

# Wanted.

## Executives who can foster innovation, execute strategically and build consensus

ONCE VIEWED AS A CAREER equivalent of an easy chair, leadership in public administration today involves increasingly demanding dimensions.

Institute of Public Administration of Canada president and CEO Gabriel Sékaly says, “Fifty years ago, issues weren’t as complex as they are today. In order to sustain our standard of living and our economy, addressing matters like health care and climate change require strong innovation.”

For example, Sékaly, who holds a CMA and formerly served as Ontario’s Associate Deputy Minister of Finance, says Ontario’s aging demographic and other factors are driving health care spending up 6% to 8% annually. At the same time, the workforce – and therefore income tax that feeds the public purse – will shrink.

“Unless health care is addressed, in 15 years it could be 75% of the Ontario budget. For a healthy, sustainable and productive society, we also need to invest in the arts, education, infrastructure and other areas – it can’t just be health.

“Governments and public agencies have to show leadership to deal with these challenges.”

Similarly, David Collie, FCMA, president of the Electrical Safety Authority, says dealing with Ontario’s energy issues requires public servants

### Credentials matter

Facing challenges ranging from a need to find ways to cost-effectively care for an aging population while at the same time affording and delivering other services essential for a well-rounded society, Ontario’s public sector needs highly qualified executive leaders.

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to manage within a global dynamic that spans energy availability issues, the influence of foreign market demand and environmental concerns to new technology integration. “It is fast moving and exciting and has huge impact on the public sector.”

He says, for example, the introduction of 4.5 million smart meters in homes and commercial buildings – just one of the ways Ontario’s Green Energy Act aims to promote energy conservation – will change how Ontarians use and pay for energy. “The responsibility for managing this change will fall on public agencies – from power authorities to social services.”

As a result, he says, “The number of groups that need to be consulted is greater than people might imagine. But it’s necessary because of the vast number of people and accountability involved.”

For this reason, Collie says decision-making in the public sector is diffused and involves elaborate and lengthy stakeholder engagement processes.

Part of that is due to an inherent need to miti-

gate risk, says Sékaly. “We’re talking about the people’s money. Leading in the public service means ensuring things are done efficiently, effectively and with due diligence.”

Within this conservative realm, Collie and Sékaly note it’s also critical to encourage creativity.

“We are a safety regulator, but our mantra is to be an innovative regulator. You can be both. Improving safety might not always be found through regulation alone; solutions might also come from building consensus through industry to take on more responsibility.”

Navigating such complexity puts a particular onus on effective strategic planning and execution.

Sékaly and Collie say a balanced score card that responds to the strategic plan, for example, is among the tools savvy administrators use to communicate with stakeholders, benchmark progress and demonstrate accountability.

While its challenges are many, Sékaly says public administration offers rewarding opportunities for managers with the right stuff who want to make a difference. “It’s an employer with significant varieties of work focused on issues that affect society as a whole. It’s a career of choice.” ■