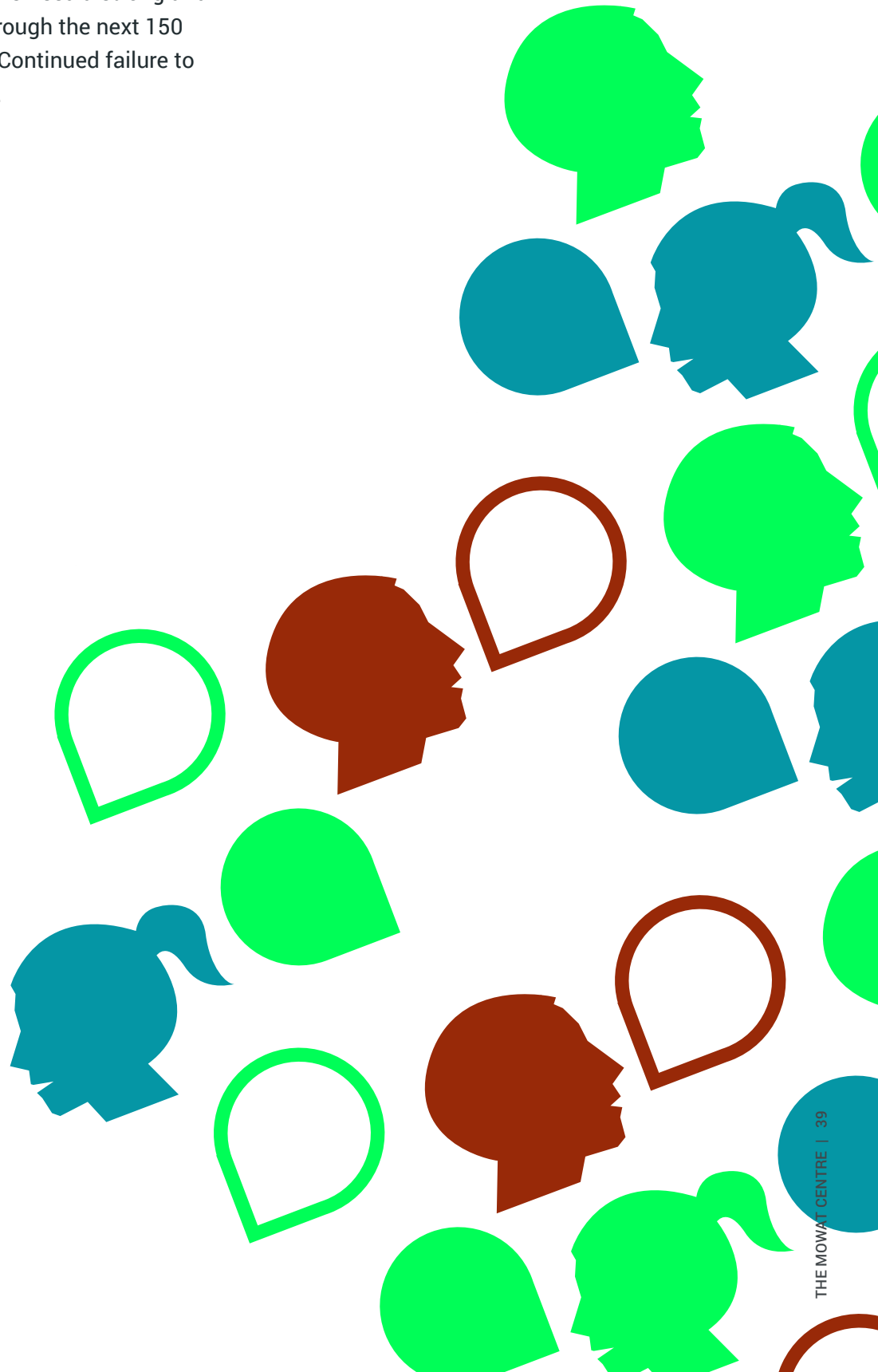
A clear public and political commitment is required to accomplish much of this reform. In order to foster this commitment:

- » Parliament should establish a committee on public administration dedicated to scrutiny and debate on matters related to the civil service and civil service reform with the goal of strengthening public discourse on the civil service; and,
- » the civil service should establish a clear and accessible charter of civil service as a basis for a shared understanding of the role and importance of a high-performing civil service, and should update the Public Service Employment Act (2005) to enshrine the charter in law.

As discussed at the outset of this report, these reforms are not ends unto themselves. The merits of any proposed reforms can – and should – be debated in terms of whether or not they help to enhance the civil service’s ability or capacity to deliver on one or more of its core responsibilities, are likely to diminish trust between the civil service and the government and the public, have clear objectives against which progress can be measured, and are politically feasible.

A high-performing civil service is vital to the well-being and prosperity of Canadians. Its failure to respond effectively to the disruptive change that is transforming other sectors of society is, in many ways, an existential threat; if it is unable to meet the expectations of those it serves, both its reputation and the public’s trust will be further eroded.

No one can force the civil service to reform against its will, but unless the civil service is willing and able to develop and deliver a comprehensive reform agenda it will continue to decline in relevance. Canadians need a strong and vital civil service to see us through the next 150 years of growth and change. Continued failure to reform is no longer an option.





Creating a
High-Performing
Canadian Civil Service
Against a Backdrop
of Disruptive Change

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