

Capitalizing on Enterprise-Wide Learning: Considerations and Recommendations for the Canada

School of Public Service and its Role Supporting Blueprint 2020

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Executive Summary

The Canada School of Public Service (CSPS) will play a key role in supporting the Clerk's 2015 priorities for Public Service workplace culture: being nimble and agile, open and collaborative, and high-performing. In designing programs, the CSPS must ensure content relevance and develop skills for networked governance. For program delivery, the CSPS needs to adopt appropriate pedagogical methodologies, ensure sufficient learner support, and promote its new learning approaches. For management, the CSPS needs to promote the values of the Public Service, explore other options to control demand for training and education, and review programming against sufficient feedback.

1.0 Introduction

Blueprint 2020's vision for Canada's Public Service is a "capable, confident and high-performing workforce that embraces new ways of working and mobilizing the diversity of talent to serve the country's evolving needs."¹ Improving the capacity of Public Servants through learning and skills development will be central to building this high-performing workforce.² Accordingly, the Canada School of Public Service (CSPS) has been tasked with a key role in supporting the vision of Blueprint 2020 through delivering enterprise-wide learning opportunities.³ This paper explores the design, delivery, and management of CSPS learning programs with the purpose of contributing to Public Service innovation and better practices in serving Canadians. Drawing on academic literature and examples of other governments, this paper provides concrete recommendations to modernize the CSPS and improve Public Service workplace culture. In particular, this paper argues that the CSPS can play a central role supporting the Clerk's 2015 key priority themes for action: innovation and continuous improvement; being nimble and agile, open and collaborative, and high-performing. By building skills and competencies in these areas, the CSPS will play a vital role in improving the workplace culture of the Public Service, the ultimate goal of Blueprint 2020.⁴ The analysis and recommendations are organized around the CSPS's three areas of activity: the design, delivery, and management of learning services.

¹ Clerk of the Privy Council, "Destination 2020" 21-23

² Clerk of the Privy Council, "Destination 2020" 21-23

³ Clerk of the Privy Council, "Destination 2020" 21-23

⁴ Clerk of the Privy Council, "Twenty-Second Annual Report to the Prime Minister on the Public Service of Canada, 2015"

2.0 Design

2.1 Background

In March 2015, the CSPA unveiled the pillar of its new enterprise-wide training regime: a common, standardized curriculum meant to “support all Public Servants through key career transitions.”⁵ The CSPA promises that its enterprise-wide approach will prepare Public Servants for the “changing realities of government.”⁶ This will include standardized curricula in foundational development (Public Service culture, shared values, ethics and priorities), specialized development (for specialists such as those in HR, IT, Finance, etc.), management development, and executive development.⁷

2.2 Considerations for the Design of Learning Content

Enterprise-wide training might be inefficient for a Public Service that relies increasingly on transient employees. The Canadian Public Service has recently been moving away from what the OECD calls a “career” personnel system towards a “post system.”⁸ In a post system, specialists are recruited for specific tasks and do not necessarily remain Public Servants over the long-term.⁹ Since the 1990’s, there has been an observed trend towards a career/post system hybrid in Canada where the Public Service has merged both systems.¹⁰ In post systems, there is much less need for common, centralized training than in career systems.¹¹ Public Servants transferring from the private sector will import their own training, which might make some of the training offered by the CSPA redundant and inefficient. Conversely, given that they are coming from the private sector, impermanent employees will not be

⁵ Canada School of Public Service, “MySchool News – March 2015”

⁶ Canada School of Public Service, “MySchool News – March 2015”

⁷ Canada School of Public Service, “MySchool News – March 2015”

⁸ OECD, “Public Service Training in OECD Countries” 7

⁹ OECD, “Public Service Training in OECD Countries” 7

¹⁰ OECD, “Public Service Training in OECD Countries” 7; Flood, Colleen M., and Bryan Thomas, “Blurring of the Public/Private Divide: The Canadian Chapter” 4

¹¹ OECD, “Public Service Training in OECD Countries” 7

steeped in the basic values of Public Service, making that aspect of the enterprise-wide training even more important to them.

The second consideration, confirmed by research, is that networked governance—a key priority of the Clerk and of Blueprint 2020—requires that **Public Servants develop a new skillset**.¹² Networked governance recognizes the need for “active participation of a range of actors in addition to government itself.”¹³ The Blueprint 2020 exercise embodies the values of networked governance by soliciting and taking into account many voices and calling for an “open and networked” government environment.¹⁴ Without training, Public Servants may not tolerate the complexity and ambiguity that comes with managing relationships with diverse and disparate groups.¹⁵

2.3 Recommendations

In light of the considerations above, the CSPS ought to adopt the following recommendations:

1. **Training should be tailored to meet short-term objectives, emphasize the values of the public service, and avoid redundancies with the private sector.** The move towards a career/post hybrid system necessitates training that is immediately applicable for short-term employees and that coaches them in the basic values of the public service. The CSPS should also avoid duplicating training that Public Servants have already received in the private sector, recognizing that certain professions already provide standardized designations, and allow Public Servants the ability to opt out when they have already been trained (e.g., Chartered Professional Accountants, Project

¹² Jackson and Stainsby, “The Public Manager in 2010: Managing Public Sector Networked Organizations”; Liddle, “Educating Public Sector Managers Within a Changing Regional, Sub-Regional, and Local Governance Framework”; Pederson and Tangkjaer, “Building Leadership Capacity in the Evolving Network State”

¹³ Pollitt and Bouckaert, *Public Management Reform: A Comparative Analysis* 21

¹⁴ Clerk of the Privy Council, “Destination 2020” 3

¹⁵ Jackson and Stainsby, “The Public Manager in 2010: Managing Public Sector Networked Organizations”; Liddle, “Educating Public Sector Managers Within a Changing Regional, Sub-Regional, and Local Governance Framework”; Pederson and Tangkjaer, “Building Leadership Capacity in the Evolving Network State”

Management Professionals, etc.). Moreover, the CSPA should take note when demand for particular training areas exceed a sufficient threshold as the CSPA does not have the resources to create individualized training for everyone.

2. **The CSPA should provide training in the skills required by networked governance.** In particular, ventures in networked governance in the UK have shown that Public Servants must be able to tolerate complexity and ambiguity.¹⁶ Public Servants must also be able to build trust between diverse and disparate groups, some of whom might be traditionally disadvantaged or have an historical mistrust of government.¹⁷ For that reason, CSPA courses on relationship management, network-building, digital approaches to networked governance, and partnerships with outside organizations such as the non-profit sector are encouraged. At the leadership level, courses that address networked approaches, such as accountability in networks and horizontal management styles, would also be encouraged.

3.0 Delivery

3.1 Background

The CSPA is also working to modernize by creating new online mechanisms for delivering and promoting learning that “remove the traditional limitations on where, when and how public servants can pursue professional development.”¹⁸ The ‘ecosystem’ of online and traditional learning opportunities is visualized in Diagram 1.1 below.

¹⁶ Liddle, “Educating Public Sector Managers Within a Changing Regional, Sub-Regional, and Local Governance Framework” 19-22

¹⁷ Liddle, “Educating Public Sector Managers Within a Changing Regional, Sub-Regional, and Local Governance Framework” 15; OECD, “Public Service Training in OECD Countries” 9

¹⁸ Canada School of Public Service, “MySchool News – March 2015”

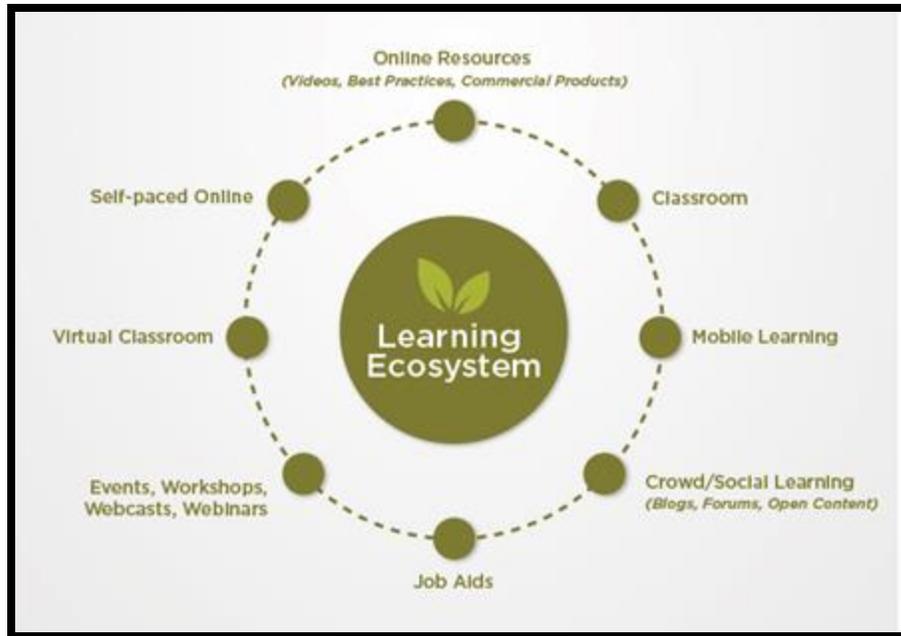


Diagram 1.1 – CSPS Learning Ecosystem.¹⁹

The use of technology-enabled learning (e-learning) is not new or unique to the CSPS. The CSPS operated the CampusDirect platform for e-learning, and there is also the Virtual School of the National School of Government in the UK, Federal Government GoLearn in the US, and the Civil Service College Open Academy of Singapore.²⁰ Findings from these governments’ e-learning programs inform the following considerations and recommendations.

3.2 Considerations in the Delivery of Learning Programs

Teaching Public Servants new knowledge and skills is effectively useless if **learners are unable to apply their new knowledge and skills into their work**. The inability to apply learning is particularly problematic when materials are taught in an abstract or theoretical manner.²¹ Similarly, the guidance

¹⁹ Canada School of Public Service, “MySchool News – March 2015”

²⁰ Chen 451

²¹ Knassmüller and Meyer 82

offered during an e-learning program, for instance, may no longer be present once employees return to the workplace; whereas in-house, in-person training represents a resource Public Servants can return to over time even after training has been completed.

Inadequate learner support by CSPS facilitators and trainers could compromise the efficacy of learning programs. With the adoption of technology-enabled learning mechanisms, there is a risk that CSPS will reduce the amount of facilitators and teachers available to support learners, as often happens with the adoption of virtual learning platforms.²² Yet access to facilitators and instructors is an essential component of the learning process, particularly when learning about complex concepts.²³ Furthermore, even when instructors or facilitators are available, online exchanges can be challenging compared to face-to-face exchanges.²⁴ Finally, the increased demand for CSPS learning programs due to the removal of financial barriers and the substantial learning needs associated with Blueprint 2020 could dramatically increase the instructor-learner ratio.

Research has shown that **people generally value e-learning less than classroom-based learning.**²⁵ With training offered outside the office, trainees get reprieve from usual duties so they can fully involve themselves in learning. However, studies have shown that e-learning is often added on to existing workloads by managers without consideration for the time required to maximize learning.²⁶ Moreover, the ability of learners to maximize benefits from learning programs directly relates to the valued outcomes they expect to receive from the program;²⁷ if e-learning is less valued than classroom-based learning programs, then it will lead to sub-standard learning outcomes.

²² Langford and Seaborne 52

²³ Langford and Seaborne 61-62

²⁴ Langford and Seaborne 52

²⁵ Langford and Seaborne 51; Chen 453

²⁶ Langford and Seaborne 51

²⁷ Chen 453

3.3 Recommendations

The CSPS should adopt the following recommendations:

1. **Adopt pedagogical methods that allow learners to critically apply their learning to their work.**

This could include the use of techniques such as explorative learning²⁸ or engaged learning,²⁹ as well as other techniques which allow for the critical application of learned material to workplace problems. Further coaching or supervision can help to support this critical application of new knowledge and skills.³⁰ The assessment of training modules should be partially based on whether learners can successfully apply their new knowledge to their work.

2. **Employ an adequate number of trainers and facilitators ensuring all learners have access to an individual who can help them understand new subjects and develop new skills.** To be cost

effective, learner feedback and assistance can be provided through learning communities or other peer-supported processes, as was successfully demonstrated in Korea.³¹ Studies have confirmed that workplace learning most often happens “through discussion with communities of people who also do the same or closely related work.”³² However, facilitators and trainers will still need to be available to support learners and facilitate peer-support mechanisms. The CSPS should make itself available for Public Servants to build a relationship with and return to even after their training has been completed. Maintaining an adequate number of trainers comes at a cost, but a fully-online version of CSPS learning programs, without in-person support, would not be good value for money.

²⁸ According to Peterson and Tangkjær, explorative learning is research-based teaching where the student and teacher learn together through experimentation and failure, and incorporation of one’s organizational reality. (36-37)

²⁹ According to Paterson and Tangkjær, engaged learning is where the student becomes involved in the creation of learning objectives, and bringing in personal and ambitious projects to the learning process. (37-39)

³⁰ Knassmüller and Meyer 91

³¹ Hur and Im 208

³² Langford and Seaborne 64

- 3. Be proactive in communicating the value of e-learning to managers and potential trainees as well as the time requirements of e-learning processes.** Learners need to value e-learning, and managers need to provide learners with sufficient time to complete programs. People who have benefitted from CSPS's e-learning programs can act as 'e-learning champions' to help counter negative attitudes toward e-learning.

4.0 Management

4.1 Background

Blueprint 2020 calls for the CSPS to provide enterprise-wide learning opportunities to the entire Public Service at no charge to the learner.³³ Instead of being funded on a pay-per-use model (i.e., per employee trained), the CSPS is moving to a cost recovery model where departments make an up-front contribution to the CSPS.³⁴ Moreover, all Public Servants, regardless of their location or career stage, are guaranteed learning opportunities.³⁵

4.2 Considerations for the Management of Learning Programs

The provision of training free of charge to the learner is likely to **change Public Servants' demand for training from the CSPS**. In addition to lowering barriers to entry, the CSPS is mandating across-the-board standardized training for professional positions in e.g. Finance, Human Resources, and Information Technology.³⁶ For example, at the Canada Revenue Agency, these categories comprise 11% of the Agency's permanent work force—totalling over 3,700 Public Servants (statistics as of 1 April 2015). If all

³³ Clerk of the Privy Council, "Destination 2020" 20

³⁴ Canada School of Public Service, "MySchool News – Special Bulletin"

³⁵ Canada School of Public Service, "MySchool News – Special Bulletin"

³⁶ Canada School of Public Service, "MySchool News – March 2015"

such professionals across the Public Service require standardized training, thousands of Public Servants would need training, a vast undertaking.

The risk of increased demand for training is particularly acute given a context of scarce resources. Whereas e-learning offers expanded learning opportunities, there is nevertheless a need for instructors and access to support (as discussed in more detail above). Public Servants' increased demand for training under the new CSPS regime would put a strain on the human and capital resources.

There is a possibility that some ministries or professions would monopolize scarce training opportunities to the exclusion of other Public Servants. Given that each department will provide the CSPS with an upfront contribution, managers may more liberally approve training.

Finally, an enterprise-wide training structure **might not address disparate perspectives and needs** within the Public Service. There is inherent tension between the "whole-of-government approach" of Blueprint 2020 and the unique and sometimes incommensurable needs of the different arms of government.³⁷ Moreover, an employee may potentially find a course extremely valuable while management may not notice a significant improvement in their ability. Therefore, the CSPS will need to account for the various perspectives within the Public Service.

4.3 Recommendations

- 1. The CSPS's enterprise-wide training must instill the values and culture of the Public Service to manage the scarcity of training opportunities.** Nobel-prize winning economist Elinor Ostrom demonstrated how common property can be successfully managed by the groups using it (as opposed to requiring external regulation or intervention).³⁸ While her research applies to social-

³⁷ Clerk of the Privy Council, "Destination 2020" 3

³⁸ Ostrom 420-421

ecological systems (e.g., fisheries or forests), her ideas may be applicable to the CSPS context. Users of scarce resources who share “moral and ethical standards [...], norms of reciprocity [and] trust in one another to keep agreements” tend to have lower costs of monitoring their scarce resources.³⁹

The CSPS might use this lesson to inform the enterprise-wide training in Public Service values that it promises; in particular, the values of stewardship (effectively and efficiently using public money), integrity (maintaining one’s employer’s trust), and excellence (fostering a work environment that promotes teamwork, learning and innovation) should be central.⁴⁰

2. **The CSPS should communicate to Public Servants the scarce nature of the learning opportunities it guarantees to them.** Ostrom writes “users need to observe some scarcity before they invest in self-organization.”⁴¹ The School should publish the number of participants it serves—a nudge that would lead Public Servants to recognize the scarcity of the training received for free. Communicating the volume of potential learners might help the public service manage its own expectations of what the learning will provide.

3. **The CSPS should explore options to grandfather or fast-track experienced Public Servants, or impose quotas.** There is no point in creating a bottleneck for Public Servants who need training when many are adequately prepared for their roles, be it in professional training or the basic values of the public service. By grandfathering or fast-tracking experienced Public Servants, the CSPS could alleviate some demand on the system under the new enterprise-wide regime. Equally, quotas on ministries or professional levels would ensure that training is fairly dispersed among Public Servants and not monopolized by ambitious departments or professions.

³⁹ Ostrom 421

⁴⁰ Treasury Board Secretariat, “Values and Ethics Code for the Public Sector”

⁴¹ Ostrom 420-421

4. **The CSPS should implement an ongoing feedback loop**, similar to its efforts in Blueprint 2020, where both managers and lower-level employees can provide input on evaluating the training they see as needed. While learning itself has its own merits, the CSPS must ensure that Public Service learning creates increased value for Canadians. It is critical that, as Blueprint 2020 promises, “departments, agencies and the [CSPS ...] work together on an ongoing basis.”⁴²

5.0 Conclusion

The Clerk’s Report identifies key priority themes for action: innovation and continuous improvement; being nimble and agile, open and collaborative; and being high-performing.⁴³ The CSPS has an integral role in supporting these priorities and improving Public Service workplace culture through its enterprise-wide approach to learning.⁴⁴ However, the CSPS must also take into account several important considerations for the design, delivery and management of the CSPS’s learning programs. Ultimately, the success of Blueprint 2020 hinges on Public Servants’ capacity to deliver on its vision. As a potentially powerful source of capacity building in the GC, the CSPS’s role in achieving Blueprint 2020’s ambitions should not be discounted.

⁴² Clerk of the Privy Council, “Destination 2020” 23

⁴³ Clerk of the Privy Council, “Twenty-Second Annual Report to the Prime Minister on the Public Service of Canada, 2015”

⁴⁴ Clerk of the Privy Council, “Twenty-Second Annual Report to the Prime Minister on the Public Service of Canada, 2015”

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