

Strategies for Creating a Climate to Support Innovation in the Federal Government

Ruth Hubbard

(President, Public Service Commission of Canada)

Presented in the Innovation Salon October 17, 1996

Innovation Salon introduction and thank you

thank you for the invitation

- Eleanor Glor
- Dr. Min Bashadur
 - * founder of the Centre for Applied Creativity
 - * professor at the McMaster School of Business Administration
- Dr. Bashadur's associates
 - * Diane Houle-Rutherford, who, I understand used to work at the PSC
 - * Danny Lyonnaise
- a mixed group of private sector, public sector - including provincial governments - from the fields of health and hospitals, Treasury Board, Canadian Human Rights Commission, etc.

Context & Plan

When I first saw the documentation you sent me, I was impressed by the range and scope of the topics you have touched upon:

- from governance issues to virtual teams
- from Nunavut to alternate dispute resolution
- I wondered what my contribution could be to your discussions?
- I decided today that I am going to touch upon an issue you saw in March 1995
- this issue is fundamental enough that we can usefully revisit it
- I am referring to the links between values, leadership and Innovation
- I want to talk about values, leadership and innovation under four headings
- what should we bear in mind?
- why innovation?
- In my mind, innovation, creativity, risk-taking and experimentation all fall into the same balliwick
- how do we nourish and sustain it?
- what can we do as individuals?

What should we bear in mind? /1

For our discussion tonight I think we need to say a few basic things about innovations:

- first, they should not be done for their own sake, we should not engage resources simply because we had a neat idea or because it is fashionable (progress is not necessarily improvement) i.e. flavour of the month
- also, in the abstract, innovations are value neutral (they can be good, bad or indifferent). And even a value that makes sense in one context may not be appropriate in another
- Canada Post was recently told to exit the junk mail business, not because that business was bad per se, but it was deemed inappropriate for their current context.
- some kinds of responsibilities don't lend themselves to innovation
- the interpretation of the law is an obvious example
- we may also mention fairness vis a vis competitors
- some kinds of responsibilities require a more complex definition of innovation
- what is innovation in a regulatory environment? what is service in a regulatory environment?

What should we bear in mind? /2

In the public service, public service values are needed to give meaning to innovations, to serve as guidance in judging their relevance and to help in their conception, elaboration and implementation

- some things are always wrong (personal gain, abusing power, breaking the law)

Pourquoi l'innovation est-elle importante?

D'abord l'environnement. Nous connaissons les forces qui agissent dans l'environnement de toutes les sociétés du monde

- la mondialisation
- reliée aux effets de la technologie et autres révolutions
- la fragmentation nationale et sociale
- les restrictions fiscales du secteur publique
- les changements démographiques
- les changements de valeurs
- These forces push or shift the boundaries of expectations and of the possible therefore making innovations either necessary or unavoidable. These forces also make our innovations transient in nature.
- An innovation that makes sense today may be useless or even harmful tomorrow

The Unknowable Future /1

Environmental forces contribute to making the future unknowable

- i.e. it is impossible to set a course of action and stick to it because of factors or combination of factors beyond our control or anybody else's for that matter
 - * realistically we have to hang on to some basic principles and make things up as we go
 - + planning by overarching vision doesn't work
 - + planning by predicting the future doesn't work

The Unknowable Future /2

We cannot only manage through a business plan, work plans, etc.

- Rather, organizations need to manage strategic issues in a dynamic way, (i.e. always unresolved, never finalized) (from Ralph D. Stacey : Managing the Unknowable) by:
 - * discovering: detecting and selecting the issues as events change (environmental scanning)
 - * choosing: clarifying their preferences and objectives while gaining attention and building issue agendas
 - * acting:
 - + gaining legitimacy and backing
 - + taking experimental action (i.e. innovating in order to respond adequately to the environment as it is and not as it was planned to be)

The Unknowable Future /3

Stacey believes that

- chaos can inspire creativity
 - * Quote from Stacey: "In chaos, creativity is a potentially ongoing process that is internally generated in a spontaneous manner."
 - * Creativity is neither proaction nor reaction
 - * Creativity is continuing interaction with the environment
- contradiction and conflict play key roles in developing strategy

e.g. A former President of Honda (Mr. Kawashima) said that he stepped down as president when employees began agreeing with him 70% of the time

- I'm not sure I agree with him, but.....
- Being a middle-manager is like trying to push jelly uphill with a pointed stick on a hot day!

How do we nourish and sustain innovation as organizations

Pour faire face à un avenir inconnu, les organisations ont besoin

- de se façonner des comportements qui font montre d'innovation et qui appuient l'innovation
 - * l'utilisation de scénarios, par exemple (outils qui permettent d'accroître la pensée stratégique)
- de mettre en place des systèmes concrets
 - * qui permettent d'apprendre d'une innovation
 - * qui permettent de mettre en pratique les apprentissages dans des domaines tels que l'élaboration de politiques et de programmes
 - * qui permettent le partage des apprentissages tant avec les gens de l'intérieur de l'organisation qu'avec les détenteurs d'enjeux
- In other words, what is needed are innovations designed for some purpose and then monitored for expected and unexpected results and we need to have the learning fed back.

How do we nourish and sustain innovation as organizations

Policies and processes are also needed to enhance innovations such as:

- rewards and recognition
- Some companies pay special attention to selection and promotion
e.g. 3M has a dual-ladder promotion program. One ladder is for management while the other honours professional success. It eliminates the need for professionals to go into management in order to get a promotion.
- and even use compensation to support learning
- Money available for innovation (Innovation Fund)

How do we nourish and sustain innovation / Learning organizations and Individuals

Openness to learning both on the corporate and personal levels is also key to successful and meaningful innovations

- in his famous book *The Fifth Discipline*, Peter M. Senge coins the term learningful.
- this is perhaps how we should look not only at our corporate activities, projects and innovations, but also at our conversations, readings and meetings. They all have to become learningful events in our corporate and personal lives.
- there is a need to extract meaning out of activities, meaning that can then be fed back into our activities

There should be room for well executed failures both on the individual and organizational levels

- if not making mistakes, not learning

How do we nourish and sustain innovation / What we can do as individuals

Que pouvons-nous faire en tant qu'individu?

nous pouvons comprendre que tout cela est un peu effrayant et que personne n'a la bonne réponse

nous pouvons essayer de trouver des moyens d'améliorer notre propre capacité d'innovation

- en développant un leadership centré sur les principes
- en évaluant les risques de façon réaliste

Let me finish by giving you examples of innovation in the PSC

Innovation in the PSC / Consultative Review of Staffing

the Consultative Review of Staffing: a nation-wide consultation was undertaken in order to review the staffing process

- it first met with scepticism from most of the stakeholders (a leopard can't change his spots)
- but we were able to get important information and buy-in through the use of non directive tools such as
 - * a two-day conference

- * focus groups
- * the Implications Wheels (a tool to evaluate the consequences of specific action or inaction or proposed policy changes)
- We were not sure what we would get, but we decided we would worry about that later. We needed to see what would be produced. (i.e.: let go.....)
- The report, by the way, can be seen on the PSC Web page

Innovation in the PSC / HR Modelling

We are now working with computer modelling techniques in order to better forecast the future of HR in the public service

- this tool is not a crystal ball to look into the unknowable future, but it is useful to get a better understanding of trends.
- it allows us to go beyond accepted ideas and look at the HR data in a dynamic way.
- it is a tool in which you can run a multitude of what-if scenarios and in which you can incorporate a great number of variables.
 - * for instance, you could (given data are available) evaluate the human resource situation in a department in ten years by taking into account the number of
 - + retirements
 - + university graduate in a particular field
 - + the internal HR dynamics of the department in question
 - + etc.

Innovation in the PSC / Scenarios

also the PSC contributed to the DM Taskforce on the Future of the Public Service by helping develop Scenarios of possible futures that can be used (given a certain methodology: wind-tunnelling) to test new policy, ideas, etc.

- With scenario thinking, it is possible for us to examine today the possible future effects of policies. By looking through particular lenses that model possible (and even likely) futures, we can evaluate (however approximately) the effects of our actions.
- The three scenarios we used were
 - * Renaissance
 - * Market
 - * Evolution

Innovation in the PSC / Internet Recruitment

la CFP utilise l'internet de façon efficace afin de faire du recrutement. Cette façon de faire, nous permet

- de réduire les coûts (moins de lettres ou de télécopies à envoyer)
- d'offrir des services 24 heures par jour, 7 jours par semaine

- de rendre le recrutement plus ouvert et plus démocratique au fur et à mesure que la technologie devient accessible (l'internet est déjà disponible chez un groupe très important: les étudiants)

par l'emploi de cet outil relativement peu coûteux nous pouvons étendre notre présence virtuelle partout sans avoir à étendre notre présence physique

Conclusion

faced with an unknowable future, it is imperative for organizations and individuals to stay principled-centered, to stay open to learning and to develop systems that foster and nourish innovations.

- It is also equally important to use and develop tools that are not solutions in themselves but rather navigational aids that will enable us to find a course that will make sense, first for our organizations and then, ultimately, for our lives.
- And remember what Arthur Ashe said:
 - * start where you are
 - * use what you have
 - * do what you can do
- Questions