

## **Preparing for the Demographic Revolution:**

How is Today's Public Service Preparing for Tomorrow's Workforce?

IPAC Toronto Regional Group

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What will the public service workforce look like in the future? All sectors are facing demographic shifts in the labour market, including an aging workforce, increasing intergenerational and cultural diversity, and changing skill surpluses and shortages. Many public sector organizations are reworking their workforce strategies to address succession planning, talent management, and employment equity. How successful have existing public sector practices been? How will the public sector retain high performers and develop future leaders? What must the public sector do to remain competitive in the future?

This session started with the moderator, **John Shields** suggesting the demographic shift is not a problem in the near future, but rather the revolution has arrived. The next few years will be crucial for public sector organization. Failure to implement succession planning now will have a negative effect on the public service. All three speakers for this session are noted leaders in the area of succession planning, retention strategies, and knowledge transfer.

**Dara Barry** is the Director of Organization and Employee Services for the Regional Municipality of Durham. Dara Barry noted that municipal succession planning in Ontario is ad hoc and informal or not done at all. This approach worked in the past, as attraction was not an issue. There was a large supply of workers after World War II and then with the baby boomers. Employment policies and practices were uniform because employees were uniform.

We now have more generations in the workforce than ever before (another form of diversity). With the coming retirements, the boomer generation will be able to fill the vacancies in the short term. One component of succession planning will be to retain this generation for a bit longer. It is generation X & Y who are harder to attract; they are more cynical of the public service, but are motivated by causes. Public sector organizations must sell themselves as working towards the public good to attract these workers. We need to focus on what we provide when we hire through coop programs, internships and at career fairs. The traditionalist generation are also a critical component in succession planning as they are needed for knowledge transfer.

Municipal governments are doing well with talent management when it comes to an employee's current position, but we need to focus on future positions. Succession planning must encompass this, but also knowledge transfer and business continuity (even for short term issues, such as pandemic planning). The coming vacancies should be seen as an opportunity to restructure an organization.

**Kim Bellissimo** is the Director of the Executive Programs and Services Branch at the Ministry of Government Services (Ontario Public Service). Kim Bellissimo brought everyone's attention to the increasing age of OPS executives: 28% will be ready to retire in 5 years; 55% in ten years. This is similar to all orders of government, which will lead to the war for talent. In 2005 the OPS launched a 4 year human resources plan. Prior to this each Ministry had its own plan.

The new plan modernized recruitment of executives and non-executives. Kim Bellissimo's work to this end has concentrated on executive recruitment. Currently the OPS is looking to centralize competitions and finding options for the second choice in a competition. Employee engagement surveys have been used and executive coaching is now available. These are important initiatives as people do not often leave a position for money or benefits, but because of a boss.

The Ontario internship has increased the number of workers under 35 and the OPS opened its learning and development to all employees. Good leadership in the OPS has helped foster talent management.

Governments should be making better use of employee referrals. Employers should ask recruits who they would recommend. An employee would not recommend someone who would make them look bad and they often know who else is out there with the right skills. Similarly, we have to make use of the talent pipeline. We should reconnect with employees who have left, talking to them about what is going well, what is not going well, and what opportunities they may be interested in.

**Yvonne Latta** is a Human Resources Consultant who had a 31-year career with the federal public service. Yvonne commenced by asking everyone in the room to think of their worst job and then asked what made it the worst job. The answer is – the boss! As a consultant Yvonne Latta sees about 70-80 federal executives and she maintains that the quality of leadership is not noticed. If an organization is experiencing a high turnover, management is at root. The problem is that when you explain this to management, they often do not want to hear it. If we want to know what someone's quality of leadership is, do not ask their boss; ask those who work under them.

We should be conducting entry surveys at 2-3 months of employment instead of exit surveys. This is to see how satisfied the new employee is in the new organization and if the job reflects the posting.

Mandatory leadership requirements should also be used. New executives at some federal Ministries must go through a year learning program, even if they were at the executive level in another Ministry/organization. This training is tied to their pay for performance. Having subordinates involved in the hiring process and mandatory coaching also helps find/build strong leaders.

Yvonne Latta has made knowledge transfer materials available [here](#).

Further comments during the **fireside chat** component of the program:

**Q:** How do we break down barriers for professionals with international Skills?

**A:** We need the government to work in conjunction with professional associations to coordinate the solution. In the mean time, we must take lead and accept foreign trained professionals and stop waiting for formal criteria/guidelines.

**Q:** What can we do about the leaders we cannot mentor or fix?

**A:** We must change the corporate culture of reward to include leadership, making some leadership styles unacceptable. Unfortunately, we still have rewards for bad behaviour as the emphasis is on getting work done at any cost. We must freeze out those who do not want to improve their leadership style, as is done in the private sector.

**Q:** There is an issue surrounding the fast tracking of employees in union-management relations. This practice can also cause resentment. What can we do about this?

**A:** We naturally invest more in good performers, but we must keep competitions in place when it comes to promotions.

Management must talk to union executives about succession programs from the start. This will also make people aware of what skills they must build to meet requirements in future postings.

**Q:** How do we work with the traditionalist generation in succession planning?

**A:** This is key to succession planning; the traditionalist generation are our mentors and knowledge sources. Changing titles can be received poorly. However, different employment arrangements can be made, such as having these employees work part time or giving them assignment based work with the goal of having them pass on their knowledge.

Many of these veteran workers do not want a big role in succession planning, but are keen to transfer knowledge. Have them work part time while they are mentoring their successor.

No one likes to ask employees when they will be retiring, as this can make it seem we want them out. You must approach them in a way that makes them feel valued. Knowing when someone will retire allows you to have a say in what information they pass on to their successors.

**Q:** There is an issue with the structure of many organizations. There are not many entry level positions and there are often gaps to the next levels.

**A:** Reorganization is needed in many organizations to produce more entry level positions to bring in new blood. Remove the gaps; employees do not want to feel stuck at the entry level.

**Q:** Many baby boomers (junior and senior) are willing to stay, but no one is looking at this demographic. How can we get some of the younger boomers to stay in organizations longer?

**A:** We must offer them flexibility. They may want new experiences and special assignments to feel as though they are leaving a legacy.

Individuals in this demographic should also bring this up with their bosses. Perhaps they are interested in switching their role. They should be included in the discussions/decision about their successor.