

Ontario Delivers Innovation

Mary Anne Covelli and Maria Cece,

Ontario Public Service Restructuring Secretariat,

Cabinet Office,

Ontario,

Canada

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Since the mid-1990s, the Ontario Public Service (OPS) has been moving from an organization with an “if only” attitude to one with a “what if” capacity. A cultural shift is happening within the OPS that affects the basic fundamentals of how it works and serves the public. The objective of this paper is to trace the evolution of a culture of innovation within the OPS that began in the early 1990's in a few places but took off in a planned way in the mid-1990s and was rooted in a customer-centred approach to public service.

OPS Capacity for Innovation		
<i>If only...</i>	<i>to</i>	<i>What if!</i>
If only the rules allowed...		What if I took a risk?
If only we didn't work in silos...		What if I partnered with other ministries, other governments, the private sector or the community?
If only I had more staff...		What if we work in teams?
If only I had a bigger budget...		What if I re-engineered the work process?

This transformational journey was expedited with a new government elected to deliver on an ambitious policy and fiscal agenda for the Province. What began as the need to find efficiencies in government operations led to a reinvention of the public service. Like other nations around the world, Canada was in the throws of a profound socio-economic transformation. Ontario, the industrial heartland of the country, was arguably the region most deeply affected. The transition to the information or knowledge era was having a major impact on the public, as well as the private sector. In 1995, in the wake of a bitter recession, the Ontario government had double-digit deficits. The incoming government had an ambitious agenda to balance the budget, cut taxes and red tape, build the economy, and improve public services.

Then Secretary of the Cabinet, Rita Burak, saw that the Ontario Public Service had to change. A major rethinking of the role of government was required, and it had to happen quickly. At the same time as she directed the public service to implement the fiscal and policy agenda of the government, she championed a new vision for the OPS for the 21st century - focused on its core businesses, providing quality services to the public through a smaller, more integrated and accountable organization.¹

In many ways this new vision was the catalyst for the change and innovation that followed. This change brought with it a number of significant re-orientations in programs and services but also

great improvements in service quality, the innovative use of technology, creative partnerships, integrated solutions, and embedded a philosophy of continuous learning within the organization.² Moreover, this vision sowed the seeds for a cultural shift within the OPS in how it works and delivers services - a culture that is receptive to innovation by working in integrated ways across ministries and between clusters³ while looking outside of government for partners and to the needs of citizens in developing public policy and delivering services. As the OPS has strived to become a more integrated, cohesive organization, the traditional lines between its structures and processes, policy, planning, and service delivery arms have naturally become blurred reflecting the agility and responsiveness of its current workforce.

This vision was communicated to the public service through the first of what became annual communications to staff from the Secretary of the Cabinet on the status and evolution of public services. The document called "*Building the Ontario Public Service for the Future: A Framework for Action*" became a way of building a two-way communications network with staff that built on key components of the vision and celebrated accomplishments. Five *Framework for Action* reports, and 21 Topical Supplements (a monthly employee publication) focusing on change have been published since 1997, with each one contributing in its own way to cultural change and innovation within the organization.

What makes the transformation agenda of the 1990s so unique was the pace and scope of this change. This kind of "reinventing" of government really hadn't happened in Ontario before. Thirty years ago, there was an historic review and restructuring of the public sector (based on the work of the Committee on Government Productivity), but even it pales in comparison to the scale and depth of change from 1995 to 2001.⁴ Thomas Courchene has characterized this period of change as:

*...the most significant transformation that Ontario has ever experienced. Indeed, one would have to scan the industrialized world to find anything similar. Perhaps the New Zealand experience comes closest in terms of magnitude, time frame and ideology. In line with the economic-nation state conception of the new Ontario, Queen's Park has been transformed from the efficient but essentially passive, internal manager of things Ontarian under [Premiers John] Robarts and [William] Davis to a pro-active, competitive-driven, co-ordinator and innovator designed to privilege the province and its citizens in the new global order.*⁵

The current Secretary of the Cabinet, Andromache Karakatsanis, acknowledged just how far and how fast the OPS has moved over the past 5 years in her 2001 *Framework for Action: Good People Doing Great Jobs*: "...the OPS has reinvented itself to become a customer-centred, quality-focused public service against which many other public sector organizations are measuring themselves."⁶ More importantly, she has raised the bar for the OPS by articulating a new vision and by framing her expectations of an innovation culture: "we must think big and care deeply. We must act boldly. We must adopt new ideas and discover new ways of working. While embracing change and innovation, we must remain accountable and committed to the roots of public service - our public service values".⁷

Transforming Public Service For the 21st Century, a publication of the OPS Restructuring Secretariat of Cabinet Office, provides an historical examination of Ontario's journey in public service reform; and, is in fact, being used by a number of universities across Canada as a textbook on modern government.⁸ It has also provided the basis for much of the information in this paper.

The specific focus of this paper though is on the cultural shift within the OPS since 1995. A cultural shift implies a change in attitude and behavior. The degree and scope of change facing the OPS during the 90s required strong leadership, a clear vision, well planned communications, and organizational commitment to creating a customer-centred organization focused on quality service and fostering an innovative culture. By focusing on the building blocks of change presented to members of the OPS in the annual *Framework for Action* reports – changing the way we work and the work we do, launching a quality service strategy, developing a learning organization, working together, and good people doing great jobs – this paper will trace Ontario's transformational journey of public service reform and the evolution of a culture of innovation. In addition, it will briefly set the agenda for cultural change within the OPS against the backdrop of some current thinking on innovation in governments.

Is Innovation Possible Within the Public Sector?

“The citizenry expects public-service reform and innovation: it wants a wide range of services that are delivered promptly, efficiently, effectively and with integrity”⁹

Private or public sector, everyone is talking about innovation. It is the topic of conferences, seminars, and round tables. Innovation has typically been associated with the private sector as a necessary condition for economic competitiveness and sustainability. In a recent conference on innovation in Singapore, PricewaterhouseCoopers noted that innovation is “key to organizational growth and shareholder value creation”.¹⁰ Similarly, in its *3rd Annual Innovation Report*, the Conference Board of Canada states that innovation is “one of the most important means to improve competitiveness, generate wealth, create jobs, and sustain our high quality of life”. As such, creating a fertile environment for innovation is the responsibility of government, business, investors, the financial community, academics, and individual Canadians.¹¹

Interestingly enough, when innovation is considered within the public sector context, it is often discussed with an “if only” attitude since many readily acknowledge obstacles to innovation within public service administrations. *If only an allocation was approved for this program/project... If only central agencies would let me do...* Countless articles have suggested why innovation in the public sector is short lived or never fully realized.¹² Traditional stereotypes of bureaucracies (as portrayed on television or in the media) would have many believe that innovation in the public service is an oxymoron¹³. As Kenneth Kernaghan notes in *Rediscovering Public Service* “the public has an unduly negative perception of the public service” that may not necessarily reflect their own experience.¹⁴ Yet Kernaghan's research suggests that “...improvement in the overall performance of the public service requires an increased emphasis on innovation” [and that] the creation of a

‘culture of innovation’ is likely to enhance the reality and the perception of high-quality public service”.¹⁵ Changing this perception of the public service both within government and in the general public can be accomplished, in part, by telling the stories of successful public service innovation.

Fostering and maintaining an innovation culture is a challenge. There appears to be organizational inertia around getting and keeping innovation. Meeting the Challenge of Innovation in Government, the conference for which this paper has been written, has framed the conference agenda around the fact that government’s must build their “capacity for innovative change” in order to remain relevant and effective.

So timely is innovation for both the private and public sectors that, after only 6 months in her role as Secretary of the Cabinet, Karakatsanis, inspired by Gary Hamel’s *Leading the Revolution*, led with the theme of innovation in her first address to OPS senior managers. In her 2001 Executive Dialogue, aptly entitled “Revolutionaries, Risk Takers and Radicals: Passion in Public Service”, the Secretary of the Cabinet acknowledged that the only way the OPS can continue to be a world leader in public sector reform is by “stimulating innovation at every level of the organization”, by improving “our institutional capacity to continually come up with new ideas”, and by “letting our passion for public service turn us into *revolutionaries, radicals and risk takers*.”¹⁶

In *The Challenge of Innovating in Government*, Sanford Borins addresses what he calls a “traditional bias against innovation in the public sector” by looking at some common obstacles to innovation: “the lack of financial incentives; the consequences of unsuccessful innovation; and the stringent controls of central agencies”.¹⁷

In her address, Karakatsanis openly acknowledges similar obstacles to innovation within the OPS; however, she counters by giving examples of initiatives that ‘led to apparent failure, but ultimate success’ and of individuals who were rewarded for intelligent, informed risk taking. She encourages her audience to help build a “cultural encouragement of new ideas and radical debate”. So while the OPS is still overcoming obstacles to innovation, it has come some distance over the past several years in sowing the seeds for a culture that is receptive to change and innovation - to developing a “what if” capacity.

One need only look to the number and scope of nominations from Ontario to The Institute of Public Administration of Canada (IPAC) for the Award for Innovative Management to suggest that there has been both a behavioral and an attitudinal shift within the OPS. Eighteen of the 100 entries to the 2001 competition focusing on “Developing the Public Service of Tomorrow” were from Ontario - the most submissions ever from Ontario. What is most significant is that nominees (representing a majority of ministries (13/23)) perceive the work they do and the way they work to be sufficiently different to qualify them for an award in innovative management.

This alone suggests a cultural shift toward an innovative culture – a change in attitude, and behavior, the development of a “what if” capacity. Not surprisingly, each of the projects and initiatives submitted has its roots within one, or more, of the four previous *Framework for Action*

themes: changing the way we work and the work we do; the Quality Service Strategy; becoming a learning organization; and working together.

An example of a submission for the 2001 IPAC Award for Innovation:

Ministry of Labour - Protecting the Public Interest -Strengthening the Fundamentals - Inspections, Investigations and Enforcement”: Thirteen ministries have created an “innovative network” to improve the protection of health, safety and the quality of life of Ontarians by working across traditional organizational boundaries to achieve more efficient program delivery through a coordinated approach to inspections, investigations and enforcement across government . The approach taken has increased the inspection, investigation and enforcement capacity of the OPS across the province through an integrated learning strategy (that relies on e-learning partnerships with universities), shared best practices, improved risk-based planning, an articulation of shared values and the improved use of information technology and shared data. The result has been more efficient and strategic delivery of services, better protection of the public interest and improved client satisfaction.

The Case for Change In Ontario: Building A Customer-Centred Government¹⁸

“The pace of change is faster than ever: governments cannot rely on one fixed set of solutions, but need to listen to ever-changing demands and innovate to find solutions”¹⁹

The impetus for the cultural shift within the OPS can be traced to the socio-economic and political drivers of the early 1990s. During the last 10 to 15 years of the twentieth century, many governments around the world have been swept into a whirlwind of transformational change. Driven by economic and fiscal pressures, the global economy, the political direction of the times, public demand for better, more accessible services, and the impact of new technologies, governments embarked on major change agendas.

Ontario’s transformation toward building a customer-centred government was specifically driven by:

- A commitment by the government of the day to make government work better, “to reinvent the way it works, to make it work for people”;
- The need to manage its expenditures and tackle its deficit;
- A growing understanding that the traditional role for government had to change to meet the changing demands of its citizens and the complex policy issues that it faced;
- The opportunities of new and emerging technologies;
- An aging workforce, the changing skills competencies of a knowledge economy, and the loss of institutional memory through the attrition of staff.

There have been previous reform efforts in Ontario and elsewhere. In the past, governments have been reorganized, management practices have been revamped, and programs have been reviewed. This new era of transformation goes beyond that level of change to a rethinking of basic principles. The questions being asked were fundamental: *What are the key roles and responsibilities of government? What are its core businesses? What should public servants deliver? What are the best ways to provide different kinds of services? What kind of accountability framework is necessary?*

The OPS moved aggressively on its change agenda. It was clear with the election of a new administration in 1995, that if the OPS were to be able to deliver on its policy agenda and meet its fiscal targets to balance the budget by the turn of the century, the public service would have to undergo a fundamental transformation. It had to re-examine programs and service delivery in terms of providing improved services with a smaller and more efficient organization. The OPS began a planned multi-year effort to transform itself for the new millennium. The fact of change was not new, but the pace was accelerated and the scope was magnified.

The first priority was addressing the fiscal agenda. A new Business Planning process was designed and put into practice. These plans were annual reports with multi-year commitments on how ministries would achieve their fiscal targets and implement new policy directions and measure performance. In addition, performance contracts of the executive cadre were tied to corporate, ministry and personal performance.

In the first set of Business Plans, ministries were encouraged to find out more about the expectations and satisfaction levels of their customers. In subsequent years, they developed targets and standards for implementing those services and closing gaps between customer expectations and service delivery.

A sampling of alternative service delivery initiatives since 1995 includes:

- The Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and the University of Guelph entered into an “enhanced partnership” agreement whereby ministry-funded education, research and laboratory programs are delivered by the university. The partnership has helped to make the university Canada’s premier centre for agri-food research, teaching and technology transfer.
- The Technical Standards and Safety Authority delivers public safety services and administers regulations on behalf of the government under an agreement with the Ministry of Consumer and Business Services. The result is enhanced consumer protection and public safety through the not-for-profit, self-funded corporations called “administrative authorities”.
- Ontario’s Drive Clean Program is a public-private partnership involving three ministries, seven private sector contractors, five equipment manufacturers, and almost 2,000 private sector automotive repair providers to enforce emission standards.
- The Ministry of the Solicitor General, with an alliance of private sector partners, led by Bell Mobility Radio Inc. implemented a state-of-the-art mobile communications network for emergency services. The outcome is a modern, fast and efficient mobile communications system.

As part of the Business Planning process, ministries were requested to examine their mandate and role, and focus on their core businesses. The result of focusing on core businesses meant that ministries had to critically examine what the public service should be delivering and what was more appropriate for the private sector or other partners to deliver. Every ministry had to take a hard look at its program delivery, and recommend options for alternative ways to deliver services that could be better provided by someone else. A range of alternative service delivery options were implemented across the OPS, including privatization, the creation of new non-profit corporations, and partnerships with public and private sector agencies, institutions and businesses, and with other levels of government.

For those services that continued to be delivered by the OPS, there was a push for improved quality of services, better access for the public, and harnessing of the power of new technologies.

In 1996, a strategic framework for public service transformation analyzed what needed to be done in order to position the OPS to deliver on the government's agenda. The result was a high level road map of projects and tasks that were required to move the OPS forward. Eighty-five corporate projects were recommended to fast-track the necessary transformation. Some of these projects included: Internal Administration Project, Agency Review, Regional Delivery Restructuring, Corporate Information Technology Strategy, Corporate Human Resources Strategic Plan, and a Quality Service Strategy.

While quick wins through the work of these corporate projects were significant in building momentum for the change agenda, the strategic leadership structure that emerged was critical to fostering long-term cultural change within the organization.

Specifically, the establishment of the Ontario Public Service Restructuring Secretariat in January 1997 as a special project within Cabinet Office has proven to be a cornerstone of change by providing the leadership and momentum for the restructuring agenda. The mandate of the Restructuring Secretariat was to integrate and coordinate all the restructuring projects and initiatives and provide an oversight role. The adoption of a Quality Service Strategy was seen as a key transformation initiative and was integrated into the Restructuring Secretariat's mandate: to review and improve the organizational structures from a customer-centred point of view and build on the existing best practices within the OPS. In addition, the Restructuring Secretariat was charged with the 'design and implementation of the communications strategy across the OPS on restructuring and spearheading the initiatives for a service and customer oriented culture within the OPS.'

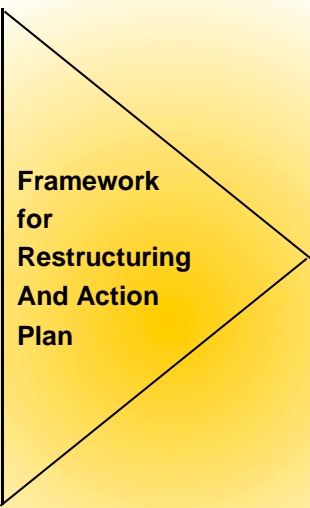
Executive sponsorship for the restructuring agenda was held by three committees: a Blue Ribbon Committee, chaired by the Premier; a Deputy Ministers' Steering Committee to direct and advise the work of the Restructuring Secretariat; and, an Advisory Committee of senior and middle level OPS management.

Building the Ontario Public Service for the Future: A Framework for Action

“The challenge to government is to move away from opportunistic reform toward more strategic reform: developing a clear vision, building a constituency, devising tactics to achieve results, and communicating this vision and the anticipated results.”²⁰

In a June 2001 public management policy brief, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development asks, “How can the public sector develop a culture responsive to change?”²¹ In part, as noted in the quotation above, the answer is to focus on strategic reform, which is what guided the OPS restructuring agenda. As early as 1996 there were clear objectives for restructuring.

The OPS leadership began to turn these objectives into a vision and a set of values for the Ontario Public Service of the future. The document called *Building the Ontario Public Service for the Future: A Framework for Action*, published in 1997, distilled the new directions of the OPS down to five short goals. It envisioned an OPS that is focused on core business; ensures quality service to the public; is smaller and more flexible; is integrated and cohesive; and is accountable.

OPS 1997		OPS 2001
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 3 central agencies, 16 line ministries, over 200 agencies, boards & commissions ➤ transaction driven, massive direct service delivery ➤ organized "inside-out" - ministries operating as separate entities ➤ red tape, regulations, barriers ➤ deficit financing 	 <p style="margin: 0;">Framework for Restructuring And Action Plan</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ smaller government with a common vision ➤ focused on core lines of business: policy development, service management, limited direct service delivery ➤ organized from "outside-in" - integrated "Government of Ontario" service points ➤ fewer barriers for business, individuals ➤ balanced budget, reduced debt

This *Framework for Action* not only set out a vision for the OPS to 2001, it made clear how the OPS would get there. The document was a blueprint for action, rooted in four “enablers” - service delivery, technology, people, and processes – that would help the OPS realize these goals:

- A business planning process in every ministry that links into an overall OPS vision;
- A range of alternative service delivery options that has a focus on the customer, rather than on the provider of service;
- Use of the latest technologies to link common service networks and improve access to government;
- Major corporate initiatives to re-engineer administrative processes across government; and,
- Performance measures that track how we are doing at the level of the individual, the program, the ministry and the whole organization.

The stated purpose of the *Framework for Action* was to highlight “where we are going, how we are getting there, what we have achieved, and what we have yet to do.” Its unstated objective, however, was to crystallize in the readers mind that they were part of a cultural transformation that had begun two years earlier and would continue until the OPS had transformed itself. The *Framework for Action* report recorded for the OPS the organizational inroads made in the first two years through changes to the budgetary process and administrative reforms. Moreover, it challenged the senior management cadre to acquire new skills and competencies and encouraged them to behave and work in new and different ways; it showed how performance measures and rewards would continue to be levers to change, it began to redraw the organizational map; and it celebrated successful innovators.

The Framework’s closing message to members of the OPS left no doubt that organizational change would be ongoing “... we will continue on our road to becoming a learning organization with people who are willing and able to adapt to change, people who are committed to learning and continuous improvement, with the desire to be challenged and the expectation that they will be accountable for results”. In many ways this report laid the building blocks to cultural change for the next four years.

Some examples of the accomplishments highlighted in the first *Framework for Action* include:

- A new OPS-wide information and information technology strategy was developed to take the OPS from a manual paper-driven organization into the era of electronic government and advance the government’s business vision and enable and support a flexible, responsive and innovative public service;
- Regional restructuring to improve customer access to government information and specialist services through a cohesive delivery system of Government of Ontario Information Centres across the province, with front counters providing common services;
- Integrating service delivery and expanding access to routine government information, products, and services such as driver’s licences and outdoors cards using multi-channel delivery options such as kiosks, telephone and the internet;
- Streamlining information, registration, reporting and remittance activities for business by developing Ontario Business Connects to allow for quick and simple, single-window electronic access to services.

Fostering an Innovative Culture

“...focusing downward, toward citizens, rather than upward toward elected officials. It forces them to reshape their behaviour by looking outside government to outcomes rather than within government for processes.”²²

A key theme that emerged as part of the new vision for the OPS is an organization that operates from the “outside-in”. This means that the public service must view and shape itself to respond to customers’ expectations. The OPS endeavored to implement its vision of “outside-in” government by opening up its business plans and performance measures to public scrutiny, by asking its customers how, where and when they want their services delivered, and by constantly learning and adapting to new challenges and new expectations.

Linda Stevens, Deputy Minister and Associate Secretary of the Cabinet, Centre for Leadership, in her speech to the 22nd Annual Roundtable of the African Association of Public Administrators and Managers, noted that one of the greatest challenges for government is meeting the public’s expectations. “These expectations are causing an enormous cultural change in government...turning all of government’s tried and true approaches on their head.”²³



In adopting an “outside-in” approach, government looks outside to assess what programs and services clients want and need then looks “in” to determine how these services could be made more accessible and convenient for the public. In the past, the OPS responded to public expectations with more programs and services. Today, public expectations of government are for more effective services at less cost to taxpayers.

Traditionally, programs that served the same customers were in different ministries that operated differently. This made dealing with government more complicated for the public. We know from surveys of public opinion that our customers want government to provide services in ways that are simpler, faster and easier to access. The OPS is moving toward one door in service delivery. Technology allows the OPS to connect programs so that customers can get services when, where and how they want.

While the OPS has made improvements to its own service delivery by harnessing technology and doing business differently, it has also looked to alternative service delivery models to meet

customer expectations for better and more efficient services in areas such as drivers' licensing, business start-up, elevator inspection, land registry and vehicle emissions testing.

In terms of policy, the rapidly growing complexity and inter-connectedness of the policy and service delivery issues facing government make it necessary for ministries to work horizontally on multi-faceted issues and concerns. As a result, a cluster-based approach that reflected the natural groupings of ministries with common customers was adopted to encourage ministries to work together and with external partners.

Changing customer expectations of government has shifted the OPS's orientation to program and policy development, service delivery, and the way it is organized. The result has been a cultural shift of behavior and attitudes in the way it works internally and in the way it delivers services to the public.

Communicating Change in the OPS

*"...successful communication involves communicating the need for reform, the process of reform and reform successes...publicising reform successes helps maintain the momentum that has been created, links actions to result and shares information between different parts of government about what works."*²⁴

While the change process began with a new vision, the OPS moved forward with initiatives to improve the delivery of specific services and began to put in place the building blocks for organizational and cultural change. In short, the transformation agenda moved along two tracks. The first was to transform services to the public so that Ontarians could obtain government information and services when, where, and how they wanted them. The second track focused on transforming public service by focusing on core business and services, quality, becoming smaller and more flexible, integrating operations and redefining and clarifying accountability.²⁵ By moving along both tracks, the OPS set as its end goal a customer-centered vision of public service.

The OPS approach to organizational change was well thought out and planned. While plans for changing structures, processes, and policies were launched and updated for staff on a continuous basis, it was recognized that cultural change would evolve over a number of years. In fact, it would need to continuously evolve in order to stay responsive to customers' expectations.

Sustaining the momentum and reaping the benefits of cultural change required senior management to communicate regularly about change to staff, recognize and reward public service excellence, and build pride in organizational accomplishments.

Through feedback from staff on the first *Framework for Action*, the Restructuring Secretariat knew that there was a mixed understanding of the change projects, their results and linkages to the broader transformation agenda. In addition, employees and bargaining agents wanted more information about how the change agenda would affect their workload and job security.

The Restructuring Secretariat took a leadership role in developing a detailed internal communications strategy that responded to this feedback by identifying appropriate communication vehicles, key messages, and tactics. The communications plan addressed the information needs of each potential audience: senior executives and decision-makers, directors, managers, employees, bargaining agents and communications and human resource directors. It developed tools for managers and leaders who were often the frontline deliverer of the transformation messages.

Each *Framework for Action* document begins with a letter from the Secretary of the Cabinet to members of the OPS. The first four Frameworks included questions to facilitate discussion at the ministry, divisional and branch levels of the organization. Special dialogues were held with the senior management cadre to ensure a consistent understanding of the change process and their role in leading the transformation agenda. The first two Frameworks also included a tear out “Your Turn” or “Talk Back” survey that asked for feedback on the usefulness of the document, gauged awareness across the OPS and determined other kinds of information that would assist staff in understanding and implementing change. In later years, this feedback was gathered through focus groups. The last chapters were dedicated to introducing the next steps for change to the organization. Most significantly, each *Framework for Action* personalized the transformation journey by telling stories of individual experiences and organizational accomplishments.

In addition to the annual *Framework for Action* documents, the Restructuring Secretariat launched a series of Topical Supplements. These issues were carefully crafted so that ministries could use the supplement as a backdrop to the related work that was underway within their organization, moving the information and the “reality of change” closer to staff. Prior to the release of the restructuring series of topical supplements, Communications and Human Resource Directors were briefed and provided with materials that could be used in their organizations as part of a readiness package.

The Restructuring Series was originally conceived as a 6 - issue supplement to Topical as a means of providing employees with a snapshot of key concepts, initiatives and “designers” of the changing OPS. Each issue focused on the four “enablers” of change people, technology, customer service and processes, with a heavy emphasis on OPS examples. This series profiled real life public service reform initiatives like, alternative service delivery, and introduced concepts of organizational change, like “outside-in” government. Topical Supplements, now in its 21st issue, has grown into quarterly updates to staff that celebrate public service excellence and builds pride in individual and organizational accomplishments.

Building a Quality Service Organization

In 1998, the next step in transforming the Ontario Public Service involved *Building the OPS for the Future: A Quality Service Organization*. The Quality Service Strategy was launched with the goal of increasing customer satisfaction with OPS services, measuring up to external benchmarks in the public and private sectors, and becoming the quality service organization against which others measure themselves. This Quality Service Strategy not only improved services to the public in ways we can see and measure, it has also become part of the culture of the OPS. This was an

important cultural shift for the OPS as the organization learned to look at the citizen as our customer first and foremost and look at improving the quality of services the OPS delivers to them.

The 1998 *Citizens First* survey was undertaken to measure “how Canadians perceive the services that their governments provide.”²⁶ It reported that people seeking government services want speedy, seamless services that are easy to access and simple to use. The 2000 *Citizens First* survey confirmed the importance of those service imperatives. The significance of this research has been that the OPS has implemented a range of service improvements that customers asked for, including single-window access for a range of routine transactions, less red tape, and expanded electronic services.

The Quality Service Strategy involves ministries setting priority improvements for organizational excellence and setting standards for service delivery across the OPS. The Quality Service Strategy also comprises the OPS Quality Service Model that sets out the long-term goals for organizational management based on internationally recognized standards. Seven cornerstones provide the benchmark for the kind of organization the OPS is working to become. The cornerstones are: customers, leadership, people, partners, planning, processes, and results.

Action plans and performance measures have been developed to address priority improvements identified following a rigorous assessment of each ministry’s performance against the seven cornerstones. They formed the basis for a ministry quality plan.

The quality improvement cycle involves ongoing tracking and reporting of progress through the business planning process and performance management. Organizational assessments will be repeated approximately every two years in order to track progress.

In 1998, OPS Common Service Standards were established for telephone, mail, walk-in service, and customer feedback/complaints resolution. An independent validation of OPS performance was conducted in 1999 and again in 2000 to provide third-party assessment of performance using standard measures across all ministries. The results of the 2000 external validation process showed that the OPS is meeting its standards in most areas and that there have been significant improvements from the first evaluation to the second on both the telephone and mail standards. Specifically, 96% of high volume phones are answered by the third ring in 2000 as compared to 91% in 1999; as well, 74% of Ministers and Deputy Ministers test mail were answered within fifteen working days, up 21% from the 1999 evaluation.

Ontario’s Quality Service Strategy has been a key vehicle for cultural transformation of the OPS. Through the Restructuring Secretariat’s leadership, the organization became engaged in a process of learning, assessing, planning, evaluation and measurement building the capacity of the organization for customer-centred service delivery. The Common Service Standards provided individuals with clear organizational expectations in dealing with the public. By involving every level of the organization in the process of quality assessment, the development of quality plans, and the responsibility for service standards, the quality service strategy has become a living management philosophy that has shaped individual and ministry perspective and approach to work.

Quality Service Examples from Framework for Action:

- The latest survey in 2000 by Erin Research Inc. found that the OPS is on track in delivering on its common service standards.²⁷ More specifically, they found that 85% of call are answered within three rings; 91% of calls are not re-directed more than once; ministry protocols universally include the option of reaching an operator; 66% of correspondence was answered within 15 business days; 93% of public offices ensure that people are served in order, and inform them of expected wait time and 84% of complaints are being acknowledged in two days.
- At the ministry level, an external survey of the Ministry of Labour revealed a 79.5% customer satisfaction score on timeliness and accessibility of service, competence and courtesy of staff, fairness and thoroughness of the process and the outcome of whether or not the customer's needs were met.

Building a Learning Organization

“Careful attention needs to be paid to the means of creating a learning culture that will promote the use of imagination and innovation.”²⁸

In 1999, transformation was focused on fostering a culture of learning across the public service. Building on the cornerstones of the quality service strategy, how well we serve the people of Ontario is dependent on the knowledge, skills, and motivation of staff who are the heart of the organization. Training and education was the avenue that would allow the OPS to drive change and provide service delivery enhancements. Organizational learning was demonstrated in a number of ways. New relationships were built, teams were forged, and technology was used in new ways to reach out to customers.

Becoming a learning organization was recognized as an ongoing journey –“ It is about making learning part of what we do in the workplace on a daily basis”. To this end, four corporate strategies that support a learning organization were communicated to the OPS through the third *Building the Ontario Public Service for the Future: A Learning Organization*. These strategies included: the Quality Service Strategy, the Human Resources Plan for Senior Managers, the Human Resource Strategy for the OPS, and renewed OPS values. Each of these initiatives encouraged individuals to take more responsibility for their own learning and development.

The Quality Service Strategy had already been the subject of the 1998 Framework for Action, however, it was worth reiterating that continuous learning and organizational improvement were the hallmarks of an organization dedicated to quality service. A quality organization engaged in continuous learning by involving its employees and by providing them with training and opportunities for other learning.

The Human Resources Plan for Senior Managers included a learning and development program targeted at the new leadership skills and corporate competencies needed by the new OPS.

Succession planning was also addressed to ensure that the most able people are identified as prepared to take on leadership roles. Lastly, a compensation package was rolled out that would help retain and attract talent. In short, the HR Plan for the senior management cadre reflected “the need for on-going change management and support for innovation from leaders.”

Key to changing behavior and instilling cultural gains into the organization was the performance management system. The Human Resource Plan for Senior Managers launched a performance management program where individual performance was linked to key business activities. For the first time, senior managers’ compensation was directly linked to outcomes from individual and corporate performance measures that were aligned with business objectives and published business plans. This system has been used to specifically reward ministries and cross-ministry teams who have piloted corporate initiatives. This system has been an effective motivation for leaders to “walk the talk” and lead in innovation.

As a complement to the senior management human resources plan, the OPS launched *Building Tomorrow's Workforce Today* as the Human Resources Strategy for the OPS. It focused action on three key areas: employee development, investment in learning and development and updating HR policies and practices. In carrying the Strategy forward, ministries were required to develop annual learning plans tied to their business and human resource plans. The learning plans had to demonstrate investment in learning. Branch learning plans reflected the ministry-wide effort and fed into it. Staff development initiatives included upgrading generic skills, developing key competencies, updating technical or professional capabilities and improving the managerial and supervisory skills of current and potential managers. Staff was encouraged to participate in their career development through their own learning plans.

New learning and development programs were created for staff and senior managers within ministries. Management Board Secretariat and the Centre for Leadership in Cabinet Office created corporate programs tied to corporate strategy and corporate competencies for staff at all levels and senior managers.

Attention was also placed on reinforcing OPS values. Values are an expression of expectations and standards and they can be a powerful influence on commitment and performance. A committee of senior managers looked at the whole area of values and wrote a statement that would resonate with the OPS. The OPS vision was anchored in a set of values: some were core public service values (open, honest, fair) the others reflected the new service values of the organization (creative, responsive, innovative, accountable).

It is inevitable that learning organizations make some mistakes or experience failure on the road to implementing successful innovations.²⁹²⁹ The accumulated learnings from the OPS experience has led to the development of formal training programs on managing service providers and risk management, as well as a new accountability directive for agencies, boards and commissions and a modern controllership framework.

Across the OPS, people have learned to work differently. They have built new relationships within and outside the organization, and have used new technologies; learned from customers, partners, and colleagues; learned from research and developmental assignments. This learning focus encourages a culture of change by exposing staff to different areas and concepts and bringing new knowledge and experience to the jobs that they perform.

Building an Integrated Organization

“We are one organization, one public service, with one customer: the people of Ontario”³⁰

In recognition of the complexity of today’s issues and the volume of information available through the use of web-based technology, governments have had to re-examine the policy and service delivery capacity of their organizations and develop partnerships and virtual organizational linkages to enhance their capacity to service their customers.

In Ontario, the rapidly growing complexity and inter-connectedness of the policy and service delivery issues facing government make it necessary for ministries to work horizontally on multi-faceted issues and concerns. Ministries and their partners must work together to meet public demand for faster, better, more lasting solutions. OPS restructuring built a customer-focused approach to meet this challenge through new processes and structures it also initiated a new cultural paradigm that redefined the way the OPS works internally.

“Working together” at all levels for better customer-focused service was the theme of the 2000 *Building the Ontario Public Service for the Future: Working Together, An Integrated Organization*. The theme of “working together” focused on how building a more integrated organization, by working in new and different ways, could help provide better services to the public.

Working collaboratively within and across the organization has led to new working relationships that, in turn, has led to more creative solutions to complex issues ultimately to serve customers better. Integration has also involved bringing together communities of people to share best practices and tacit knowledge. These are like-minded people in similar situations that come together in formal and informal settings to discuss topics like: project management, quality service, and change management. Most recently, the Restructuring Secretariat launched the Innovation and Change Network which is a forum where executive project leads meet to share information, identify opportunities for integration, discuss common challenges and transfer learning and solutions from one project to another. These people are living the new culture of the organization.

As already mentioned, new processes and structures helped to improve integration through coordinated planning, greater policy coherence, more customer-focused program design and better integrated service delivery. As the OPS becomes a more integrated, cohesive organization, the traditional separation of these areas becomes less relevant.

Integrated Structures and Processes:

- Ministries have been grouped into customer-based clusters to formalize collaborative working relationships and to create synergies and capitalize on efficiencies from working across the organization to improve service delivery, policy and planning. This cluster-based approach recognizes that ministries often work with the same stakeholders and share common visions, strategic directions, goals, customers and service delivery partners.
- The development and implementation of a Quality Service Strategy that has resulted in service standards for telephone, mail, walk-in and complaint resolution.
- Information management and technology are being integrated across the OPS and are playing a key role in enabling and driving business integration (e.g., the Shared Services Bureau is providing integrated business support services to ministries; Workforce Information Network is an integrated human resource planning tool; and Integrated Financial Information System).
- There is also an OPS-wide strategy to develop common infrastructures, standards and policies for information and information technology with a goal of becoming the world leader in delivering services online by 2003.

Integrated Policy and Planning:

- Policy development has traditionally been a ‘silo-driven’ process, with insufficient regard for its impacts on other policies and programs. The development of a “cluster” approach to inter-ministerial policy issues pulls together the expertise and knowledge that resides in each ministry in order to tackle complex and cross-cutting issues.
- An integrated planning framework aligns ministry planning for policy, legislative, capital and communications requirements **into** a common cycle with business planning and allocations for decision making.
- A strategic policy secretariat was established for the Business and Economic Development Cluster ministries. The secretariat is leading horizontal policy work.
- A government-wide initiative to improve the policy capacity of the organization to enhance its research and analytical capabilities has led to, among others, the development of core competencies for policy professionals and identified quality standards and measures for policy products.

Integrated Service Delivery:

- The integration in the delivery of many routine transactional services to individuals and business clients of government, resulting in a new Consumer and Business Services Ministry (MCBS) with a mandate to develop more convenient service access channels for customers (phone, internet, mail, over the counter, public access terminals).
- The OPS has been recognized internationally for its improvements in service delivery through single-window, technology-based initiatives such as Ontario Business Connects (OBC) which offers one-step business registration services through internet and Teranet, Ontario’s single window for land registration and transfer on-line, MCBS is building on these successes.

In her message to members of the OPS with the launch of the fourth *Framework for Action*, the Secretary of the Cabinet made clear that integration builds on their past experience as a learning organization and their dedication to quality service. “Integration... involves learning to work together within new structures, processes, and relationships... responding to what we have learned from our customers about services – that they want serviced delivered how, when and where they want them.”

Good People Doing Great Jobs

“Innovation at the end of the day, is a pretty straightforward proposition: It’s a people-driven business.”³¹

In answering the question, “Who Innovates?”, Sanford Borins challenges popular belief that innovation necessarily comes from the top. After surveying over 300 winners of public sector award programs for government innovation, Borins concludes that innovation is more likely to originate with middle managers and front line staff.³² Similarly, the stories of successful public service reform and innovative initiatives that guided the development of the most recent *Framework for Action, Good People Doing Great Jobs*, did not originate from the top, but from all levels of the organization.

The purpose of the 2001 *Framework for Action* was two-fold: to celebrate how far we had come in our transformational journey, and to set a new vision for the 21st century. *Good People Doing Great Jobs* does this by focusing on those individuals and teams of employees who have made a difference in realizing a customer-centred OPS and in delivering tangible results to communities and citizens across Ontario. Under the theme of celebrating public service excellence, this *Framework For Action* recognized people who had demonstrated a commitment to quality service, learning, integration and working in new and different ways - as necessary for public service renewal and for creating a culture open to change and innovation. The following examples celebrate innovative customer-focused initiatives that use technology as an enabler to working in new and different ways and delivering faster, simpler, easier to find and easier to use services.

- The Road User Safety Branch of the Ministry of Transportation was determined to improve Ontario’s road and highway safety record in cooperation with their many road safety partners. To build the program and policy development base, the Secretariat to the Advisory Group on Safe Driving hosted a web-based global conference on aggressive driving in 2000. More than 10,000 people in 59 countries took part. A definition of aggressive driving was developed and they are using the knowledge and experience gained to pursue a combination of initiatives in law enforcement, social marketing, public education and highway engineering to improve safety.
- Service Ontario kiosks allow motorists to get their new motor vehicle sticker 24 hours a day, seven days a week in shopping malls and other convenient locations. Customers can also do other things at these terminals, like getting information on driver vehicle history and used vehicle liens, changing addresses for several government programs, and renewing an outdoors card.
- Ontario Business Connects allows an entrepreneur to register a new, non-incorporated business electronically in a matter of minutes. Up to nine different government programs are integrated into a single application for business start-up, including several provincial and federal applications.

- Lawyers who must complete registration of land titles can now, in many cases, complete the transaction from their computer instead of making the trip to the Land Registry Office. E-registration is also now available in eight Land Registry Offices in the province.

In addition to celebrating OPS accomplishments, *Building the Ontario Public Service for the Future: Good People Doing Great Jobs* launched a new vision for the OPS of the 21st century. This vision is rooted in customer-centred values and speaks openly to the importance of a dynamic culture and the strength of its workforce. An Ontario Public Service for the 21st century focuses on serving the people of Ontario by:

- clearly understanding our core businesses and delivering them with excellence;
- sharing a dynamic culture that attracts and keeps the best and brightest employees;
- working closely together across organizational boundaries to meet customers' needs;
- living the values of a professional public service;
- delivering tangible results for Ontarians and protecting the public interest.

While the OPS has been through a tremendous amount of change over the last few years it continues to transform itself to better meet the needs of its customers. A major challenge for the future OPS is the so-called “war for talent”. A large number of talented staff has already left the OPS due to downsizing and retirements with another large cohort expected to retire over the next decade. Not surprisingly, the focus of the past year has been on the renewal and revitalization of the OPS. This means retaining and attracting the best and brightest employees. It also means that the OPS has to be, and be perceived to be, a great place to work.³³

The OPS is being revitalized by ministry efforts to create a dynamic, challenging and rewarding work environment by encouraging staff innovation, learning and wellness, by recognizing excellence and stimulating pride in public service. An innovative culture is key to retaining and attracting good people.

In addition, initiatives such as the Deputy Ministers Leadership Group was established by the Secretary of the Cabinet early in 2001 to address the issue of renewal and revitalization of the OPS. This Leadership Group has approved a new Strategy for OPS Renewal and Revitalization with five strategic outcomes:

- has pride in quality public service;
- is dynamic in its leadership;
- recognizes the importance of learning;
- has a motivating and flexible work environment; and
- has a capable and innovative workforce.

A range of initiatives will be launched in all these areas to build momentum in creating a culture that will clearly establish the OPS as an organization focused on excellence, where innovative people want to work.

Ontario Delivers Innovation

The Province of Ontario has been an innovator for many years and ...during the past two decades in particular has pioneered the introduction of many significant management innovations³⁴

Ontario's leadership in modernizing the public service has been recognized across Canada and around the world. Ontario's innovative initiatives and best practices have been profiled in *Canadian Government Executive* issues since 1998, including for 2000/01, articles on Enterprising Administrative Services, Government Information Centres: Ontario's New Front Door, Ontario's New I&IT Strategy, Transforming Public

Service – An Ontario Perspective, Quality Service, Drive Clean and the Shared Services Bureau. The OPS's reputation as a leader in public service reform is also evident by the awards it has won and the jurisdictions that benchmark themselves against the Ontario experience.

Ontario has been recognized nationally and internationally for public service excellence. Most notably, it won the Gold CAPAM International Innovation Award in 1998 for electronic service delivery. In 2000/01, Ontario has won awards in the areas of quality service, public-private partnerships, innovative management, technology and consumer protection.

Government representatives from all over the world come to Ontario to see a public service against which they are benchmarking themselves. Internationally, delegations from one-hundred and thirty countries have visited Ontario over the past three years to learn about its public service transformation agenda and accomplishments. In addition, Ontario has established relations world-wide with countries such as Lithuania, South Africa and Malaysia to assist them with their own modernizing government agendas.

Ontario has profiled its sophisticated business planning, quality planning, performance measurement and accountability framework internationally. Within Canada, it is the only provincial jurisdiction that ties corporate performance measures to individual performance measures and incentive rewards. As such, the Federal government is looking to Ontario to enhance its own performance management system. The Federal government has also turned to Ontario's experience to benchmark good practices in citizen-centred services (Service Ontario Kiosks) and innovations and good practices in single-window service (Ontario Business Connects and Ontario Community Care Access Centres). These stories have been profiled in the past in Citizen-Centred Service Network publications: *Innovations and Good Practices in Single-Window Service, and Good Practices in Citizen-Centred Service*.

In reviewing its transformational journey, it becomes clear that much of the OPS's success can be attributed to having put into practice the principles of successful innovative organizations.³⁵

Critical to the success of the OPS's transformation has been the executive leadership from the Secretary of the Cabinet in articulating a vision and setting clear direction for change. This change

agenda was steered by the Restructuring Secretariat and supported by the senior management cadre. In addition, the Human Resource Plan for the Senior Management Group ensured its senior management cadre had the necessary competencies to lead the organizational transformation.

Monetary and non-monetary systems have been developed to reward and reinforce innovative public service behavior. As mentioned earlier, sophisticated pay for performance management systems and an accountability framework tied individual performance to ministry and corporate restructuring and quality service goals. While the Amethyst Award, launched in the early 1990s, was as a formal corporate recognition program for public service excellence, all ministries have been encouraged to make employee reward and recognition part of the corporate culture.

A review of the Amethyst recipients from the past nine years would reveal that innovation has come from all levels of the organization, both in terms of individuals and teams. Similarly, a review of Ontario's submissions to the 2000 IPAC award for Innovative Management reveals new and different approaches to public policy and service issues by members of the OPS.

While the OPS has incubated its own innovations, it continues to look elsewhere for best practices and participates in numerous internal and external networks and organizations both to share its own experiences and to learn from others. The Ministry of Consumer and Business Services' (MCBS) "Ontario Delivers" initiative has been referenced a number of times as an excellent example of organizational learning from the outside. In this case, looking outside the OPS led to the development of a leading edge geographic information system for its land titles.³⁶

In short, the OPS has fostered innovation by building a more integrated organization in policy, planning and service delivery. It has reshaped the organization to fit the demands of today's modern government: rethinking what government does and how it works; adopting a new customer focused "outside-in" perspective on services from the customer's point of view; and harnessing new technologies to improve the timeliness and accessibility of public services.

This experience has demonstrated that traditional organizational structures and governance models do not always lend themselves to addressing increasingly complex public service issues. We have learned that an organization needs the agility to attract, retain and reward employees for working differently. Moreover, current research suggests that employees stay longer with an organization when provided different and interesting opportunities where they feel that they can make a difference.

While strong leadership and structural changes are necessary for organizational transformation, sustaining the wins of an innovative organization is ultimately dependent on an accompanying cultural transformation. The OPS has reinvented itself from a "passive, internal manager of things" to a modern public service that is flexible, responsive, integrated and customer-centred. It is also innovative in how it works internally and delivers services to the public. This change was possible due to strong leadership, a clear vision, well-planned communications and an organizational commitment to creating a customer-centred organization focused on quality service and fostering an innovative culture.

Key to reshaping an organization's culture, according to Osborne and Plastrik, is to "mold the organization's habits, hearts, and minds" by giving people new experiences, by reinforcing new behaviors, and by building a shared vision of the future.³⁷ Each *Framework for Action* report spearheaded a new public service reform concept that was rooted in vision and values, made clear organizational expectations, set a clear course of action, measured progress, celebrated accomplishments, and told and retold the transformation story from an individual perspective.



The transformational journey is not finished, but the OPS has made incredible progress in a short period of time. The OPS continues to look to new ways of working to champion public service excellence and innovation, promote cultural change and build pride in and recognition of the Ontario Public Service and its accomplishments.

About the Authors:

Mary Anne Covelli is Director at the Ontario Public Service Restructuring Secretariat in Cabinet Office.

Maria Cece is a Project Manager at the Ontario Public Service Restructuring Secretariat. Special thanks to Melanie Fernandes who assisted with research for the paper.

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³ Working in clusters means formalizing natural working relationships of ministries that have common interests and customers. Working collaboratively in clusters allows the OPS to do better planning, and connect or integrate policies and programs. Clusters will result in more accessible and responsive services through more opportunities for one window service delivery.

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²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.3.

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³⁴ Kenneth Kernaghan et al., *The New Public Organization* (Toronto: Institute of Public Administration of Canada, 2000), p.225.

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