

# **Toward a New Moral Contract: Reclaiming Trust in Public Service**

**Ralph Heintzman**

**Senior Research Fellow  
University of Ottawa**

**The Vanier Lecture  
Institute of Public Administration of Canada – Saskatchewan Region  
Regina, Saskatchewan  
Monday, May 14, 2007**

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I would like to begin by thanking the Saskatchewan Regional Group of the Institute of Public Administration of Canada (IPAC) for their very kind invitation to deliver this second annual Vanier Lecture. I should also like to congratulate the Saskatchewan Region of IPAC for the wonderful initiative they have taken in establishing such an annual lecture, to be delivered each year by the winner of the Vanier Medal. I hope that other IPAC regional groups may follow your very good example.

I am sensible of following in very large footsteps. For the Vanier Medal, of course, the former winners of which include those two illustrious sons of Saskatchewan, Al Johnson and Tommy Shoyama – for whom the University of Regina's Graduate School of Public Policy is now, happily, to be named. To find myself in such company is something that passes all understanding.

But I am also standing in large shoes, as far as this Lecture itself is concerned, because last year's inaugural lecture was delivered by Peter Aucoin, of Dalhousie University, for whom I, like so many others, have the very highest respect.

To stand here before you this evening is therefore a very great honour indeed. But it is also an exciting opportunity to reflect aloud with you about some of the important current challenges for the profession of public service the Vanier Medal is intended to celebrate. I want to consider some of the ways in which we can reclaim trust in public service by renewing our moral contract with public sector employees, with elected leaders, and with the citizens of Canada.

My remarks this evening will be in six parts. After describing what I call the "existential" crisis the public service has been going through for over twenty-five years, I will review two conceptual frameworks that can help us to think about the factors that influence trust in government and in the public service. Then I will talk about three of the "drivers" of public trust those frameworks suggest: service delivery, management and leadership, and values and ethics. And I will conclude with some final thoughts on reclaiming trust by renewing our moral contracts.

## A Special Calling – and its Existential Crisis

In the spirit of celebration appropriate to a Vanier Lecture, I'd like to start by reminding ourselves that public service is a noble calling. Some of you may remember the celebrated passage on this theme from the conclusion to *A Strong Foundation*, the report of the federal deputy minister Task Force on Public Service Values and Ethics (better known as the "Tait Report"), published in 1996. If not, perhaps you will allow me to recall its words.

Public service is a special calling. It is not for every one. Those who devote themselves to it find meaning and satisfaction that are not to be found elsewhere. But the rewards are not material. They are moral and psychological, perhaps even spiritual. They are the intangible rewards that proceed from the sense of devoting one's life to the service of the country, to the affairs of state, to public purposes, great or small, and to the public good.

The rewards of this special calling, like those of other professions, come at a price. The price is submitting to very high standards of professional conduct; accepting public scrutiny and accountability; learning to hold a public trust and to put public interests ahead of self; respecting the authority of law and of democratic will; and entering into a community that values these as the foundations of good government. The values of public service are both its price and its reward.

Immediately after these words, the Task Force recognized, however, that a community based on such high ideals "is bound to have its moments of disappointment and discouragement." In the federal public service, we have certainly been living through another one of those in the last few years, to say the least. Since about 2000, the federal public service has found itself under a cloud of suspicion. Various public events have tarnished the reputation of the public service for competence and integrity. During this time much of the news coming out of Ottawa seemed to be about boondoggles, and wrongdoing, and whistle-blowing, as if that was all that occurred in the federal government.

For federal public servants, as you can easily imagine, this kind of an atmosphere has been discouraging. Not just because the assumptions and implications of this discourse were usually false, but also because these events reinforced an "existential crisis" that has been going on in the public service for over twenty-five years, the very crisis that led to the creation of the Tait Task Force in the first place. This crisis had seemed to be waning in recent years, but these events have served to revive it, at least for a time.

By an "existential" crisis I mean a crisis that has to do with the very *existence* and role of a public service: a crisis of *identity* compounded by a crisis of *legitimacy* and, for a time, a fiscal crisis as well. The public service is not alone in experiencing such existential crises: other professions have experienced them in recent decades (as Howard

Gardner, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, and William Damon have pointed out, in their book, *Good Work*). But the public service's own existential crisis has been long and profound, because it was related to deep social and cultural trends, and to what I call two "long cycles" of legitimacy since the Second World War.

In the first cycle, from the 1940s to the 1960s, governments could do no wrong, and, as far as public opinion was concerned, everything that *could* be in the public sector *should* be in the public sector. In the second long cycle, from the 1970s to the 1990s, that perspective was completely reversed: public opinion now believed the *private* sector could do no wrong, and everything that *could* be in the private sector *should* be in the private sector. Since somewhere in the late 1990s the pendulum has, I believe, begun to swing again, and we are gradually moving back to a more balanced and realistic view of both sectors, and therefore into a third cycle. (It remains to be seen how "long" a cycle it will be.) But the recent events to which I referred have helped to keep us acting and thinking as if we were still in the second, and in the existential crisis that went with it.

In an existential crisis of the kind I'm talking about, a profession loses confidence in its identity and a firm grip on its traditional reference points. As a result, it may thrash about looking for new ones, often imported from other professions or sectors perceived to have greater legitimacy or prestige, and greater public trust. That's what happened to the public service, beginning in the 1970s, and reaching a peak in the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s. In those two decades, public servants often appropriated the language and model of the private sector, in a reflex of self-defence.

I am very far from thinking that this existential crisis, and the aping of the private sector that went with it, had only negative consequences. But it had a very high price, a price that exacerbates and prolongs what was already a crisis of trust, both internal and external.

One of the prices we have paid is a feverish pursuit of public sector "renewal" since the late 1980s, a pursuit that is sometimes far removed from a confident spirit of continuous improvement and innovation. Another is that we have often been pursuing false futures, futures that never came, or if they did, for a time, brought with them unfortunate results. And a third is a frequent sense of failure rather than accomplishment, and a pervasive cynicism about change, and about those who lead it. It was into this atmosphere that the various so-called scandals and the Gomery Commission fell. The over-all result has been to prolong, unjustifiably, what I called the "existential" crisis of the public service.

The most important result of this twenty-five year crisis, in my view, has been a temptation for the public service not to think deeply enough about the specific dynamics of the public sector itself. I think that a way out of this crisis, toward renewed confidence and trust in the public service – both internally on the part of our employees, and externally, on the part of the citizens of Canada – will require us to think again about the specific requirements of the public sector, as the Tait report did, not as a failed or lesser or paler version of some other sector, but as an essential institution in support of democratic government, with its own characteristics, imperatives and ethos.

## Reclaiming Trust: Two Frameworks

In reflecting on some of the ways in which the public services of Canada might begin (and already have begun) to reclaim public trust, I am going to make use of two conceptual frameworks. One comes from the Public Management Institute at the University of Leuven in Belgium, a leading European centre for research on public administration. The other comes from the Institute for Citizen-Centred Service, a Canadian public sector institution established cooperatively by the three levels of government in Canada, to assist them in their joint efforts to improve public sector service delivery.

These two frameworks are different but complementary. The Leuven framework identifies two broad categories of explanation for levels of trust. The first may be called the cultural or identity theory, and the second the performance theory.

The cultural or identity theory posits that there have been deep changes in the way that individual citizens relate to all institutions, including public institutions, over the past fifty years, mainly because of the impact of technology and communications, especially television, and now the internet, and the iPod. In a nutshell, these technologies have allowed and encouraged citizens of western countries to retreat progressively into private and even virtual space, and have gradually detached them and their identities from public space and from public institutions. As a result, they no longer feel as deeply or personally engaged by public issues or public institutions as they did fifty years ago, and this growing psychological and cultural disengagement between individuals and public space is reflected in declining levels of trust in public institutions.

Although these deep cultural and identity factors may well be the most powerful influences on levels of trust, I'm not going to say much more about them here, for lack of time, among other things. Instead I'm going to turn to the second category of explanations that I called the "performance" theory, partly because it speaks about things that are more within the immediate control or influence of public service leaders. This second approach seeks to explain varying levels of trust on the basis of the "performance" of the public sector.

The Leuven framework divides "performance" theories into two further categories: those based on "macro-performance" and those which highlight "micro-performance." "Macro" performance means the success of governments and public institutions in providing the large public goods that citizens expect from public authorities: goods like sustainable economic development and prosperity, social security, public safety, transportation and other public infrastructure, and so on.

The other half of the performance challenge is what the Leuven framework calls "micro" performance. This simply means performance on the smaller, day-to-day stuff of behaviour and management, rather than the big picture stuff of macro-economic performance and societal well-being. Again, this micro-performance dimension of trust can also be divided into two sub-components: the domains of *political* micro-

performance and *bureaucratic* or public service micro-performance. The Leuven framework further suggests that bureaucratic or public service micro-performance might itself be sub-divided into yet further sub-areas, such as service delivery performance and ethical performance.

At these levels we are clearly getting down into territory over which the public service itself can and should hope to exercise some influence, either through its own behaviour and performance, or through the nature of its relationship with, and influence over, political micro-performance. And, at this level, the Leuven hypotheses receive strong support, and some additional insights, from the Canadian framework I referred to. The Canadian framework comes from a series of studies carried out by the Institute for Citizen-Centred Service, acting on behalf of the three levels of Canadian governments. Under the generic name of *Citizens First*, the Institute has been conducting a biennial national survey since 1998, to measure, understand, benchmark and track progress in Canadians' satisfaction with public sector service delivery. The last two of these national surveys also began to explore the factors that explain or influence levels of trust in government and in the public service. *Citizens First 4* identified three strong drivers of trust and confidence in the public service, (in addition to "benefits for citizens and communities," consistent with macro-performance theories). Two of these drivers are the "strong services" and "ethical and equal treatment" anticipated by the Leuven hypothesis about ethical and service performance. But the Canadian study found that the strongest driver of all is Canadians' perceptions of the quality of leadership and management in the public service. Interestingly, the importance of this third factor turns out, at least for the time being, to be an especially strong driver of Canadians' trust and confidence in the *federal* public service.

I think these frameworks and insights are a good place to start, for thinking about priorities for reclaiming confidence in the public service, by renewing our moral contract with Canadians, with public service employees, and with elected leaders: that is to say, the priorities of service delivery, strong leadership and management, and ethics and values highlighted by *Citizens First 4*. I will use these three "drivers" of trust as a framework for the remainder of my remarks, starting with service delivery.

### **The Canadian public sector service journey as a model**

The Canadian public sector service delivery journey over the past decade is a good news story. If there is anything in Canadian public administration to show why the public service's existential crisis should now be over, this is where it can be found. And the Canadian public sector service story can also provide models of practice for some of the other areas of public management that now deserve similar attention.

The service revolution in the Canadian public sector certainly did not start in the mid-1990s. In fact efforts to improve public sector service delivery have been going on almost as long as governments have been delivering services to citizens, and especially since the 1970s. However, by the mid-1990s there was a widespread feeling that all of this worthwhile public sector effort lacked rigour and focus. As a result, representatives

of service organizations across all three levels of government came together in 1997 to begin working cooperatively on a common, citizen-centred, service improvement agenda.

I want to highlight some six things that occurred over the following decade, as a result. The first was the creation of communities of practice within governments and across governments, together with the institutions necessary to support those communities, including intergovernmental councils and the Institute for Citizen-Centred Service I already mentioned. The second thing was early agreement within these communities of practice on a common objective and results measure, an outside-in measure (not an inside-out or process measure, as so often occurs in the public sector), based on citizen satisfaction with public sector service delivery. The third was the undertaking of joint “action research” to achieve a deeper, shared understanding of the nature and dimensions of the challenge, as a basis for action. The fourth was the development of common measurement tools and methodologies, to facilitate results measurement, service improvement planning and implementation, and performance benchmarking within and between Canadian governments. The fifth was deepened insight (resulting from the “action research”) into the various dimensions of the performance challenge, especially the critical problem of “access” to public services, and the challenges of each service channel, and of a multi-channel universe. The sixth – and by far the most important result – was a shared understanding (also resulting from the “action research”) about the distinctive “drivers” of citizen satisfaction with public sector service delivery.

The last is the most important, because if you want to achieve a result – any result – you need to know the factors, or “drivers,” that influence that result. And you need to know more than simply *what* they are: you need to understand their *relative importance*, or the *degree* of their influence on the result you’re aiming at. Because unless you know that, you don’t know how to do, to achieve the result. You don’t know where to start, or where to focus your effort. As a result, you are not only unlikely to achieve the result, but will probably waste time on things that have no impact on it at all, as we have done so often in the past. Setting a result target is pointless, or even harmful, if you don’t understand the actions that will get you there, and their order of priority.

Of course in many areas of public policy, we don’t have that kind of knowledge, and are unlikely to get it. The causal chains are too long, complex and remote: the links just aren’t there, or can’t be demonstrated. Governments just don’t have enough of the levers (nor should they) for us to expect to be able to attribute public policy outcomes directly to government actions. But some aspects of public administration are much more within our control, especially public management itself: the management and performance of public organizations, *qua* organizations. For these areas, what we have achieved in public sector service delivery can be an instructive model.

So what *have* we achieved for public sector service delivery in Canada, over the past decade? Well, ten years ago, a federal task force on service delivery proclaimed that public sector service delivery lagged woefully behind private sector service delivery performance, such as the banks. Ten years later, the service performance of many

Canadian public sector organizations now surpasses comparable private sector results and benchmarks, including the banks. In the process, Canada has become a world leader in public sector service delivery, the only country that has achieved, and can measure and demonstrate, continuous improvement in citizen satisfaction with public sector service delivery over a ten-year period. The international consulting firm Accenture has identified Canada as the world leader in public sector service delivery, and other countries are now looking to Canada as a best practice.

This public management story shows how an “outside-in” approach to public management can transform the performance of the public sector, and, above all, how understanding the “drivers” of public sector performance – especially in some key management areas – is critical to achieving the goals both of performance and of trust. It was clear understanding about the “drivers” of service results that allowed the Government of Canada, for example, both to set and then to exceed a target of a 10% improvement in service results between 2000 and 2005, overtaking the provincial level in the process, and even closing the gap with the municipal level in service reputation. I believe the lessons from this success can and should now be applied to the second driver of confidence in public service: leadership and management.

### **Leadership and management**

There are both individual and organizational dimensions to this second driver identified by *Citizens First 4*, and I’ll say something, briefly, about each of them, in that order.

#### *Individual leadership and management*

The question of individual leadership and management, especially the management of people, is closely related to the challenge of service delivery I just discussed. Research and experience in both the private and public sectors have shown a pretty consistent correlation between “outside-in” service satisfaction and “inside-out” employee engagement. This equation is a simple one, even self-evident: committed public servants mean better public services, and hence more satisfied citizens. My colleague Brian Marson and I have explored this relationship and its implications for citizen trust in the context of what we have called “The Public Sector Service Value Chain.” I will come back to this concept. But for the moment, there are two key things to notice. The first is that our continued success in improving *external* citizen satisfaction depends, in part, on our *internal* performance in people management and leadership. And the second is that we can meet this second performance challenge, in part, by using some of the *same* techniques and models we have already developed and used successfully for public sector service delivery. Above all, we now need to identify the “drivers” of public sector employee engagement. And not just *identify* them: but *use* them for rigorous annual planning and performance improvement, target setting, regular performance measurement, accountability, and benchmarking, just as we have done for service delivery.

Lest you think I'm being bold or unrealistic, I'd like to point out two things. The first is that this is not exactly a new idea. It was already put forward by the Tait report over ten years ago, by the sixth report of the Advisory Committee on Senior Level Retention and Compensation in 2003, and by the Working Group on the Disclosure of Wrongdoing, in 2004, among others.

The second thing to point out is that we are *already* doing it, in several parts of the Canadian public sector: at the provincial and municipal levels (in B.C. and in the Region of Peel in Ontario, for example), and even at the federal level, in some central agency pilot projects. And we have already begun to share and compare the data from these various initiatives, to identify common public sector "drivers" of employee engagement, through the Institute for Citizen-Centred Service Delivery. What is now required, among other things, is a major joint "action research" initiative, comparable to *Citizens First*. But also the will to *use* these insights, in the five ways I just mentioned – rigorous annual planning and performance improvement, target setting, regular performance measurement, accountability, and benchmarking – to make our public sector workplaces *second to none*.

Public sector leadership is more than people management, however. It is also a question of knowledge and deep competence in the business of government. I start from the assumption that, as Michael Pitfield used to say (echoing Vincent Massey), the public service should be one of the "learned professions." Being a "learned profession" is essential for genuine *professionalism*, in all three roles of policy advice, public management; and leadership. The question we should ask ourselves, therefore, is whether we still *are* a learned profession, in the tradition of Tommy Shoyama and Al Johnson. The more we talk about *learning*, the less genuinely *learned* we sometimes seem to become. In the federal public service, at least, I have sometimes been led to wonder whether we really *know* enough, at our highest levels, about our profession, about the functions we lead, about public management (especially from a comparative perspective), or about the world, to be the reliable advisors to government that we should be.

Some of the public management practices we have adopted over the past thirty years seem almost to militate against this kind of deep professionalism and learning. One such practice, for example, is the habit, even encouragement, of rapid horizontal mobility, especially at the managerial and executive levels. We have even gone as far as to build this principle right into some of our accelerated executive development programs. The churn and constant personnel rotation resulting from this kind of mobility culture bring with them an inevitable loss of focus, purpose, expertise, and professionalism in our organizations. Public servants too often have the impression of being led by amateurs, travelling salespersons, who don't have deep knowledge of the government business line they're supposed to lead. That may be alright, if others do. But sometimes you now have to drill right down to the lowest levels to find that kind of organizational memory and deep competence. And sometimes it isn't there at all. One result is a loss of credibility and confidence, both internally, with our employees, and externally, with stakeholders.

Another equally important consequence for public sector excellence is a loss of the *continuity of purpose* we all know is essential to achieve real public sector results, over the long timeframes they require. In the public sector, major improvement initiatives require from five to ten years to take hold, let alone to complete. If your senior leaders are moving every two to three years, as is now commonly the rule, it's obvious you won't have the continuity of purpose excellence requires. You will not have high-performing public organizations. So we need to return to an expectation that the norm is at least five years, rather than two or three. And we need to achieve a better balance between horizontal and vertical mobility, so that more people at the top really understand the government function they are leading, right down to the ground.

There are a number of other potential initiatives or approaches to the challenge of improving individual leadership and management in the public service, including recruitment, orientation, certification, action learning and action research, executive development, talent management, performance management and accountability. But I do not have the time to talk about them this evening. I will simply note that in all these initiatives, and others, the aim must be not just for knowledge and competence but also the cultivation and development of what I call public service "wisdom," which has to do with the way knowledge and competence are held, and used, and involves elements of restraint, balance, humility, imagination, memory and taking long views, among other things. I wish I had more time to talk about that.

### *Organizational management and performance*

The second half of the challenge of renewing trust by improving performance on the driver of leadership and management is the organizational dimension. It seems to me there are at least three requirements if we are to make headway on the organizational dimension of this second driver of citizen trust. The first is continuous with what I already said about service and people management. In many more places than we now think possible, we can and should develop more rigorous organizational management performance measures, even in such unexpected areas as values and ethics, for example. Such measures should not be numerous; and as far as possible they should be outside-in results or outcome measures, not just process or input measures, though there will always be room for the latter, in public management. These results measures should also be based, as far as possible, on an understanding of the *drivers* of performance, as we have already done for service delivery, and are beginning to do for employee engagement.

But having the measures is not enough. We need to put them into some kind of context, or contexts. I believe there are two kinds of context we need to think about.

The first context is a conceptual one. Performance measures will be less useful if they are not considered within a comprehensive framework (or frameworks) of public management, some kind of over-all vision of the building blocks of a well-performing public organization. The kind of thing I'm thinking of is something like the federal government's Management Accountability Framework, or MAF. I may of course be biased (because I had something to do with its creation!), but I think the MAF is a good

example of the kind of framework public services need, to identify the areas of management performance for which organizations should be held accountable. The only problem with the MAF is that, as far as I can tell, the federal government has been pedalling backwards almost since its introduction, retreating from genuine outcome and results measures to the old stand-by of process and input measures. Nevertheless, performance measures will only make sense and be both manageable and defensible if they are positioned within this kind of broad public management framework.

The second, and much more important, context is a process one. And it also has at least two possible dimensions: the governance process and the annual cycles of government, especially the expenditure and performance management cycles, including the budget cycle. Let me say something about the latter first.

It seems to me that Canadian governments will continue to be held back in their pursuit of excellence in organizational performance until they develop or acquire the core planning and accountability systems for public management, linked to the budget cycle. The two Canadian governments that seem to have gone furthest down this road appear to me to be the Alberta and Ontario governments. A very appealing model in this area is the U.K. government's biennial spending reviews. In the course of these two-year budget cycles, a robust dialogue between the centre and departments (on results achieved in the previous cycle, and results to be achieved in the next), concludes in a performance contract (called Public Service Agreements or PSAs) between the centre and departments – including performance targets to be achieved – and the budget allocation to go with it. For public management purposes, two additional elements need to be grafted onto this core process. The first is a dialogue about management performance and results, based on something like the MAF. And the second is the performance management cycle for deputy ministers and other executives. One Canadian government that has gone far to integrate the individual and organizational performance management cycles is the Ontario government, where organizational performance assessment precedes, and sets the envelope for individual assessments. Together, the three elements of budget, organizational management accountability, and DM and executive performance management should be solidly linked in one annual (or biennial) expenditure management and accountability cycle, which is at the core of the government management system.

The budget and accountability cycle inevitably raises the other process issue, which I called the governance process. This has at least two dimensions, to neither of which can I do justice tonight. But I will mention them. The first is the role of central agencies, and the question of central agency accountability. I don't know what it's like in Saskatchewan, but I think we have been avoiding this issue for a long time in the federal government. Who is accountable for "whole of government" management performance, and how do they exercise that accountability? Who is accountable to whom? What is the difference between parliamentary accountability, and internal accountability, to the executive? In the federal government, the ongoing failure – at least since 1984 (if not longer) – adequately to define and link the roles of "management board" and "budget office," for example, is one of the key risk areas for the future of the federal public

service. It leads both central agencies and departments into unproductive activities and behaviours, and prevents the development of the kind of integrated budget and management accountability cycles I mentioned earlier, among other things.

Of course, the role of central agencies can't be considered without raising the question of the governance process for departments themselves, and the relation between the two. They are two sides of the same coin. These issues include the relative roles and powers of departments and central agencies, the management governance system within departments themselves, and the question of deputy minister accountability. This last issue brings me to the important question of the boundaries of the public service, and the third of tonight's themes: the values and ethics of public service.

### **Values and the Boundaries of Public Service**

The third driver of trust and confidence I proposed to discuss is the perception of public service ethical performance. And if the service journey over the past decade is something of which the Canadian public sector can be proud, another is the rediscovery of the values and ethics of public service that occurred in reaction to the existential crisis I described earlier. One of the most important things that has taken place in public services right across the country, over the last ten years, is a reawakened awareness of the democratic, professional, ethical and people values inherent in public service, and of their importance, both to public service institutions, and to the daily lives of individual public servants. Since the publication of *A Strong Foundation* in 1996, public servants right across the country have come to see that the values of a public service devoted, above all, to the public interest are not marginal, or optional, or nice to have. They are not the icing on the public service cake. They are the cake itself. They are what make public service "public service." Taken as a whole, the values of public service describe not just what it is right to *do* but – which comes first – who we *are*: what a public service is for, what it stands for, what it means, what it wants to *be*.

Since public service values are what *define* a public service, one of the important unanswered questions we now need to address is: what are the institutional boundaries those values both create and require? I will call this issue that of the "boundaries" of the public service, and I think it is one of the most critical current issues in Canadian public administration. We know that the public services of Canada are distinct institutions. But what kind of "institutions" are they? What kind of "distinctness," or autonomy, or "independence" should the public service and individual public servants enjoy? This is a very tricky question – but also a very important one for many in this room!

Clearly the most important boundary is the one between the elected and non-elected parts of the executive. The public service is obviously an integral part of the executive. It's not "independent." But it's also obviously not part of the *political* executive: it's chosen differently, it has different functions, status, powers, constraints and values. So what is the relationship between the two, properly conceived? For a long time we avoided dealing with this question, in Canada, and I think we would still prefer to avoid doing so. We have become accustomed, especially at highest levels, to a very

fluid, vague, imprecise approach to the question of the boundaries of the public service, and have even come to see it as a virtue, as the recent letter to the Canadian Prime Minister about the Gomery report, signed by a bevy of public and private sector luminaries, vividly illustrated.

But we have also paid a very high price for avoiding this issue, internally and externally, as the sponsorships episode and the Gomery Commission illustrated so well. And it is the public service that pays much of the price: at least in reputation, honour and trust, both internal and external. If it is not to continue to be “at risk,” the public service needs better tools and concepts that both equip it and *require* it to define and *respect* the boundaries of the public service institution.

I do not think we will be able to renew the moral contract with Canadian citizens, or even with our own public service employees, until we have done this. And one of the ways to do it, as I will explain in a moment, is by renewing the moral contract with elected leaders themselves.

There have been at least three recent attempts or proposals to address the issue of the boundaries of the public service. One approach to defining the proper boundaries of the public service has been the recent effort to develop a doctrine concerning the constitutional “independence” of the public service. But there are at least three problems with this approach. The first problem is the common law jurisprudence cited to build up such a doctrine, which not only does *not* establish the “independence” of the public service but actually establishes its opposite: the public interest in having a public service *responsive* to democratic will. The second problem is a problem of *language*: both the *rhetorical strategy* required to turn these cases on their heads, and, more important, an inappropriate *vocabulary* not consistent with a proper view of the public service or with public service values. And a third problem is the specific use of “constitutional” language, which serves only the purposes of verbal and conceptual inflation and, more seriously, of removing potential decision-making (about the merit principle, for example) from the political arena, where it should be, and transferring it to the courts instead.

A second and far more promising approach to defining the boundaries of the public service is the proposal that Canadian governments should adopt the British concept of the “Accounting Officer,” which makes deputy ministers “personally” responsible for the financial and general management of their departments. From the point of view of defining the “boundaries” of the public service, the most important feature of the concept, as it is practiced in the U.K., is the tools that are given to an accounting officer for that purpose, especially the clear instruction from the Treasury to request written instruction from a minister for any administrative action for which an accounting officer is not prepared to accept personal responsibility, and the procedures that then follow. In other words, the accounting officer role, properly conceived, gives deputy ministers the tools to draw a line in the sand, and to define, in concrete circumstances, where the boundaries of public service values and action end, and those of political accountability take over.

The difficulty here lies not in the concept itself, which is admirable, and much needed in Canada, but rather in understanding accurately what it is, and how to apply it, in the Canadian context. Many mistaken assumptions and interpretations of the accounting officer principle have been allowed to take hold in Canada, creating: confusion about the nature of accountability, and about who should be accountable for what and to whom; cumbersome and lopsided arrangements for “drawing the line”; and an approach skewed, negatively, toward rule-breaking rather than, positively, toward defining the boundaries of public service values and action. But, shorn of these distortions, I believe the accounting officer role is critical to reclaiming trust in the public service. Especially if it is combined with a third proposal for establishing the proper boundaries of public service.

This third proposal is to define and protect the boundaries of public service, and, at the same time, provide a firm foundation for public service values, through a Charter of Public Service, or a Charter of Public Service Values, endorsed by both ministers and the legislature. This, too, is not a new idea. It goes back at least to the Tait Report, which concluded ten years ago that “a statement of the great principles of public service endorsed by the Government and Parliament of Canada is now required as a foundation and reference point for public service values.” The Task Force argued that such an instrument “could help to provide not only a new foundation for public service values, but could establish a *new moral contract* between the public service, the Government and Parliament of Canada.” This idea was endorsed again by the external Working Group on the Disclosure of Wrongdoing in 2004, and a commitment to establish such a Charter was included in the Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act, unanimously adopted by Parliament in 2005. The concept of such a Charter was also subsequently endorsed in the second Gomery Report.

This kind of “moral contract” is required, for at least three reasons. First, public service values require such a foundation because a public service does not exist for its own sake. In a parliamentary democracy, a public service exists to support and serve legitimate democratic governance. So a public service cannot and should not give itself its own mission and values. The values of public service must be rooted, implicitly or explicitly, in a “moral contract” with legitimate constitutional authority. Second, this kind of three-way moral contract is necessary to ensure that all three are formally committed to upholding public service values, maintaining the integrity and the boundaries of public service, and governing their own actions accordingly. And, third, the increasing interaction between public servants and parliamentary committees (including but not limited to the accounting officer role) require some kind of explicit agreement on the basic ground rules. Such a Charter could, as the Tait report suggested, “set out the principles that govern relations between public servants and Parliament, especially parliamentary committees.” Already ten years ago, the Task Force noted that “this is an area where public service values and conventions have been subject to great pressure...and a public statement of principles endorsed by the Government and Parliament could greatly help to put things on a clearer footing.” Ten years later this need is, if anything, even more urgent.

## Renewing the Moral Contract and Reclaiming Trust

I referred earlier to something Brian Marson and I call the Public Sector Service Value Chain. I have talked this evening about the first two links in that chain: people and service. But the third link is trust. The bottom line for the public sector is not a financial bottom line. Our bottom line is trust. The trust of our employees, the trust of elected leaders, and the trust of the people of Canada, or of Saskatchewan.

I believe we need to reclaim that trust by renewing the moral contract with all three. We have begun to do so with our employees through our work on public service values and, now, through initial and promising work on employee engagement. We have also begun to renew the moral contract with Canadians through our work on service delivery, but we should keep in mind that perceptions of strong leadership and management may be equally or even more important drivers of confidence in the public service, especially for the federal public service. We need to deepen and strengthen our management and leadership practices in ways I have already mentioned in this lecture, such as the budget and management accountability cycle, and others I have not had time to touch on.

But another priority must also be to renew the moral contract with ministers and with members of our legislatures, through concepts such as a Charter of Public Service and the accounting officer principle, properly applied. This third contract is critical to renewing the other two. Unless our employees and citizens believe that we have established clear boundaries for public service values and action, and have full agreement with elected leaders on how to do so, we will not earn, or perhaps deserve, the trust and confidence our values should lead us constantly to seek.

I noted earlier that public service values describe not just what we should do, but who we *are*. Judgements about right behaviour must be rooted in a “vision of the good,” by which one is moved, and inspired to act in certain ways rather than others, from which our moral intuitions flow. The fading or distortion of this vision was the source of the existential crisis from which I began my remarks this evening. I hope I have helped convince you that this existential crisis should now be over: because of what has happened in the world, because of what we ourselves have accomplished, and because it clouds our vision, as we move forward. But Howard Gardner and his colleagues have noted that these kinds of existential crises can be “beneficial” for a profession like the public service. They can “expose the threats to good work and may mobilize people to struggle productively, *to confirm the essence of their calling, embrace high standards, and reaffirm their personal identities.*” I think that is what has happened in the public services of Canada, over the last ten years. And now we can move forward with more confidence in our identity, to reclaim the trust of Canadians, of our own employees, and of our elected leaders, by renewing our moral contract with all three, beginning, now, with the last.

You may have noticed that the words of Howard Gardner and his colleagues I just quoted strikingly echo the celebrated passage from the Tait report I read at the beginning

of this lecture, about public service as a “special calling.” But you may have forgotten that *A Strong Foundation*’s conclusion also had some important things to say about trust, and about its importance for the future of the public service. Perhaps you will allow me to remind you of them, too. “The future of the public service will be determined in large measure,” *A Strong Foundation* argued,

by the level of trust it will be able to sustain in its mission as an important public institution. In our view a high level of trust can only be maintained through a consistent attention to public service values. This will be even more true as public servants come to hold their accountabilities in more public ways. ...

If public service values are affected by the declining legitimacy of government, they can also help to restore it. The legitimacy of public institutions will be enhanced by a renewed pride and self-confidence on the part of public servants themselves, a confidence that can only come from refocusing on the character of public service as a public trust. But this is a step that public servants cannot take alone.

...[They cannot take it alone because] what is needed is something that goes beyond the public service itself, something that helps link it to the broader framework of parliamentary government in Canada.

So the public services of this country now need to work with elected officials to lay the basis for a new moral contract – including a Charter of Public Service – in support of a neutral, professional public service, dedicated above all to the public interest, an essential pillar of Canadian parliamentary democracy. If they are looking for the spirit which should infuse such a moral contract, they might consider the words of a great Canadian statesman, words that might serve as a simple but reliable guide to action, for both: “When I sit down in solitude to the labours of my profession,” said Joseph Howe, “the only questions I ask myself are What is right? What is just? What is for the public good?”