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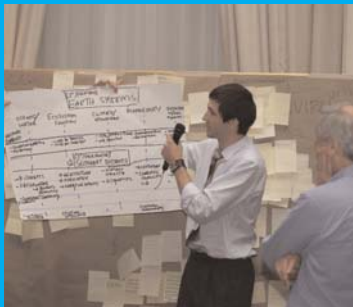


This past June saw the official launch of the Government of Canada's year-long **canada@150** project from the nation's capital.

canada@150 brings together 150 early-career public servants to look at the policy challenges that we are likely to face in 2017 (Canada's 150th birthday) and the implications for the Federal Public Service. The initiative is about active learning, acquiring skills while working on the issues.

Participants come from across the country, bringing a broad array of educational and professional backgrounds. The project will last 1 year and will involve 4 conferences. Between each conference, they work on subjects that prepare the ground for the next conference.

The First Conference: June 9 & 10, 2008



Facilitated by Dan Normandeau, this inaugural conference identified *canada@150* as an opportunity to recognize what individuals new to the public service view as emerging issues. *canada@150* represents an opportunity to create cross-cutting, horizontal networks that can bridge ideas and generate proactive — rather than reactive — responses. These networks were created during the June conference through various exercises set up for the participants. To ensure the networks are sustained between conferences, an online collaborative Web 2.0 site was set up to allow participants to work with each other. Web 2.0 tools allow participants to discuss issues, post documents, download, read, and edit them; conduct surveys of their peers; and set up blogs to inform their peers of new projects or ideas that they may develop.



Learning from Others

Ingo Rollwagen, Stéphane Donné and William N. Fisher formed a panel for the second session of the day, using expertise from forward-scanning projects already underway in Germany, France and Australia.

Contact us:

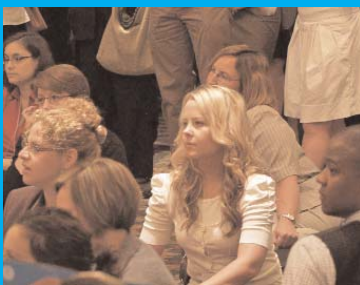
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"I am excited and energized by the opportunity to be part of canada@150. I believe strongly in Canada, its future and the Public Service to which I have the privilege of belonging."

*– Thomas Townsend
Policy Research Initiative*



During this session's question-and-answer period, three main themes emerged. **The first: the importance of questions** – formulating questions; questioning norms and stereotypes, your own role, where the country is headed and where it should be heading; and asking how these issues can be merged.

The second theme was closely related, with its concept of maintaining an open mind while thinking "outside the box." Sometimes it becomes difficult for policy-makers to "see the forest for all the trees," but balancing work between the big goals and the details is essential. To avoid narrow perceptions, exploring topics and opinions outside the norm helps break up a set mental framework, while engaging in informal discussion with individuals and the larger community helps policy makers to keep an open mind.

The third theme was prioritization. All upcoming policy issues must be taken into account, including those outside of traditional fields of work and those with weak signals. Simple forms of expression, along with the use of case studies, help to clearly depict the dynamics of certain ideas and display their plausibility. These ideas should be debated down to a few priorities through challenging discussion: consensus should not arise too easily. After scanning, experts should be consulted to validate the findings.

canada@150 Roadmap

June 9–10, 2008, Ottawa Conference

June through October - Identify policy-change drivers

October 22–24, 2008, Vancouver Conference

November through February - Analyze policy challenges

February 23–24, 2009, Québec City Conference

March through May - Examine the implications for the Public Service

June 1–2, 2009, Ottawa Conference

Working Together in New Ways

In the third session, the participants took part in a team strategy simulation facilitated by Operating System Earth Inc., a highly interactive, live-action simulation that puts participants in the roles of organizations and governments working on global issues.

The exercise gave participants a sense of how important trust, open communication and information sharing is. They noted that having a strategy is crucial, but that following instinct and remaining flexible to change (as needed) was also important. In addition, participants recognized that a meaningful role for each member of the group and coordination of responsibilities, strengths and weaknesses were key aspects of a functioning organization.

Keynote Speaker



During the dinner session, Adam Kahane described three types of complexity and the processes required to solve highly complex problems.

The first type of complexity is dynamic: it cannot be solved piece by piece, but must be treated as a whole. Dynamic complexity requires a systemic solution; i.e., the need to understand the reality of the situation. This occurs, for example, by recognizing that we cannot erase past mistakes.

The second form of complexity is social: it cannot be resolved by experts alone, it needs the involvement of all stakeholders. Social complexity requires a participative process: people must participate not only in the solutions, but in the definition of the problems. They need to understand a diversity of perspectives.

In its third form, complexity is generative: it cannot be solved by best practices and existing solutions; it requires emergent, innovative solutions. In other words, solutions that work in an innovative way, are connected to others and to ourselves, and recognize that we are also part of the problem, which means we must also be part of the solution.



Taking Stock and Challenging Assumptions

On the following day, Adam Kahane asked participants to share questions they had asked themselves in response to his presentation the night before. Their answers reflected two general themes.

The first area consisted of questions regarding personal capacity. Participants were concerned about striking a balance between expertise and fresh perspectives, while maintaining hope and passion around issues that are difficult to solve.

The second was to maintain issues surrounding the project and the potential outcomes it may produce. They perceived that it would be a challenge to ensure that “dull-ache” issues would get attention amidst “sharp-pain” issues. They also questioned if desired outcomes would be achieved as a group, and how projects could maintain relevancy to Canadians and overcome other obstacles to implementation.





How to do Medium-Term Thinking

Peter Bishop presented a framework for thinking about change in the medium-term. He noted that there are changes that happen to us and other changes that we create ourselves (which means that we have a certain degree of influence on our world).

Significant for foresight work is the distinction between continuous changes that are reasonably predictable, and disruptive changes (referred to as discontinuities). While the future cannot be predicted, we can imagine a number of possible futures. The probable future forms a baseline (e.g. baseline projections of continuous changes, as forecast by economists, demographers, etc.). Plausible futures are also considered as alternative futures. Anticipating discontinuities means expecting the unexpected. While discontinuities may take the world by surprise, there are usually a pocket of experts who had anticipated these changes.

Although weak signals may be present as a precursor to potential change, the specific preconditions that will actually frame an event are unknown. We seek the information for forecasting through history, various informants and current conditions, and then consider the forces of change.

It is the discontinuities that bring about a new era: society adjusts itself to a new equilibrium following a disruptive event. A change in the worldview is indicative of a new era. We often perceive these changes in terms of progress; we adjust to the new era and become comfortable with it. A new era, however, often brings about a change of positions; some benefit and some lost ground. Moving into a new era requires cessation of the current era's activities to move on to another (destruction, creation). It can therefore be challenging. The old era also contains strong resistance, because it has data and experience on its side.

Organizing the Next Phase of the Work

Participants selected 15 scanning topics that would help identify the forces that will shape the Canadian policy landscape over the next decade. They organized into small working groups that would enable them to develop a deeper knowledge of what was occurring in the topic area and identify change drivers influencing Canada's future.

