



Observatory of  
**Public Sector Innovation**

Preliminary Findings - October 2017

Canada Report Supplement





## Disclosure

This supplementary booklet should be considered as a working document that was used in the production of the report *The Innovation System of the Public Service of Canada*, developed during 2017-early 2018.

We invite the reader to note that as such, this document has no official standing, but was shared for instructional purposes as part of OPSI's work and to fulfil the mission to help countries understand their public sector innovation systems.

Due to the fragmented nature of any innovation system, it is quite possible there are errors, omissions, or things that have been misinterpreted or nuances missed (but that's part of the learning process). It is hoped that this annex can provide a resource that can be built upon, and a more official and complete version developed over time.



## *Notes*

This working document has been prepared as part of an OECD Review of the Canadian Public Service's Innovation System, being undertaken with the support of the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, and the Privy Council Office.

The aims of the project are to:

- Make an assessment of the current state of the public sector innovation system, what it delivers, and the range of different actors within the system
- Understand the public sector innovation system in-depth, including the position and the role of different components, the system's strengths and weaknesses, and the system's ability to deliver change that makes a difference
- Identify areas for action for the Canadian government to reinforce its capacity to innovate and thereby deliver better outcomes for citizens and government.

The project is guided by eight research questions:

1. How is innovation understood within the Public Service of Canada?
2. What is the lived experience of innovation in, and by, the Public Service of Canada?
3. Who are the key actors and what are their roles?
4. What are the current perceptions, hopes and concerns about innovation?
5. What is working, and what has been achieved?
6. Where are the gaps and unmet needs?
7. What might be changed to support a more effective innovation system?
8. Where are the best places to act first?

This document is supported by a series of companion draft artefacts:

- Innovation Review Project Outline
- Innovation Definitions Compilation, "Innovation in the Public Service of Canada – what is it and what does it mean to people?"
- Innovation Timeline, "Innovation Timeline for the Public Service of Canada"
- Innovation Examples, "Key Examples of Innovation in the Canadian Public Service"
- Innovation Players, "Identifying the Actors in the Canadian Public Service's Innovation System"

This document has primarily drawn on the outcomes of interviews, conversations and workshops involving nearly 100 people within, or closely connected, with the Canadian Public Service.

This document and any map included herein are without prejudice to the status of or sovereignty over any territory, to the delimitation of international frontiers and boundaries and to the name of any territory, city or area.

The Review is being conducted by the Observatory of Public Sector Innovation team with the Public Governance Directorate of the OECD. The Observatory collects and analyses examples and shared experiences of public sector innovation to provide practical advice to countries on how to make innovation work.

## Contents

Notes .....	3
UNDERSTANDING THE INNOVATION SYSTEM OF THE CANADIAN PUBLIC SERVICE: AN INTRODUCTION .....	6
THE INNOVATION SYSTEM OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE OF CANADA – A PRELIMINARY OVERVIEW .....	11
Initial Finding 1: Whether the Public Service of Canada is innovative depends on who you ask .....	12
Initial Finding 2: There is not a widely shared conception of “innovation” .....	14
Initial Finding 3: The focus on public sector innovation is relatively recent, and takes place within a rich history .....	16
Mapping the System: A Timeline of Milestones, Developments and Contextual Events .....	18
Initial Finding 4: There is “narrative confusion” about the innovation agenda and its intersection with other agendas .....	20
Initial Finding 5: There is no overall picture of the innovation that is occurring .....	22
Mapping the System: Examples of Innovation in the Public Service of Canada.....	24
Lessons From Innovation Projects.....	25
Initial Finding 6: The role played by the Central Innovation Hub is not widely understood or recognised.....	26
Initial Finding 7: The roles played by other organisations with regards to innovation is not widely understood or recognised.....	28
Mapping the System: System Actors and Responsibilities.....	29
Initial Finding 8: There is no commonly understood view about what role individual public servants can or should play in the innovation process .....	30
Initial Finding 9: There are many barriers and obstacles that confront the innovation process ....	32
Initial Finding 10: One main barrier or obstacle is the hierarchy; particularly the “Clay Layer”/middle management.....	35
Initial Finding 11: The barriers to innovation are not absolute.....	37
Initial Finding 12: Innovation can feel like a fight, and one where winning does not feel like winning .....	39
Initial Finding 13: Risk Aversion is an endemic issue .....	41
Initial Finding 14: The notion of risk is beginning to be reframed and renegotiated, but it’s not there yet .....	43
Initial Finding 15: The underlying systems of government are not calibrated for innovation .....	45
Initial Finding 16: The systems of government have the ability to change, but not quickly .....	47
Initial Finding 17: Government is confronted by significant rates of technological change .....	49
Initial Finding 18: There is a focus on impact, but not necessarily a strong connection to those being impacted.....	51
Initial Finding 19: There are a number of “limiting factors” that are affecting the capability and capacity to innovate .....	53
Initial Finding 20: The commitment necessary to match the expectations of innovation may not be there yet .....	55
Initial Finding 21: There are a lot of pockets of innovation .....	57
Initial Finding 22: Innovation is often something that is done ‘side-of-desk’ .....	59
Initial Finding 23: The innovation community is not well integrated into the broader Public Service of Canada .....	61
Initial Finding 24: Senior leadership’s relationship with innovation is patchy .....	63
Initial Finding 25: The behaviours appropriate and necessary for innovation to thrive are still being developed.....	65
Initial Finding 26: The appropriate balance between innovation and other needs is not clear .....	67
Initial Finding 27: There’s energy and optimism about the journey ahead.....	69

Initial Finding 28: There is a considerable diversity of views about what needs to happen next.. 71

## UNDERSTANDING THE INNOVATION SYSTEM OF THE CANADIAN PUBLIC SERVICE: AN INTRODUCTION

*Why look at the innovation system?*

Why a review of the innovation system? Why does it matter and how is it relevant?

“Public sector innovation is about finding new and better means to achieve public ends. Innovation, especially breakthrough innovation, is complex and challenging for governments. Yet, the scale and nature of the challenges that governments face today require responses that go beyond incremental improvements. The public sector context has also changed with low level of productivity for a re-thinking and re-scoping of public sector processes, structures and systems.”<sup>1</sup>

In short, innovation matters because it is one of the primary means by which governments can deliver the results that are required and expected. Any government that does not innovate, while in a world of fast-paced technological, social, environmental and economic changes, is unlikely to meet the needs of its citizens and deliver on any visions of a better country or society.

Yet innovation does not happen on its own or simply because it is needed. Innovation often faces barriers, hurdles or just the ordinary challenges of trying to overcome existing habits, existing processes, and the incumbency of the status quo. Innovation can require new skills, new mindsets, new structures, and new enabling conditions. Innovative initiatives can take time to demonstrate that they are better than the established approach. They can require support. In other words, undertaking innovation can be difficult, challenging and demanding.

If innovation is needed, but will not necessarily occur on its own, then it becomes important to appreciate the innovation system and how it functions. What are the factors that are supporting or hindering innovation? What is influencing the quality and quantity of innovation that the system is achieving? Is the system delivering innovation where it is needed? Is it doing so consistently?

An innovation system is a result of the aggregate interactions and impacts of inter-related and inter-dependent components and factors that can affect when and how innovation occurs. It is big and complex. In order to be understood, a framework, a mental model, is required. A good framework will provide a means by which to understand where there are strengths, where the system is functioning well, and also where it is not, where there are gaps or underdeveloped capabilities. A review of an innovation system can provide insight into what frameworks, what models are useful, and what might be done next.

So if innovation is needed, and it follows that understanding the innovation system is a helpful way to identify what is working (and what is not), then how should the review of an innovation system be approached? Which framework is best to to begin with?

*How do you begin to understand an innovation system?*

A place to start might be to think about the essential components of the system, and how they relate to innovation. For instance:

- People: who are those undertaking innovation? Who are those trying to introduce new ideas? Also, why are they trying to do it? What motivates them to work against the status quo, when the incentives might act against it? What are their beliefs that help them think that alternatives are not only possible, but that they should help make them happen?
- Organisations: what are the structures, processes and infrastructure that exist to support or depress innovation? What are values of the organisations? What do they reward, encourage

---

<sup>1</sup> OECD 2017, *Fostering Innovation in the Public Sector*, p.11

and reinforce, and what do they discourage, ignore or stop? How do the organisations identify problems and capture lessons?

- Institutions: what the established practices and system-wide beliefs? What does the public sector, as a whole, demonstrate in how it works when it comes to innovation? What is enforced, what is encouraged? What is expected of the public sector, as an institution, when it comes to innovation?

Another framework<sup>2</sup> might be to consider people, the essential building blocks of innovation, more closely. It might ask about their:

- Capability to innovate, which is essentially whether the relevant level in an organisation/system is able to innovate. This is shaped by resources, skills, knowledge and space to innovate
- Motivation to innovate, or whether the team or unit actually wants to innovate. This is shaped by incentives, values, leadership and behaviour
- Opportunity to innovate, or whether the enabling conditions are there to innovate. This is shaped by creativity, autonomy and collaboration.

Alternatively, it might be wise to consider those enabling conditions in detail<sup>3</sup> – for instance, regulation, budgeting, human resources, innovation organisations and structures, or how risk is dealt with or engaged with. What is, deliberately or otherwise, being valued, encouraged, enabled by these core conditions? What is not?

Yet a further approach might be to consider the innovation lifecycle, effectively the innovation “supply chain”.



**Figure 1: The Innovation Lifecycle**

This involves looking at:

- Identifying problems – learning where and how an innovative response is needed, where the demand for innovation is
- Generating ideas – finding and filtering ideas to respond to problems, what are the possible options
- Developing proposals – turning ideas into business cases that can be assessed and acted upon, understanding which options might be best

---

<sup>2</sup> OECD 2017, *Fostering Innovation in the Public Sector*, p.21. See also OECD 2017, Public Governance Review, *Innovation Skills in the Public Sector: Building Capabilities in Chile*.

<sup>3</sup> OECD 2017, *Fostering Innovation in the Public Sector*, p.22



- Implementing projects – making the innovation happen
- Evaluating projects – understanding whether the innovative initiative has delivered what was needed, whether the promise of the idea was sufficient for the realities of the problem
- Diffusing lessons – using what was learnt to inform other projects, seeing how the innovation can be applied in other ways to maximise its value.

There are, then, quite a number of possible frameworks or models that one might use to approach the investigation and understanding of a public sector innovation system. Added to these, there has been some previous work done by individual governments on looking at innovation and what might be done to understand, support and encourage it.<sup>4</sup>

So, in order to understand the innovation system of the Public Service of Canada, can one of these existing frameworks be used? If so, which one would be best?

*A cautionary note on innovation in the wild, as opposed to innovation in theory*

Before applying a specific model, it is important to note some other characteristics of innovation systems, and to appreciate the limitations of theory when it comes to understanding an emergent topic such as public sector innovation. Some relevant factors include that:

- Innovation systems are dynamic. What happens in one part of the system will affect other parts over time, and the totality of the system can only be appreciated over a longer context. What has happened before will have shaped things, and affected what is possible in the future. Who did what, when, and with whom, will also have flow-on effects through-out the system. For instance, if one agency undertakes a radical experiment, and it works well, then that might assist others make the case to do something similar. However, if the experiment goes wrong, others may quickly feel that trying to experiment is bad, even if they had no personal connection to it or unaware of the specifics of the case. This means that capturing a sense of the system from a single moment in time will be insufficient for really understanding it.
- Innovation systems involve multiple, contextual truths – there is no one truth. Different people will experience the same things in different ways. Where one person may be encouraged and enthused by a stirring message from a senior leader, another may feel that they had heard the same things many times before and it never changed anything. Where one may find a series of rules impenetrable and confusing, another may see contradictions and loopholes that provide an opportunity for working in between and around compliance requirements. Each experience will have its own validity, its own truth, and yet may be contradictory or conflicting with others. Multiple things can be true, and yet very different. Therefore, understanding an innovation system requires identifying and appreciating the tensions that come with multiple, contextual truths.
- Innovation is an evolving practice. How people and organisations undertake innovation changes over time. Innovation is something that humans or their antecedents have been doing since the invention of tools, yet much is still being learnt about the practice of innovation. This is only exacerbated as new technologies increase the number and type of possible

---

<sup>4</sup> Australia's 2010 report to its (then) Management Advisory Committee, *Empowering Change: Fostering Innovation in the Australian Public Service* [https://industry.gov.au/innovation/publicsectorinnovation/Pages/Library%20Card/Empowering\\_Change.aspx](https://industry.gov.au/innovation/publicsectorinnovation/Pages/Library%20Card/Empowering_Change.aspx) and its companion piece *Assessing Policies, Programs and Other Initiatives to Promote Innovation in the Public Sector: International Case Studies* [https://industry.gov.au/innovation/publicsectorinnovation/Pages/Library%20Card/Empowering\\_Change\\_Annex\\_1.aspx](https://industry.gov.au/innovation/publicsectorinnovation/Pages/Library%20Card/Empowering_Change_Annex_1.aspx); the UK 2009 National Audit Office report, *Innovation across Central Government*, <https://www.nao.org.uk/report/innovation-across-central-government/>

innovative options. This means that an innovation system that was perfectly suited for one time, may be found insufficient in another. It also means that it is difficult to fully ‘optimise’ an innovation system, as a system is more likely to need continued fine-tuning, rather than a ‘set-and-forget’ approach.

- Innovation systems are complex, and public sector innovation systems particularly so. They involve people, their behaviours and their beliefs. They involve culture, values and the interplay of different types of knowledge and skills. They involve organisations and their various business practices and deliverables. They involve politics (Where is innovation needed? What should it look like? Who should be involved? What happens if innovation results in someone being worse off?). They involve power (How does innovation affect leadership? What does it mean for hierarchical or traditional structures? How is innovation recognised or rewarded?). They involve the interconnection of multiple individuals and groups, organisations, practices and previous innovations, and are, simply, messy. Therefore no framework or model (a simplified version of reality) is likely capture the full nuance of an innovation system. There will likely always be a point of irreducibility, beyond which simplification will mean the model loses the ability to reflect the nuance and reality of the system. There will also likely be a point of accessibility, after which the system will be incomprehensible as the model provides too much detail and too many considerations for the system to be meaningfully grappled with.

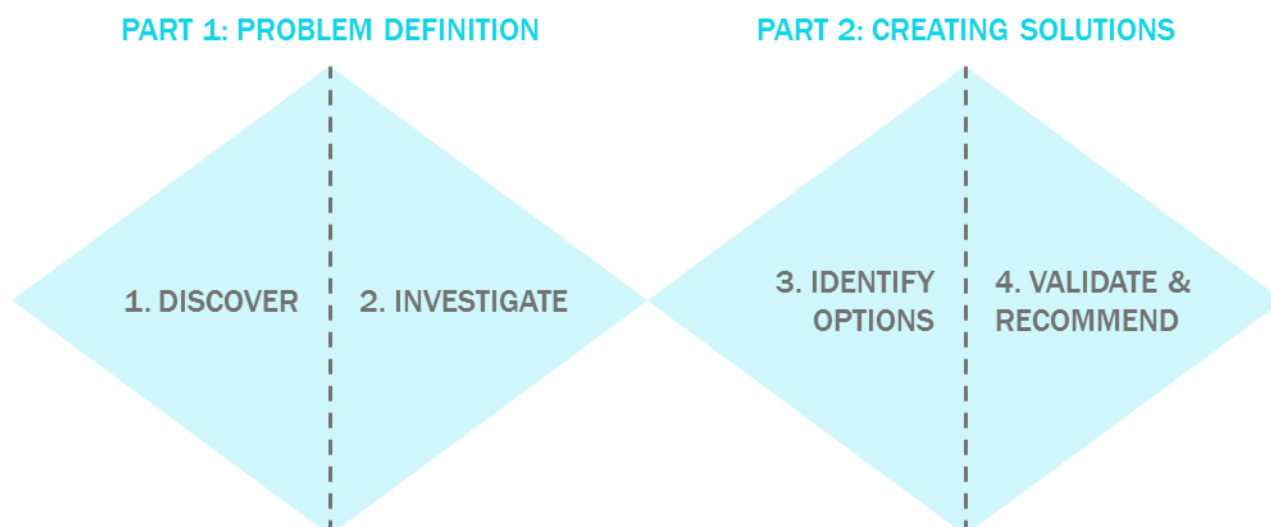
These factors mean that innovation systems need to be understood in context. There needs to be an appreciation of their past, of the lived experience, of the realities of innovation in that environment, and of the other systems and factors that might have bearing on the innovation system.

#### *An experimental approach to understanding public sector innovation systems*

In short, then, there is no one readily available “gold standard” innovation framework that exists that can be applied to an entire public sector and provide immediate answers as to where there are strengths and weaknesses, or where action needs to be taken. An innovation system needs to also be understood in context, with a real understanding of how the system is experienced.

Given these factors, an “off-the-shelf” approach is not yet advisable. An exploratory and experimental approach is needed, one that allows for more to be learnt about the nature and characteristics of public sector innovation systems, and that provides insight about which frameworks may be of most use. Only then might there be sufficient understanding to apply a framework to other countries.

Therefore, this Review is taking a ‘design-led’ approach, in that it is seeking to uncover and understand the lived experience of those within the system.



**Figure 2: Innovation Review Process (inspired by Design Council's Double Diamond)<sup>5</sup>**

This document marks the juncture between “Discover” and “Investigate”. The preliminary findings identified here will be investigated further and tested with, including through a series of specific case studies that can illustrate in detail the working of different aspects of the innovation system.

This document is intended to spark conversation about the innovation system of the Canadian Public Service, its nature, and how it might need to develop or be strengthened.

#### Advice on How to Approach the Findings Contained in this Document

This working document provides an early overview assessment and a series of preliminary specific findings about the innovation system of the Canadian Public Service. Each of the findings is accompanied by a descriptive sentence that epitomises the finding, that could be used by someone if they were talking about the system or describing it to someone else, and then by a short explanatory description. That is followed by a short discussion of why it might be relevant or why it might be significant to the functioning of the innovation system, and then by an indication of where there might already be positive signs or developments within the system that relate to that finding. Most findings are followed by a set of quotes taken from the interviews conducted for this Review. These quotes are intended to provide some relevant insight into the finding, and to help illustrate some of the nuances, tensions or contradictions that might underpin the finding. As the innovation system is a complex one, made up of many views, the quotes should be regarded in aggregate, rather than drawing on any one to make a judgement about the system.

None of these findings should be taken as an official or formal assessment, but are provided for the purposes of testing, exploration, discussion and further investigation. They are an attempt to reflect what has been learnt about the system back to those within the system, and to check whether they accurately represent the current state of the system.

<sup>5</sup> Read more about the Design Council's Double Diamond approach at <http://www.designcouncil.org.uk/news-opinion/design-process-what-double-diamond>

## **THE INNOVATION SYSTEM OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE OF CANADA – A PRELIMINARY OVERVIEW**

The picture of the public sector innovation system assembled suggests that overall the innovation system is relatively immature in that:

- there is no overriding sense of what the intent driving the system is
- there is no overall picture of the innovation system, what it includes, what it involves, what is happening, nor how it is performing
- the expected roles to be played by individuals and organisations is not clear
- there are a number of things acting as unintentional filters for innovative activity, with a result that the determining factors for the success of an innovation is less likely to be its underlying promise and potential, and more likely to be related to how it can be shepherded through barriers, risk aversion, and systems not calibrated to innovation
- innovation is not well integrated into business-as-usual
- the behaviours and norms for supporting innovation are not well established or explicit
- there is no shared sense across the system of what needs to happen next.

This picture may seem bleak, but it should be seen in a global context, where very few (if any) public sector innovation systems appear to be very mature and developed. Public sector innovation systems are complex, and much still is to be learnt about how to best drive them.

In addition, there is considerable activity happening across the Public Service of Canada, supported by many passionate people trying their best to get better outcomes for Canadians. Some of the immaturity of the system may simply be a by-product of the recency of the coordinated focus on innovation. Over time, many of these issues may resolve themselves, given the promising efforts already underway. Other issues may be resolved simply by drawing attention to them, and allowing and empowering people and teams to come up with their own solutions.

The journey of innovation in the Public Service of Canada is still relatively new. These findings are intended to provide an insight into how to make that journey as successful as possible.

### ***Initial Finding 1: Whether the Public Service of Canada is innovative depends on who you ask***

*“There are a lot of different views about how innovative the Canadian Public Service is”*

There was a wide range of sentiments expressed about how innovative the public service is, ranging from it definitely not being innovative, to it definitely being innovative with innovation happening all the time.

#### ***Why This Might Matter***

In any organisation or system there are likely to be many different views about any topic, and this is especially likely to be the case with something as ambiguous and hard to pin down as innovation. Yet to have a very varied perception of the system suggests that:

- The system is not clearly understood or defined
- The system is not even recognised as a system
- There is no benchmark or common reference point
- There are varying views as to how innovative the system should be
- There is no common understanding of what innovation is
- Some combination of these factors is at play.

It is likely that if there was a clear understanding of the system then there would be much more consistency in views about whether the system was innovative (or not).

In the absence of a more cohesive view of the system (or its performance) it's unlikely that different actors within the system will find agreement on what, if any, changes need to be made to the system. If some think it is already innovating, while others do not think it is at all, then there is unlikely to be agreement about the nature or severity of the problem (Do we need to be innovating more? How? Why?).

In short, then, if there is not agreement on how innovative the system is, it is unlikely that different actors will agree on whether, and how, it might need to be more innovative.

#### ***Positive Signs***

There are many signs of innovative activity happening across the Canadian Public Service, with a lot of focus on, and thinking about, innovation by many people and organisations. However, it is not clear that there is a common understanding of what innovation actually is.

“Is the Public Service of Canada Innovative?”

- “Yes.”
- “No.”
- “If I were to answer for myself, I would say N/A. I don’t have enough information. I’ve only been around a year.”
- “I would say it’s pretty embryonic. We’re just starting to think about it, we’re starting to look at how we’re going to integrate ...”
- “I would say that we’re taking steps towards it; in the sense that no, we’re not fully innovative ...”
- “I think it is. I think it’s a lot more innovative than it’s given credit.”
- “I would definitely say we’re innovative. It would then be a question of degree and the scale and the scope of that, the pace relative to different times that I can look back on in my career ...”
- “I think there’s lots of micro-level innovation across the public service right now.”
- “I think we are in a very recognisable state of transition. I would not say we have arrived at the endpoint, but I’m not sure there is an endpoint, so I definitely think there’s a recognition and an awareness that it’s necessary to do things differently.”
- “I would say the system is highly un-innovative. In fact, I would argue it’s pretty much sclerotic. There is very, very little innovation. What innovation there is moves slowly ...”
- “I don’t know that there’s an answer for all of the government of Canada.”
- “I think it is innovative within certain boundaries and I think it’s innovative in certain areas.”
- “I would lean towards no, but they’re trying. I think people are slowly starting to come out of the old ways of working ... When you think innovation, government of Canada isn’t the first word that comes to mind but I think we’re moving towards a place that could happen.”
- “Without a doubt.”
- “No better than anybody else. I think it is very difficult.”
- “I don’t know. I can’t say. I think there are challenges to being innovative within the public sector.”
- “I think the Canadian Public Service knows that it needs to be innovative. I’m not sure it knows how to do that yet.”
- “Yes, but not enough.”
- “I don’t think I can give a yes or a no to that. It’s not typically the most dynamic environment for innovation.”
- “Generally, no.”
- “I think on the whole, I think yes. I think, as I say, there’s that potential. There’s a lot of things that just get managed on a status quo kind of basis, and there’s not always the motivation to always look for improvements.”
- “There is certainly innovation happening.”
- “Absolutely not, far from it.”
- “I think we are emerging in that area.”
- “Sure. In terms of, in some ways.... From my perspective, it’s pretty set in its ways.”
- “... my observation is that there has been more encouragement to actually do some intentional innovation in other areas, but it’s been more what I would call more traditional innovation.”
- “In many respects, yes, yes.”
- “At times .... It may not be the first characteristic I associate with the public service of Canada.”
- “I would say that there’s innovation happening literally every day in every area of the public service, probably in every department.”
- “Continuously improving ... I would say that we’ve got a ways to go.”
- “I would say I think there are definitely pockets of innovation and we should be proud of those, but on a whole, the way government operates, I think it’s pretty poor. Which makes me sad.”
- “If I contrast it from five years ago ... I would say the progress has been encouraging.”
- “Not nearly as innovative as I would hope it to be.”
- “I think they have the potential to be. I think that in a lot of small ways, they are. They don’t know what it is.”

## ***Initial Finding 2: There is not a widely shared conception of “innovation”***

*“I don’t think everyone is talking about the same thing when we talk about innovation”*

There is considerable variation in how innovation in the Public Service of Canada is understood. This variation applies to basic definitions, as well as the conceptual associations/meaning/significance that was given to innovation.

### ***Why This Might Matter***

Innovation is an inherently ambiguous concept, as it is about things that have not happened before. It is hard to be specific about something completely new. Therefore it is expected that any innovation system will have some variance as to what innovation really means, what people identify as actually innovative, and what innovation is for or when it is needed. Indeed, some variance and lack of precision may be healthy and necessary, in order to avoid being too prescriptive, to allow for the questioning of the status quo and tailoring to different organisational contexts.

However, the variance witnessed in the context of the Public Service of Canada appears to be very high, which can be problematic. A shared understanding can be important in order to aid the:

- **Practice of innovation:** it is difficult to get better at something unless there’s a shared language for talking about the practice of actually doing it.
- **Maturity of the innovation system:** it is difficult to collectively develop more sophisticated approaches to guiding and facilitating innovative practice, unless there is a shared understanding of what innovation is, what the innovation system includes.
- **Legitimacy of/support for innovation:** innovation can be risky and contested by others. Effective innovation needs to be seen as legitimate, and will often require support (whether passive or in the form of engagement, skills or resources) from others. It can be hard to build that support, and to manage the expectations around innovation, if there is a not clear articulation of what the innovation is, why it matters, and how it fits with the core work of government.

In short, then, without a common understanding, it will be hard develop a shared picture and a shared practice of innovation, and to communicate with others about what it is that’s being done.

### ***Positive Signs***

While the definitions and conceptions of innovation varied, some possible core elements from the interviews and wider discussions could be identified around:

- The difficult and challenging nature of innovation, yet it being important
- Innovation as a means for creating options and solving problems
- Innovation as a means for achieving improved outcomes for Canadians
- A focus on impact and measurement
- Innovation being a process that involves new ways of thinking and questioning of, or reflecting on, the current state.

<p>“In our context, innovation means applying new insights, resources, technologies, or approaches that can be demonstrated to improve outcomes for the public compared to conventional ways of doing things.”</p> <p><i>Annual Report: Central Innovation Hub, 2016-2017<sup>6</sup></i></p>
---

---

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/pco-bcp/documents/pdfs/inn-inn/annual\\_report2016-17\\_eng.pdf](https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/pco-bcp/documents/pdfs/inn-inn/annual_report2016-17_eng.pdf)

## What Does Innovation Mean?

- Making things better
- Better outcomes, results and solutions for Canadians
- Fundamentally changing the way we engage with Canadians
- Creating things that create new public value
- Staying relevant
- Modernisation
- Solving a problem
- Responding quickly when a change needs to be made
- Doing things better and doing them faster
- Copying other governments and organisations
- Constantly questioning the value and relevance of existing policies and processes
- Deconstructing and reconstructing processes
- Constantly looking at new ways of getting better at the policy making process
- Breaking open the system, where appropriate
- Choosing to start at a different or unorthodox place
- Departing from convention on how we work, letting go of current understandings of what the boundaries are and what the rules are
- Knowing the rules and the system well enough to work around them, to figure out what doesn't work
- Putting users first
- Connecting things in new ways
- A focus on measurement of outcomes
- Involving different people than normal
- Trying new ways of doing things
- Challenging assumptions
- Looking for the best, rather than just the status quo
- Self-reflection
- Intelligent risk-taking
- A process of developing and testing ideas and deciding if the work or not
- Something new to a relative context or time that adds value to both users and providers
- Invention plus adoption
- A functionally novel product or service, or process that produces a significant positive change compared to the status quo
- The successful exploitation of a new idea
- Long term enduring changes in the way we do our work, including the tools we use, our ability to make use of foresight methodology, prototyping methodology, the whole suite of tools, design tools that innovation labs make available
- The ability to try new things and do things differently, in order to improve the process of the system or reinvent the process or the system
- Insights and solutions
- Looking for options
- A response to pressure, or to adaptive problems
- Testing ideas in the real world
- A leap, not something already conceived of
- Being able to look forward and do things that are going to make sense in ten years, and not to do things that made sense ten years ago
- Different, but related, to experimentation
- Taking the best of what's worked, but not resting on that as a firmament that doesn't change
- Something that belongs to everyone
- Something that empowers experts and working level employees
- A learning opportunity
- Ambiguous
- A buzzword
- The latest fad
- Exhausting
- An uphill battle
- A catch-all that is being used for everything under the sun
- A duty
- Exciting but hard work
- Imagining a better future and working to create it today.

“To me, I think the beauty and the horror of the word is that it can, and in fact it probably should, mean something different to everybody depending on how they intend to use it.”



### ***Initial Finding 3: The focus on public sector innovation is relatively recent, and takes place within a rich history***

*“I don’t trust that the public service is really committed to innovation ... yet”*

While the Canadian Public Service has multiple examples of innovation throughout its history, a sustained and discrete focus on innovation is a relatively recent phenomenon, with the advent of the Blueprint 2020 process seen by multiple players as a particularly important development. At the same time, the focus on innovation has not landed on a blank slate. An emphasis on innovation may not always easily or comfortably integrate with or replace established cultural “memories”, beliefs and narratives, and this can sometimes contribute to some scepticism, doubt or uncertainty as to the extent or validity of the current commitment on innovation.

#### ***Why This Might Matter***

Globally, the public sector generally has a long history of innovation, though it could not necessarily be described as consistent or systematic. It is only more recently that particular attention has begun to be paid by governments, including Canada’s, to the process of public sector innovation, not least because of changing demands and high rates of external change.

In Canada, there have been a number of developments over time that have been supportive of innovation, whether explicitly or as a by-product, such as the creation of the Policy Research Secretariat (the early predecessor to Policy Horizons) in 1996, or the work of the Canadian Forest Service in creating a learning organisation community of practice.

Yet an invitation to innovate (the act of thinking and doing things differently and of questioning what is) can sometimes feel difficult to reconcile with other elements of history, where the public sector was not regarded as welcoming or accepting of innovation. Any country can usually point to almost visceral cultural experiences where something went wrong (regardless of how innovative the initiative was) and the system responded rigorously, emphasising compliance and rules to ensure that the situation is not repeated. Canada appears to be no different in this respect. In such a context, it will take repetition and consistent effort to demonstrate that this time is different, that the invitation is sincere, that the system will not “snap back” to a previous default.

In short, even though there may be some history of innovation, it is not the only history affecting how a focus on innovation is perceived.

#### ***Positive Signs***

The Blueprint 2020 process seems to have marked a turning point in the discussion and action on innovation in the Canadian Public Service. This has been followed by a number of encouraging developments designed to promote and encourage innovation.

“Departments will be expected, where appropriate, to adopt new approaches (e.g., social media, ‘Dragons’ Den’ processes) that will enable employees to generate, shape and move forward on innovative ideas. Tiger teams will be used to speed up the adoption of good ideas. Technology will enable employees to track ideas in a transparent manner and let them see how ideas are turned into action.”

*Destination 2020, 2014*

## The Importance of Blueprint 2020

- “I think since the launch of Blueprint 2020, I think it definitely raised awareness for the need for the public sector to consider new ways of working, in terms of what’s going on around the world and in Canada and how might that affect us and what we might need to do adapt and how we want to work.”
- “I think the Blueprint 2020 has been quite successful. I think it's bringing about a whole culture change. I think people sometimes don't see the links between that initiative and what's happening. But I would say a lot of this innovation and labs is because of that. And it's getting a lot of deputies to green-light, they actually invest in innovation. So I think that's a real success.”
- “Some people now are starting to say, this is what we want it to be. Blueprint 2020 it's the vision of the future.”
- “And so when I think about what the journey was, for me, in the world that I live in, in the terms of public sector, I actually think people only really started to think about it, as a result of Shared Services. We couldn't afford not to. And then Blueprint 2020. In 2013. We actually had, we've had this pent up demand for a very long time.”
- “I think Blueprint actually helped in terms of raising awareness, getting the buy-in, showing that senior leadership actually believed in innovation.”
- “So far what I’ve seen of innovation in the public sector, I think our thinking around innovation has evolved from Blueprint 2020, from what I’ve seen.”
- “It’s interesting because I think we’ve been talking more about innovation during the last 18 months or so, more than we have, in some ways, in the last 10 years.”

## A History of Innovation

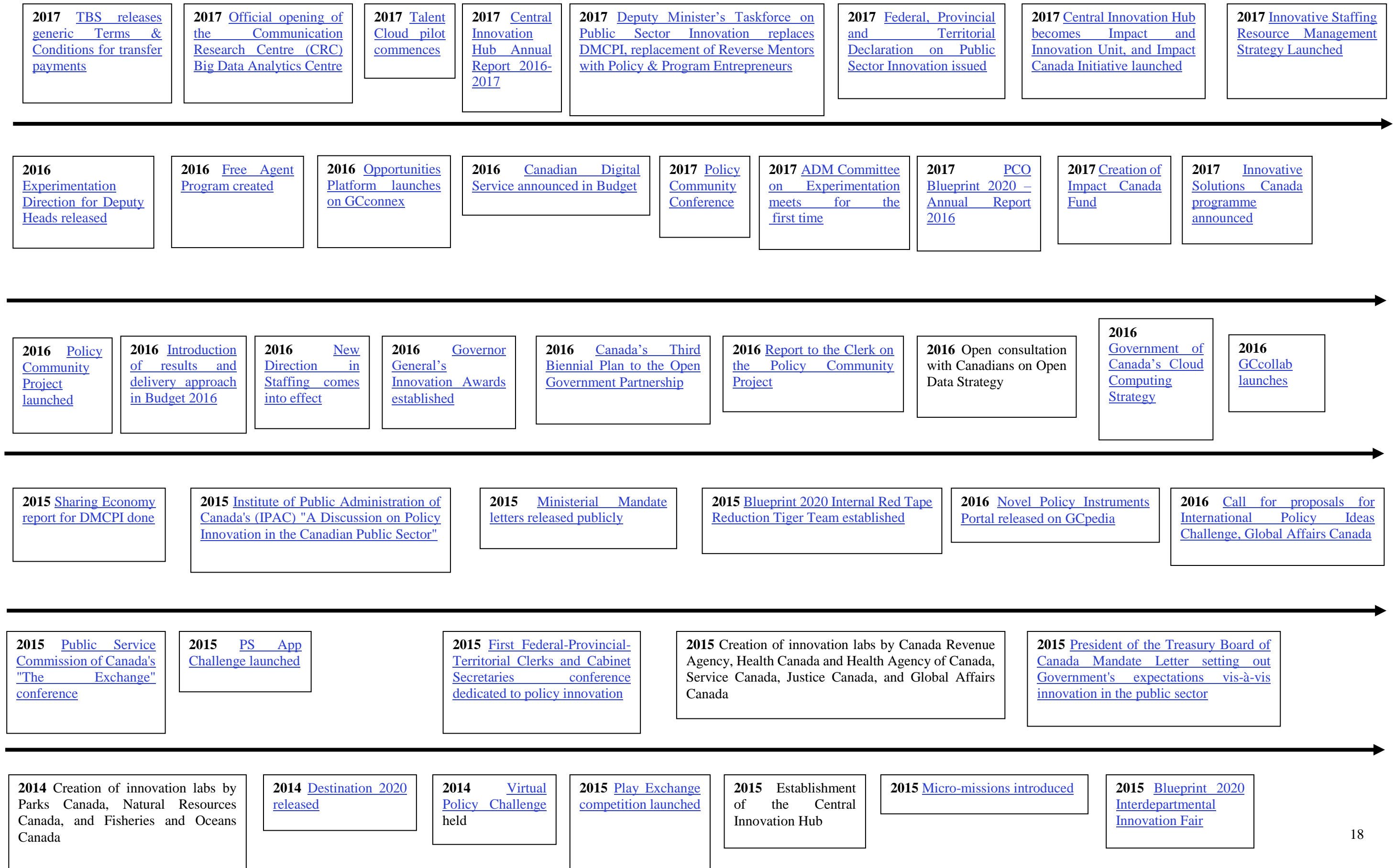
- “We’re in the early days of the innovation story.”
- “We have always adapted. This is the world. We've had to.”
- “So, again, we have a history of it. Making it more deliberate, I think, is where you sort of need to head, so it's not so ad hoc.”

- “... in 1995 ... I was in the system then. We really had to address our fiscal challenges in Canada. A lot of organisational innovation, a lot of program innovation, new policy thinking. New approaches were driven from that pressure. I think now we’re at another period with a different set of pressures, probably not as acute or strong in the way they’re felt ...”
- “...you've had now here in Canada at the federal level at least four Clerks of the Privy Council successively who have maintained a focus on public service renewal or transformation in one form or another. That has kind of provided a platform for public sector innovation to kind of take shape, and in the past if you look at kind of the history of public service renewal efforts in Canada, one of the problems is they didn't sustain long enough.”

## But Not only a History of Innovation

- “Then in the early 2000s we faced a series of scandals, for lack of a better word.... the response from the federal government and then from parliament was to really crackdown in oversight on the federal bureaucracy. So new offices of parliament were created, new oversight regimes, reporting requirements were created. So in that the context, the public service became very risk-averse, incredibly conscious of the amount of scrutiny that they were facing, and very afraid of the sort of big public embarrassment from trying something new or from even continuing in the same vein as they had, and having some sort of a public mistake.” [In reference to developments such as the Human Resources Canada Audit and the Commission of Inquiry into the Sponsorship Program and Advertising Activities]
- “I think we’re just starting to get back from 2012. A lot of people became more closed off and wary of their colleagues, and a lot more back-stabbing.” [In reference to the perceived impacts of the Deficit Reduction Action Plan]

*Mapping the System: A Timeline of Milestones, Developments and Contextual Events*



**2012** [Interchange Canada established](#)

**2012** [Deputy Minister's Committee on Social Media and Policy Development \(DMCSMPD\) created](#)

**2013** [Blueprint 2020: The Deputy Minister Sub-Committee on Public Service Engagement refines vision for public service and develops an engagement strategy to reach out to all public servants and key external discussants](#)

**2013** [Formal Blueprint 2020 process commences, including creation of Blueprint 2020 Champions in departments](#)

**2013** [DMCSMPD becomes Deputy Minister's Committee on Policy Innovation \(DMCPI\), holds Dragon's Den, and introduces reverse mentors](#)

**2013** [Blueprint 2020 Summary Interim Progress Report](#)

**2011** [Policy Research Institute \(PRI\) transformed to become Policy Horizons Canada](#)

**2011** [Strategic and Operating Review / Deficit Reduction Action Plan](#)

**2011** Social innovation agenda at Department of Employment and Social Development starts testing new funding instruments (e.g. pay-for-performance)

**2011** [Canada becomes a member of the Open Government Partnership](#)

**2011** [Blueprint 2020: Deputy Minister Committee on Public Service Renewal embarks on a foresight study on the future of the federal Public Service and outlines a proposed vision for the Public Service](#)

**2009** [Launch of GCconnex](#)

**2009** [Web 2.0 Practitioners Group formed and group conference organized](#)

**2009** [“Assessing Policies, Programs and Other Initiatives to Promote Innovation in the Public Sector: International Case Studies”](#)

**2010** [Creation of Employee Innovation Program](#)

**2010** [1<sup>st</sup> Policy Ignite event held](#)

**2011** [Red Tape Reduction Commission](#)

**2011** ["Innovation in Government? Conversations with Canada's Public Sector Leaders"](#)

**2005** [Creation of Service Canada](#)

**2005** [Canadian Forest Service releases \*Canadian Wildland Fire Strategy: A Vision for an Innovative and integrated approach to Managing Risks\*](#)

**2005** Canadian Forest Service develops a learning organisation community of practice and offers training

**2006** [The clerk of the Privy Council establishes the Deputy Minister's Steering Committee for Policy Research Initiative](#)

**2007** [Cabinet Directive on Streamlining Regulation](#)

**2008** [Launch of GCpedia](#)

**2008** [Launch of \*canada@150\*](#)

**2000** [Human Resources Development Canada Audit released](#)

**2002** ["Innovation and Change in the Public Sector: A Seeming Oxymoron" Statistics Canada](#)

**2002** [CCMD's Innovation Toolkit published](#)

**2003** [Public Service Modernisation Act](#)

**2004** [Commission of Inquiry into the Sponsorship Program and Advertising Activities](#)

**2005** [Recruitment of Policy Leaders initiative established](#)

**2004** [CCMD becomes Canada School of Public Service \(CSPS\)](#)

**1991** [Creation of the Canadian Centre for Management \(CCMD\) Development \(CCMD\)](#)

**1992** [Public Service Reform Act](#)

**1996** [Policy Research Secretariat was created in the Privy Council Office](#)

**1999** [Government On-Line Initiative](#)

**2000** The Policy Research Secretariat becomes the Policy Research Initiative (PRI)

**2000** [“Results for Canadians: A Management Framework for the Government of Canada”](#)

***Initial Finding 4: There is “narrative confusion” about the innovation agenda and its intersection with other agendas***

*“I don’t think it is clear how innovation fits together with other agendas and priorities”*

The Public Service of Canada is one that faces a number of challenges, and has agendas in place to respond or to position the public sector to be able to better grasp new opportunities. Among others, these agendas or change initiatives include innovation, experimentation, digital, open government, results and delivery, Blueprint/Destination 2020/public service renewal, New Directions in Staffing, and a number of technological initiatives, as well individual agency agendas. However, the overall interplay and contributions of these agendas does not appear to be very clear and seems to have resulted in a degree of “narrative confusion”, where there is uncertainty or differing interpretations as to what it is that’s actually being strived for.

*Why This Might Matter*

Innovation is a difficult task. It involves trying to change what is, including established processes, thinking and behaviours. It can be made particularly difficult if there is no clear sense of why the innovation is needed, or why the current state is not sufficient. Without a sense of why the innovation is needed, it may simply seem like an imposition or busy work. A clear narrative, can be very important in helping overcome obstacles and mobilising resources and support.

While innovation will often be complementary with the sentiments or directions of other change agendas, it is not automatic. It can also be confusing when agendas sort of overlap. For instance, innovation might be considered as the identification and implementation of new options in response to deficiencies within the existing system. Experimentation on the other hand is effectively a means for deciding between options, rather than necessarily understanding the underlying problem or generating the options for responding. Equally a results oriented agenda can help innovation, as it can identify where delivery is currently not good enough; but it can also be in tension as new initiatives are unlikely to perform as well in as what already exists, at least in the short term.

In short, a lack of narrative clarity, a situation where the story around innovation is not clear, makes it harder for actors to know what’s going on or what their focus should be.

*Positive Signs*

Some individuals could clearly articulate the connections between particular agendas and how they related, integrated or supported each other. A number of senior leaders are also aware of the challenge and the necessity of having a clear and coherent narrative around innovation. These aspects are combined with some existing important high level messaging and discussion of innovation, including the Clerk’s report on the public service of Canada and the Annual Report of the Central Innovation Hub.

“More efforts are also needed to make successful and innovative practices the norm. For example, I will be encouraging deputy minister policy committees to promote policy innovation and the use of both new internal tools and external resources to strengthen policy analysis. The conversation on how to constantly improve the way the policy community works is very much alive and ongoing.”

*Twenty-Fourth Annual Report to the Prime Minister on the Public Service of Canada, 2017<sup>7</sup>*

---

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/pco-bcp/documents/pdfs/clerk-greffier/24rpt-eng.pdf>

### What is the Agenda?

- “How would we describe what the government wants to accomplish in public service innovation? How would that be expressed by different departments? What indicators would we use to measure it? Who would we report to? When would we report on it?”

### How do the Agendas Fit Together?

- “And then probably we need more coherence on the different agendas for innovation. So you've got the Blueprint 2020, there's the Business Intelligence stuff, we have a conversation under way on a Digital Maturity Strategy, knowledge management ...”
- “There is a debate about, ‘Did they understand that experimentation's just a small subset of innovation? And that just pursuing an experimentation agenda isn't gonna drive innovation necessarily?’”
- “I think adding this experimental layer to the innovation lens allows us to pursue the proper methodologies, to really know what works. That's kind of the distinction and I think there's a lot of confusion in the system right now because we've introduced this experimental language, experimentation language, that I think people feel like we've changed the guideposts as they were barely getting used to one guidepost, which is the innovation language.”

### What is the Agenda Actually Trying to Achieve?

- “Another challenge is on, again, the sense that I've seen to observe is that the innovation narrative is very exciting and people want to do these things because they're cool and the UK is doing them, and the US is doing them. But we don't have a good

enough sense of what our key objectives are. At the policy level.”

- “...the work of innovation is about the practices. It's about the discipline. It's about, like a trade. Let's all make sure that we agree on what it means to do those things. What are those practices all about? What's the process that we're undertaking? What are the different processes we could undertake? Make sure we have some agreement on the utility of those.”
- “I'm not sure that we should be innovative, or how innovative we should be.”
- “You can't be innovative all the time. Nobody should be thinking that is the goal, that you just keep... Chaos. That's what that is.”
- “...fundamentally it's about how to sustain a public service that's relevant, nimble, technologically adept, and far more open.”

### How is this Agenda Different to Before?

- “We bring these big agendas, people still are passionate about and talk about it, but a lot of people like myself, it's created a bit of cynicism, because another big push on public service renewal.”

### Is the Agenda Connecting to People?

- “Like in the report from the clerk that just came out, it will talk about we need an innovative work force but I think, I'm guessing if I wasn't in this field, I would be like, ‘what the hell does that really mean?’”
- “If innovation is a big framework that has complex parameters in it and complex formulation of it, it's going to fail, I believe.”

### ***Initial Finding 5: There is no overall picture of the innovation that is occurring***

*“It can be difficult to know what’s going on in other areas or agencies”*

There does not appear to be a consolidated or accessible picture of the innovation that is occurring across the system, nor do those within the system have a reliable means of finding out what is happening in other areas or agencies.

#### ***Why This Might Matter***

Innovation can be a difficult thing to identify when it is happening: the divide between improvement and innovation can sometimes be subtle, and what is innovative to one person might not be recognised as such by another. In addition, innovation may not be made visible, as there may be fears that if the project receives too much attention or visibility, it will be hampered or possibly stopped. This can be seen in a tendency for some to prefer to run innovation projects “under the radar”. Alternatively, it may be a matter of those involved with the project not knowing who to share an innovation with, as the innovation may just be seen as part of doing one’s job, and therefore accompanied by thinking of “why would anyone be interested in that?”

Yet if innovation is not visible across the system, nor a collective picture available, it can:

- Give a false impression about the level of innovation activity that is actually happening
- Increase the chances of duplication or conflicting initiatives, as opportunities for collaboration or joined-up activity across (or within) agencies can be missed
- Limit the dissemination and impact of lessons from innovative projects
- Reduce the chances of innovations diffusing and being used in other contexts
- Reduce the opportunity for understanding the functioning of the innovation system, where innovation is reliably being generated, where there are clear innovation priorities or needs remaining unmet, or where there are systemic/consistent issues affecting the performance of the system.

In short, without an overall picture of the innovation occurring in the system, it can be hard to know how the system is performing or if it is doing what it should be.

#### ***Positive Signs***

Mechanisms such as the Central Innovation Hub’s Annual Report, the Deputy Minister’s Committee on Policy Innovation, and the developing networks across the public service are good steps for helping develop a more comprehensive and cohesive picture of the innovation activity occurring within the system.

### The Innovation That is Happening is Not Easily Visible

- “I’m sure there are lots of great things. I just don’t know any examples stick out for me.”
- “So yeah, it could be already happening, I don’t know about it.”
- “There might be the coolest things going on with Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, or something really cool with Transport Canada but we don’t know about them because there aren’t the channels to find out about it.”
- “I try to keep up to date with as much as I can. I’m active on the GC Tools, GC Connex. I’m trying to talk to people from different departments and I frequently look at GCPedia pages and our GC Internet pages to see the stories that are being highlighted. Again, I’m still new so no one really gives you a folder and says, ‘Here’s all the cool stuff that’s happening.’”
- “Because again, with the traditional vertical accountability structures, departments don’t even have line of sight of what other departments are doing.”
- “Open.Canada.CA I think is an incredible example of innovation, and I think it was in part as successful as it was because it flew under the radar.”

### Poor Visibility Reduces the Chances for Cooperation, Learning and Diffusion

- “So you’ve got again, 250,000 people. I think there’s actually more than 300 organizations in the government of Canada. So there’s a lot of, ‘Well, you’ve got this wonderful idea. Wait over here.’ Somebody else, ‘Oh, we’ve got this wonderful idea’ and so you end up with and people trying to do stuff but not being aware that it’s either been tried and didn’t work or it worked but you need this or just all the context around that.”
- “I don’t think we have very good methods and approaches for enabling the system, whatever scale we’re talking about, to see itself and how things

are currently going and engage people in a conversation about how things are going, where we want to get to, and then how to get there. I don’t think we do that particularly well.”

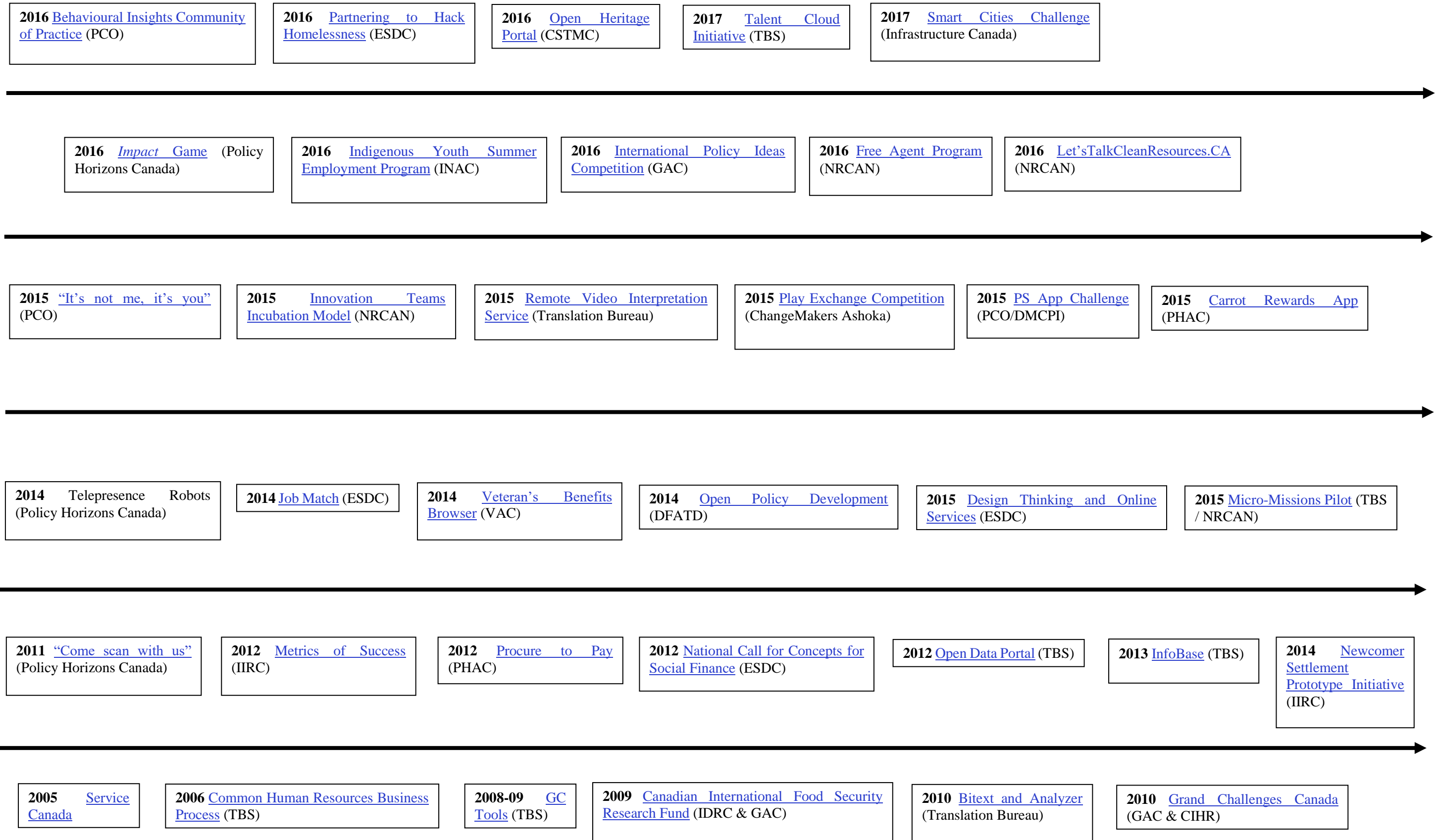
- The other key thing, though, through all of this, which is so hard to do, and it quickly bogs down, but it’s so important, is that you have to have a way of communicating what’s been learnt by all of these things”

### Where is the Vantage Point for Getting the Big Picture?

- But the minute you don’t fix the root cause, which is, at the end of the day, no one is really accountable, no one is very ... No one is in the position to command innovation and say, “You know what. That’s the vision. That’s where we’re going. That’s where everyone will march toward.”
- “I think that a bureaucracy struggles from some fundamental questions about why do we do innovation, what is the purpose? I see one of the problems is that that question is interpreted very differently depending on what level you’re at.”
- “I think what the centre’s doing now is exactly what we need to be doing, which is encouraging the thought, encouraging the horizontality and starting to invest in some common messages around what is innovation, how is it valid with the Government of Canada.”



*Mapping the System: Examples of Innovation in the Public Service of Canada*



### *Lessons From Innovation Projects<sup>8</sup>*

- Breaking government silos across agencies and departments through higher information and knowledge sharing
- Engagement of senior management is critical
- Importance of spending time up front to clearly define the project goals and guiding principles, as well as having an extensive engagement strategy to ensure the eventual buy-in of all government organisations.
- This innovation represented a significant cultural change for the organization. Although it was clear that the tools would greatly improve productivity and efficiency, they added to the level of change fatigue. A specific change management and communications strategy was developed and featured endorsement by "early adopters" of the tools. The organization also started to discuss possible methods with which these tools could eventually be shared with the public service at large
- All product releases should have clear release plans that include training plans, communication strategies and testing scripts.
- Clearly outline targets and measurements, which are agreed upon by all parties before reporting begins
- Engage governments in extensive collaboration between analysts and IT experts to ensure that both parties are aware of the capabilities and potential limitations.
- Scoping and blueprinting phases of the project require close attention from project team and senior management
- Assess level of knowledge of staff assigned to perform user acceptance (UAT) (never make assumptions about the UAT participants level of knowledge). Also ensure UAT testers are trained appropriately to "hit the ground running"
- Sound testing/piloting strategies required to ensure system issues are addressed prior to launching so as to avoid user frustrations.
- Social finance, at core a collaborative, multi-sectoral approach to financing social innovation and preventative interventions, is well suited to crowd sourcing and other collaborative social media approaches
- Crowd sourcing can be an inexpensive and effective way to identify issues and potential partnership solutions
- Persistent, complex social problems often fall under the purview of multiple government departments; both crowd sourcing and social finance foster a collaborative, cross-government approach to achieving meaningful outcomes.
- Piloting new approaches at a very small scale can be valuable
- Flexibility of the approach has been a key success factor and care should be given to not formalizing the process too much
- Short-term feedback loops can be very helpful in adjusting thinking and direction within our department.
- Nudges based on BI principles do matter and clearly outperform standard government messaging in some contexts
- Nudges may tend to have immediate/short term impact only. This should be better accounted for when designing future nudges.
- Don't let the naysayers stop you from moving an idea ahead. Transformational ideas are especially difficult to push forward in a bureaucracy that is content with its self
- Don't focus on program needs (the department's perspective) when developing a tool to serve clients; rather, focus on what the citizen needs for engagement and drive the development of the service from their perspective.
- While some of open policy pilot projects may fail, they are designed to encourage a culture of experimentation. Experimentation is about finding out what works and what does not work in order to discover what works best. It entails taking smart risks. Eureka moments are the result of countless experiments that yielded more lessons than results. In order to mitigate the innovation-dampening effects of a risk-averse culture, open policy seeks to emphasize the importance of experimentation and learning rather than failing.
- Collaboration is key, and so is leveraging internal expertise
- Involve affected parties from the beginning
- Interpretation of rules and guidelines sometimes unclear: the system and the people working in it must constantly challenge their understanding.
- A well developed core team with an open, collaborative culture is a necessary prerequisite for the model to succeed
- Collocation is a key ingredient to the success of the incubation model
- Access to a productive and inspiring workspace supports the production of high-quality work
- Work with users and have a user-centred approach
- Have the time and resources to prototype and test multiple iterations of the output and maintain frequent interactions with the contractor
- Gamification and serious games have the potential to supplement the current suite of government policy levers.

---

<sup>8</sup> See Observatory of Public Sector Innovation [https://www.oecd.org/governance/observatory-public-sector-innovation/innovations/?hf=10&b=0&sl=opsi&q+=Country%3A\(ca\)&s=desc\(document\\_lastmodifieddate\)](https://www.oecd.org/governance/observatory-public-sector-innovation/innovations/?hf=10&b=0&sl=opsi&q+=Country%3A(ca)&s=desc(document_lastmodifieddate))

***Initial Finding 6: The role played by the Central Innovation Hub is not widely understood or recognised***

*“I don’t have a good idea of what the Central Innovation Hub does”*

There does not appear to be a common or clear understanding of the role of the Central Innovation Hub and how it works, nor of what role it should be playing in the system more broadly.

*Why This Might Matter*

A public sector innovation system is complex and has multiple components, with competing interests. An innovation system is formed from the intersection of multiple other systems (e.g. those of accountability, performance, transparency, delivery, and political). Innovation is ambiguous and uncertain, and in the absence of a clear and overriding driver and measure of success (e.g. profit), an innovation system will be fragmented.

A public sector innovation system is therefore unlikely to “self-organise” and optimise itself for the level of innovation wanted or required without some degree of direction and coordination, and without mechanisms for learning and for identifying gaps, weaknesses, and opportunities.

In addition, the system needs may not fit neatly with local needs. Innovation is often a contextual and strategic activity, i.e. it is something that makes sense within a specific setting and conditions. Therefore, it can be difficult to have an overarching coordination of an innovation system that both addresses system-wide concerns, and fits neatly with organisational or team priorities.

A lack of perceived clarity about the role of the Hub may reflect:

- Broader issues about the general immaturity of the public sector innovation system
- The challenges of having any central coordination capacity for what is an inherently distributed and fragmented system
- The natural, but gradual process of it taking time for an innovation hub/lab to position itself within a system, understand its capabilities and develop an appropriate “business model”
- A need for greater and more consistent engagement by the Hub in the broader ecosystem
- Some combination of these issues.

Whatever the reason, a lack of understanding about the role of the Hub is likely to limit the impact of the innovation system.

*Positive Signs*

The Central Innovation Hub has undertaken a range of initiatives and made some significant contributions including on experimentation (including the Experimentation Directive and the ADM Committee on Experimentation), behavioural insights (with specific project assistance and the formation of the Behavioural Insights Communities of Practice and the associated Behavioural Insights Network), mechanisms for funding innovative activity (including the Impact Canada Fund and changes to the grants and contributions terms and conditions), and supporting the exchange of ideas and experiences at senior levels (through support the Deputy Minister’s Committee on Policy Innovation). Importantly, most of these activities have been in conjunction or collaboration with other agencies. There appear to be further opportunities in strengthening broader engagement however, including with other innovation hubs and labs in the system, and potentially identifying or considering future challenges, and providing a stronger framework around innovation.

## Perceptions of the Central Innovation Hub

- “I’m trying to think of who we would turn to for innovation. I know there’s the PCO Innovation Hub, right? They’re mandated to promote innovation. I don’t know what innovation, what innovative measures have come out of that yet, so that’s who we’re looking to now, too, for some of our behavioural insights projects. We’re looking for support from them. But other than that ...”
- “They’re still in a bit of like SWAT team mode, like if you’ve got a problem in your department and you want us to come in and help you do behavioural insights work, we can do that, which again, maybe is part of the broader theory of change. It’s the like the way to eat an elephant is one bite at a time, so instead of trying to shift the entire organization, they seem to be more project based, but they’ve definitely done some interesting work, and again, providing top level credibility, because if PCO is doing it, it says that it’s a priority.”
- “I feel like they’ve been doing some work with different departments on some of their programs, but it still feels very disconnected. I’m not sure, it’s not entirely clear to me what the objectives are. Again, it’s totally possible it’s just a function of where I sit.”
- “From where I sit, as a person who’s trying to be a practitioner, who’s trying to be part of the community, I don’t see it. I guess I would expect to see maybe a more visible profile, to understand the work that’s being done, to know what the objectives are, to have more information flow through the department. I don’t hear senior management talking about the work of PCO Innovation Hub. I don’t hear them talking about the work of the innovation community. There’s just not a lot of visibility.”
- “I think the vision for the Hub was that the Hub was a centre that would help the other innovation hubs in everything from that network, and that isn’t something that happened. And I think that some of the other hubs wanted to do that, but then that wasn’t well received.”
- “I think over the last couple of years, one of the things that’s been dramatically important in our

maturity is there’s been increased expression from the centre, from PCO for example.”

- “I think they’re good in that they exist and that they’re passionate and they have these ideas and they’ve had uptake on the ideas. So I like the challenge platform kind of stuff, and I think that was good and that wasn’t going to come from anywhere else. And kudos for coming up with that and getting it through.”

## Thoughts on What the Hub Should Do

- “I think in theory, the PCO hub should be a space where people can come and use and so the experts could be there and they would be able to make the interconnections. They would be able to be a sharing space. They’d be able to provide maybe even the micro-mission kind of experience, etc. To date, they haven’t behaved that way because they are within PCO, so they have a mandate and they get told, ‘Sure, you’re supposed to be that, but actually, you have to do these things.’”
- “It is kind of this buzzword, but there’s action behind it. But what I would like the Innovation Hub to be thinking about is, what the heck is going to happen in even like five years time when all the players have changed, and for lots of complicated reasons all the structures will have changed. Will we have this legacy of, ‘oh, remember that decade,’ or ‘remember that time when the government came in and started talking about innovation, and now we have all these weird people that’ ... Yeah, so it can also be- It could speak to that, too.”
- “Wouldn’t it be beneficial, again contributing to taking down the silos, to have a single place? And perhaps the PCO innovation lab is supposed to be that place, but it doesn’t have that accessibility feel.”
- “I think PCO can come up with what I would call more the framework of innovation and the policies around innovation, at the broader government level, but not drive it.”

***Initial Finding 7: The roles played by other organisations with regards to innovation is not widely understood or recognised***

*“The respective roles of different agencies in supporting or driving innovation is not clear”*

There is significant amount of activity happening within the system, either specific innovations, work to support innovation, or directives and initiatives to explore and better enable innovation. A number of agencies have dedicated innovation labs or have other responsibilities that relate to the performance of the innovation system. However, just as with the Central Innovation Hub, there does not appear to be a clear sense of what exactly the role the differing areas have is, or should be, in relation to the innovation system.

***Why This Might Matter***

Innovation, as an act of seeing or understanding the world differently to how it is or was, will always involve the blurring of responsibilities or the challenging of existing delineated roles. An illustration of this might be with the introduction of drones: are they a consumer product to be regulated? Something for an aviation authority to oversee? What are the privacy implications and who oversees that? And just as a new technology can challenge existing frameworks and accountabilities, so can other innovations can challenge existing understanding of what each organisation does or should do.

Therefore, in an innovation system there is always going to be some degree of fuzziness or confusion as to who is responsible for what, or who is best placed to undertake something.

However, the effective functioning of a system is likely to be harmed if the degree of confusion is high and/or there is no alignment between activities or consideration of the intersection and aggregation of different responsibilities.

In short, a lack of sufficient clarity around roles, whether self-identified or designated, is going to make it difficult for the different parts of the system to collaborate or align their efforts.

***Positive Signs***

There is clear enthusiasm from different areas and agencies for innovation, and some impressive examples and initiatives that have developed from agencies without direction or prompting, and this should be encouraged. There are also mechanisms such as the Deputy Minister’s Committee on Policy Innovation and the Assistant Deputy Minister’s Committee on Experimentation that provide forums for coordination, information sharing, and for sensing/exploring who is doing (and who is good) at what.

### ***Mapping the System: System Actors and Responsibilities***

The following provides a high level overview of some of the main actors and formal responsibilities, functions or activities that have identified as being relevant to the innovation system. This is not exhaustive nor does it reflect the cross-agency nature of many of the initiatives.

#### **Privy Council Office (PCO)**

- [Central Innovation Hub](#)
  - Experimentation Direction for Deputy Heads
  - Impact Canada Fund
  - Behavioural Insights Community of Practice, Behavioural Insights Network
  - Support for Deputy Minister's Committee on Policy Innovation (DMCPI)
  - Support for Assistant Deputy Minister's Committee on Experimentation
- [DMCPI](#)
  - Signalling support
  - Socialising ideas and identifying innovation issues
  - Reverse mentors
- Results and Delivery Unit
  - Support for network of Results and Delivery Officers
- [Policy Community Project](#)
  - Investigating needed capabilities of the public service
- [Public Service Renewal Secretariat](#)
  - Support for the [Board of Management and Renewal](#)
  - Ensuring a world class public service
  - [Innovation Fair](#)

#### **Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS)**

- Chief Information Office Branch (CIOB)
  - [Government of Canada Information Technology Strategic Plan 2016-2020](#)
  - GC Tools
- [Canadian Digital Service](#)
- [Open Government Partnership](#)
  - Open Government Portal
  - Directive on Open Government
  - Open by Default Pilot
- [Talent Cloud pilot](#)
- [Policy on Transfer Payments](#)
- Office of the Comptroller General
  - [Advisory committee on innovation and internal audits](#)
- [Mandatory Procedures for Public Opinion Research](#)
- [Management Accountability Framework](#)
- Monthly Ideation Series

#### **Canadian Heritage**

- Internal Innovation Fund

#### **Canada Revenue Agency**

- Accelerated Business Solutions Lab

#### **Communications Research Centre Canada (CRC)**

- [Big Data Analytics Centre](#)

#### **Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC)**

- ESDC Innovation Lab

#### **Finance Canada**

- Central agency

#### **Fisheries and Oceans Canada**

- Innovation Lab

#### **Global Affairs Canada**

- Development Innovation Unit
- Departmental Champion for Innovation/Innovation Award
- Innovation Unit, Trade Commissioner Service

#### **Health Canada**

- i.Hub
- [Community of Federal Regulators](#)

#### **Innovation, Science and Economic Development (ISED)**

- Service Lab
- [Innovative Solutions Canada](#)

#### **Institute of Public Administration of Canada (IPAC)**

- [Institute for Citizen-Centred Service](#)

#### **Justice Canada**

- Indigenous Policy and Program and Innovation Hub
- [Justice Partnership and Innovation Program](#)

#### **Natural Resources Canada (NRCAN)**

- IN.Spire Innovation Hub
  - Novel Policy Instruments
  - Free Agent Program
- Office of Energy Efficiency Social Innovation Unit
- Learning Organisation Community of Practice

#### **Office of the Auditor General**

- [Audits](#)

#### **Parks Canada**

- Innovation Labs

#### **Policy Horizons Canada**

- [Come Scan with Us](#)
- Foresight
- [Serious Games Community of Practice](#)

#### **Policy Ignite**

- [Pitch sessions](#)

#### **Public Service Commission of Canada**

- [New Direction in Staffing](#)

#### **Public Services and Procurement Canada**

- [Build in Canada Innovation Program](#)
- [Change Management Cloud](#)

#### **Service Canada**

- Insights Centre

#### **Shared Services Canada**

- Technology provider/partner for government agencies

#### **Transport Canada**

- [Community of Practice on Service Excellence](#)

***Initial Finding 8: There is no commonly understood view about what role individual public servants can or should play in the innovation process***

*“I don’t think everyone knows how they are expected to contribute to innovation”*

There is a wide range of views about what role people can or should play with regards to innovation. Is it everybody’s job? Or is it something that should be left to those with the identified inclination, aptitude and experience? Is innovation something that everyone is able to learn, or is it something that is innate? Is it the responsibility of those working in innovation labs and hubs, or is it something that all parts of the organisation need to be involved in? There does not appear to be a common understanding across the system.

***Why This Might Matter***

Innovation can be challenging for individuals. It can raise questions of what their role is or what their contribution should be. If innovation is wanted, does that mean what they are doing now is not? Does it mean that their existing skills and knowledge are no longer valuable?

Given these and other challenges associated with innovation, and that it involves stepping outside of the comfort zone of what is known, not everyone will feel prepared to engage with the process. While challenging, there can often be a desire for certainty around an uncertain process – am I meant to play a role in this? Am I able to contribute? At the same time, many others will readily engage with innovation, seeing it as an opportunity to help make change and to try out new things – though that enthusiasm may be limited to how their initial participation is responded to or welcomed.

In addition, any system can only perform to the extent of its limiting factor (e.g. the buffalo herd can only move as fast as the slowest buffalo). The spread and uptake of innovation does not just depend on those that are enthusiastic and expert at innovation, but also those around them who will play a decisive role in how far and how successful an innovation will be. Everyone will play some type of role (positive or negative); it is a question of what role they are invited or able to play.

If innovation is seen as something that is the responsibility of the few, then it may harm engagement by the rest of the organisation (“that’s their job”) or hamper opportunities for take up of new ideas (“that’s not how we do things”). If innovation is something that everyone is expected to participate in, then that may be problematic if people are not provided with the opportunities or experiences to develop their innovation skills, potentially resulting in them becoming disappointed, sceptical or cynical about any encouragement of innovation.

In short, many people won’t contribute if they do not understand what their role is, or if they are rebuffed because others didn’t see innovation as their role.

***Positive Signs***

There are a range of networks, platforms and tools that have been developed or provided across the Canadian Public Service that allow or call for general involvement, and there appears to be a general expectation that innovation is something that everyone could or should be involved in. This expectation is, however, still perhaps a little ambiguous when it comes to the operational level.

### Who Can Innovate?

- “I think we need to accept that not everyone is an innovator.”
- “... it's about getting everyone to understand their roles in that ecosystem. So making innovation everybody's business.”

### Is Innovation Operational?

- “So, I would say that highly operational organization, it's unrealistic to ask them to really focus too much on innovation because, you know what? They're fighting fires all day long.”
- “It's because when you integrate it in the day to day, even the most operational team, it gives them a sense of purpose. That's why human being created the world's wonders, right? They wanted to feel great and show what they can do.”

### Is the System Welcoming of Everyone Contributing?

- “On the other hand, I think there is a very sincere appetite from people to learn that I think sometimes is overlooked by innovation people”
- “People have ideas. There are reasons why they don't bring them forward. Or if they do, they do it once or twice. And then the reaction they get determines whether they ever do it again.”

### Is Innovation Seen as ‘Other’ or as Part of the Norm?

- “Innovation is something done by other people, often you know, the tech nerds, or whatever, I have referred to them before, because I think sometimes you think, ‘oh, I'm not innovating, I'm just doing my job.’ So it's relegated to the corners of somebody else, and it's often, I think associated with harder skills, or something, and often innovation is thought, I think, to be in the more tech and digital world, so there's a force, as well.”
- “It's kind of treated, I think, as this sort of funny little add-on that those weird people in the lab do, while we do the real work of government.”

### Where Does the Responsibility for Innovation Lie?

- “I'd say making everyone have kind of an equal play in being innovators for the public service. It's not just your DG levels and up that should be innovating, it should be everyone having an active hand in changing the way we work.”
- “People need to be coming up with bright ideas on their own, and they're so capable. You take these people out of the formal context, and you put them in a context like Policy Ignite, brilliant ideas. It's unfortunate we have to take them out of their conventional context to get those organic things.”
- “I honestly think, I think I would wave a magic wand and say please allow people to see themselves as part of a system. Because I think, we only can control ourselves and yet we get overwhelmed by the system needs to change and something outside of me needs to change, and we don't really think, turn that mirror back on ourselves to say, well what is the thing that I can do to influence this situation I am in right now.”
- “I think to some level, everybody tries to do things better. So if I go by my definition again, of trying to do things better, I think there's a huge amount of people who try to do that.”

### What can Happen if you Give People a Chance?

- “In terms of what I would like to see change, it's again, increasing the opportunities for everyone to participate outside and inside, increase participation in the design, in finding solutions, and acceptance that it's not only leaders or executives that have all the answers. I think that would be a lot more rewarding for most people, because every time I've given somebody the opportunity to participate, they change. There's a light inside. They want to, they're more motivated, they're not just thinking about doing their regular hours, they stay at work longer, they go off on the weekend, they still think about it. The ideas are always there.”



### ***Initial Finding 9: There are many barriers and obstacles that confront the innovation process***

*“I feel that there are a lot more hurdles with innovation than there should be”*

There are many barriers and obstacles that can be encountered during the innovation process, including around technology, approval layers, the general pace of compliance processes and approvals, procurement, specific rules, human resources, financial resources, available time, business as usual pressures, resistance to change, investment in existing solutions, pathway dependencies and legacy systems or infrastructure, and many other things. These barriers do not appear to be uniform, and can vary across agencies and contexts.

#### ***Why This Might Matter***

Innovation is an inherently challenging process, involving confronting the status quo. Innovation, being new, is rarely going to fit easily with existing processes, systems, measurement and reporting frameworks. Innovation usually involves displacing or replacing existing initiatives (and thus involves confronting some degree of vested interests), or it may be something additional (usually requiring resources to be taken from or found somewhere else), or stopping something and *not* replacing it (thereby potentially confronting anxieties around job security or current understandings of how things should work).

Such dynamics mean that there will always be challenges associated with innovation, even in the most welcoming of systems. However, if an innovation system is to be consistent and systemic, barriers and obstacles will need to be understood, including an assessment of whether they are:

- Necessary – i.e. what are they trying to prevent/encourage?
- Appropriate – i.e. are they the fit-for-purpose?
- Proportionate – i.e. are the costs greater than the potential benefits?

In short, unless obstacles are deliberate and considered, they will act as an unintentional filter for innovation, meaning that the innovations that proceed may be determined by the teams behind them being the best at negotiating hurdles, rather than because the innovation was the most promising.

#### ***Positive Signs***

There have been a number of developments or initiatives to understand, reduce or ameliorate barriers and obstacles (including rules and processes). These include the New Direction in Staffing, the Red Tape Reduction tiger team, and the changing of the processes around Terms and Conditions for grants.

## Barriers and Obstacles

- “I also think we don't have the tools and structures necessarily in place to drive innovations, so our IT systems are very, very limited. They're very inflexible”
- “... one is, just the machinery, the way the government is structured. So they kind of call it machinery of government. There's often the business processes. You know, just to get travel has become very difficult. Bot purchasing is difficult. So there's kind of those operational barriers. Like in machinery I include like the silos between departments. So we're trying to break that down with these Hubs and PCOs Innovation Hub and BP 2020 and so forth.”
- “The pace. There are a lot more checks and balances for doing anything, which slows down progress, which could delay the potential for innovation.”
- “What I find is that, we have all the right intentions in terms of wanting to generate ideas, but when it comes down to it, the reactive approach and the panic approach always takes over, as a government.”
- “Responsive means you don't have time to think things through, don't have time to think things differently, introduce new processes.”
- “I mean the time and the will to experiment and to innovate, I mean I think everyone would love to have it, it's just not a reality in a lot of areas in public service.”
- “I'm sure in some areas and some organizations they're probably super innovative and super creative whereas others, it's just impossible.”
- “We are still in a command and control regime in terms of how the public service is run. It is not as bad as the army, but you can think of it being a quasi. So you know if you don't have an innovative champion or leader it is pretty hard to be able to ... and especially with all of the ... I am not saying it is impossible but there are a lot of barriers.”
- “Treasury Board rules and regulations, that are contradictory and act as inhibitors. It grinds people down, and it disincentivizes innovation. The layers of reporting and what's seen as rigor but, in fact, is just process. I think that's something we really need to take a hard look at. Over many years, we have built up layers and layers and layers of regs and authorities that are acting as a disincentive.”
- “What has hindered innovation or made it more difficult, is the rules and regulations which apply to all government services, especially things like procurement.”
- “Being able to request a laptop that's not a big clunker, for instance, having Wi-Fi within a building that the public servant is working in, any number of things. It's not just one thing.”
- “What I think the obstacle ... where the obstacles come is in the ability to scale up small ideas. I think we just get individuals who feel like they get blocked in scaling up ideas.”
- “For the majority of people, it's not an instinctive mindset yet. If anything, they applaud themselves on doing what they're currently doing better. They're rewarded for compliance, and they're rewarded for efficiency gains. Their sense of self and their worth draws from the knowledge of what the processes and practices are, right.”
- “The only reason why we've gotten there, is because we have top-level cover. Otherwise the system would have crushed us... It was top level cover. And even there, sometimes, it's almost impossible.”
- “What they've done is they've engendered tons of administrative systems in delegation of a lot of stuff up where it's really the deputy has to be involved in all kinds of minor detail. Trust starts to fall because there's nothing much about trust in all of this paperwork and sign offs. It is the anti-trust, right? Then it tends to, at some time, erode people's incentive to embark and to try to just keep our new things and they just sort of, inertia. You get into a state where it's more people's sense of the risk is just out of whack, too. Slows things down. Now, I think we've

switched in some ways but it's not like it's completely reset and there's still a lot of legacy of that in the system.”

***Initial Finding 10: One main barrier or obstacle is the hierarchy; particularly the “Clay Layer”/middle management***

*“Middle management (the clay layer) is often a common problem with innovation”*

A particular concern or issue for those who have engaged with innovation is the hierarchical nature of the public service, and the feeling that much of the resistance (active or passive) comes from an ill-defined middle layer of management, or “clay layer”. Many people noted the support for innovation from senior leadership, and the enthusiasm often seen from lower levels, but felt that the middle layers (the specifics of which varied depending on the context) often acted as a catalyst for converting enthusiasm into demotivated process. This is recognised as not necessarily being due to deliberate intent or because of ill-will from those in the middle layers. Alternate explanations included time, compliance requirements, risk aversion, system defaults and lack of incentive/support for innovation for middle managers.

***Why This Might Matter***

A consistent impediment at the middle management layer to innovation may indicate a number of things. For instance, it might indicate:

- A mismatch between organisational intent and business realities. i.e. that what the organisation says it wants is not matched by what happens on the ground
- A mismatch of the behaviours and actions of those in the positions. i.e. that the skills or beliefs of those in middle management is no longer appropriate to what is expected or required
- Blockages, workflow or information flow problems, or processes and systems that are not suited to the level of innovation expected. i.e. that messages about problems, opportunities or priorities are not being effectively communicated

Issues such as these are likely to harm the ability of an organisation to identify problems requiring innovative responses, to explore and prioritise options, and to act in innovative ways. The occurrence of such issues across organisations implies some systemic or structural underpinnings are at work rather than individual factors.

In short, a systemic issue or blockage at the middle management layer will act as an unintentional filter, meaning that innovations that succeed may do so because of change, rather than potential.

***Positive Signs***

Many people have had experience with managers who were actively supportive and who helped make change. There were also those within the middle management band that were aware of the challenges and issues and were either trying to find ways to address these concerns or demonstrating behaviours that would seem to help mitigate some of the problems.

## The Clay Layer / Middle Management

- “To me, that gets to another trouble with innovation in the government, is you’ve got this group at the working level that have often very good, very innovative ideas, and you’ve got this group at the very senior leader level that are waving the flag yes, innovation, yeah. But then somewhere in the middle, things get muddled.”
- “There is a cumbersome hierarchy that slows things down within the executive ranks there.”
- “There's a push from the top, there's a push from the bottom, but that middle layer, which is sometimes called negatively the clay layer or whatever, it's very difficult to get anything to happen because they're the managers and they kind of control the employees, there's a bit of stagnation I think that happens.”
- “... things going up the chain get less innovative as they go towards senior leaders, and the senior leaders waving the flag and saying let’s do it, the resources and enthusiasm, dedication gets watered down as it goes down the chain. And by the time it gets to the analysts, it’s like, okay, you have four hours to do this on Friday.”
- “I think it's going there, but it's being said from top down but it's actually coming from the ground up. The people at the bottom, the newbies are the ones who really want to push it and yeah it's coming from word of mouth from the people at the top of the hierarchy but around the director/manager level it really needs to be implemented because people are again still so stuck in that old way of thinking.”
- “I find there's a lot of excitement at the top level and there's a lot of excitement at the bottom level. The top level has the authority but doesn't have the time and then the bottom level has the time but doesn't have the authority to put into a project. It's really up to that middle section to make or break a project. It's luck of the draw of what kind of manager or director you get because they can either pass along the information from top down or bottom up, but if they're not willing to then things aren't going to happen.”

- “Whether it’s just a multiplicity of layers of approval on things or things that just condemn you to be slower in trying to do things either because there’s so many layers of approval or things need to be checked against a long list of policies, terms, and conditions and so forth, that if they don’t exhaust all the innovative instinct from the system, it will certainly damp it down.”

## Where / Who is the Clay Layer?

- “I don't think it's any one place in the organization. I wouldn't say to you all deputy, director generals are clay layer. I would never say that, but I think anywhere, because we are a hierarchal institution, anywhere along your chain of command between the analyst and the deputy minister if one person is not on board, that's the clay layer.”
- “... but the middle management seems to be where the message gets lost, so that's a really key condition for me. That really sets up the ability to innovate, from what I've seen.”
- “I would say that's the clay layer to me. Again, in every organization it can be different. Also the number of layers. Obviously if you have a manager or point to a director or point to a seated director to a DG. Like it's just, you know, I would say a little oppressive to innovative ideas.”
- “People at my level, people maybe one step above me at the Director level, they will challenge, they will come up with innovative ideas. Above that, people are interested in maintaining the status quo. They really are not interested in innovation. And it could be because the things I was talking about previously, there is no incentive for them to innovate. If there’s no incentive and there is a possible downside of attempting innovation, you won’t do it. People tend to be / are willing to change the status quo if they don’t have to change.”

## A Cautionary Note

- “I think a lot of time people blame middle management for the lack of change, but I feel like that’s just a cheap shot, that I don’t really know that that’s true.”

### ***Initial Finding 11: The barriers to innovation are not absolute***

*“It can be hard to innovate, but innovation is happening despite the barriers that exist”*

Despite all of the barriers and obstacles that exist, some of which may be natural or innate characteristics of the public sector, the fact that innovation is occurring shows that those barriers are not absolute or unnavigable. Many of the barriers or obstacles may actually be self-imposed limits, based out of fear or uncertainty or out of a perceived, but potentially incorrect, wisdom about what the system will allow. Or they may come from a discomfort with not knowing, with not having the answers, and with failing, not seeing failure as a necessary, even useful, part of the process.

#### ***Why This Might Matter***

If the barriers to innovation are porous, then at some level this is advantageous – innovation can, and does happen.

However, if that means that innovation is something that only happens in spite of the characteristics of the system, then innovation is unlikely to happen regularly or consistently; rather it will be reliant on the confluence of the right circumstances and people. Such a situation may mean that areas that are in serious need of innovation may miss out, and other areas will get it – e.g. where innovation happens will be reliant on chance and a degree of luck.

Alternatively, if the barriers are a matter of people having a sophisticated understanding of the relevant rules and processes, of what is definitely not possible and of what might be, then that poses some other challenges. In a dynamic environment dealing with ongoing change, very few people are going to be able to be across all of the detail of the systems, let alone the aggregate impact or intersection of multiple rule sets and conventions.

From another perspective, it may be that the porous nature of the rules simply reflects more underlying problems within the innovation system. People may default to pointing to the rules as an excuse, as a response to stress or feeling unsupported in their role, as a proxy for “innovation is hard, and I don’t know how to do this”. This explanation would imply that the limiting factor will be one of persistence and/or abilities to reframe the situation, to motivate others to find the solutions rather than focussing on the problems. This can be a big ask of people, and is again likely to be limited to those who are particularly able, feel empowered, and have the emotional energy and persistence to push through the change.

In short, the fact that barriers are partial is good, but because they are not consistently so, the determining factor for the success of an innovation is more likely to be chance than merit.

#### ***Positive Signs***

There appear to be a growing number of communities of practice within the Canadian Public Service, the provide forums for sharing experiences and lessons about how to engage with different potential barriers and the work-arounds that might exist. There are also the GC platforms, which provide a channel for people to promulgate and share lessons more broadly, and to find and mobilise others who might be interested in particular innovative projects. However, this is unlikely to be sufficient on its own to encourage more regular and reliable instances of innovation.

## Hard or Soft Limits?

- “So I think there’s often this narrative that the public sector, government of Canada is slow, bureaucratic... But you often hear these laments, and there are, to be sure, process constraints, but that’s a function of being in a democratic system where you have to make concessions and you have to manage different expectations and demands and priorities, and I think that’s probably not necessarily the same thing... It’s like that’s all part of the game. You have to figure out how to deal with all of that to move things forward, and I just find that people don’t always want to take up that space I think that is available”
- “But there’s a bit of a disconnect into what is possible and then what people sort of think is possible ... Sometimes, the wisdom of the system is wrong.”
- “But sometimes people are waiting a bit too much for cover. So, again, we’re often our own worst enemy, like we limit ourselves. Sometimes nobody else is actually limiting. We’ve just sort of decided ourselves not try something out or not to take, again, it’s not even a risk really sometimes.”
- “Departing from convention on how we work ... which parts of which organizations and legs and arms are doing, we can be quite consumed with that at times, to sometimes I think very little net benefit or value to the taxpayer on a day to day basis in terms of accruing value. I think we need to let go of our current understanding of what the boundaries are and what the rules are.”
- “This is what innovation is. Innovation is not just looking at barriers or why you cannot do it. Or what you need to have in terms of services around it to be able to innovate. It’s just, milk it. It’s just figuring out a creative way to do it.”
- “Yeah, the NR came close, the Natural Resources Canada that free agent pilot, that seems ... When I first heard about that I was surprised that was even allowed to happen. I thought with the way all the collective agreements were with the different classifications for employees in public service, that would be unfathomable that someone could just sort of be ad hoc employee floating from department to department.”
- “We limit ourselves by the legislation that we’ve created. We limit ourselves by the policies that we’ve made and we believe that there’s valid and solid reasons for those policies that we’ve created. But, we do not push that further and say, ‘Well, wait a minute. Maybe there’s a different way.’”
- “... innovation in the public service, I would argue that it doesn’t hit up against ministerial accountabilities at all. Political powers don’t need to tell us to be effective in the way that we serve Canadians. They don’t need to tell us to maximise our efficiency within our jobs. Those things, in my mind, are just core elements of how we function as a high-performing organisation. It’s like, would we only have transitioned from typewriters to computers if the ministers had told us to? No, that’s just the state of play. We need to be an innovative organization that is seizing opportunities.”
- “I think what works well is just believing that, hey, it can happen. And worst thing that will happen is that people will think I’m crazy. And you run with it because most of the innovation right now, I can’t say it really came up from the top.”
- “So, the barriers, I think ... I mean, we’re still people and a lot of people in positions are afraid to admit that they don’t know something. I mean, I’m the same way. I like to have all the answers. I think, being able to admit that you don’t have all the answers, that things are complex and changing faster than you can necessarily keep up with is part of it. And the other part is admitting that you’re going to fail, but that you need to understand that failure is not a bad thing. Failure is a necessary part of success. It’s how science works. It’s how people grow. And that, even though these are public funds, people don’t expect us to be perfect, but if we continue to fail, or not fail, but if we continue to be inactive, that’s worse than failing. If we fail and learn and improve, that’s much better. So, one of the barriers is really just ourselves.”

### ***Initial Finding 12: Innovation can feel like a fight, and one where winning does not feel like winning***

*“I see people who are trying to do new things have to go to great effort”*

Innovation can often be a difficult and challenging process that draws on an individual and/or team resources and reserves. In some instances, undertaking innovation can feel like a fight: a fight against the status quo, against processes, against constraints, against those (often justifiably) invested in the existing way of doing things. Even if the innovation does proceed, and the fight is “won”, it may not feel like winning for the innovator, as they may not be recognised or thanked for it, it may not benefit their career (or if it does, it may mean they have to stop doing what they love), there can be an expectation of more of the same effort, or they may feel exhausted and drained from the experience.

#### ***Why This Might Matter***

An innovation system that relies on individuals going “above and beyond” is one that will inherently have a limited supply of innovation. If the effort/reward ratio is skewed such that innovation requires significant effort with only the potential of intrinsic rewards (e.g. seeing an impact, feelings of having contributed/made a difference), it can result in a:

- **Loss of expertise:** those who have innovation experience will over time increasingly be likely to move on or stop trying to innovate, or otherwise risk burn-out, disillusionment, or resentment. This can contribute to a potential loss of expertise from those who have actually experienced innovation processes and practices, if they disengage from the process. This can harm the prospects of developing a critical mass of innovation expertise.
- **Deterrence for others:** if others see the effort that is required to innovate and the lack of commensurate recognition/results, then it will likely deter them from engaging with the innovation process.
- **Reliance on other innovation drivers:** if many people see innovation as generally too hard or not worth it, they may then only engage with innovation when there are other drivers (e.g. a crisis, a government priority, or a new program). This may harm the capacity of the system to be adaptive to emerging opportunities.

In short, if innovation feels like a continual and ongoing fight, most individuals will stop fighting at some point.

#### ***Positive Signs***

Conversations revealed a general enthusiasm for innovation, however one tempered by a strong sense of the challenges, the barriers and the demands involved in undertaking innovation individually.



## Innovation Can Feel Like a Fight...

- “It’s not considered real work, and I kind of, my response to that is do you know how frustrating it is to be a social innovator within government? Do you know how many times I’ve beat my head against the brick wall? No, I love it, but it’s not necessarily fun. It’s not easy. I don’t do it for the fun of it. I do it because I hope to effect change. There’s a huge disconnect still in government. It’s like, ‘Oh, anybody can do innovation. That’s just the fun stuff.’”
- “And so for me, I love public service. I’m really excited, I love my job, I’ve had great opportunities, and I have a lot of energy. But I could see someone who’s just kind of mid-range on their level of engagement, trying, trying, trying, and then just saying, “Why bother?” It’s just so much effort, and so much work, and so frustrating, that I don’t know.”
- “It’s very hard to be one of the people who’s constantly pushing. And you get, after a while you can get a signal, someone will just say, ‘You know what? You’re really rubbing people the wrong way. So stop pushing, or it’s gonna be career-limiting.’ Basically.”
- “What’s happening is, small teams like mine are working way too much, burning out beyond belief, trying to make change in government, and the bottom line is, we’re eventually gonna leave. We’re eventually gonna find that it’s too hard, it’s too draining, we don’t have the support. They’re saying all the right things, but the actions are not there.”
- “So you can imagine how, if somebody just has a good idea, and wants to get it through, how much effort and motivation and energy and resilience is required to actually move the yardstick. And then even if you manage to actually move it, over time it tends to default back to the original.”
- “Look, I think there’s a ton of willingness. People are ... there are so many smart people. People want to love their job and feel engaged. The system crushes down on them over a period of time and it just seems like it’s not worth it because

there’s only so many resources and that includes mental health and energy. You want to do something kind of cool and somebody says no. Well then you try it again and somebody says no again and then your e-mails are piling up and then, yeah. It’s sort of resource constrained.”

- “After two years of doing this and fighting that, I decided I probably just needed to go somewhere where I wasn’t fighting everyday.”
- “You can only fight so many times before you become quite tired”

## ... Where Winning Does Not Feel Like Winning

- “They have success but they have to overcome significant barriers, but then there’s no payoff at the end of the day. Or it’s not that these people want a payoff, they just want to see their ability to make calls and their impact scale with the amount of value that they’ve added which... there’s not a direct relationship between value added, in public value terms, with how somebody’s career progresses.”
- “Trying to climb the corporate ladder is not feasible most of the time when you’re in this world. You stay pretty much at the same level for very long periods of time.”
- “I can move up levels potentially, but then I don’t get to do what I love to do, so this is career limiting.”
- “One of the things, we ask people to take risk, we ask people to provide truth to power, but we do not reward people that take risks and we do not reward people who speak truth to power. And often those individuals who do the things that we want people to do, their careers plateau at sub-management. And they often burn out, because they do all the things they’ve been asked to do.”
- “It’s a battle day to day fighting upstream and in my experience, the best innovators are not only great innovators, they’re very strong people being able to swim upstream day in and day out. It’s not easy and I think some relief and some credit to those people over time would be I really think something to celebrate.”

### ***Initial Finding 13: Risk Aversion is an endemic issue***

*“Risk aversion is a core characteristic of the Canadian Public Service”*

Risk aversion appears to be pervasive in the current operations and practices of the Canadian Public Service, acting as an inadvertent filter for ideas, as a hindrance in terms of garnering support for innovation, and as a general dampener or inhibitor for innovation. It does not appear to be always clear what the risk being avoided is, who or what the risk is to, nor is the risk always quantified or verified.

#### ***Why This Might Matter***

If risk aversion is endemic, yet innovation is still occurring, then it suggests that one of the major filters for innovative ideas and initiatives will be the motivation, skill and persistence of those trying to advocate it, rather than a more thorough and considered assessment of the merits of the idea. In other words, risk aversion can act as an informal and situational, and thus inconsistent, filter, and there will be a lot of chance about which innovations proceed, as opposed to need or merit.

In such a way, risk aversion can be a more pernicious barrier than any formal rules and obstacles, as:

- it will be inconsistent in application
- highly variable as the level of acceptable risk in a political/public sector environment can fluctuate quickly
- hard to disprove or counter that the risk aversion is over-zealous
- risk aversion is a very necessary component and attitude of a responsible public sector which has a duty to avoid unnecessary waste, political surprises and harm.

However, identifying an appropriate level of risk aversion will often be contextual, and rely on the experience, judgement and savvy of those dealing in the situation. Formal guidance, processes and even values may have trouble finding an appropriate balance between engaging with risk and avoiding it. In short, entrenched or endemic risk aversion is likely to act as a filter that results in the success of innovations being determined by factors other than identified or emergent need.

#### ***Positive Signs***

Risk is starting to be engaged with, and there appears to be messaging, emphasis, and action from a number of senior leaders to demonstrate that, and to try and change the conversation around risk.

## Entrenched Risk Aversion

- “There’s a massive tendency to water down innovation or innovative ideas to the broadly acceptable, which may not always be the right case but also in terms of risk tolerance. If you have a 50% chance per level of some of these saying yes, by the time you go up seven levels, you’re like 0.25% or whatever it is.”
- “That risk aversion is scary. It's scary because you can have the greatest ideas and the greatest plans, and you can say, ‘You know, this is going to work,’ but if people don't want to take that risk, even though it's a calculated risk, this is not willy-nilly jumping out of an airplane with no parachute. They just will not, they will completely kibosh a project, an idea, whatever it is. I don't know how you get past that.”
- “There's also, I think there's a risk aversion within the public service. It's almost like if you take a risk and things go well, you're kind of given a little pat on the back. But if things go bad, you know, you basically have to look for a new job kind of thing.”
- “I think it's risk aversion, but not just for the sake of the risk aversion. I think there is so much to be delivered, and people are feeling comfortable and under control, and they are doing things the way they are doing it. There is some comfort that comes with it, and then trying something new obviously gets you out of your comfort zone, and you are not sure what the results of those are going to be. And the system is not rewarding you for taking the risk. And that's the part that we are kind of struggling...”
- “I'm not a risk taker at all but I think what risk taking has come to represent in this large, bureaucratic organization is you don't care what other people think about you. So much of the risk is about perception and especially federal government. So much. Our whole values and ethics system says if it is perceived that you are in conflict of this, then you might be. I think that's just a really crazy awful way of thinking about things that keeps us stuck in the status quo.”
- “... when I have had conversations, say regulators or finance, there is immediate, you bump up against risk tolerance. You're immediately in a conversation about risk, and that risk is not... It's not risk to an individual. It's risk to... Will my director approve? Will my DG approve? Will my ADM approve of this? This looks like something different. I have to wait. I can't do anything. I can't really even talk to you until I hear from more senior management that this is okay.”
- “We don't trust people. It's risk averse security culture. Hard to be innovative in that.”
- “My sense is that there's a lot of perceived risks; I'm sure there are some real risks as well, but there are a lot of perceived risks that aren't necessarily as serious as I think people perceive them. There are opportunities that are just being missed because people are afraid to take those risks.”
- “I think there's a perception of risk attached to trying something new that means that individuals who see a need to operate in a different way in order to achieve outcomes in a particular area are having to take on, not necessarily more personal risk because their jobs are relatively secure, but they have to be motivated very much under their own steam to stick their neck out and reap the consequences if whatever they try doesn't work out. It's on them, too, to get the right buy-in up the chain in order to get something out the door.”
- “Again, that gets you into the world of risk aversion and I understand where some of that comes from. You can try innovative projects that end up getting you weighed down and mired in dealing with either criticisms or problems that arise from having tried to do things differently, fair or unfair. You hear conversations where people ask the question, ‘Why don't we do things differently?’ This is why we don't do things differently.”

***Initial Finding 14: The notion of risk is beginning to be reframed and renegotiated, but it's not there yet***

*"I think the attitude towards risk is starting to change, but there's a long way to go"*

While risk aversion is pervasive, it is beginning to be engaged with at a system-wide level, with growing acknowledgement that it is impossible to have risk-free innovation, that there can be smart/informed risk-taking, and a nascent awareness that sometimes taking an active risk is a smaller worry than not acting and waiting for a bigger risk to realise itself. In addition, more deliberate strategies, such as bringing in new perspectives and the introduction of the Experimentation Direction for Deputy Heads, can change the default levels of acceptable risk and create a structural demand for risk-taking (which in turn makes it less risky). This greater engagement with risk, particularly the notions of smart risk, is still at early stages however.

***Why This Might Matter***

A more sophisticated and deliberate approach to engaging with risk, as opposed to a default aversion, is *prima facie* something will benefit the performance of an innovation system.

At the same time, such a change may be vulnerable to the reaction to any failures that arise, which may cause a stress-response where people default to their previous norms and behaviours. An innovation system might be described as having a long memory, where the reaction to one incident, if visceral enough, may outlast the impact of many more non-reactions. One media-storm, one political objection, one public outcry may be sufficient to reinforce previous behaviours despite the strength of any formal guidance or assurance.

In short, an innovation system can benefit from a more mature engagement with risk, but the real gains will only be evident once the system can repeatedly and consistently demonstrate that considered risk-taking will be defended and celebrated.

***Positive Signs***

A change to something that has been a fundamental characteristic to a system will take effort and time, but a number of initiatives appear to be being put in place to ensure that the change is integrated. The implementation of the Experimentation Direction for Deputy Heads could ensure a structural demand for risk-taking that then feeds into a broader sophistication when assessing and engaging with risk. The reaction to any inevitable experimental failures and possible mistakes (deliberate or careless) will likely be as equally, if not more, important.

## Reframing and Reassessing Risk

- "... risk free innovation is a bit like calorie free poutine: it's an interesting theory, and impossible."
- "People dislike change. And I understand that. People are scared of change. On the other hand, most of the change that I have experienced has been positive. Certainly technology changes have been positive."
- "Lately, the tides are turning a little bit. There's the whole innovation agenda, and there seems to be more of an appetite for innovation, yet there's still that aversion to risk that we see, that I've seen."
- "We've always framed it in terms of smart or intelligent risk-taking, to be kind of thoughtful about how you do these, take risks and experiment and try to innovate, but do so in a safe kind of way. That's something we're really trying to push."
- "It's now become a buzzword. Oh, we can do risk tolerance or we can mitigate risk or we can take smart risks, and I think we still haven't asked the question what kind of risk are we talking about? Is it reputational? Is it your own job? Is it the response that you might get? Nobody's answering that question, and I think it would be a very fruitful call."
- "That's the only other thing I would say just because one of the phrases we use is like 'smart risk taking' or 'intelligent risk taking'. So the problem is that people can often interpret that as no risk taking, or like taking only the smart risks, basically the really smart ones. So, yeah, you could take risks, just don't screw up, right, which doesn't really work to really drive innovation. So sometimes we have to help employees, like you get a high-level message from senior management, that's great, but when push comes to shove, again, we revert to old habits. So can we take a term like 'smart risk taking' and actually unpack for an employee and say, 'You know what? If the risk you're going to take is reversible, that's smart. If you're going to do something where the consequences can't be reversed, think really carefully about that one.'"
- "... there has been reassessment of risk, and a much greater tolerance for informed or smart risk taking."
- "The whole thrust on experimentation, how we're introducing that into what we do, is a way of de-risking."
- "There is an issue with incentives and just management risk aversion. There's a greater phenomenon in civil services or public services just on risk aversion because in general, success is not making mistakes, which politicians tend to get angry about, particularly if it impacts their or the government's standing. That just kind of gets entrenched. The challenge is how to incent that right behaviours and some of this risk taking and generate some tolerance for things that don't work as well."
- "And so part of what can change the culture around that risk taking and people experimenting more and innovating more is to, again, to bring new blood and genuinely, kind of people with different perspectives and experiences working in different kinds of organizations and different kinds of contexts that have a very different risk appetite, for example, so that when you're all sitting in a meeting and the tendency would be to kind of norm towards the point that, yeah, we shouldn't do this, somebody would say like, 'Well, actually, we totally did that, and here was the outcome, and it was fine.' And so communication, internal communication matters a lot, like if you celebrate the failures, celebrate the risk taking, celebrate innovation, celebrate experiments, so that very explicit license again from senior management and showcasing that those things are okay can be very helpful."
- "The goal of minimizing surprises or downside risks versus the goal of trying to get better outcomes which will mean, in some cases, taking bigger risks. They don't necessarily have to be in conflict, but they can be."

### ***Initial Finding 15: The underlying systems of government are not calibrated for innovation***

*“It feels like much of the basic machinery of government is in tension with innovation”*

Many basic elements of government as a system do not currently appear to be aligned with innovation. While government can and does innovate, the circumstances in which government best does that appear to be limited (e.g. in response to a clearly defined problem with political priority, or where the innovation is occurring “under the radar” and there is reduced scrutiny and risk). In many other ways, the essence of government, its systems, its structures and accountability, its silos and its collaboration dynamics, its ability to process and make sense of information, its emphasis on set processes over other needs, its time horizons, its underlying traits, do not appear to be especially conducive to, or harmonious with, innovation.

#### ***Why This Might Matter***

Innovation is innately a difficult process as it goes against what is, against the current state and any defaults, legacy investments and efforts, vested interests, and existing behaviours and patterns. If the underlying fundamentals of the environment are not supportive to innovation, or are actively in tension with innovation, it is likely innovation will occur under very limited circumstances, or only with great effort or through effective chance. In other words, innovation will be something governed by chance, rather than as a deliberate, strategic activity.

Given the relative recency of the increased attention to, and importance of, innovation, any underlying tensions may simply be a reflection of a system still adjusting to a changed environment. Or it could reflect a more fundamental misalignment, implying the need for a redesign and rethinking of some of the basics of how government operates and organises itself, if innovation is to be truly supported.

In short, the performance of an innovation system will be limited if the underlying conditions are not conducive to innovation.

#### ***Positive Signs***

There are a number of positive examples where the Public Service of Canada appears to be exploring different systems and basics. For instance, the introduction of the Free Agent Program demonstrates an alternate way of facilitating access to skills at the same time as giving individuals alternate ways of structuring their career. The pilot Talent Cloud initiative could be a much more substantive questioning of some of the basics of how to organise people within the system. The Experimentation Direction for Deputy Heads could facilitate other questioning and exploration of basic systems.

#### Government Can Innovate in Some Situations ...

- “For me, it works well when there is a very clearly defined problem that is high on the political agenda, and for which immediate action is necessary. Alternatively, I think it can work well when it's under the radar and no-one's paying attention, because then the stakes of failure are lower, so it almost depends on either. Almost every time that I've seen something innovative happen, it's because of an immediate manager who is willing to provide cover. So they say, ‘Yes, this is a little bit different than what we've always done, let's try it, I'll handle the uppers and make sure that they're on board.’”
- “The public service of Canada has a lot of very smart people.... And they very often identify what is wrong and even suggest exactly what needs to be done to fix it. The problems seem to be in actually implementing the fix.”
- “Identifying problems is done, identifying solutions to problems is done very well, very competent people. The implementation of the solution is where the government of Canada falls down.”

#### ... But is Not Fundamentally Designed for it

- “But, the structure, the edifice that is the Federal Government and the bureaucracy, actually is too heavy to support innovation.”
- “Our biggest weakness is systems. It's our infrastructure, essentially. Old infrastructures. Whether it's IT, or our human resources management model. They're old, old models, and old systems.”
- “Our systems are very, I don't know what the right word is, but our systems don't seem to be well designed, our structures don't seem to be well designed to support change, it seems.”
- “When you go into mainstream, and you're trying to scale up, the infrastructure for government, starting from governance tables ... Let's not even talk about governance tables ... Down to the actual makeup of government, it's not set up for innovation.”

- “Part of the issue is that, and that comes down to why we don't collaborate with each other too, is that we're very siloed in the Government of Canada, moreso than again that I've seen in other government organizations. We're not encouraged to work together and the systems, you know, like, the plumbing of the machinery, I guess, of government, makes it very difficult for us to work together.”
- “But the way the system works in practice, it's all very vertical. There's just no incentive for real shared objectives. There are incentives for collaboration, but actual shared objectives and shared outcomes, it's really hard. Really hard. There's nothing in our system that prevents it, but there's no incentive for it, I would say.”
- “I think really the main problem is just information overflow. Then weeding through what is the most pertinent for me or for whoever at that time. That I think is a huge challenge and an increasing challenge. It's just getting worse.”
- “I think our structures in government often push us to do things a certain way, and tend to focus on process over user needs.”
- “But then I think just some of the forces I was talking about, such as, rotationality, churn, and the fact that in a government ... our government tends to be very dependent on the structure and the hierarchy, and the reporting relationships. And innovation, in my mind, is and should be cross-cutting, it's a horizontal initiative often, and horizontal initiatives often, in a way, like policy making, when they don't theoretically report to just one person, or something, can be a little bit, can struggle to find their place.”
- “Often times the time horizon for innovation is longer than the time horizon on which funding and the political cycle is operating.”
- “If you don't recognize the underlying behavioural traits of the system, and its impact over time, then you end up comforting yourself in innovation by anecdote, and not coming to terms with the structural impediments to innovation.”

***Initial Finding 16: The systems of government have the ability to change, but not quickly***

*“The Public Service of Canada is like a large ship – it takes time to turn”*

The system can and does change, it does respond to signals and directions, but the rate at which it does so on its own is not very fast.

***Why This Might Matter***

The system may, over time, recalibrate itself to be more conducive to innovation, however a reliance on inbuilt/existing mechanisms and their default rates of change may be insufficient.

***Positive Signs***

Measures such as the Experimentation Direction for Deputy Heads could accelerate such a recalibration.



### Turning the Ship of State ...

- “I would say that we're taking steps towards it. In the sense that, no we're not fully innovative in government and the public service are large institutions. It's like steering a very large battleship or an aircraft carrier, it takes several miles to be able to turn one of them. I think that's probably safe to say that often it's in our best interest at times not to be blown around by change but to continue the course to need to develop and deliver services and products and programs to the public. You can't change that all the time.”
- “Because there is a full understanding that with the speed that we go to regulate, it takes two to five years to put a regulation in place, and there are good reasons why we have to want to go slowly. It has a huge impact on the people and the economy. But also the economy and the sectors are going so far ahead, that I don't think the pace of our rule-making, and the pace of the sectors we regulate are never matched the way that we can co-op and be ahead of it, if we continue the way that we are.”
- “I think, because it's still a very large bureaucracy, and to manage a large system like the federal government you need that structure, but there's still a lot of change movements within departments and across departments, so the system is constantly adjusting itself.”
- “Like it's a pretty good functioning system overall. It's more like I think it just needs to keep up with the changes in external environment, new technologies, new thinking in terms of the management approaches. We're just kind of keeping up to date. There's probably more room for, I think it could be more efficient, I'm not sure if it needs as much resources as is being dedicated. I'm not sure if resources is being used in most efficient way right now.”
- “Government, at least Canadian government, has changed dramatically in the last 30, 40 years because of technology, because of demographic change in the public service. Yet, we operate a lot like back when we were in the 80s.”

- “The system adopts and changes, but it takes time.”

### ... Is Hard Without a Shared Map

- “I think just the bureaucracy, like we're still operating in the post-war siloed hierarchical system that really doesn't imagine people outside of kind of a specific box or role, so challenging that. And some of the innovations that are taking place right now are pushing and kind of pressing against that in different ways.”
- “I think the bigger problem, which I say problem, and maybe that's not the right word, is that the structures or the accountability in the incentive frameworks within government create biased towards working within the silos of a ministry, because that minister has to report to cabinet or to parliament on funds that have been given to that ministry for particular purpose. There isn't much incentive, I think, to work across departments even though issues, obviously, across departments.”
- “I think defining a set of outcomes and making sure that the data is aligned to measure those outcomes and making that available on some kind of cost-sharing basis to different ministries and levels of government, I think that would prompt a lot of the innovation that we're talking about.”
- “So, while there's innovative approaches and initiative happening across different departments and agencies, very few bridge the gap. So, to me, to say that government Canada is innovative... I have a hard time saying it because having been in different departments, having been in departments in central agencies ... it doesn't feel like we have a whole of enterprise view on government.”
- “If I had to characterize the policy making process in Canada, as it's described by officials and by scholars, is that it's short-term, focused on firefighting, heavily driven by media and managing media responses to potential government failures. As a result, we don't do long-term planning, we're not sufficiently preparing for emerging issues, and that there's often a lack of data and evidence to informed decision making.”

***Initial Finding 17: Government is confronted by significant rates of technological change***

*“I don’t think we really understand the technology that is now available to us”*

The Public Service of Canada is operating in a world of fast moving change, yet appears to be grappling with some systemic IT legacy issues, with concerns that new technologies are not being engaged with fast enough, and a potential lack of overall sophistication when it comes to really understanding and being literate in new technologies.

***Why This Might Matter***

If the speed of change within government is dramatically different to the speed of change outside of government, the gap will likely result in increasingly strong pressures for more innovation. This pressure will come from those within the system (“why can’t I use or access the technology at work that I can use at home?”), and from without (“government is not keeping up with the reality that I live in”). At the same time, the gap will mean that the pool of those within government who really understand what is possible and how it could happen will shrink.

In short, a gap in the relative rates of change happening inside and outside of government will both increase the pressure for innovation, and weaken the ability of government to innovate.

***Positive Signs***

There are a number of elements in the system that are contributing to grappling with technological change, including Policy Horizons from a foresight perspective, and the Canadian Digital Service from an IT perspective. There are also some government programs that may assist.

## A Lethargic Metabolic Rate

- “I think Dominic Barton ... He refers to the civil service as lacking a sufficient metabolic rate, like it's a lethargic metabolic rate, and I'd say that that's pretty accurate. It's moving too slowly to be able to keep pace.”
- “... we're also dealing with huge legacy systems on the IT front and so there is a whole IT infrastructure piece that needs to catch up ...”
- “The technology on the market is not necessarily what we're using.”
- “And in fact sometimes by the time you complete your procurement exercise, the technology has moved forward and you're no longer leading edge, you're already trailing edge because the stuff that you bought has already been superseded by better stuff. In fact, even after we've spent the time to procure it, because there are so many things to upgrade, then we will take an inordinately long time to make all the upgrades. By the time you finish upgrading everybody, your technology is already obsolete ... You're continually upgrading.”
- “But there are times when government I think lags from a readiness perspective, and we have a fairly mixed and not always good kind of historical track record on the use of technology, deployment of technologies, of disruptive technologies internally, our ability to kind of reckon with others who are using them in ways that maybe disrupt our space, right, like government sometimes who've had historically monopolies on certain kinds of functions, and those kind of get progressively disrupted over time, and we're not always good at being very practical about that disruption.”
- “... we're thinking of tomorrow with the technology we have today. We're not thinking of tomorrow with the technology of tomorrow. So we always seem to be playing catch up because everything is so expensive because you're government, because they're so big, because everything is so integrated so it's really, really, difficult...”
- “I think governments, in general, are very good at the very short term. But the longer the scope ends up being, or the longer the reflection or the foresight has to happen, we miss so many things.”
- “Things that are changing quickly, and things that have emerged over the last decade or two, we haven't been able to respond. We haven't been able to respond in incremental ways. And we haven't been able to respond in transformational ways.”
- “So I think and one of the gaps is a lack of deep awareness of what technology does across the public service, especially at senior levels and that hampers our ability to really make good decisions on what needs to be done.”
- “... the pace of change in government does not align with the pace of change going on out there and so even as I talk about these things and think about the new stuff we're trying, the world is evolving really, really rapidly in ways that people cannot predict and whether it's AI or robotics or the big data on the AI and the algorithms. The stuff that we're dealing with here, even the way we approach disruption and transformation even at the most cutting edge, at the most accelerated ways, I think there is a general concern that even our most ambitious thinkers are far behind what's the pace of change that is going on outside of government.”
- “I think just educating our folks on digital skills and literacy and not everyone needs to be a programmer but if you don't understand how technology works or how something like Google Maps is actually happening or how API's connect to different things, you can't imagine what's gonna happen coming next.”
- “I cannot think of a part of government that doesn't need more digital literacy.”
- “... maybe all decisions have, and certainly in the technology world, should have a best-before date. You have to go back and re-examine your decisions.”
- “And I'm not sure how government will survive when outside of the government we're moving so much faster.”

***Initial Finding 18: There is a focus on impact, but not necessarily a strong connection to those being impacted***

*“I think we care strongly about impact but we don’t often get to see that impact”*

There appears to be a strong focus on impact and results within the Public Service of Canada, however the connection with those who are impacted – stakeholders, partners, citizens at large – does not seem as strong.

***Why This Might Matter***

A focus on results and impact is an important driver for innovation. A focus on impact will provide a stronger sense of where innovation is needed, where the current approach is not delivering to expectation.

Yet innovation often happens at the “edge”, the intersection of different worlds and experiences. Often innovation will occur, and be driven by, the needs on the ground, where policy intent hits the realities of the lives the policy is designed for. The edge also provides important information and insight into whether something is really working or not.

Currently, it appears that the Public Service of Canada, for whatever reasons, does not seem to have as strong a connection with external stakeholders and citizens as might be needed to really drive innovation.

***Positive Signs***

There are a number of developments that look promising here.

## A Focus on Impact

- “I think that inherent to innovation is a requirement, not just a nice to have but a must have, a requirement that you are undertaking rigorous assessment of whether those innovations are improving those outcomes whatever those happen to have been. So again, and these are things that you have said and others have said, but innovation is not simply trying new things. It is appropriately conducting research and having plausible hypotheses and a reasonable theory of change and rigorously assessing other similar experiments that may have happened elsewhere and having a hypothesis about what might happen if we undertake a particular change or innovation and then having in place the systems to assess whether you are in fact delivering those results.”
- “So even with our innovation stream, we don’t have evaluators on the ground. We have an evaluation requirement. We don’t judge it. We don’t tell them whether it’s a good one or a bad one. We simply want an evaluation. We want a conversation with them about what they thought worked. We missed that capturing of what knowledge that I think is again part of the point when we’re looking at moving that innovation.”
- “I think the biggest challenge, to my mind, in terms of an overarching, more innovative approach in the government of Canada is having the tools and capacity to actually measure how effective or efficient our programs or policies are.”
- “Much more focus on outcomes as opposed to compliance to process. That has been, for the public service, that shift of perspective is really, really important. It then liberates you to think about, ‘Well, there are other ways. This is what we’re trying to achieve.’”
- “The same people that are hounding you on that stuff, the most pedantic, bureaucratic, time honoured checklists and metrics, and red, green and yellow lights, those are the same people who are leading the charge on transforming the public sector’s approach to innovation and innovative policy development.”
- “I think people are worried about, “I have limited amount of money and I have limited amounts of time. I don’t want to go out and promise something or raise expectations.” I think it’s a knee jerk reaction to managing expectations on the limited resources. I guess if you found a way to not promise anything, or oversell anything, but still again it’s doing it once and twice, and getting people used to it.”
- “I think it’s starting that relationship with Canadians and citizens, where we don’t know where to start because we haven’t done it.”
- “So again I think that’s the hard part, I think, in any innovative element is to get the right people around the table having that conversation .... But even like 10 years ago, we still had the opportunity to go and meet stakeholders. We don’t have that all the time now.”
- “But I think most people are willing to feed into those processes. Sometimes they feel over-consulted, and I think that feeling of over-consultation would be because they see a lack of action following the past consultations.”

## External Engagement

***Initial Finding 19: There are a number of “limiting factors” that are affecting the capability and capacity to innovate***

*“I don’t think we have the critical mass needed for widespread innovation”*

It appears that there are some limits – such as the number of people with the relevant experience, skills, and formal knowledge; the infrastructure or opportunities to increase that number; the extent of integration of new tools and methods – that are holding back the potential for innovation within the system.

***Why This Might Matter***

Innovation is difficult, and only so much can be done by individuals in an environment that is not necessarily conducive to innovation.

***Positive Signs***

There is currently ongoing attention and focus on innovation, including through the innovation labs, the Experimentation Direction for Deputy Heads, through the Deputy Minister’s Committee on Policy Innovation and its reverse mentors, the creation of the Canadian Digital Service, the work of Policy Horizons Canada, and many more. These may act as powerful signals which will continue to build up the critical mass of innovation, and those experienced with innovation, in the Public Service of Canada.

## Limiting Factors

- “If you actually, even from the inner circle, if you actually look for people who have the training, the formal training, or the depth in all of these methodologies that they talk about, very few do. That's a problem. I think a lot of us have had to kind of learn as we go through processes with social impact bonds and things like that. This is a challenge internationally as well, but it's still a problem that could be resolved through capacity building.”
- “The innovation hub is 10 people. All of the innovators in the broadest sense of the word in government, self-described innovators, in government are about less than 300 people. Three hundred people in a size of 250,000 public servants. We are like a drop in an ocean.”
- “There are a lot of enthusiastic public servants who've learned about these new tools. Might have been exposed to them through training or through Twitter. On the off, off chance in their work outside of government. But we have a pretty short bench. We don't have a lot of people that have experienced the use of these new tools. Or implementing or designing.”
- “I don't know if we're set up properly, because there's no way to know what our actual skills are in the system.”
- “So if you want to do experimentation properly as a government, you need to have a critical mass, which could be two people, but you have to have people within a department that know what a random controlled trial is, know how to calculate, what is statistically significant, have a bit of the basis so they can act as knowledge brokers.”
- “We have a literacy gap right now in many swathes of the public sector, including at senior levels, which is really dangerous given the age that we have entered, and it's not that people have to be kind of experts of practitioners, you don't need everybody to be a coder, but the way I was talking kind of about literacy for experimentation, you need people to know enough to be able navigate at the interface between public problems and science and technology or digital technology, and right now we have a pretty serious deficit there and a very kind of traditionalist of IT.”
- “Like the network of labs, in theory it's a great idea, and they've done a lot of great work. But they haven't done a lot of work to work horizontally amongst themselves. And they're only accessible to a tiny fraction of public servants.”
- “There are capacity challenges within the system to use new tools, processes, approaches, how we do data analysis or random control trials or the data analytics or integrate really rigorous program evaluation into decision making so that there're huge capacity issues. There are lots of political risks if some of these things go off the rails or don't do well whether they get shut down, we need demonstrable successes early before the inevitable mistakes occur.”
- “That culture in the innovation community of managing up, of really staying focused on moving the early and late majority and not just supporting the early adopters. That hasn't developed as much as it needs to be. It's still a lot of people that respond to what their executive says, and doing it exactly how they've been told to do it. Which you can't do if you own the innovation portfolio.”
- “I think that that's a big challenge that we've got, is that you get these really innovative people, and you bring them in, and then their management realizes that they're really good people and then assign them files that are not innovative. So I don't think the challenge is more people, more people, I think the challenge is doing the right thing.”
- “I think there's much more capacity there, although it's very hard to identify exactly where it is until you liberate it, to kind of push in this direction. As you move up that scale of, we want to design kind of clinical level trials and whatnot, I think there's going to have to be big investments, or important investments made, to be able to get there.”

***Initial Finding 20: The commitment necessary to match the expectations of innovation may not be there yet***

*“I don’t know that we’re really doing what we need to if we’re going to make the Public Service of Canada really innovative”*

While there is a growing sense that the Public Service of Canada needs to be more innovative and needs to embed innovation into its practices, there appears to still be a gap between that intent and the commitment necessary needed to realise it.

***Why This Might Matter***

A strong focus on innovation is a big change for any traditional, hierarchical, slow-moving bureaucracy. The level of commitment to make the change will need to be substantial.

***Positive Signs***

There are some significant investments being made (such as the Experimentation Direction).



## Intent Versus Action

- “So I think where the government of Canada Public Service has been encouraged to be innovative, it's clear from the Prime Minister, it's clear from the Clerk. The tools that we have at our disposal don't necessarily currently allow for that, in terms of reporting, in terms of internal processes, in terms of constraints from the Treasury Board, in particular. Now, we're working with them on that, but I wouldn't say we've completely found a happy place.”
- “I think the fact that innovation is a priority now for management, and it's actually like the deputies embrace it, the clerk, there's a strong message out there that we need to innovate. There's also the whole agenda of bringing people from the new generation.”
- “So I think we're getting there, but it takes time ... to reinforce it, as this is a normal part, this has always been a normal part of our culture, but that now, we have new ways of doing it that we didn't have before. And so how do we help people with that, as well?”
- “So, no. Neither are we equipping our staff with the new tools and technologies that they need, nor do we fully yet, as a public service. I think we have a sense of what's coming, but I don't know that we've fully anticipated all the ways in which we, as a public service, will need to design policies for our citizens, that will enable Canada to be prepared for the fourth industrial revolution.

But we're not ignorant to it, either. And I think probably, compared to other countries, we're not in a terrible space in terms of knowledge and awareness. Execution is a different story.”

- “So here in the federal government we do this amazing thing. We tell departments you need to be experimenting, but then we don't resource this. We don't put any staff behind it. We beg, borrow and steal and pull together, sorry, but half ass teams that don't have the skills necessary to actually mainstream this. We starve groups like mine who are actually trying to do innovation in government.”
- “I think there's just a certain amount of making sure everyone's on the same page, on this. That doesn't necessarily exist yet, at the most senior levels.

They're all very supportive. I don't know that they entirely understand what that means.”

- “And then we realized that around innovation, people were really adopting the language of innovation, but maybe not as much the doing, which was quite interesting. In some cases, they knew what the buzz words were.”
- “Does it resonate with public servants? I don't know. I think that could also be an issue, is that we just overuse that word and then it just loses all meaning and in fact people can start to feel maybe, I don't know, trapped or something. That there's an expectation there but there's no real space that's opening up. There's not a lot of money that's being spent towards it.”
- “I think the Canadian Public Service knows that it needs to be innovative. I'm not sure that it knows how to do that yet. I just think about my folks, in terms of, I've given them license to do things differently and I know, I can see a lot of hesitation.”
- “I think that there's a lot of work that needs to be done there because we're going to be asking the same folks, who have not been doing innovation, to now think in an innovative way. That's not easy, right?”
- “You can't just ask that off the bat. Being able to analyse, observe, draw conclusions, those are the kinds of skills I think that we're starting to build, but we're not building them throughout the organisation.”
- “And so there's this mismatch, I think, between what we expect people to do with the abilities and experience that they have.”
- “Yeah, the gap between I have an idea and I have any clue how to make it happen. So we have a lot of, again, really bright people who's like, ‘I know what you should do. You should do this’ and then the people who are doing stuff and whether it's an IT area that is, probably doesn't have the skills that are required anyways, but who might also be super busy, look at it and say, ‘Well, I've already got all this other stuff to do that you don't know about, so that's nice but...’”

### ***Initial Finding 21: There are a lot of pockets of innovation***

*“It seems like innovation is only happening in small pockets”*

Innovation is happening in the Public Service of Canada, however there is a common view that it occurs in small “pockets” of activity.

#### *Why This Might Matter*

Pockets of innovation raise the prospect that the innovation system is not producing consistent and systemic innovation as needed. Rather, the occurrence of pockets of innovation suggests that innovation is:

- happening in spite of the system (i.e. the defaults are not supportive for innovation)
- an emergent practice (i.e. the skills, capabilities, processes and behaviours needed to produce innovation are not (yet) widespread)
- not typically scaling up even when the innovation is successful (i.e. the potential of the innovation is either not recognised, the innovation is situation dependent, and/or there are complications in ramping the innovation up)
- not currently diffusing across organisations as much as it perhaps could (i.e. innovations are either not seen/identified as relevant to other contexts, or there are difficulties in spreading them).

(An alternative interpretation would be that the need for innovation is not that great, and that therefore the system is meeting the incipient need through these pockets, and that nothing further is required. However, this interpretation is unlikely given the environment and significant external rates of change.) In short, pockets suggest that happening in spite of the system, is an emergent practice, is not typically scaling up even when the innovation is successful, and not diffusing across the organisation/system.

#### *Positive Signs*

There are signs that the *pockets* may actually be *nests* that act as spaces that are incubating emergent innovators, innovations, innovation capabilities, and allowing for the exploration and testing of new approaches. A number of the pockets, with the benefit of hindsight, appear to have had a potentially significant impact across the system – e.g. the Reverse Mentors in the Deputy Minister’s Committee on Policy Innovation, the innovation labs, and some of the specific innovation projects.

“The future is already here – it’s just not very evenly distributed.” William Gibson <sup>9</sup>
--

---

<sup>9</sup> [https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/William\\_Gibson](https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/William_Gibson)

## Pockets of Innovation

- “I think there's pockets of innovation”
- “I can think of all kinds of great examples of innovative things that are happening in pockets.”
- “I think it's got pockets of innovation.”
- “There are all these sorts of pockets of activity, and I think that we likely would benefit from a more collaborative approach around these things.”

## The Limits and Uses of Pockets

- “I don't think the pockets of innovation are necessarily helping us. Maybe at the central agency level, to have something that's broader and more articulated, in terms of innovation.”
- “We have good examples of trying new things, but we don't have good examples of these new things yielding an impact that's either incremental or transformational.”
- “Just like small things like that, I know it sounds very perhaps trivial, but those kind of like small innovations, I think can potentially open the door to wider innovations down the road.”
- “I think people, they're just kind of busy doing their thing and, yeah, they'll believe it when they see it but there's a lot of talk because it's so hard to pinpoint what innovation means.... So I think innovation by example is a good approach. Stop talking about it and just show us how you're doing it. And again, I think it's if we can do a better job or just a job at showing that innovation is just a way of being, it's not something that scientists do in a corner, but anyone can innovate. Like, show us.”
- “There is more willingness than has been in the past recent while, to do, to be more innovative. There is ... There are a lot of pockets who are doing some excellent work. I think, I'm hoping that with this experimentation directive, and putting pockets aside for it, I'm hoping that people are going to start looking at doing in a more systemic way. So it's not just a pocket here and there, but there is a bit of a system to do that more and more.”
- “But we're not there yet, and there's different reasons, one is that we're not always good at taking

those pockets and making them last or making them scale up so that they're more than just a pocket.”

- “...where the obstacles come is in the ability to scale up small ideas. I think we just get individuals who feel like they get blocked in scaling up ideas.”
- “And then there's a big thick layer of clay in between which is the bureaucracy and there's certain initiatives if they're small enough they just pierce right through. It's like a pin going through the clay. And you can link the two. I get top level support. I get grassroots, bottom up development, great innovation and you can get it through that hole. If the initiative's too big it never gets through the hole it runs into the clay right? You're kind of hooped at that point, but if you can find those smaller, agile, under the radar, initiatives you can really effect change. And that's what I think is where we fall down big time.”

## Pockets or Nests?

- “I think there are pockets of innovation in the Canadian public service that have been working very hard for the past number of years to try and drive innovation deeper into it. I think there are structural changes, partially as results of these pockets and pockets are always people. It's not like this organization that's innovative. It's the people that are moving around.”
- “I think part of the innovation journey right now, which is really interesting, is that those people in the network I mentioned are now getting into positions of real authority. And they're starting to say, ‘Just get it done. Find a way to get it done and don't get bogged down in the reasons why we don't need to do things.’”
- “... there have been pockets of people working hard out there to innovate, to think differently, to challenge different assumptions, to build the competencies, to reward those competencies within organizations ... but it's sort of been a coalition of the willing out there that have been embracing each other.”

### ***Initial Finding 22: Innovation is often something that is done ‘side-of-desk’***

*“Innovation is not very well integrated with our day-to-day work”*

Innovation is often on top-of/ in conjunction with ‘normal’ work, rather than something that is either a dedicated/full-time project or seen as a necessary and inevitable part of doing the job or task at hand. Innovation is not integrated into the day-to-day operations and practice of most organisations.

#### ***Why This Might Matter***

Innovation may often not be the appropriate response to a problem, and is certainly unlikely to always be needed in day-to-day work. However, if innovation is generally something that is a secondary consideration and that occurs only as an additional ask of people, then:

- the practice of innovation is unlikely to be particularly sophisticated, as it will be seen as something ancillary or optional
- the supporting processes and infrastructure that might be needed (e.g. approvals processes, processes for the prioritisation of innovative proposals) are unlikely to be well developed
- organisational behaviours, cultural norms and values, and practices are unlikely to be adapted to innovation, as it will not be seen as an organisational priority.

In short, a lack of integration and normalising of innovation into the day-to-day work will hinder the development and maturation of the innovation system as something that can provide innovation on a consistent and reliable basis in response to identified needs.

#### ***Positive Signs***

The various innovation labs and hubs provide some spaces for dedicated efforts and attention to innovation, and there also appear to be a number of teams who are engaging in relatively sophisticated innovation as part of their work. The introduction of the Experimentation Direction for Deputy Heads is likely to also assist with the integration of innovation with the core work of agencies.

### “Innovation Happens as Something ‘Side of Desk’

- “But, innovation falls to the margins because it's not a core function, and there's a lot of confusion, and confusion is even a strong word, it's like complete ... what's a word that's like, it's non ... no one even knows it exists. You know, it's just like completely on the margins of anybody's core business.”
- “We've had to be creative in how we even get this prototype going, but it's been on the side of our desk type thing, so there's been minimal resources given to this project. But we had a hard time plugging into the innovation agenda in terms of getting resources for this project.”
- “I think it's appreciated, but again, when decisions need to be made in terms of, ‘Do we continue to work on this? Or do we do our core business?’ We got to do our core business.”
- “What I can say is that a lot of times being innovative means doing something that's not part of your daily job, not part of your core duties, and we're constantly being asked to do more with less, but when push comes to shove, because there tends to be an aversion to risk, if there's a choice between doing your business as usual versus doing something new and risky, it tends to go back to do what you're supposed to be doing.”
- “I would say that a lot of times, while there might be interest in finding ways to do things differently, there's also a lot of pressure to keep doing things the way we've always done them or for change to happen on the margins.”
- “That's simply because people are so busy doing the work that's on their desk, that it's very difficult to sometimes carve out the time. I also think leadership has a strong role to play in how that gets communicated to employees so that they feel empowered enough to take the time to make that happen.”
- “We worked sort of on the side-lines, outside our desks ...”
- “It's all just little side projects that people do.”
- “They don't have the methods. They don't have the rigor and they also, again it's side of desk, and

there's only so much we can do at side of desk without the real investment.”

- “Again, the innovation stuff seems like a nice to have instead of an imperative in order to meet our targets.”

### Innovation is Not Yet Integrated

- “People are not internalizing it. They say, “Okay, well, how does this apply to me?” And for me, that's the risky part. The technology is moving so fast. We're so busy in our internal red tape sometimes, that people don't have the time to get up and see what's happening outside their offices. Understand the sectors, understand the technology, because we have to be on top of this, to understand it and then to kind of figure ways of how to either regulate it, or be good partners in promoting certain technology. But I think that is very, very important.”
- “I think the sweet spot that we need to focus on is taking innovative ideas, approaches, tools and thinking and infusing them into our core functions.”

### Innovation is Not Yet Normalised

- “You can have brilliant minds put brilliant things together, but if the platform on which it's going to live and breathe hasn't gone through that culture change, hasn't gone through that mind shift, that innovation is actually of assistance and helpful and it's not just the cool thing to do these days, it's going to fail if it hasn't.”
- “Bringing new ways of working in is easy. Having them implemented and used by the employees is the hard part.”
- “I think you need to incorporate innovation in the day to day. I think often because we want to give it a focus or give it an importance, we carve it off as a separate role, but if you don't engage who's actually delivering the service or who's actually doing the work, you can't sustain the change or you can't build that culture of change.”
- “What we need to do now, is making it part of day to day business throughout, in all the different groups.”

***Initial Finding 23: The innovation community is not well integrated into the broader Public Service of Canada***

*“I think there’s a bit of an innovation ‘bubble’ which can be a bit cliquey”*

There appears to be a bit of an innovation “bubble”, a feeling of an in-crowd of those who “get” or are included in innovation. The exact nature of this divide is not clear, but aspects appear to include a gap between those working in Ottawa and those working in the provinces and territories, between those in the policy community and those with more of program/service orientation, and between those who self-describe under a broad umbrella of “innovators” and others who may have much to add or be interested in innovation, but who are not seen as innovators.

***Why This Might Matter***

Innovation is about change, and change in a complex, interconnected and interdependent system requires widespread participation and engagement. While change initiatives and innovations can be spearheaded by individuals, they are unlikely to become embedded and integrate into a new business-as-usual, unless there is broader support. While not everyone may identify as an innovator, a mature innovation system will likely require there to be widespread engagement with the issues, concepts and developments.

In short, if innovation is seen in terms of “us and them”, the practice of innovation will not get very far.

***Positive Signs***

Many of those in the innovation community are aware of the perception of there being a bubble and are keen to engage more broadly and widely, even if they may not be sure as to how best to go about that, or do not feel that they have the available time or capacity to do so.

## An Innovation Bubble?

- “I think there’s a policy innovation bubble in Ottawa at the federal level. I think we talk a lot amongst ourselves and there’s an echo chamber. I don’t know. I don’t think that’s the intent. I think people have very good intentions, but it can be self-reinforcing and it can be limiting and not really inclusive, particularly to the vast majority of public servants who need to be engaged in the process.”
- “So you start to realize that there’s two worlds. There’s this kind of elite group of people who are aware of the interesting directives that the new government has brought in, and who are in the labs and hubs. It’s a bit of an echo chamber, and then you have the rest of the 240,000 people who comprise the Federal Public Service, who are, I think, potentially largely oblivious that this is even going on. That’s a huge challenge, I think.”
- “I still think that the discussion and the discourse on innovation is in a bubble, so I don’t think it’s as pervasive as it needs to be. I don’t think it’s as well understood as it needs to be.”
- “I think there’s the risk of becoming the new elite with policy innovation lingo and now experimentation.”
- “It’s kind of a bit cliquy in the innovation space and I think that’s wrong and not very innovative, frankly.”

## Who is in the Bubble?

- “The innovation community is broad and diffuse and everybody wants in, but some people don’t know they’re in. But they’re doing the kind of work that we’re excited about. And others are in it, but don’t want to be visible. And those are often the practitioners.”
- “Sometimes it’s just that your bread and butter standard civil servant is potentially not even aware that these labs exist or that they are something they could be benefiting from.”
- “I think anyone who wants to play in the innovation space should be encouraged to play in the innovation space, even if you don’t think they’re innovative. And I think sometimes the real innovators are a bit sceptical of the other groups that are trying to play in that space.”
- “It’s like, no, things have context and place and power relations. They’re not as simple as you parachute the innovator in and they’ll fix everything. I’m afraid that not everybody ... We might be missing this humility in the field because I think some people might come in with this perception of like, ‘Yes, just bring me in and I will fix everything.’ Or, depending on personality or whatever, people like this might elicit jealousy or sort of somebody who’s been in the system for 15 years and has been doing a good job, and knows the subject matter, and then all of a sudden, you have this young 24-year-old who comes in and everybody looks and thinks that everything they touch is gold. That creates this elitism.”

## Going From Bubble to Ubiquitous?

- “And the innovation people, I think, are the same, they’re just too on the margins. So one of my questions is, how do you ... if you want to make a sustainable ... maybe I’m hypothesizing what they want, but if you want to engrain innovation as a way of being, you need to appreciate some of the forces that are working against it that will try to marginalize it, because it’s a little abstract, it’s confusing, and, yeah, people like doing what they’re doing, so don’t change what we’re doing, right?”
- “I think that we do need to figure out ways of collaborating and creating functional communities across departments, that go beyond the sort of informal grouping that ends up being a lot of secretariat-type discussions. I need knowledge, and I need stuff that’s going to be related to action, because otherwise I can’t justify sending my team to participate in those things.”
- “... how do you engage all of the talents within the public service at all levels. That’s something I don’t think we’ve tackled yet. A lot of things that come from grassroots movement or enlarging the base, right?”
- “And so I find that innovation network within the Canadian government is starting to spread”

### ***Initial Finding 24: Senior leadership's relationship with innovation is patchy***

*"I think the quality of leadership is pretty inconsistent when it comes to innovation"*

Leadership has clearly been important in the development of the innovation journey of the Public Service of Canada, not least through the Blueprint 2020 process and the Deputy Minister's Committee on Policy Innovation. Yet there appears to be some inconsistency in the experience of senior/positional leadership across the system.

#### ***Why This Might Matter***

Innovation is a challenging, difficult exercise, and providing leadership that helps balance between business-as-usual pressures while also allowing for exploration and testing of new approaches is no less so. Carving out the time and space to not only be across existing responsibilities, but to understand the changes that might be emerging, and new technologies and new techniques and mind-sets can be a big ask. Yet without such leadership, there is a risk that processes will default to the status quo.

Some senior leaders appear to be managing these competing tensions, while others may still be grappling with them. This might be for a number of reasons:

- **Comfort:** Some leaders may be comfortable with the existing ways of working; indeed these may well have been the ways of working that saw them reach those leadership positions. Change may seem to offer them increased difficulty and hassle, especially if there is no clear rationale for why things should change from how they understand things to be done.
- **Uncertainty:** Some leaders may simply be unsure as to how to engage in the best way with innovation. Just as innovation can require developing new skills and attitudes, so too can leading it. It may take time for senior leaders and their successors to develop the appropriate repertoire of leadership behaviours.
- **Constraints of existing practice:** Some leaders may also be trying to model new behaviours and processes, but have trouble integrating them with the existing structures and processes which developed for a more stable and predictable environment. Meeting processes, information sharing protocols, approval processes – these and other aspects may have all been developed for very different leadership styles. Attempting to be otherwise in these new contexts may sometimes be very challenging.

The overall performance of the innovation system will depend on the consistency and sophistication of senior leadership's ability to engage with innovation. Without such leadership, it will be difficult to change and adapt the system in a deliberate fashion.

#### ***Positive Signs***

There appear to be a number of examples of senior leaders demonstrating innovation-supportive behaviours, and creating, adapting or adopting processes that may support staff in undertaking or thinking about innovation. There also appears to be a number of leaders who are very aware of the challenges and who are grappling with the issues.



## Leading for Innovation: Challenges & Opportunities

- “The DGs may have been very well open to innovative ideas but, if they're not signalling it, there's an assumption from the staff that senior management isn't willing to accept responsible risk-taking, or to encourage innovation.”
- “If you’ve got an ADM somewhere who’s really innovative, has strong, almost charismatic qualities to drive change, et cetera, you can get very interesting things done in line departments.”
- “And that kind of leadership is rare and I think part of it is the deputy ministers aren't licensing or not giving their ADMs a license or ability to be more risk tolerant. They're also not pushing them to do anything differently. And you know, again, it's all lip service, but when it comes down to it, we just want to, you know, at the end of the day, do our nine to five.”
- “Whatever it is, they're starting to realize that we have these tools and we're doing things differently. It's not just taking what we did and making it digital. It's completely rethinking the way that we develop policy or design programs and services. It's giving people permission to think differently. Actually bringing in citizens to get their perspective on a policy or program, not just asking public servants what they think about something. Trying different things out, doing testing, iterating, failing. I think we'll really start to be innovative when senior management is more comfortable with the concept of failure, because right now, they're still spinning it as lessons learned.”
- “If we had leaders that were a little bit more savvy, and who understood the level of effort involved, the level of risk, or even who had better line of sight to those pockets of innovation that I talked about, then we wouldn't all ... I'm not sure that we would accept the status quo as being ... I know if I was the Deputy, and somebody told me it's going to take you five years to put a form online, I would be like, ‘Go away, and come back to me with a reasonable proposal.’ Right?”
- “I've found lots of bosses in the system who are looking for innovation, and who are looking for people to build. Who are looking for people to take a chance and figure something out rather than having to manage a steady state operation.”
- “So, I like to boil it down in very simple terms and the reason I like to do that is because the folks on the ground floor need to be able to consume innovation and it needs to be simple. It needs to be easy, it needs to be accessible.”
- “My own personal view? I have seen a lot of senior leaders talk a lot but they are the most risk-averse people out there. Right? And they are the first people to shoot down ideas that aren't theirs. Or they are the first people, who, when someone does have a new idea, they ignore it.”
- “I think what's being done lately has been very helpful, I think that direction from the top down and the push to be innovative is helpful, I just think there needs to be a better mechanism to do it, to make it easier to be innovative.”
- “I think that sharing of the strategy, the design at the top, the budgets, all of that, they keep that very tight. There's not a lot of participation. Even after the deficit reduction action plan, you see more and more of this closing all that information at the very highest levels, and even some executive levels not even being part of the discussion anymore, so the executive committee's restricting instead of expanding.”
- “We're still very hierarchical. Other than the DM Committee on Policy Innovation, there are still a lot of these leadership forums where it's just the DGs and the ADMs present. And they're quite removed from the reality on the ground.”
- “Whereas I have all confidence in my senior management, the trickle down of information is minimal at best. They just don't have time. They don't know what to report to me. They're still struggling with understanding it, so I experience these huge disconnects and it's a feeling of yes, I know how to be innovative. I would like to adopt a practice. I want to encourage particular things that should be done, but bump up against... the need to have that approved, and in order for it to be approved, it has to be understood.”

***Initial Finding 25: The behaviours appropriate and necessary for innovation to thrive are still being developed***

*“I don’t think that we, as individuals, always know how to act in a way that supports innovation”*

There does not appear to be an explicit or well-developed set of behaviours that individuals can look to adopt to help make innovation “normal”.

***Why This Might Matter***

It is one thing to know that there is a need to innovate. It is another to convert that into actual behaviours, to change how things are done and how to react to situations. For instance, innovation can require being open to saying that you have a problem that requires things to be done differently, being open to new ideas, being prepared to question what is proposed, being prepared to stop doing things, being prepared to be make yourself vulnerable and put crazy ideas out there, and being open and prepared to really engage with others, with new partners.

Many of these behaviours may be in tension with previous behaviours and preferences – e.g. notions of professionalism centred on having subject-matter expertise and knowing the answers, rather than being prepared to share a problem and actively seek help and input from others.

An effective innovation system will be one where people not only know what is expected from them in regards to innovation, but also how to act and behave in a way that is appropriate to supporting innovation.

***Positive Signs***

There appear to be a number of examples of people demonstrating such behaviours across the system, at all levels. This is supported by communities of practice and other networks (informal and formal) that will likely help with the establishment and normalisation of behaviours that are conducive to, or at least not detrimental to, innovation.

## Behaviours Supporting Innovation – A Challenge

- “So, my experience, in terms of idea generation ... You know, it’s hard to say, but maybe because of the role that I have, I don’t see a lot of openness to accept new ideas.”
- “So it's very difficult to sit back and say ‘You know what? I have a problem and I want to do things differently.’”
- “And that sometimes is very hard, especially in the regulatory area. We try, and love, to do things internally, and we've got a vast, technical people who do that. But trying to bring the end users into the conversation is a bit of ... Still the bit of resistance, because we feel like we need to have it figured out altogether before we go externally and talk to people.”
- “I think that kind of freedom to experiment with ideas and to reach out to various people without having to ask for permission every time you're talking to folks ... especially folks who might be at a higher level than myself, actually does lead to innovation in my own experience.”
- “Whatever comes down from the top is usually done without a lot of questioning or a lot of pushing back unless, you know, it's egregious in some manner. There's not a lot of, ‘oh maybe we could do it a little differently’. No, they asked for something in this way, we've got to give it to them in this way. I think that risk-aversion is a huge problem.”
- “If you give the space to the employee and you give the reassurance that no negative consequence will come of them having occupied that innovative space, then they will take that innovative space.”
- “So all of this kind of stuff, the habits that get formed were as harmful essentially to innovation, as much as a barrier as anything written on paper, and because they were kind of more amorphous, it's actually harder to deal with, like at least the rule, the rule I have a really torturous process to change it, heaven help you if it's legislative, whatever, but usually at least there's a way you know how to do it, right? That stuff is harder because it's harder to put a finger on it. And so we often wrap it up with the term kind of ‘culture’ and then talk about risk aversion, but it's actually to just aggregate into all those different things, because then you can start to actually chip away at it.”
- “And so I actually think it's as simple as that. Everyone, every manager being able to say, what are we doing? What's the continued relevance of it? And having the courage. I've done this before, gone to my boss and say, ‘We're gonna do these things, these are new priorities. But that means these other things we're either gonna stop, or we're gonna put a pause on them.’ And sometimes you put a pause on something, and nobody says anything.”
- “... I think the word innovation comes with change. The word change is very scary for a lot of people. When you regularly engage and communicate frequently, you need to see that there’s a point to this and where we’re going. That enables you to keep an engaged team or an engaged workforce, when you know why you’re doing this.”
- “So partly it’s just the cultural mindset of working in an innovation space that you can take with you and put things forward. And if you put crazy things forward enough times, people will at least let you do one of them. Maybe. Sometimes.”
- “I mean, we're all trained in secrecy, to be honest. That's what you get taught a lot as you grow up in the system. And so getting that out, and getting people to kind of be more open about things they may be working on, or co-development of ideas and proposals for people ... It's gonna take a while. We'll have them in pockets, but we're not on any broad level. I think it's gonna take a while.”

### ***Initial Finding 26: The appropriate balance between innovation and other needs is not clear***

*“I don’t think there’s a clear notion of how much innovation would be too little or too much”*

There does not appear to be a developed sense of when innovation would, and would not be appropriate, nor of how to balance innovation with other needs within the system.

#### ***Why This Might Matter***

Innovation can often be needed, but it can also have costs and consequences. In any innovation system there will be some degree of tension between the new and old. An innovation system will have a balance between the competing forces of what exists and what might be. Other tensions can be between:

- what works/should be kept vs exploring new options
- old tools and methods vs those that offer new approaches
- innovation vs regard to the functioning of the system where innovation is being introduced
- additional new activity vs ceasing other activities to make room for the new
- innovation vs efficiency
- responsiveness vs stability
- removing the barriers to innovation vs ensuring innovations are tested and have rigour
- highlighting and celebrating innovation vs being honest and self-aware about the actual level of innovation that is happening/the level that may be needed.

These tensions are important because too much focus on either side will likely end up being detrimental to the performance and legitimacy of the innovation system. If there is too much innovation, core services might suffer, or systems might lose coherence and suffer fragmentation. If there is too much focus on maintaining existing services, they are unlikely to keep pace with the expectations and needs of those who they are serving.

Finding a balance can also be important for the functioning of the system as a whole. For instance, a hypothetical might be that there is a perceived problem (e.g. “HR processes are too rigid”). Once the problem has sufficient weight and attention behind it, the system will likely respond in some fashion. Yet the speed at which different parts of the system may vary, and the response may take time to enact and then impact the whole system. In such an example, the pressure for something to change may continue, and further changes may be triggered before the consequences of the first set are felt. The natural cycles of the system itself may be unbalanced, flipping between too much and then over-reacting and accidentally over-correcting, thus in turn setting off further imbalances.

In short, an effective innovation system may be hindered if there is no strategic and deliberate consideration of the differing tensions and where the most appropriate balance might lie.

#### ***Positive Signs***

There appear to have been a number of investigations (e.g. those by the Deputy Minister’s Committee on Policy Innovation, by the Policy Community Project, or by the Red Tape Reduction tiger team) which have looked at some of the tension areas. However, there might be more opportunity for monitoring and ongoing discussion of the different needs and tensions that the innovation system will need to balance between.

## Finding a Balance In and Between Differing Tensions

- “I think the other thing though, that we've been trying to articulate to the staff is that not everything has to be innovation either, right? That it's really important that you continue to pursue what's proven and effective.... but we're not just gonna jettison things, if they're working and they're proven and they're delivering development impact.”
- “How can we, from a system perspective in the federal government be on top of technology? Where are those pockets within the organization, that are looking at what's coming our way, understand it and translate it into whatever the system needs to do to ... Then take measures either to promote it, because we are talking more and more that we want to be a country of innovators, and we want to promote innovation and enable it. And then, where do we need to kind of find the balance with safety?”
- “Having said that, I mean, we shouldn't just ignore the old ones. I mean, you still need proper cost-benefit analysis, and doing scientific analysis, and not just trying to just, you know, use new tools for the sake of using new tools, right? So it's usually, the best thing is usually a mix of policy tools. So you might, you know, you might do a regulation, but you might have some behavioural science component to it, but you may also have some communication component. And then it's like kind of the combination of that that usually leads to the best policy outcomes and reaching your policy objectives.”
- “So I think there's, you know, there's some people that become, I'm not sure how to say it, but maybe a little bit complacent or happy in their job, and they want to just keep things constant.”
- “And I do think the only way we're gonna do that is if we stop doing some things. And if we have the courage to stop and say, shed that piece of work. Shed not just the way of doing things, but actually stop doing things. And those are difficult decisions to make, but I just don't see any way around it. I don't think we've done nearly enough of that.”
- “In terms of innovation too, it's being able to allow for that feedback, and building that culture of continuously looking at how you can make things better, more efficient, and keeping that balance. I think efficiency's another one, where you can bring efficiency right up, but burn out everybody in the process.”
- “Why is the government of Canada not more innovative? It's certainly a massive ship. You don't turn it on a dime, and think that is for good reason. There are certain areas where I'm not sure it's in our best interest or Canadians' best interest to attempt to be highly innovative.”
- “Governments shouldn't be the leading edge of the risk curve. There's a place for us to be a governor on risk. There's a judiciary responsibility. There's a stewardship role. You shouldn't be gambling.”
- “You could say, part of the test of whether something is actually innovative and worth pursuing is if it actually manages to survive this hostile environment, it's got to be a really good thing. You know? If you made it all too easy and you tried to set all these conditions up, you don't actually get innovation out of that. You've lost the sufficient... one of the elements required for it, which is that you're pushing against adversity, and trying to come up.”
- “So, once the low hanging fruit, as they were, were picked, the dual monitors, the Wi-Fi, and that kind of stuff, it was like okay, so what else are you guys gonna do. And innovation became an exercise in bureaucracy, where it was like, tell us what you're doing that's innovative. And then, anything that was slightly different would go on this innovation list.”
- “I think there's a much greater awareness now of the importance of innovation. ... I think the risk is we have just enough innovation going on that deputies can happily write a report to the Clerk every year about how they're being innovative, and maybe delude themselves into thinking that they have an innovative ecosystem.”

### ***Initial Finding 27: There's energy and optimism about the journey ahead***

*"I think we're heading in the right direction, even if we don't have all of the answers"*

While there are many challenges and problems, the innovation journey of the Public Service of Canada is underway, and has picked up pace over the past few years. In addition, there appears to be a growing sense of awareness of the journey, a feeling of optimism about it, and a determination to keep moving forward, though with the recognition that there is much more to be done.

#### ***Why This Might Matter***

Innovation is about the possible, about identifying where things could be different and then realising that, making it happen. In the public sector innovation is, or should be, an act of optimism, of trying to imagine and achieve a better state than the status quo. Enthusiasm, energy and optimism are thus all important things to have in an innovation system. Without them, little is likely to change, except in response to external forces and events, and such change is not likely to be as fulfilling, beneficial, or strategic as innovation that originates from choice. They can also sometimes provide the means to overcome potential barriers and issues alone, rather than requiring more formalised structures and processes.

On the other hand, the potential drawback is that if a system is reliant on such factors, it is also vulnerable to a change in sentiment or enthusiasm for innovation, meaning that the support for the innovation journey could dissipate or change abruptly. Enthusiasm and optimism can be derailed, whereas structural drivers may sometimes be more suited for ensuring that progress is continually made even in the face of the inevitable roadblocks, detours and turn-backs that will occur.

In short, an innovation system will benefit from enthusiasm and optimism; but this may need to be supported by mechanisms to ensure the support is continually refreshed and reinvigorated. An innovation system may also require structural drivers to sustain innovation practice in the event of a change in sentiment.

#### ***Positive Signs***

Initiatives such as the Experimentation Direction should provide powerful drivers for innovation, ensuring it occurs on a more widespread basis. More might be done to consider how to continually engage and build optimism around the innovation journey, particularly in anticipation of any possible push-back, detrimental developments, or negative feedback.

## Heading in the Right Direction?

- “I feel very optimistic right now when I look across the federal family at the good sense of optimism about our ability to change how we think and do our business in a way that's going to work to help the government deliver on its mandate but also help the public service itself.”
- “I think there's overall a desire to change. I think there's a desire to innovate. I think the public sector in general believes there's a need to modernize and keep up.”
- “I think we have moved far more from talking to starting doing. Three years ago, I would talk about things, but I would not find a case study to anybody who had tried or used or had a project on it. And there are far more best practices now.”
- “So a lot of these things, you know, I think in the past there was resistance to kind of a lot of this innovation in approaches. Now I think they're actually looking for new ways of thinking and trying to change the system, and new technology.”
- “We're trying to break down the way the government was traditionally run and I think the more we break down that hierarchy and that red-tape, that's when innovation has a place to grow. I would say at the moment we're kind of in that baby/kindling phase and it's not like a full-fledged innovative space. When you think innovation, government of Canada right now isn't the first word that comes to mind but I think we're moving towards a place that that could happen.”
- “I don't think there's an easy fix, but I think we've made a lot of efforts in recent years to kind of think like an enterprise. To think at a whole of government level. But we don't have the accountability structures in place to really make it happen, or to make it real.”
- “But yeah, I'm actually seeing a trend in the direction towards more openness and collaboration, rather than less, and so I think the experimentation commitment and other things are good faith demonstrations that the centre is looking for departments to try different things and create the kind of environment within the constraints obviously of good public stewardship of money, and wanting to make sure that the government's doing a good job and not taking unnecessary risks, like taking intelligent risks around improving an outcome in an area.”
- “A lot of these components I think, is moving us up that maturity curve that I think for those folks that have been out there in their little pockets working hard and driving against convention a little bit, or thinking at least without that as the terms of reference for how they do their jobs or improve service to Canadians, I think that we now are starting to see, okay, there is a collective willingness and understanding that this is important across the government scheme.”
- “So there are pockets of innovation, and there's been a strong movement the last few years I would say in the right direction, but I wouldn't say we are both, not only are we not kind of where we need to be, but we're not even on a definitive trajectory to success yet.”
- “I think we're a bit further along in, in not having everything as a pilot, and I think some of the Impact Fund that PCO has received green light for, and some of these bigger pieces, including the experimentation commitment. We are the mainstream now. I think we are the desired state or the vision. But from that to a place where this actually is truly understood by everyone, I think we're 10 years from that. And I don't know if we need another kind of generation to pass before we get there.”
- “To me, it's at the very beginning stages. There's a lot more that can be done. It seems to be going in the right direction.”
- “I do think that we're on the right path with innovation.”
- “So, we're always going to have a bubbling need to be able to convert people into folks that believe in innovation and so on. But, I think, I wanted to pass more on the message that if people can embrace innovation, there's less of a need of a machine in the back that's pushing it.”

***Initial Finding 28: There is a considerable diversity of views about what needs to happen next***

*“There’s no consensus on what should be done to improve innovation in the Public Service of Canada”*

There does not appear to be a shared sense of what the next priority areas for action are, with views ranging across matters as simple as better equipping public servants; to ensuring they actually understand what innovation is; to improving HR aspects; to ensuring the public service works more, and better, with other sectors; to ensuring better evaluation; to ensuring clearer accountability; to ensuring better engagement; to clarifying what the actual core business of government and the public service is; to recognising that for the system to change, it will require everyone to be open to change; to wiping the slate clean and starting again.

***Why This Might Matter***

Any system will have diversity of views about what might need to change, but a lack of consensus will hurt the chances of support coalescing behind specific measures and action occurring. So while there are many initiatives happening within the Canadian Public Service to support or encourage innovation, their effectiveness may be hampered by a diversity of views about what needs to happen.

In short, if there is not agreement about where to go or how to get there, the innovation system will not get very far.

***Positive Signs***

There are a lot of creative people with a passion and interest in how the system could be better, and how innovation in, by and with the public service, will result in better results for Canadians.



“If You Could Wave a Magic Wand, and Change One Thing...”

- “Being able to request a laptop that’s not a big clunker, for instance, having Wi-Fi within a building that the public servant is working in, any number of things. It’s not just one thing.”
- “Well, so I would love to see people have a better idea of what innovation is and what it could be, and how to empower their employees to be more innovative.”
- “I think the sweet spot that we need to focus on is taking innovative ideas, approaches, tools and thinking and infusing them into our core functions. Right?”
- “I would say more opportunities for those at the bottom of the food chain to be able to make a difference and pitch their own ideas and have it actually happen.”
- “I don’t think the magic wand works, first of all. Like anything, people have to get used to it. There has to be a little bit of pain in the process to get somewhere. In terms of what I would like to see change, it’s again, increasing the opportunities for everyone to participate outside and inside, increase participation in the design, in finding solutions, and acceptance that it’s not only leaders or executives that have all the answers.”
- “I think empowering people is the main thing. I think that probably any public service, there are people who learn to do a job and just do it but I think that this idea that you want to have more from a job than just a pension and a pay, you want to make a difference.”
- “I think it would be the ability to give time. Time to exchange not just within the groups, the various little groups, but also within the community, within the department, within the government of Canada. So having the abilities to actually have those exchanges, I think would go a long, long way, with the innovation sort of lens to it. There’s a lot of stressed people in the public service, believe it or not, and they’re stressed because of various things, but having the ability to give them time to say ‘Okay. 1 day a week for the next 5 weeks you can go do this with this group of people.’ Would be amazing.”
- “I think some of the systemic pieces that are already in place, where you need expressed policy support for innovation, which we have in some ways through experimentation direction. We need those systemic pieces in place, like the omnibus, TB subs, things that actually give us the authority to have innovative ideas and fund them.”
- “I think I would go with the culture. ‘Cause I think if you change the culture, and the way that people think and do things, I think then everything else would start changing.”
- “I would go back to culture actually and change the culture, which obviously I still think is probably the most difficult and most time consuming thing to change.”
- “If we could improve the quality of people management across the board, across the board, we would deal with 90% of what ails us as a public service.”
- “I would encourage staffing processes to be leaner, faster, getting people on board earlier.”
- “I would say, honestly the most dramatic change we could make would be at the intake process but you can’t just say we’ll take different people in. You have to actually change what we take them in for. You have to manage them differently, you have to inspire them differently, you have to give them a very significantly enhanced level of intellectual freedom to innovate.”
- “I would change the compensation for executives to compensate them for taking risks and making changes. So that the guy that does take a risk, even if he fails, he gets a pat on the back and maybe even a bonus for taking that risk. You have to incentivize executives to accept change.”

- “Put a time-stamp on somebody being an executive. Making it not a, once you're an executive, you're always an executive. But, you have to go through a renewal process every five years that looks at a number of factors, one being, overall impact, another being are you creating good environments for your staff to thrive? Psychologically safe environments. Those kind of things. Do you experiment? Yes or no. Just doing a check on our executive cadre. Because they wield a significant amount of influence. And so we need to make sure they're at the top of the game if we want to achieve the kind of results that Canadians deserve.”
- “I think I would focus on the walls. I would use the wand to wave away the exterior walls. I think it could have a profound impact, not just in innovation, but kind of on good management across the public service if we could tear down some of those barriers to the outside world, and have a lot less, again, kind of stereotypes and assumptions about the other sectors that we work with.”
- “This is like a nerdy response, but I would honestly fix the information management culture. Such that information was shared better, could be shared better, information and data, and that there was an appetite for it.”
- “It's evaluation capacity. We've struggled with evaluation capacity for decades. We've regularly, in all kinds of reports, internal and external, noted that it's a problem. We've had different directives and policies within government and we still haven't gotten to a place where we continuously, rigorously evaluate programs. And I don't think you can do any of the rest of this stuff without knowing, without actually having a better empirical sense or evidence about what actually works.”
- “Maybe evaluation of dollars spent on service delivery on the basis of outcomes, because I think if you did that, a lot of other things would trickle from it.”
- “I think I'd work on the accountability question.”
- “Make someone accountable. Just one. Right now, the accountability is distributed to all the head of departments. So, deputy heads, deputy minister, the secretaries, the presidents; meaning that, again, we don't have this all of government overview, when it comes to saying yes or no, on something.”
- “I'm just not sure how I would change it except... I think it's the relationships to Treasury Board I would say, which every government has in its Westminster model. The treasury role is important, yet sometimes where, I think, it's not where the compromises should be made. The policy process is one thing to move an important piece through that policy process and get Cabinet approval. The harder part is getting it through Treasury Board, which then can force compromise on the policy front. You can end up, can go backwards a little bit, right, which can really water down what you were trying to do from a policy perspective. If you can just wave a magic wand and have, somehow, that treasury and policy pieces working better together.”
- “I want to start having a conversation about what works and what doesn't work. So I think having a mechanism in place in which we can begin to look at policy outcomes with our stakeholders. So having our stakeholders not part of a consultation roadshow, but really coming in as co-collaborators of policy development. That's super tough to do but it's definitely the thing that I would change ...”
- “The first would be for me to really understand and ask, and get an actual complete answer to, what is the business of government? What are we ... What are we supposed to do? What is our mandate? Let's go back to the really core value proposition of why we're here. And then, once we figure that out, I would wave the magic wand and make every civil public servant buy into that and move

towards that. So, infusing that public service with the willingness to work, achieving the mandate of the government. But only once we've figured it out.”

- “I think it relates to that in order for the system to change, we ourselves have to be open to change.”
- “I would literally break everything. All the processes, all the bureaucracies break it down so there’s a clean slate and start again.”

