



Observatory of
Public Sector Innovation

Preliminary Findings - October 2017

Canada Report Supplement



DISCLAIMER

This supplementary powerpoint 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 powerpoint 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.



PRELIMINARY FINDINGS ABOUT THE INNOVATION SYSTEM OF THE CANADIAN PUBLIC SERVICE

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THE INNOVATION REVIEW – WHAT IS IT?

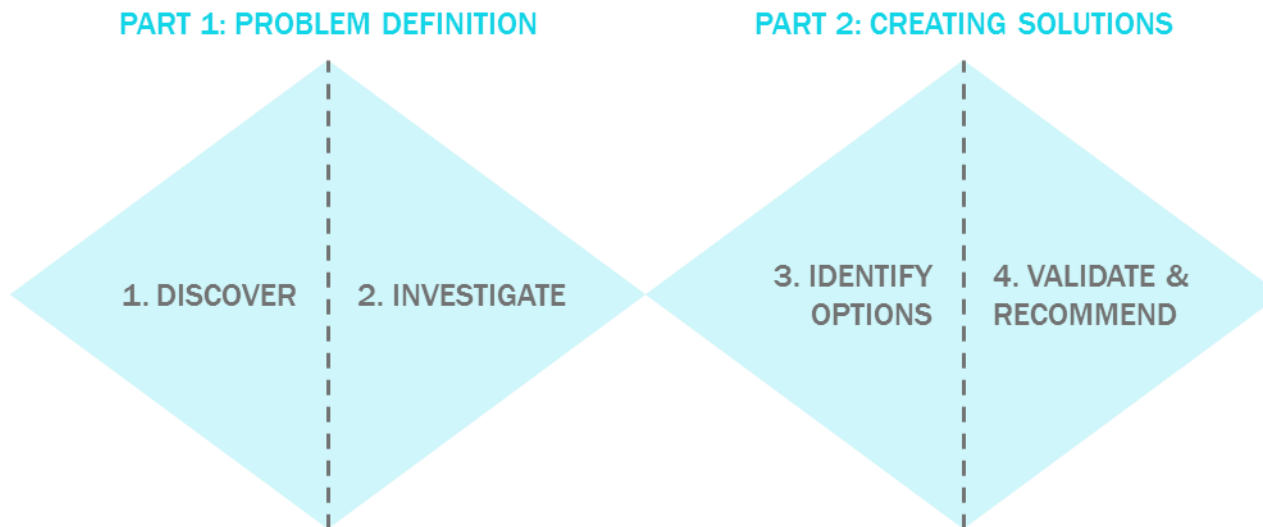
One year process to look at 3 main things:

- 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 a set of priority areas for action for the Canadian government to reinforce its capacity to innovate and thereby deliver better outcomes for citizens and government.



HOW ARE WE DOING IT?

- Experimental and exploratory – there is no perfect checklist or framework
- Innovation systems are messy – there is no one truth to rule them all
- Need to understand the lived experience, the history, the context, what's happening now, what people would like to happen, and what might be possible
- A design-led approach to really understand the realities of the system





WHAT HAVE WE FOUND SO FAR

- Overall, it appears that the innovation system is relatively immature.
- But that's okay.
- No one else has got this right yet either.
- Innovation is hard, messy and complex.
- There are plenty of positive signs and hard work that has already been done.
- The following findings are **preliminary** – they are to reflect back the system as it was told to us, rather than an official assessment.
- If we understand the issues well enough, it will allow us to understand what the appropriate responses, if any, might be.



PRELIMINARY FINDING 1

Finding:

Whether the Public Service of Canada is innovative depends on who you ask

Accompanying Statement

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

Why This Might Matter

If there isn't agreement on whether the system is innovative, how likely is it that there will be agreement on whether and how it needs to be more innovative?

Positive Signs

There is a lot of activity occurring across the system.



PRELIMINARY FINDING 2

Finding:

There is not a widely shared conception of “innovation”

Accompanying Statement

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

Why This Might Matter

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

Some possible core elements of what it really means coming through from the interviews and wider discussions.



PRELIMINARY FINDING 3

Finding:

The focus on public sector innovation is relatively recent, and takes place within a rich history.

Accompanying Statement

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

Why This Might Matter

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.



PRELIMINARY FINDING 4

Finding:

There is a “narrative confusion” about the innovation agenda and its intersection with other agendas.

Accompanying Statement

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

Why This Might Matter

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.

Positive Signs

Some voices are articulating a story that connects the pieces, and others are aware of the need and working to help make it clearer.



PRELIMINARY FINDING 5

Finding:

There is no overall picture of the innovation that is occurring

Accompanying Statement

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

Why This Might Matter

Without an overall understanding of the innovation occurring in the system, it can be hard to know if the system 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, cooperation between innovation labs/hubs, and the developing networks across the public service are good steps



PRELIMINARY FINDING 6

Finding:

The role played by the Central Innovation Hub is not widely understood or recognised.

Accompanying Statement

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

Why This Might Matter

A lack of understanding about the role of the Hub is likely to limit the necessary coordination and oversight of the innovation system.

Positive Signs

The Hub has undertaken a number of important initiatives and steps around experimentation, behavioural insights, mechanisms for funding innovative activity, and support of the Deputy Minister’s Committee on Policy Innovation.



PRELIMINARY FINDING 7

Finding:

The roles played by other organisations with regards to innovation is not widely understood or recognised.

Accompanying Statement

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

Why This Might Matter

A lack of some 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.



PRELIMINARY FINDING 8

Finding:

There is no commonly understood view about what role individual public servants can or should play in the innovation process.

Accompanying Statement

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

Why This Might Matter

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.



PRELIMINARY FINDING 9

Finding:

There are many barriers and obstacles that confront the innovation process.

Accompanying Statement

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

Why This Might Matter

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).



PRELIMINARY FINDING 10

Finding:

One main barrier or obstacle is the hierarchy; particularly the “Clay Layer”/middle management.

Accompanying Statement

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

Why This Might Matter

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, and some in middle management are very aware of the challenges.



PRELIMINARY FINDING 11

Finding:

The barriers to innovation are not absolute.

Accompanying Statement

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

Why This Might Matter

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, they provide forums for sharing experiences and lessons about how to engage with different potential barriers and the work-arounds that might exist.



PRELIMINARY FINDING 12

Finding:

Innovation can feel like a fight, and one where winning does not feel like winning.

Accompanying Statement

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

Why This Might Matter

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.



PRELIMINARY FINDING 13

Finding:

Risk Aversion is an endemic issue.

Accompanying Statement

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

Why This Might Matter

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



PRELIMINARY FINDING 14

Finding:

The notion of risk is beginning to be reframed and renegotiated, but it's not there yet.

Accompanying Statement

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

Why This Might Matter

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 number of initiatives appear to be being put in place to ensure that change is continued over time.



PRELIMINARY FINDING 15

Finding:

The underlying systems of government are not calibrated for innovation.

Accompanying Statement

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

Why This Might Matter

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.



PRELIMINARY FINDING 16

Finding:

The systems of government have the ability to change, but not quickly.

Accompanying Statement

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

Why This Might Matter

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.



PRELIMINARY FINDING 17

Finding:

Government is confronted by significant rates of technological change.

Accompanying Statement

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

Why This Might Matter

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.



PRELIMINARY FINDING 19

Finding:

There are a number of “limiting factors” that are affecting the capability and capacity to innovate

Accompanying Statement

Why This Might Matter

Positive Signs



PRELIMINARY FINDING 20

Finding:

There are a lot of pockets of innovation.

Accompanying Statement

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

Why This Might Matter

Pockets suggest innovation is 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.



PRELIMINARY FINDING 21

Finding:

Innovation is often something that is done 'side-of-desk'.

Accompanying Statement

"Innovation is not very well integrated with our day-to-day work"

Why This Might Matter

A lack of integration and normalising of innovation into the day-to-day work will is not likely to lead to innovation happening 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.



PRELIMINARY FINDING 22

Finding:

The innovation community is not well integrated into the broader Public Service of Canada.

Accompanying Statement

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

Why This Might Matter

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.



PRELIMINARY FINDING 23

Finding:

Senior leadership's relationship with innovation is patchy.

Accompanying Statement

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

Why This Might Matter

Without 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.



PRELIMINARY FINDING 24

Finding:

The behaviours appropriate and necessary for innovation to thrive are still being developed.

Accompanying Statement

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

Why This Might Matter

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.



PRELIMINARY FINDING 25

Finding:

The appropriate balance between innovation and other needs is not clear.

Accompanying Statement

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

Why This Might Matter

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 which have looked at some of the tension areas.



PRELIMINARY FINDING 26

Finding:

There's energy and optimism about the journey ahead.

Accompanying Statement

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

Why This Might Matter

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.

Positive Signs

Initiatives such as the Experimentation Direction should provide powerful drivers for innovation, ensuring it occurs on a more widespread basis.



PRELIMINARY FINDING 27

Finding:

There is a considerable diversity of views about what needs to happen next.

Accompanying Statement

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

Why This Might Matter

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.



NEXT STEPS

- Validation of findings
- Case study research
- Develop a model for understanding the key drivers and considerations of the system
- Use international peer research to identify and consider appropriate options
- Test and validate options with system players



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