

Speaking notes for Amelita Armit

PS Transitions: Collaborative Solutions for Recruitment and Retention

General Comments:

Thank you for inviting me to this panel discussion. The study conducted by Carleton University and supported by Industry Canada is a very timely initiative. The findings presented provide us with another interesting insight on labour force dynamics that will allow us in the PSC to sharpen our recruitment and staffing strategies.

I am also glad to participate from a self-interest perspective: Because of the nature of my job, I am always on the lookout for what is new, what is possible, what can we do better, in the area of recruitment and staffing. You, our new and young recruits, are an important voice, and I am looking forward to hearing from you.

I also want to note that I feel fortunate in being the last discussant as this gives me an opportunity to respond to the themes that the two other panelists presented. They have provided compelling testimonies to the nature of our recruitment and retention challenges and what we can do about them. Peter Harder's description of Industry Canada's experiences in the recruitment and retention of university graduates is a good example of the kind of success a department can have when it is totally engaged in the recruitment/retention issue – when senior managers take the time to develop a comprehensive and integrated strategy to address their HR needs, when they make recruitment and retention a strategic imperative for delivering their mandate, where HR, recruitment and retention are not separate issues or add-ons, but part of the total management picture.

Matt Jones' remarks about his experience as a new and young recruit in the economist stream are also something you should keep in mind in your deliberations. In particular, he noted that he is enjoying the challenge right now, but that he cannot readily say, at this time, what it would take for him to stay. He talked about life cycles, and the notion that one's interests and needs are affected by where a person is in that cycle. This is an important point in terms of recruitment and retention strategies – we need to know more, to understand more of what makes people tick, what their interests are, if we are to recruit and retain the people we need and want.

En cette période marquée par un resserrement du marché du travail et d'importants changements démographiques, il est en effet important de bien comprendre les principaux éléments à prendre en considération pour concevoir de nouvelles stratégies de dotation et de recrutement qui répondront davantage aux besoins et attentes des nouvelles recrues et des recrues.

J'aimerais souligner plus particulièrement trois des points saillants de l'étude de l'université Carleton.

Premièrement, il est clair que les stratégies de recrutement et le maintien en poste sont les deux faces d'une même médaille pour assurer la qualité de la fonction publique. L'efficacité des efforts de recrutement est inextricablement liée à la qualité des conditions de travail offertes et de l'environnement organisationnel.

Les réponses formulées par les deux cent dix (210) anciens et anciennes de l'école d'administration publique de l'université Carleton confirment entièrement les conclusions de récentes études de la CFP portant sur les attributions professionnelles qui sont les plus valorisées par les employés actuels et potentiels de la fonction publique fédérale.

These findings were highlighted in the document *The Road Ahead: Recruitment and Retention Challenges for the Public Service*. Let me highlight some key findings:

A survey of New Hires – indeterminate employees hired between July 1999 and June 2000, conducted in February 2001, revealed that the reasons for accepting a position in the public service was:

- A job that matches their interests to their skills/abilities/knowledge;
- Job security;
- The ability to work in one's field of study; and,
- A competitive salary.

A survey of student employees conducted in the Summer of 2000, focusing on what students want in a future career reinforced the same findings. Students identified interesting work, a competitive salary, and work in their field of study as highly important in a future career.

We learned that candidates encountered frustrations with the Federal Public Service in terms of its:

- Failure to offer competitive salaries;
- Low level of employee morale;
- Failure to encourage independent decision-making;

Those who said they might leave the Federal Public Service stated it would be for:

- Better use of skills and abilities (83%);
- Better salary (74%);

- Ability to see immediate results of the impacts of their work (73%);
- Opportunity for advancement (72%);

AETP and PRDP:

We have also conducted reviews of the PSC's various corporate programs which are geared to policy analysts, such as the Accelerated Economist Training Program and the Policy Research and Development Program.

Again, feedback from participants indicated that they were attracted to these programs because they offered:

- Great opportunities for challenge, and diversity of work assignments;
- Good exposure to the central agencies of the Federal Public Service and a better understanding of the nature of the work done;
- Opportunity work on high-level portfolios;
- Opportunity to obtain customized training to meet specific needs;
- Opportunity to receive coaching and mentoring from senior executives;

In today's issue of *Le Soleil*, there is an article on what the federal government and the Quebec provincial government are doing or not doing to attract young talent. Antoine Brunelle-Côté, a young economist with the federal government, is quoted as follows:

<< Quand tu mets les pieds dans la fonction publique fédérale, tu te sens vraiment désiré. Les autorités veillent à ton développement. Ils font tout en leur possible pour que tu fasses carrière longtemps dans l'administration. >>

These observations reinforce the Carleton study. The programs have a high attraction and retention rate because they offer participants a career stream which best matches their interests and offers them a challenging and stimulating work environment.

The same observations hold true from our participants in the Management Trainee Program review of the Management Trainee Program (December 2001), which indicated that participants were attracted to the Program for the following reasons:

- The MTP offers development and training opportunities with a clear focus towards achieving a target level upon graduation;
- Access to language training at no cost to them;
- Opportunity to network;

The second observation I want to make relates to what Gene Swimmer referred to as the "bad news" for the federal public service. This is the finding about a target population seemingly tailor-made for federal employment who are working outside of

the federal sector (36%) and the net movement out of federal employment (from 77% who had it as first job after graduation to 64% today).

Il faudra prêter attention à cette tendance « migratoire » car ce phénomène prend de plus en plus d'ampleur au Canada. Ce phénomène a aussi été remarqué dans l'administration fédérale américaine et pourrait avoir de sérieuses conséquences non seulement sur nos stratégies de recrutement et de maintien en poste mais aussi sur notre aptitude à bâtir la fonction publique fédérale dont nous avons besoin et que nous souhaitons pour l'avenir.

Paul Light, the Director of the Brookings Institute Governmental Studies program, and the author of "The New Public Service", states that this phenomenon can be expected because today's public servants expect to change jobs frequently and are more focused on challenging work than security, and if it means a job with a private sector or a non-profit agency or being self-employed, so be it.

Also the nature of government work and who does it or where is it done has also changed. Working for the public interest is no longer the monopoly of government in general and the federal government in particular. Governments have outsourced many functions traditionally thought of as core functions e.g. research, governments have formed alliances with private sector, universities, NGOs to deliver or provide government services, so one can work in the public interest through these various avenues.

The fluidity in the boundaries of various labour markets and the ease in which the new public servants can move in and out of these markets point to more targeted strategies to address the recruitment and retention challenges of the federal public service.

What all these mean, is that we, as federal public servants need to refine our strategies, we need strategies that will differentiate us from all our competitors. What would make us a more compelling choice than others?

This brings me to a third observation—and it relates to the kind of strategies and programs we have underway to improve the recruitment and retention edge of the federal public service.

There is a finding in the Carleton study about the 64% in the sample who are working in the federal sector, 86% of whom are generally happy with their choice, are content with their job prospects and enthusiastic about federal employment generally. My comment is – let's use this untapped pool as our recruiters and ambassadors for the federal public service. Who could provide a better testimony of the interesting work we have than this group? The use of employees as recruiters is a strategy well-used by many organizations, public and private, and has proven to be successful. We have our own

success stories of this kind (examples: the Dept of Finance Recruitment Strategy; the Student Ambassador program; Career Talks on campus, etc.).

We have also enhanced our relationship with Universities, Associations and students. We have continuous campus visits. This is part of redesigning the Post-Secondary Recruitment Program on a continuous basis. We are on campus not just for specific jobs to fill but to talk about opportunities in the federal public service.

Student bridging:

We have also facilitated the integration of students into the federal public service by enhancing our student bridging mechanisms. Students who have worked in the federal public service and who meet the merit / competency requirements of a department can now be easily converted to full-time employees.

Saskatchewan Fellowship Program:

Further to bridging students into the FPS, we recently launched the Saskatchewan Fellowship Program pilot which expands on FSWEP to provide students with a more structured, diverse experience in the Public Service. The program will offer seasonal employment in at least two departments over the course of the students' studies. The focus is in providing students with meaningful and challenging work. When they complete their studies, departments will have the option of bridging them into the FPS.

These are just a few of the initiatives in which we have been involved to address some of the recruitment and retention challenges.

I said at the outset that I would make three points. However, I cannot resist making a fourth point, and this relates to the presentation that Gene Swimmer just made about the policy implications of their study, and I refer to the bullet "There may be a need to address the perception that promotions are awarded on the basis of merit."

There is much talk about merit these days. There is the re-definition of merit in the context of HRM. Then there is this current media debate on merit and equity and diversity. So allow me to make a few comments.

For us in the PSC, merit means six values: the *results values* of a competent, non-partisan and representative public service, achieved through the *process values* of fairness, equity and transparency. We don't see these as a hierarchy of values, one is not more important than the other, but rather closely linked and interactive. We see them all being viewed in balance in each managerial decision.

We have found that most of the time when people say “this is not merit” or “this promotion process is not based on merit”, it is because they do not understand the staffing process and how the values work or how they are used in the process. So what we are doing is increasing awareness, increasing understanding, through education, promotion and outreach of how the staffing process works, what the values mean in practice. For example, when we do outreach and recruitment to various designated groups, we tell them about the staffing process in the federal government, what the steps are, what is involved, what the qualifications mean, what assessment tools we use, why we use them, etc.

Then there is the oversight function of the Commission. When cases are brought to our attention where merit is in question, we do active monitoring – we follow-up with the individual or the department, we have a recourse system – we handle individual cases, and we also look at systemic patterns, we reinforce these with surveys, thematic studies and research. All of these are brought to the attention of the system – Parliament, the DMs, senior officials, managers, HR community, those who can make the difference.

All this to say that the PSC is about merit, what it means, how it is used, how it is upheld, how it is evolving, as part of a modern human resource management system.

Thank you and I welcome any comments or questions you may have.