



BARRETT VALUES CENTRE

PUBLIC WORKS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES CANADA

Building a Culture of Client Service Excellence

THE SITUATION

In 2010, Public Works and Government Services Canada (PWGSC) was dealing with complex, unprecedented change that was stretching systems and people beyond anything they had ever experienced. The Government of Canada was in a period of tough fiscal restraint—with a deficit reduction of \$4 billion, 5 to 10% of departmental budgets being cut, increasing the pressure on staff to do more with less. Retirements were seriously reducing the number of staff while there were changing demographics to serve, and new technologies raising service expectations at a time when their client service was already considered too slow.

Daniel Leclair, Director General Service Integration Sector, was asked to form a senior leadership committee to deliver on the Client Service Strategy. Cultural transformation to change the values and behaviours of the leaders and staff was seen as a key driver to support the strategic initiatives.

The directors-general who would be instrumental in transforming the client service culture throughout the department were chosen from across the organisation to join the committee. With client service reported at a 50% satisfaction rating in previous years for some of the business lines, senior leadership recognised that how they were doing business needed to change significantly. The change would entail a transformation from rigid accountability to stewardship (having control of \$24 billion in government purchasing) balanced by speed and agility.

A leadership problem emerged within a year of starting the project. Discussion around the boardroom table was missing key voices. Those of the senior leaders who had been appointed to the Client Service Strategy committee were deafening in their silence. Their voices were silent because they were not attending the committee meetings.

Something was wrong, but what? Engagement and commitment should have been high. This initiative was very strategic and had the deputy minister's and assistant deputy minister's attention. Yet the seats were empty. In their place, the directors-general were sending their directors, who were sending their managers to replace them. Yes, something was definitely amiss.

Industry:
Government

of Employees:
12,000

Annual Revenue:
\$6 billion Cdn, including
60% in cost recovery

Country:
Canada

Consultants:
[Joanna Barclay, Culture
Leadership Group](#)

It was time to diagnose the reasons for the malaise affecting committee members. It was time to make the intangible tangible and assess the committee's performance by mapping and measuring its culture. The stakes were too high for the strategic initiative to fail. This initiative needed the hearts and minds of the top leaders fully engaged or only a small measure of success would be possible.

THE PROCESS

The leader of the committee hired a Barrett's Values Centre® Cultural Transformation Tools® (CTT) Consultant, Joanna Barclay, to conduct a Small Group Cultural Values Assessment with the thirteen directors-general (DGs) on the committee. The diagnosis was a misalignment of personal values with the values experienced in the current culture of the committee.

Ethics, excellence and leadership were personal values for seven out of the thirteen DGs. The concern was these values were not showing up in the current culture—a sign of misalignment that needed looking into. These values had also been selected by the DGs as desired cultural values, which meant the DGs considered them important going forward to achieve their goals.

What was the problem? Why weren't these values showing up in the current culture? What was happening to prevent them? These questions and more were discussed during the team debrief session to understand the assessment data report and develop strategies to increase engagement and commitment.

Experience shows the biggest single success factor in building a high-performance organisation is a cohesive leadership team. This element was a major factor with the DGs' leadership team, who identified creating internal cohesion around a renewed vision as a desired goal going forward. To increase engagement, the meetings needed passion and commitment.

After reviewing the assessment results, the committee members met to renew their vision and mission and selected key values and behaviours to support their strategies. One answer to their problem was discovered in the committee's terms of reference—the word leadership wasn't mentioned anywhere in the document. This was a clear sign to the group how much leadership was a life force value and driver that fueled their performance.

From that moment on, they became a leadership team and not a committee. Their mission was to create a partnership of leaders to enhance, innovate, and develop services and processes to become a client-centric organisation. Their vision: to be the centre of expertise and provide leadership in Client Service Excellence. With this horizontal vision and key values of *integration, collaboration, efficiency, and whole of government approach*, the leaders began showing up more regularly to meetings that translated into more rapid progress.

OUTCOMES

Over the past three years, PWGSC has been in transition to become a client-centred organisation. The following strategies have provided tangible results in terms of improvements to service, client satisfaction, innovative new programs, and employee engagement with client service rating above 90%.

Client Service Strategies— New Systems and Processes to Support Cultural Transformation

The Client Service Strategy (CSS) is changing the way PWGSC does business by shifting away from the hands-on delivery of some of its services toward the strategic management of its business.

The CSS has two major components: *Renewed Service Offerings* and *Enhanced Client Focus*.

The Renewed Service Offerings has three subcomponents:

- Comprehensive Service Agreements: Departmental Service Agreements (DSA) create a strategic partnership between PWGSC and the client organisation by defining:
 - Mutually compatible purpose and component objectives and expected mutually beneficial outcomes;
 - The principles that guide the behaviour of individuals of the department and its client to ensure a work environment that is conducive to effective service delivery;
 - The menu of services to be delivered along with any limitations;
 - The financial arrangements including the cost of the services provided;
 - The overview of the roles/responsibilities, the amendment and dispute resolution process;
 - The measurement/reporting of service performance, client satisfaction, and risk management.

This is a more comprehensive, cooperative and standardised approach to the mutual governance of the service relationship.

- **Clear Service Standards** provide a clear and published commitment to achieve a measurable level of performance that the client can expect under normal circumstances for all services provided by PWGSC. Service Standards help clarify expectations for clients and employees, drive service improvement, and contribute to results-based management.
 - They also reinforce PWGSC's accountability by making performance transparent and increase the confidence of Canadians in government by demonstrating its commitment to service.
- **Innovative Service Offerings** includes a "one knock" approach to streamline access to departmental services. PWGSC is also leveraging the expertise of the private sector to deliver services and introduce self-serve models of service delivery. This approach generates efficiencies, avoids duplication, and results in more uniform service. These and other approaches are being used to evolve its service offerings to meet its clients' needs and strengthen its program delivery.

The Enhanced Client Focus has three subcomponents:

- **Integrated Client Engagement** is one of the cornerstones of sound client service. Working with the department's various business lines, PWGSC developed a robust new framework to foster a more consistent departmental approach to client engagement and business relationship management. Specific techniques include:

- Embedding people, communication and values at the project level to improve the client service experience;
- Improved governance at service agreement level using the comprehensive service agreements mentioned above;
- Improved consultative methods at the project, DSA, and cross-jurisdictional levels.
- **Increased Client Satisfaction** is the department's new focus. The establishment of a client satisfaction assessment, measurement, and feedback system enables managers to know how well the organisation is performing from a client perspective and to deal with any issues interfering with more satisfied customers. It also helps ensure the reward and reinforcement systems in the organisation are operating to create the proper incentives that make people want to commit their energies to the cause of client service.
- **Client Service Culture.** PWGSC is committing to service excellence on the part of its employees and affirming its importance to the organisation's identity as a whole. In other words, it is enshrining service excellence as a cultural and an essential element of the CSS. Other measures used to anchor client service into the organisation include:
 - Use of core client service competencies in hiring client-focused employees;
 - Incorporation of the client service competencies in performance assessments to provide the feedback necessary to adjust cultural dimensions in response to changing client requirements;
 - Use of tailored client service training courses;
 - Employment of a monthly service excellence award.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Many achievements have been realised during these past four years:

- a) Departmental Service Agreement—twenty-two signed Departmental Service Agreements;
- b) Standard and Performance Indicators—Published four editions of “Our Services Standards and Results”;
- c) Service Offerings—Launched the “One Knock” approach with a single point of contact for Small Departments and Agencies; inventoried PWGSC services; streamlined service channels and contact points; launched workplace 2.0; launched centralised Pay service; initiated Smart Procurement Initiative; launched rethinking the Translation Bureau;
- d) Clients and Suppliers Engagement—Developed a departmental Client Engagement Framework; held five PWGSC annual conferences on client service; developed senior client service governance;
- e) Client Satisfaction: Developed and launched the PWGSC Client Barometer;
- f) Client Service Culture and Employee Engagement: PWGSC client service course and client service awards, client service competency, three annual Client Service Weeks, rolled out people management philosophy; Leadership development, Mentoring and Coaching circles for individuals and groups.

LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE LEADING CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION

At different times, it has been exciting, scary, stimulating, and discouraging.

What has been surprising is the need for flexibility, the difficulty in recruiting team members who can think outside the box and are comfortable in a context where rules are not yet written. Also surprising is how often it is necessary to repeat the same thing in different ways to get people to understand.

What has been delightful is seeing cultural change taking root, moving from awareness to understanding to action. Hearing clients state they are seeing an improvement in the client relationship with PWGSC. Seeing the breakdown of silos as organisations were brought together to develop the service agreements, and planning the integration of transformation initiatives.

Where they struggled the most was:

- Keeping the momentum alive;
- Dealing with change fatigue in a period of deficit reduction;
- Trying to make inter-branch committees work on horizontal issues that were not the leaders' main responsibilities, the pull of vertical line functions and responsibilities against horizontal functional roles.

How has the leadership team's work added value to the transformation effort:

- The team has added value by building bridges between branches to develop more integrated solutions for clients (from e-procurement to e-payment);
- The team now has a better understanding of its clients' strategic priorities.

The key learnings over the past three years:

- The process of negotiating the Departmental Service Agreements was more important than the final result;
- The process brought together various parts of the organisation and identified client issues before seeking senior-level signatures;
- There were many fears related to the establishment and publishing of service levels standards. These fears were addressed by co-developing standards together that both parties could live with;
- The need for quick wins to get traction, which they were able to achieve with the signing of agreements and publication of standards;
- The need for a mechanism to reach down to all staff and show how they will be directly affected. This was accomplished with the development of core client service competency training, hiring client-focused employees, performance assessments and feedback, and monthly service excellence awards.

What new directions or initiatives are in the planning phases?

In additions to building on the above, the following initiatives are being added:

- Integrated transformation: identification of synergies between key transformations is taking place, development of an integrated approach to PWGSC Service Transformation;
- Branding/Positioning/Centres of Expertise: launching an integrated marketing plan; modernisation of web presence with less sites, cost reduction as a driver of change, continue to renew and adapt;
- Structure and Cost: Adopt a centre of expertise approach, lead and influence government-wide initiatives, adopt a government-wide mandate for key internal services to reduce duplication (HR, Fin., Corporate, Industrial Security, etc.).

CONCLUSION

Conscious leadership is a key component to driving and supporting the system-wide change. When Daniel Leclair was asked to describe the conscious leadership qualities, he felt were instrumental in supporting the PWGSC transformation, he identified the following facilitative leadership competencies:

- **Diplomacy** – having the ability to bring together different points of view and strong personalities;
- **Engaging communication** and good listening skills;
- **Self-awareness** – recognising the need and having the ability to change yourself as well as the organisation; it's not just about producing results but engaging people in the vision and challenges;
- **Rational and emotional** – must work with the head and heart, the emotions of people, and being aware of the impact you have on their lives;
- **Inspire** staff with the benefits;
- **Empathise** with the challenges;
- **Co-develop** solutions that will make those impacted want to engage;
- **Access the wisdom** of the group to develop competencies together with managers;
- **Validate** with experts to bring credibility;
- **Energy to sustain the momentum and make it all happen.**

On the whole, the Client Services Strategy provides the means to fundamentally improve the nature and effectiveness of the PWGSC relationship with its clients on an ongoing basis. It provides the tools and techniques to ensure the relationship is managed and maintained from a strategic viewpoint with a commitment to closer cooperation. Altogether, it enables a workplace culture that fosters teamwork, consistency, discipline, and the proactive sharing of information.