

Delivering Results through Quality:

The Ontario Public Service reaps the benefits of its Quality Service Strategy

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Quality Service Strategy**

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Ontario's Quality Service Strategy is a results based approach to continuous improvement linked to business planning, individual performance contracts and performance pay. It has set goals for the Ontario Public Service (OPS) to improve public satisfaction with OPS services, measure up to external benchmarks and become the premier public service jurisdiction to benchmark against. In the three years since its launch, ministries have undergone rigorous assessments of organizational performance, put quality improvement plans in place, implemented Common Service Standards and measured results. As a result, the OPS has become a world recognized public service to benchmark against.

Context for Change¹

During the last ten to fifteen years of the twentieth century, governments around the world were swept into a whirlwind of transformational change. Driven by economic and fiscal pressures, the political direction of the times, the rising expectations of citizens, and the impact of new technologies, governments embarked on major change agendas.

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 run along these lines: 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?

¹*Transforming the Public Service for the 21st Century*, Ontario Public Service Restructuring Secretariat, Cabinet Office, April 2000.



Answering such fundamental questions has been an extraordinary challenge for the Ontario Public Service (OPS). The journey is not finished, but the OPS has come a long way in a short time. Major initiatives over the past three decades laid a firm foundation for the changes from which the OPS could move forward.

The OPS moved aggressively to implement its change agenda with the election of a new government in 1995.

It was clear from the beginning of the new administration that if the OPS was to be able to deliver on the government 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. 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 business plans were annual reports with multi-year commitments on how ministries would achieve their fiscal targets, implement new policy directions and measure 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 delivering those services and closing gaps between customer expectations and service delivery.

During 1995, OPS leadership began to work on a vision for the Ontario Public Service of the future. This vision was developed to clarify the key directions and key enablers of change and was communicated to the public service through the first of what became annual reporting 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*² 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.

A key theme that has emerged as part of the new vision for the OPS is an organization that operates from the “outside-in.” The OPS has 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, improving and adapting to new challenges and new expectations.

² *Framework for Action: Building the Ontario Public Service for the Future*, Ontario Public Service Restructuring Secretariat, Cabinet Office, Ontario, 1997

OPS Quality Service Strategy

The “outside-in” concept involves looking outside the organization to understand citizens’ and key stakeholders’ views and needs and to respond by developing policies and programs that reflect these needs and expectations. The OPS Quality Service Strategy is a key part of the overall transformation agenda and a key enabler of change within the OPS.

In 1998, recognizing that becoming a quality organization would be an important part of reshaping the OPS, Cabinet approved the OPS Quality Service Strategy. The initiative set goals for **improving public satisfaction** with OPS services, **measuring up to external benchmarks** in the public and private sectors, and becoming the **jurisdiction other public services benchmark against**.

The OPS Quality Service Strategy established a management model for public service excellence in Ontario. Based on internationally recognized models of organizational excellence including the National Quality Institute’s Excellence Criteria, the Malcolm Baldrige Criteria and the European Excellence Model, the OPS model articulates desired organizational performance against seven cornerstones: **leadership, customers and citizen focus, people focus, planning, processes, partners, delivery agents and suppliers, and results**. Within each cornerstone are evaluative criteria that outline the benchmark the organization is striving to meet.

The OPS Quality Service Model

Processes

- Development of Processes
- Monitoring and improvement of Processes

Planning

- Setting Policy & Strategy
- Dev’l & Implementation of Operational Plans
- Measurement & Analysis of Performance

Leadership

- Culture of Excellence
- Strategic Direction
- Leadership Involvement

People

- Human Resource Planning
- A Learning Organization
- Participation in the Organization



Partners

- Focus on the Customer
- Selection & Partnering

Customers

- Service Delivery
- Measurement of Customer & Citizen Satisfaction

Results

- Customer & Citizen
- Operational
- Employee
- Partners, Delivery Agents & Suppliers
- Financial

The model is being used to: rigorously assess organizational performance and measure ongoing improvements, set standards for routine services where the public conduct business with the government, measure customer and employee satisfaction in order to focus organizational responses to identified weaknesses, establish good practices for ministries to emulate and benchmark, embed the concepts and practices of a learning organization into the OPS through the development of a quality curriculum and reward and recognize organizational, team and individual successes.

Ontario Public Service Restructuring Secretariat

The initiative is being led by the Ontario Public Service Restructuring Secretariat (OPSRS), Cabinet Office. OPSRS was established in 1997 to co-ordinate, communicate, monitor, support and promote transformational change across the organization. The development and implementation of the OPS Quality Service Strategy was considered to be a key element in helping to transform the organization with the goal of becoming more “customer” focused. The mandate given to the Secretariat by the Secretary of the Cabinet was to review and improve the organizational structures from a customer-centered point-of-view and build on the existing best practices within the OPS. The Quality Service Project (one of the two key parts of the Secretariat) was to stimulate and lead the integration of Quality Service principles and practices across the OPS. Implementation was to be accomplished through the deployment of a world-class quality service management model, and anchored heavily on customer service measurement, and reward and recognition of outstanding success in the area of quality service.

“To the Restructuring Secretariat, ... instilling Quality Service into the OPS culture had really come to mean reorganizing and redesigning the OPS organization and its processes at the most fundamental level. They realized that they had to literally ‘put the customer first’ not only in the minds, but also in the daily sights, of all OPS Managers. To do this, they were seeking to start an evolution in thinking and acting, generated by a complex, yet fundamentally simple, strategy. The strategy was to make Quality Service a priority for all ministries, but in a way that did not significantly alter the way they (the ministries) saw how they did business, believed they should manage, or wanted to operate their ministry. The strategy was to ‘pull’ the ministries forward by presenting them with a sound comprehensive strategy and benchmark standards through best practice examples and achievements, while simultaneously ‘pushing’ them with measured and monitored baseline standards for customer service as well as making Quality Service a required component of all business plans.

The approach used was to instill the model for a quality service organization built around three core strategies: communicate broadly, build in measurements early and layer a quality service focus into the business planning process.”³

OPSRS is a small specialized group of seconded staff from line ministries brought together to incubate and champion the OPS change agenda. The team is a virtual organization with staff being contributed by line ministries. Changes are made to the team as new sets of skills are required to meet project requirements. This allows staff to grow and develop new skills and the organization to remain nimble to respond to emerging needs.

³ Case Study on the OPS Quality Service Initiative: Spring 1998 to Spring 1999, Greg Pellet, Institute of Market Driven Quality, 1999

Quality Planning

To layer in a quality service focus into the business planning process, ministries would require reliable information on how well their organizations were doing with respect to the quality service goals. It was therefore decided that an internal evaluation tool was necessary so that a thorough organization-wide assessment could be conducted to identify areas of strength and determine key improvement opportunities in the area of quality service, as well as establish a baseline for improvement target setting. The results of the assessment would lead to the identification of select key improvement priorities, which would be built into the annual business planning process as regular operational improvements.

To start the process of quality planning and using an assessment tool in this way, a pilot phase was instituted. This pilot of the quality planning and assessment process involved five volunteer ministries in the Spring of 1998. The OPS Restructuring Secretariat provided support to ministries throughout the process. The objective was to set a baseline for sustained organizational improvement and to provide a basis for future benchmarking based on internationally recognized standards.

The Restructuring Secretariat's approach was to design a process that would engage the organization in a process of learning about quality and to build organizational capacity for future assessments and continuous improvement activities. The philosophy was also very much to model quality principles and practices through the pilot phase to maximize learning and to ensure measurement and continuous improvement of the process in subsequent rollout phases.

Through a series of planning meetings with OPSRS, ministries prepared for their assessments and the quality planning process. While focused on the deliverables of the project, OPSRS recognized that building the team and learning to work as a team were key outcomes of the comprehensive, front end planning process. Upon reflection and subsequent evaluation, this was seen to be a major strength of the pilot process.

The pilot ministries and the OPSRS hired external consulting support to assist them with the training, implementation of organizational assessments and development of quality plans. Outside experts brought credibility and expertise to the process. Training and consulting support ensured that ministry quality planning teams developed skills and expertise in quality assessment methodology, evaluation and practices and that these skills would be retained within the organization long after the consultants finished their work.

The assessment included one-on-one interviews and focus groups with all levels of management and front-line staff across the province against the Quality Service model's criteria for organizational excellence. A rigorous review of ministry core documents to determine approach required to meet project requirements. This allows staff to grow and develop new skills and the organization to remain nimble to respond to emerging needs.

The findings and key recommendations were then reviewed and refined by senior management into three priority areas providing high-leverage opportunities for improvement and having the most impact on the organization. Action plans to address these priority improvement areas formed the basis of the Quality Service Plans. Results were reported in ministry business plans.

Results – Internal/External Evaluation

“We have found the Quality Service Initiative is a powerful tool to rebuild the morale, capacity and effectiveness of the OPS after several years of restructuring. It puts the service back into the Ontario Public Service.”

Carr Gordon Limited; Evaluation of the Quality Service Pilot Projects and Common Service Standards, 1999)

Quotes from Participants:

“We don’t want to be known to our clients as the ministry of “No”. Through this Quality Service Initiative, we can make sure we communicate the importance of good service to all our staff, identify what we mean by good customer service and measure how well we are doing.”

Deputy Minister

“The rigor of the methodology and the formal analysis challenges some of our perceptions and assumptions. People throughout the organization became engaged and interested. The team members were enthusiastic. We were able to send a clear message to the organization and the process gave the staff a ‘voice.’”

Assistant Deputy Minister Sponsor

“The best part of this Quality Initiative is that it legitimizes what we all know needs to be done - we can put the ‘service’ back into the OPS. Everyone who participated is charged up - it touched everyone and encouraged us to make continuous improvement a

The OPS used evaluation methodologies, both internal and external, throughout the implementation process, consistent with the quality concepts of ongoing measurement and continuous improvement.

To model quality practices, the Restructuring Secretariat and pilot ministries designed a system to evaluate the process used and the results of each phase of the assessment and quality planning. A template was designed to collect feedback and to evaluate and make recommendations for improving the process for ministries that would follow in subsequent years. All aspects of the project were examined from the support provided by consultants, OPSRS and the ministries’ experience. OPSRS has continued to use the practice of consistent periodic reviews and feedback in the following phased rollout of quality planning across the OPS.

In 1999, the Restructuring Secretariat hired Carr Gordon Ltd., in partnership with Erin Research Inc, through a competitive process, to externally validate the OPS approach to quality.

Their “*Evaluation of the Quality Service Pilot Projects and Common Service Standards*”⁴ confirmed the approach to organizational assessments and quality planning, the OPS Quality Service Model, the validity of Common Service Standards and also made recommendations for the future.

Ministries reported that the process energized their organizations. These ministries developed plans for building capacity in their organizations that were directly tied to their ability to deliver results. Staff and senior management were enthusiastic about moving forward with their quality plan.⁵

The Carr Gordon evaluation concluded:

- A strong foundation for quality planning was established
- The common OPS-wide approach was successful
- An objective and realistic measurement was taken of the organization and plans for improvement developed
- Ministries participating had ministry-wide commitment to improvements
- The process contributed to staff development
- The corporate and external (consulting) supports were essential

Quality Improvements across the OPS

Based on the evaluation of the pilot phase, Cabinet enthusiastically endorsed the rollout of quality planning to all ministries. Ministries began undertaking organizational assessments and developed quality plans in phases over the following two years.

However, this does not mean that ministries waited to implement quality improvements until it was their turn to do an organizational assessment.

From the launch of the Quality Service Strategy, ministries were involved in communicating the corporate quality messages and identifying their own quality practices. Through the Secretary of the Cabinet’s annual Framework for Action Report, the Quality Service Strategy was launched. The 1998 report: *Building the OPS for the Future: A Quality Service Organization*⁶ outlined the quality goals and principles, the management model, and Common Service Standards that were part of the strategy. The document launched the vision for a quality public service in Ontario and illustrated how these concepts could be put into practice through the celebration of best practice examples from within the OPS.

All ministries held meetings with their staff to talk about the concepts of a quality organization and to identify their own good quality practices. These discussions formed the foundation for ministries to identify key strategies for inclusion in the next business plan that would move them forward to achieving a vision of customer centered service delivery.

⁴ Evaluation of the Quality Service Pilot Projects and Common Service Standards, Carr-Gordon Limited and Erin Research Inc. June, 1999.

⁵Ibid

⁶Framework for Action 1998 Building the OPS for the Future: A Quality Service Organization, Ontario Public Service Restructuring Secretariat, Cabinet Office, Ontario, 1998.

OPS Rollout of Quality Planning

Common Improvement Themes Identified from Ministry Quality Plans

Customer

*defining customers
evaluating customer needs*

Leadership

*setting strategic direction and leading change
meaningful & consistent communications
with employees*

People

*building a learning organization
meaningful participation in the
organization*

Process

*reviewing and linking process to core
business*

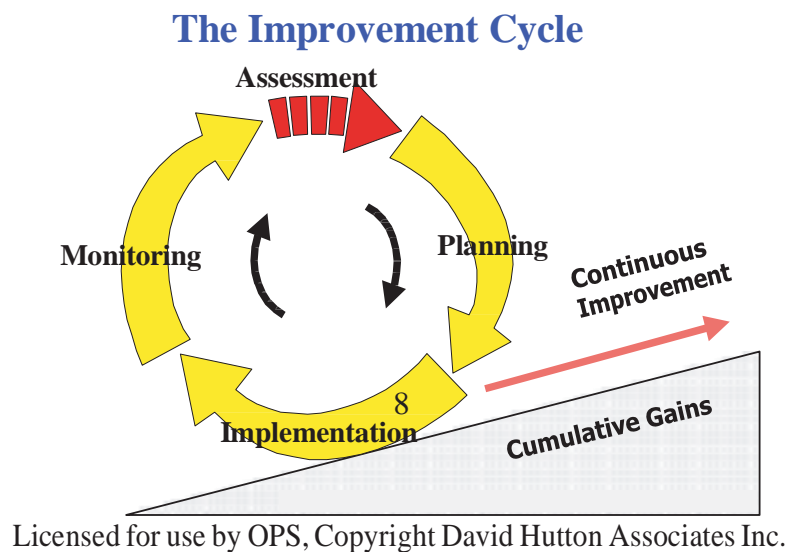
Currently, all 23 ministries have undergone organizational assessments and have developed quality plans. This was accomplished over the two years following the completion of the pilot phase. The process built on the learning from the pilot phase and from each subsequent round of ministries completing their plans.

Ministries who followed the pilots have had the benefit of their experience. In addition to the support provided by the Restructuring Secretariat and external consultants, the experience of earlier Quality Teams was used at key intervals of the training and implementation

processes. This ensured the best transfer of knowledge and practical experience of those who had gone before.

Not surprisingly, common themes across ministries have been identified through the priority improvements selected by ministries for their quality plans. The strength of the approach is that it identifies these themes and builds communities of interest and networks of people working on common problems.

The quality planning process has been firmly established with the pilot ministries undertaking their second organizational assessments in 2001 to measure improvements from the baselines set in 1998 and to set further plans for ongoing improvements.



The OPS Common Service Standards

With Quality Planning focusing on organizational issues and providing significant benefit to the organization as a whole, the OPS Common Service Standards for telephone, mail, walk-in (counter) service and customer feedback/complaint resolution were intended to focus more on the individual's role in providing responsive service to the people of Ontario.

The Development of the OPS Common Service Standards

In response to public and media criticism of the introduction of voice mail, the Restructuring Secretariat was asked to take a look at its use in order to "fix the phones." In 1997, the telephone was the most frequently used channel for accessing government services by individuals and businesses (80%) but the OPS phones had become a symbol of an unresponsive, non-customer focused system. "Voice mail jail" described automated systems with endless loops and the inability for callers to reach a public servant who could provide information or service.

In response, a working group was struck to look at common standards for routine services offered to the public. Focused on a customer driven organization and serving OPS customers better, this group led the development of the Common Service Standards for the OPS.

Research was completed into what customer service standards existed within the OPS and in other jurisdictions (as well as industry standards for similar services) for the main ways OPS services were accessed (at the time - phone, mail, and in person).

OPS Common Service Standards

Telephone Standard

When you contact the Ontario Government by telephone you can expect that eight times out of ten :

- Your call will be answered by the third ring during core business hours (8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.);
- You will always have the option of reaching a person and your call will not be redirected more than once;
- All calls will be returned within one business day;
- A common telephone protocol will be in place.

Mail Standard

When you contact the Ontario Government by fax, mail or electronic mail, you can expect that...

- Correspondence will be answered within 15 working days of receipt;
- If a conclusive response is not possible within that time, an interim acknowledgement with an anticipated date of response will be provided within 5 working days of receipt.

Walk- In Standard

If you visit one of our service locations, you can expect that...

- Core business hours for staff-assisted service will be at least 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., inclusive;
- You will be served in order and will be told the expected waiting time;
- Best times to receive speedier service will be posted.

Customer Feedback/Complaint Resolution

If you have comments or concerns about our services, we encourage you to let us know and provide us with details at your earliest convenience. You can expect that:...

- Each ministry will have a complaint resolution process in place;
- Your complaints will be documented and acknowledged within 2 working days;
- We will follow up with any required actions within a specific timeframe;
- With each contact, you will have the opportunity to provide feedback on our service.

A series of round tables were held with OPS staff and representatives of other organizations (both public and private sector) known for quality to collect opinions and information on what the Standards should be. In all, more than thirteen hundred people were consulted on the content of the Common Service Standards.

To ensure the Standards were aligned with customer expectations, questions in Citizens First 1998, a major national survey of Canadians, were used to test their expectations of routine services. This research confirmed the content of the Standards and that the OPS was on the right track in setting achievable standards to meet citizen expectations.

At the end of the consultation, staff of the OPS Restructuring Secretariat proposed standards that were approved by Management Board of Cabinet in the Spring of 1998. Common Service Standards were established for telephones, mail, in person or over the counter service (the main ways citizens access service) and customer feedback/complaint resolution.

Implementation - A Phased Approach

The Standards were implemented in two phases to ensure the workload for implementation was manageable for ministries and that the Standards were applied first in the areas where there would be the most impact. Phasing in the Standards also ensured the OPS was able to achieve some quick wins.

Phase I applied to high volume telephones (call centres, 1-800, and general inquiry lines) and Minister and Deputy Minister correspondence. Ministries developed and filed implementation plans in the Spring of 1998 and identified a time line for final implementation. As most ministries indicated that they could achieve the phone and mail standard by the end of the year, a deadline of December 31, 1998 was set for full implementation of Phase I.

During the implementation, the OPS Restructuring Secretariat made many presentations to ministry senior management committees and ministry working groups to ensure a consistent, thorough understanding of the Standards. Regular communications were also provided to managers and staff – including information packages (slide presentations, speaking notes, questions and answers) and articles in the OPS newsletter.

A working group of ministry Common Service Standards Leads was established. The mandate of this working group was to identify and share methods to further the effective and efficient implementation of the Common Service Standards throughout the OPS. The working group also provided an opportunity for networking among members. This working group has been an excellent vehicle for information sharing and communicating on issues related to the successful implementation of the Standards.

Achieving the Phase I telephone standard proved to be relatively straightforward. Most information hot lines and call centres are answered quite easily within three rings. It was a bigger challenge, however, to ensure all phone lines provided the option of reaching a live operator, especially where there were automated Interactive Voice Recognition (IVR) systems in place.

Meeting the Phase I correspondence standard proved to be somewhat more challenging. Many ministries completely re-engineered their processes to eliminate unnecessary steps and to put improved systems and processes in place to support more efficient, effective management of the mail. In one case, changes to the mail processing system enabled the ministry to move from an average forty-three day response time to less than fifteen days for Minister's mail.

Another issue related to Phase I mail was how to ensure that adequate and consistent tracking and monitoring processes were in place for Minister and Deputy Minister mail. Ministry correspondence managers, ministry implementation teams and the corporate team spent many hours sharing information, best practices, tips and processes to ensure comparability of data from ministry to ministry. The exercise provided a good foundation for the intellectual processes needed to ensure similar comparability of data for the other standards and specifically helped pave the way for smoother implementation of the mail standard for Phase II mail.

Ministries also shared significant information about how they communicated about the Standards within each ministry. For example, tips and best practices on working to ensure timely sign off of mail by Cabinet Ministers were widely shared across the Ontario Public Service.

Phase II

Planning for the second phase of the Standards implementation began in the Fall of 1998 and took sixteen months to fully achieve. This phase included the balance of telephones and mail, walk-in services and establishing a feedback/ complaint resolution process. As in Phase I, the time lines for full implementation were developed based on the plans submitted by ministries to OPSRS.

Successful achievement of Phase II built on the knowledge and skills developed and shared during Phase I. However, because of the increased complexity and scope of this phase, enhanced creativity was needed to ensure that all areas in the OPS could meet the standard.

An example of this creativity in action was the solutions ministries developed to respond to the challenge of how to always provide the live operator option from 8:30 am.. to 5:00 p.m. across the government. Initially, many ministries indicated they would be unable to achieve this element of the standard because there were too few staff in some of their offices to provide coverage early in the morning, at lunch and at the end of the day. As well, in an era of leaner government, many program areas had reduced the number of administrative staff, eliminating receptionist positions.

However, many program managers rose to the challenge, thinking creatively about solutions to the situation. Office main telephone lines were connected to cordless phones so that anyone in the office could answer the phone anywhere in the office thus ensuring that the requirement to provide a live operator on request was met. In other offices, technology was changed so that the main telephone line could be call forwarded to any phone in the office or even to a cell phone so someone was always available to answer the phone during core hours.

A significant culture shift took place as a result of the requirement to have a live operator available during core hours. Suddenly, answering the main telephone line became everybody's job, not just the work of one (or a few) administrative staff.

This, combined with a requirement in most ministries to regularly update voice mail messages, to return calls within one business day and to ensure calls being referred to another part of government were referred correctly on the first attempt, has been a catalyst for a real customer service excellence throughout the OPS.

The breakthrough that was achieved with respect to the zero out element of the telephone standard was a turning point in the achievement of the standard. As Ministry Leads and their teams began to see examples of solutions to seemingly overwhelming challenges, attitudes changed from being negative and barrier-focused to being creative and solution focused.

Implementing the walk-in standard's core hours in front line offices where there are only one or two staff was another significant implementation challenge. Security issues for offices that handle money and ensuring staff were not being asked to work overtime to meet the standard were among the issues raised. Initially, Ministry Leads identified almost three hundred offices where this could be an issue.

In order to find a solution to the situation, a team of Ministry Leads and representatives of the affected program areas was pulled together by staff of the Restructuring Secretariat. This group spent four months identifying creative ways to meet the standard, and clarifying the application of the standard (e.g. those offices where the public routinely accesses service).

Through those meetings, opportunities for co-location and sharing of workload were identified. Some ministries combined offices in the same community in order to achieve the core hours. Finally, in the course of researching options, staff of OPSRS became aware that some ministries had included locations where standard does not apply (e.g. offices that the public does not routinely access for service).

All along the way, there has been an emphasis on practical, low cost, local approaches to achieving the standard. Ministries set their own voice mail protocols, developed and implemented their own feedback processes in a way that is logical in their environment. Ministries developed their own processes for self-monitoring achievement. While data is collected on common elements using common templates, the processes used to collect data are determined locally, taking into account each ministry's unique operating environment and organizational culture.

External Evaluations

Another way the organizational culture was changed was through independent evaluations of achievement. All ministries were evaluated on their achievement of the Standards by an external consultant, at the end of implementation of both Phase I and Phase II. These evaluations sent an important message across the OPS that senior leaders were serious about achieving the Standards and measuring results in a rigorous manner.

The Carr Gordon/Erin Research Evaluation⁷ in 1999 tested OPS achievement of the high volume phone standard and standard for Minister and Deputy Minister mail using a “mystery shopper” approach. A second evaluation⁸ was undertaken by Erin Research in 2000, re-testing and measuring improvement in achievement of the Standards for high volume phones and Minister and Deputy Minister mail and testing achievement for the balance of the Standards for the first time.

These evaluations were conducted in the Spring of 1999 and the Fall of 2000 respectively and measured progress on achievement of each phase of the Standards using a “mystery shopper” approach. Overall, in the two evaluations, more than 11,000 test calls were placed to call centres, information lines and individual’s phones. The evaluators attempted to ask questions that were as close as possible to ones the general public would ask of ministries and programs and then tested what happened. Letters and feedback were also sent to test response times. The external consultant, while completing the evaluation, also assessed staff knowledge and perception of the Standards.

The OPS has shown improvement from the first evaluation to the second, on both the telephone and mail Standards. Ministry achievement of the standard for high volume phones has improved from ninety-one percent of calls answered by the third ring in 1999 to ninety six percent in 2000. Over eighty percent of calls were resolved with only one referral for both high volume and staff phones.

The OPS is also showing improvement in achieving the correspondence standard for Minister and Deputy Minister mail, with seventy four percent of test letters being answered within fifteen working days, up twenty-one percent from the 1999 evaluation.

Ninety-seven percent of front counters are open during core business hours (8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.) and in many cases (twenty-two percent) have expanded hours of service. Over ninety percent of front counters have processes in place to ensure clients are served in order, best times to receive speedier service are posted and clients are told expected wait times. Eighty four percent of “mystery shopper” complaints were acknowledged within the standard of two days.

As well, by surveying over a thousand OPS staff about the Standards, the evaluation provided valuable insight into the knowledge and opinions of Ontario Public Servants. Eighty two percent of staff surveyed agreed that the Standards are effective in ensuring good service to the Ontario public and seventy four percent of staff agreed that the Standards are effective in ensuring good service internally. The survey also showed a high level of knowledge, with ninety seven percent of respondents indicating they had heard about the standards.

⁷ *Evaluation of the Quality Service Pilot Projects and Common Service Standards, Final Report*, Carr-Gordon Limited and Erin Research Inc, June 1999.

⁸ *Excellence in Achievement of the Common Service Standards, Ontario Public Service, 2000*, Erin Research, February, 2001.

Setting standards, measuring results and publicizing them attracts positive attention for good public service. After the first evaluation of achievement in 1999, an article in the National Post noted Ontario's efforts to improve service to its citizens. As well, announcements by the City of Brantford about new standards for telephone service (based on the OPS Standards) received significant media coverage.

Ontario is the only jurisdiction in North America to set common, government-wide Standards for transactional services and to measure results through an independent evaluation. Staff of OPSRS have met with staff of other jurisdictions to share information and implementation tips.

Next Steps in Standard Setting

As continuous improvement is a key element of any quality journey, the OPS is not resting on its laurels with respect to the Common Service Standards. A number of initiatives are underway. To ensure the Standards stay current, a review is being undertaken. As well, the Standards will be rolled out to Agencies, Boards, Commissions and third party service deliverers, such as private sector service deliverers. In the age of alternative service delivery, ensuring that government services and services delivered on behalf of the government are consistent and of high caliber is key to ensuring the OPS can continue to meet citizen expectations of service.

As well, a number of programs have developed or are considering developing and implementing program-specific service standards. The OPSRS is supporting this work by developing a framework that will help ensure consistent, high quality standards are set across the OPS.

Becoming a Quality Public Service

A key principle of any change management undertaking is to ensure the innovation "sticks" by changing the organization's culture so that new processes and methods of working become "simply the way things are done."

One of the ways the Ontario Public Service is ensuring the success of its Quality Service Strategy is by threading quality services principles and practices in organizational processes right across the public service. By ensuring quality is strategically aligned with the key deliverables of the organization, the quality service strategy is succeeding in changing the culture.

This is happening through the use of the OPS Quality Model as the strategic framework for managing within the OPS. Further initiatives such as Modern Controllership, Risk Management, the Human Resources Strategy and the learning organization have been designed and implemented within the broader quality framework to ensure consistency of philosophy and alignment of goals.

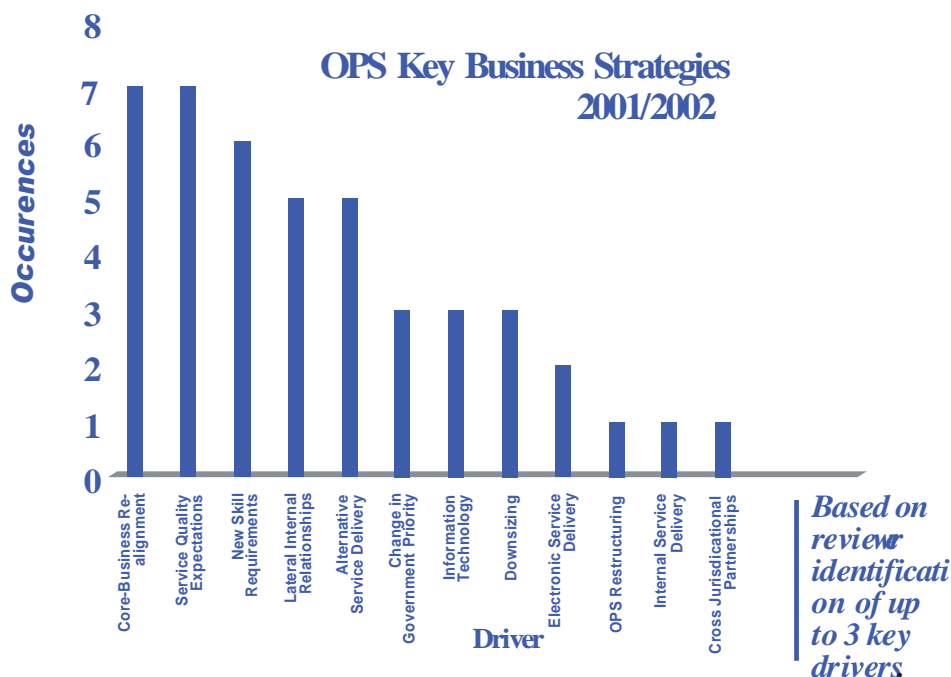
As well, the Quality Service Strategy is succeeding in changing the culture by instilling requirements into the performance management system. Following the theory that what gets measured, gets done, quality practices and principles have been incorporated into Ontario Public Service performance measurement systems. In Ontario, a fundamental construct of the measurement system for senior managers and their compensation is the linkage of individual performance contracts to the achievement of the government's agenda.

Ontario's non-partisan professional public service is enhanced by increased personal and organizational accountability. The approach of personal performance contracts and pay linked to government commitments in published business plans is an important contribution to the enabling framework of accountability in government. Implementing the Quality Service Strategy is part of the key corporate commitments that every ministry is accountable to achieve.

Every year the Premier and the Secretary of the Cabinet set out the key public sector priorities to be achieved. The system recognizes that ministries will play different roles in the achievement of the government's agenda from year to year. Individual senior manager's performance or incentive pay is based on these outcomes e.g. providing corporate leadership, providing effective customer services, achieving financial and people strength in the organization, efficient delivery of core businesses, and improving business efficiency. An incentive envelope for the senior management cadre is established if the priorities are achieved. The size of the incentive can range from zero to twelve percent of the pay envelope depending on the achievement level overall.

Quality planning results and achieving full implementation of the OPS Common Service Standards are part of all senior management's performance contracts and incentive pay. In addition, the Secretary of the Cabinet has rewarded ministries who volunteered to pilot quality planning by giving them an additional percentage point in their incentive envelope. Including quality service in the pay for performance scheme for senior managers has been a powerful motivator in ensuring the Quality Service Strategy is achieved.

Quality Service has also been embedded into the annual business planning process. Every year, ministries are asked to identify three key strategies to achieve their business plan goals. Implementing the quality strategy is one of these three goals. As well, quality principles and practices are part of the performance measurement system. Quality Planning and Common Service Standards results are reported annually in ministry business plans.



Communities of interest

One other way quality service is becoming part of OPS culture is through the development of a number of communities of interest organized around common themes and activities. The various working groups, teams, provide opportunities for learning new information and ways of doing things, networking, problem solving, disseminating information quickly throughout the OPS. The Ministry Leads Working Group (designated individuals in each Ministry) is a good example.

The Ministry Leads Working Group was responsible for the implementation of the Common Service Standards. Established early in the process, this working group met every other week. Now that the Standards are fully implemented, it meets monthly. The group provides a means of information sharing between ministries and the OPSRS corporate team. The corporate team uses the meeting to provide context to ministries, to disseminate new information about the Standards quickly and to get feedback on new reporting procedures, changes and next steps with respect to the Standards.

Ministry Leads use the network in a variety of ways. The Leads act as resources for solutions to problems that arise. After three years of implementation there are very few new issues that have never been faced by another ministry or program in the OPS and the Leads are recognized as a valuable source of ideas. They also act as a support network for one another and use the network to bring new ideas, suggestions and issues to the attention of the corporate team.

Over time, members of this network have developed a high level of trust and confidence in the corporate team and in each other. This group has become a “safe” place to discuss problems and ideas.

But the Common Service Standards Leads is not the only “community of interest” that has developed as a result of the Quality Service Strategy. Regular working group meetings of ministry Quality Planning Leads have been organized to assist the various groups of ministries undergoing organizational assessments. These meetings were an excellent way to provide focused training and a support network for ministry Quality Planning Leads as they completed the assessment, then planned their priority improvements. The process promoted sharing of good ideas and solutions to problems. It also has allowed each successive group of ministries to learn from the experience of those who went before them. Now that the first round of assessments are complete across the OPS and quality plans are in place, this network of Quality Planning Leads is focusing on an agenda of joint learning and identifying tools required for their ministries to move forward on their quality journey.

Over time, many Quality Leads expressed interest in more formal learning opportunities and more opportunities to network with one another. In response to this need, the Quality Network Forum was established. The Quality Network Forum is held three times a year. Each forum is focused around a theme and provides speakers from the public and private sector who have experience and/or expertise in a particular area. These forums also provide Common Standards Leads, ministry team members, Quality Planning Leads, and other interested parties with opportunities to network. The themes have been relevant and timely to the work that is ongoing within the OPS as the themes are developed based on input from the Leads. “Customer Satisfaction Surveys” and “Using Quality Practices and Principles in your Organization” are examples of the themes of the last two Quality Network Forums. The events are well attended, typically with one hundred participants.

Each ministry has identified a member of its senior management team as a Quality

Champion who is responsible for leading quality within the organization. The Champions meet collectively three to four times a year at breakfast meetings hosted by the Deputy Minister of the Restructuring Secretariat, to listen and learn from both private and public sector organizations about best practices and lessons learned from their organization's quality journey.

A Learning Organization

Becoming a learning organization is an ongoing journey. It is about making learning part of what is done in the workplace on a daily basis.

The importance of learning was highlighted in the third *Framework for Action Report – "Building the OPS for the Future, A Learning Organization"*⁹. This report focused on renewing and revitalizing the OPS and outlined concepts of the OPS as a learning organization. It described four aspects of becoming a learning organization (customer, organizational, team and individual learning), aligned with the Quality Service Strategy and provided a number of stories that illustrated employee experiences and insights.

Early in the implementation of the OPS Quality Service initiative, it became clear that a strategy for identifying learning needs and gaps would be required to support successful OPS-wide implementation. The Restructuring Secretariat and the pilot ministries recognised that successfully embedding and maintaining quality throughout the OPS required a broad understanding of quality principles and practices, as well as specific tools to support ministries' quality initiatives.

There are approximately 61,000 employees in the OPS including 1,600 in the senior management group and 5,400 other managers in 23 ministries and their agencies. The full deployment of Quality Planning and Common Service Standards requires training interventions that will transfer sufficient awareness, knowledge, tools and techniques to OPS employees at all levels.

An Advisory Panel consisting of ministry representatives from various service and corporate areas was created to develop a Quality Service Learning Strategy for the OPS. Members of the Quality Learning Advisory Panel were selected for their OPS leadership experience in quality, their familiarity with government directions and processes, and their commitment to the professional public service.

In 2000, the Advisory Panel contracted for and received a report titled *The Quality Service Learning Assessment*¹⁰. The report provided details on the types of interventions and training that should be considered in a learning curriculum against the Quality Service Cornerstones. It recommended two streams of learning:

- creating the environment where new initiatives can be established and sustained (e.g. cultural training focusing on relationships and awareness);
- training to establish new skills and deploy the use of quality tools (e.g. capability training).

⁹ *Framework for Action 1999 Building the Ontario Public Service for the Future: A Learning Organization*, Ontario Public Service Restructuring Secretariat, Cabinet Office, Ontario, 1999.

¹⁰ *The Quality Service Learning Assessment Report and Recommendations for Education and Training Needs to Support Implementation of the OPS Quality Service Framework*, Eduvision Inc, 2000

The Quality Learning Advisory Panel accepted the conclusions and recommendations of the Quality Service Learning Assessment Report and is proceeding with the next phase of developing the curriculum.

Measuring Customer Satisfaction

In addition to building communities of interest and developing a learning strategy in support of the Quality Service Strategy, there are a number of other supports being provided to ministries to assist them. These include the development of a survey tool to measure customer/client satisfaction with government services, collaborating with other governments across Canada on a nation-wide survey of citizen satisfaction with government service.

Citizens Satisfaction with Services Public vs. Private

	Citizens First 2000
Fire departments	79
Public libraries	77
Supermarkets	72
Police	66
Provincial/Territorial parks, camps	65
Department stores	61
Telephone companies	61
Canada Post	59
Taxis	56
Revenue Canada	54
Hospitals	52
Banks	51
Cable television companies	49
Road maintenance	40

The Government of Ontario is working with other jurisdictions across Canada to establish tools and practices to consistently measure citizen and client/customer satisfaction with government services. These initiatives – the Citizens First Research and the Common Measurements Tool – support Ontario’s goal of benchmarking against

other jurisdictions and being the jurisdictions others benchmark against by providing ways of collecting comparable data from Canadians.

Citizens First is a research project that collects information on satisfaction with government services at the citizen – not individual customer – level. The Common Measurements Tool (CMT), on the other hand, is a survey instrument that is used to collect information from individual users, clients, and customers of specific government programs. Citizens First is an award winning¹¹, groundbreaking research report first undertaken in 1998 “to measure how Canadians perceive the services that their governments provide. It provided a changed perspective on service quality by challenging the widely held view that government services are second-rate and by showing how polls have often underrated citizens’ perceptions of government services. It defined the five elements of service delivery that most strongly affect citizens’ perceptions of service delivery. It offered managers and service providers clear direction for improving services”¹² and it proved that government services are often rated higher than the private sector.

The results of this research have been used to shape government service delivery across the OPS and across Canada. The research was repeated in 2000 and the results confirmed many of the approaches to service delivery being deployed in Ontario.

¹¹ 1999 Institute for Public Administration in Canada Gold Award for Innovative Management and 2000 Commonwealth Association for Public Administration and Management Innovation Award

¹² *Citizens First 2000 Report on “Have Your Say!” A survey on improving government services* by Erin Research for the Public Sector Service Delivery Council and the Institute for Public Administration in Canada, 2001

The Common Measurements Tool

What is the Common Measurements Tool?

The CMT is a client survey tool that offers a set of commonly used survey items and a consistent measurement system for public service organizations.

Its objectives are to:

- provide a ready made tool for public service organizations
- enable like-organizations to compare results
- facilitate the sharing of information gained and lessons learned between organizations
- enable organizations to build internal benchmarks.

It consists of a suite of 9 core questions and supplemental questions that ministries can use to measure customer/client satisfaction with a particular service.

Service dimensions assessed by the CMT include:

1. Responsiveness
 - a. Timely delivery of service
 - b. Number of contacts
 - c. Wait times
2. Reliability
 - a. Service needed was provided
 - b. What was promised was provided
 - c. Policies and standards were followed
 - d. Errors were detected and corrected
3. Access and facilities
 - a. Convenient location
 - b. Hours of service
 - c. Telephone access
 - d. Variety of access modes
4. Communications
 - a. Questions were answered
 - b. Information was available
5. Cost
 - a. Ease of billing/payment
 - b. Reasonable cost

The Government of Ontario, along with other Canadian jurisdictions, participated in the development of a common tool for customer surveying – called the Common Measurements Tools (CMT). This tool was developed in response to an identified need for public sector organizations to be able to benchmark progress over time and against one another in a consistent manner.

The CMT measures client/customer satisfaction of service recipients and users of government services, not citizen satisfaction with government overall. To provide public sector organizations with the vital information needed to improve service, the CMT incorporates the measurement of five elements which are: client expectations, perceptions of the service experience, level of importance, level of satisfaction, and priorities for improvement.

The development of the CMT has been an excellent example of partnership with other governments across Canada. The Canadian Centre for Management Development (Government of Canada) and the Citizen-Centred Service Network (a partnership of governments across Canada now called the Public Sector Service Delivery Council) led the development of the tool itself. The Government of Manitoba has developed an electronic version which is being used by many other jurisdiction.

Ongoing maintenance of the CMT and support for its use is managed by the CMT Standards Board, a working group of the Public Sector Service Delivery Council (PSSDC). The group represents the jurisdictions most involved with, and interested in, the CMT. From time to time, it brings in external expertise to support innovations to the tool, such as additional questions to probe satisfaction with electronic service delivery.

In addition to ongoing work in supporting the use of the Tool and the development of additional questions related to electronic service delivery (and other access channels), Ontario has developed a manual, *How to Conduct Customer Surveys*¹³, for distribution within the OPS and to other governments across Canada. This manual is based on a publication by the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and has been updated and customized for use in Ontario with the EPA's permission.

The OPS is also committed to regularly measuring customer satisfaction. Although many ministries and programs frequently measure and monitor customer satisfaction, there was no consistency in the survey tools and methodologies used across the OPS. Following the Speech from the Throne in April 2001, the Honourable David Tsubouchi, Chair of Management Board of Cabinet, announced:

“The government will measure its own performance, including that of its senior management, based on service delivery and customer satisfaction.”¹⁴

To fulfill this commitment, ministries are developing plans for how they will regularly measure customer satisfaction with the services they provide.

Some ministries have had an early start and have already used the CMT with great success. The Ministry of Labour, for example, used the tool in 2000 to re-check the results of a 1998 survey. Their survey included timeliness, accessibility of service, the competence and courtesy of staff, the fairness and thoroughness of the process, and the outcome (whether or not the clients needs were met). Their results were an impressive 79.5% overall customer satisfaction rating.

A training program on how to manage customer surveys is being developed in order to provide support and build capacity in ministries. It will be delivered in partnership with the Ontario Government's Shared Services Bureau and the Association of Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology of Ontario (ACAATO), the network of Community Colleges in Ontario. The training program, if successful, may also become a standard training module to support the use of the CMT across Canada.

Benchmarking is an important way organizations can improve their services and processes and is one of the ways the CMT will help with improvements to government services. To support the CMT and its continued development the Institute for Citizen Centred Service has been established. “Its mandate, among other things, is to be the custodian of the CMT and the electronic tool in the public sector and to provide a CMT data repository and benchmarking service for public sector organizations.”¹⁵ Ontario is supporting the establishment of the Institute by seconding staff, administration, and by guiding its development.

¹³*How to Conduct Customer Surveys*, Ontario Public Service Restructuring Secretariat, Cabinet Office, 2001

¹⁴Implementing the 21 Steps Into the 21st Century A Statement to the Legislature by the Honourable David Tsubouchi Chair, Management Board of Cabinet ,April 23, 2001.

Celebrating Successes - Reward and Recognition Programs and Initiatives in the OPS

Recognizing and celebrating good practices in public service is an essential part of the OPS Quality Service model. Although many organizations had formal programs to recognize staff, the Restructuring Secretariat recommended that all ministries institute reward and recognition programs as part of the Secretary of the Cabinet's 1999/2000 key corporate goals for Deputy Ministers. This would ensure consistency across all organizations and foster the identification and celebration of good practices within ministries.

Ministries have both formal and informal programs. Ministry formal programs include yearly awards based on staff nominations which are evaluated by peers. Ministry informal programs include advice for managers on recognizing staff achievement throughout the year. Information on best practices are disseminated through CD-ROM and intranet based toolkits, guides, and handbooks.

In 2001, all ministries in the OPS have implemented formal or informal programs and initiatives, which recognize and reward employee contributions. There are a few themes that are common across the OPS.

Many ministries focus their recognition programs on customer service by rewarding employees who provide exceptional service above and beyond the normal expectations of timeliness, responsiveness, accessibility, cost effectiveness and reliability.

Team building is another area of focus, whereby employees who demonstrate enthusiasm and willingness to help others are recognized. Employees, either individuals or teams, whose accomplishments involve a high degree of innovation and/or creativity also receive recognition. Staff are also recognized for demonstrating outstanding leadership, efficient and effective stakeholder relations, and displaying bravery.

In addition to ministry-specific recognition, the OPS also has a provincial award to recognize outstanding achievements by OPS staff. The Amethyst Award recognizes individuals who have made exceptional or outstanding contributions on the job in one of the following areas: client service, innovation, valuing people or professional achievement.

Public Sector Quality Fair

Communicating the change agenda, identifying, recognizing and celebrating success as it occurs is a key responsibility of the OPS Restructuring Secretariat. In addition to publications, speaking engagements and a presence on the web, the OPSRS has fostered the growth of the Public Service Quality Fair (PSQF) to showcase quality service and quality excellence among all three levels of government and the broader public sector in Ontario. The PSQF is an annual forum that encourages the sharing of ideas and demonstration of "working" examples of improved quality service and continuous improvement that can be measured and consistently repeated.

¹⁵*Institute for Citizen-Centred Service, who we are...what we do...*, December, 2001

The Fair consists of plenary sessions with keynote speakers/panels, seminars, awards and exhibitors demonstrating public sector quality achievements. The exhibitors are public sector teams that have been evaluated, and qualified to exhibit, against quality criteria used for the Canada Awards of Excellence (CAE). Applicants must show measurable improvements.

Ontario participates in the PSQF through sponsorship, speakers, exhibitors, seminar presentations, and organizational support. In 2001, Ontario once again had a sizeable contingent among the exhibitors, constituting over half of the 42 applications selected to exhibit at the Fair. Participating in the Fair is one way the Ontario Public Service can benchmark their programs and services against internationally recognized quality criteria, learn from other public sector organizations and celebrate successful improvement initiatives.

It also provides an opportunity for OPS senior management to visibly acknowledge quality improvements, recognize and value staff undertaking this work

Getting the Message Out

In order to implement any innovation of this magnitude, effective communications with staff are essential. Staff of the OPSRS support regular communications about the change agenda, Quality Service and new initiatives in a variety of ways.

They prepare and deliver speeches and presentations to many groups of staff at all levels all across the province. As well, staff of the Secretariat make presentations across Canada and around the world to share information on the Quality Strategy and the OPS transformational agenda.

Results and achievements are also regularly included in ministry and OPS-wide newsletters and on intranet sites. The OPS staff newsletter, *Topical*, provides regular status updates to all OPS staff through supplemental inserts which are published four times per year. This ensures that regular, consistent messages are provided to staff.

At the launch of the Quality Service initiative, staff of OPSRS prepared information packages, with core presentations, questions and answers and key messages. These packages were distributed to managers to assist them in speaking with their staff about Quality Service in the OPS. The practice of providing managers with this kind of information package has been used at key junctures of the implementation, including the release of Citizens First 2000 results and the last external evaluation of achievement of the Common Service Standards, where each ministry was provided a customized presentation package for managers to use to disseminate results throughout each ministry.

Most ministries have quality intranet sites. Assessment results and status updates on the implementation of quality plans are posted. Results of recent audits of achievement of the Common Service Standards are shared with staff, as well as tips and reminders to assist staff in continuing to achieve the Standards. Messages from Deputy Ministers and other senior leaders are included on a regular basis.

To provide consistency and support to ministries and to provide information externally to the OPS, the OPSRS has both an intranet and internet site which have corporate information related to the Quality Service initiative. Key documents (e.g. the Framework for Action documents,



Topical Supplements and core presentations) are posted for staff and external contacts to access. Quality service has become part of the culture through a branding strategy and the use of the quality model (the “Q”) as part of the visual identity for the Quality Strategy. The brand has been produced on lapel pins, mousepads, identity tag holders (lanyards) and posters to ensure it stays visible for all staff. These items (“toys/tools”) are in demand by Ministry Leads who are initiating a quality service activity such as an organizational assessment and to event organizers who are organizing events where quality service is a key theme as a take away for participants.

In an environment where monetary rewards aren’t possible, these tools serve two purposes, they have helped brand the “Q” as the quality model for the OPS and they provide reward and recognition to staff, a perk for participating in the initiative.

Ontario’s Public Service is the Benchmark!

The OPS continues its quality journey, fueled by the work of the previous three years. Further work will be completed to ensure quality is embedded in the organization. Tools to support the implementation of quality improvements are under development or have recently been introduced to assist ministries improve organizational performance. Ontario will continue to measure itself against its Standards and its quality criteria. Improvements in customer satisfaction, delivery of services and the engagement of employees in the change process through customer and employee surveys will provide indicators of ongoing progress. These measures and the continuous improvement plans will guide the ongoing journey to public service excellence and achievement of the OPS quality goals.

Increasingly, the OPS is moving towards its goal of becoming the organization others choose to benchmark against. Over the past two years, one hundred and twenty delegations from over one hundred and thirty foreign countries have visited Ontario to learn about the transformation of the public service. Each has learned about Ontario’s quality program. Many are considering quality approaches for their own reform programs and have consulted extensively with Ontario about the 23 program and how to replicate it within their own jurisdictions. Because of the comprehensiveness of Ontario’s program and because results have been evaluated and tracked in ministry business plans, the program can successfully be replicated in other public services.

Ontario has been happy to share its experience with this change program and reflect on the successes and challenges it has faced on its journey so far. The lessons learned are similar to other jurisdictions and private sector organizations using quality tools and principles to bring about cultural change and organizational excellence.

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Critical to the progress achieved to date has been the senior management leadership dedicated to the achievement of the OPS Quality goals. The Secretary of the Cabinet has been a clear champion for Quality since the inception of the program by setting strategy and vision and holding Deputy Ministers accountable for results through their performance contracts. Senior management drive and commitment to quality has been key to individual ministry successes. Organization wide commitment to the approach, to the connection and integration of the planning processes and the setting of priorities and expectations have been essential to moving forward and producing results for the OPS. Reward and recognition of achievements have also been key implementation features, as well as senior executive demonstration of the importance and significance of quality service to the success of the organization.

Another significant challenge was, and continues to be, the need to involve all staff in the quality initiative either directly or indirectly. Active and constant communication is important to let people know why the organization is pursuing a quality program and how it is consistent with organizational goals. Throughout the past several years, OPS staff were involved in implementing a number of changes to ministry businesses and implementing corporate initiatives aimed at streamlining and enterprising the organization in order to modernize public service delivery. Providing a context for the change and painting the bigger picture for staff of the strategy for change has been an ongoing challenge for the Restructuring Secretariat and OPS senior leaders. The organizational thirst for information is unquenchable.

Setting measurable targets and results linked to business plans and accountability systems is a third key determinant in driving the organization forward. Measuring results through ongoing internal ministry reporting has begun to embed the cycle of continuous improvement into the culture of the OPS. External validation and research has verified ministry results, but equally importantly, has provided insights regarding how service delivery is perceived from the customer's perspective, highlighting good practices and areas where attention is necessary.

Although much has been accomplished over the past three years, there is still much to be done. The expectations of OPS customers will continue to be a spur to innovation and quality service. Ministries will respond by listening to their customers, building responsive public services, measuring and continually improving. Quality in the Ontario public service continues to be about the journey. Success will be judged by the public from the "outside-in".

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