

Sandford Borins
*University of
Toronto at
Scarborough*

Trends in Training Public Managers: A Report on a Commonwealth Seminar

ABSTRACT: This article reports on a conference on issues and trends in training practicing public managers. Some trends identified include: greater competition between civil service colleges and outside providers of training; university programs that compete in this market being based in business schools or autonomous units, rather than in traditional political science departments; a convergence among training providers on the use of adult education methodology; elite training programs now playing a larger role in training the entire public service; and some civil service training institutes simultaneously identifying more closely with strategic government priorities and developing a research role comparable to the university.

INTRODUCTION

The Commonwealth Association for Public Administration and Management, a voluntary association of individuals and organizations interested in the study and practice of public management, held a two-day seminar in April 1999 on issues and trends in the training of practicing public managers. The organizers invited representatives of programs and institutions they consider to be at the leading edge. The 30 seminar participants included representatives of public service training institutes and universities, two major providers of training to public

servants, as well as representatives of central agencies and government departments, the principal clients of public sector training programs (see Appendix 1). The resulting mix marshalled expertise on both sides of the market for training. The participants were from ten diverse countries, including OECD members (Australia, Canada, the UK), a newly-industrialized state (Singapore), developing countries (Cameroon, India, South Africa, Uganda), and small and island states (Barbados, Malta). The seminar was off-the-record to encourage frankness. This article is intended to report to a different audience, in particular public management academics, on the trends identified and issues discussed at the seminar (Borins, 1999). Academics may not be very familiar with this area of training, as many of them focus on pre-career (undergraduate) education and/or the training of doctoral students. The four main topics of discussion at the seminar were the role of universities as providers of training for practitioners, the growing role of civil service colleges, the training of elites, and training for diversity. In each case, the discussion was initiated by presentations from organizations with experience in that area.

THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES

The seminar heard presentations regarding a variety of public management programs:

- The University of the West Indies' part-time graduate program and public sector executive development program;
- The part-time graduate program at the Schulich School of Business in Canada's York University;
- The part-time graduate programs at the Monash Mt Eliza Business School of Australia's Monash University; and
- On-site executive development courses given throughout the developing world by the International Development Department in the University of Birmingham's School of Public Policy.

In all these programs, the students are adults who have already begun their careers. As a consequence the programs use adult learning pedagogy. This includes linking training to practice (for example by having students write about their experience), student involvement in shaping assessment practices, individualized assignments, rapid feedback, and shared learning, with the instructor playing the roles of expert or facilitator as appropriate.

Some practitioners were skeptical about the ability of universities to play a role in mid-career training. A former Public Service Commissioner of Australia recounted that in the late Eighties and early Nineties many Australian academics, particularly those holding appointments in political science departments, were

critical of the new public management reforms Australian governments were implementing and advocated a return to old-fashioned public administration. As a consequence, Australian governments did not involve these departments, turning instead to public management programs in business schools. A former Principal of the Canadian Centre for Management Development, the federal government's executive development agency, reported that few Canadian universities had bid in a recent competition to provide training modules for a corporate leadership program because the universities were unable to coordinate the individual faculty members who would have to be involved. She also observed that universities are notoriously slow to change, and that few university faculties have management experience.

The university representatives who spoke at the seminar felt that, while these criticisms might be universally valid, their programs were exceptions. They observed that the university-based programs that were responding to governments are located in business or management schools, rather than arts faculties and/or are autonomous units dependent on the revenues they earn. Thus, they must provide education that participants view as effective. As one representative put it, they must "respond or die." Another described himself as often feeling like "a businessman in a bureaucracy."

It was observed that another factor leading to responsiveness is comparative audit. The Thatcher and Major governments have required universities in the UK to become much more performance-oriented. They must undergo rigorous teaching quality assessment, one criterion of which is the use of modern techniques, rather than what one university representative referred to as the traditional "chalk and talk." It was noted that, because education is a provincial responsibility in Canada, governments did not attempt a comparative audit of Canadian universities on a national basis. However, *MacLeans* magazine, a national weekly, did begin such an audit of the overall performance of Canadian universities several years ago and produces national league tables. The audit has begun to influence the universities' behavior and is also a financial success for the magazine, which now republishes its annual report on the universities as a separate volume. This is similar to practice in the US.

The Growing Role Of Civil Service Colleges

The seminar heard presentations about two civil service colleges. The Canadian Centre for Management Development (CCMD) describes its mission as providing executive development that is responsive to the Government's strategic agenda. That agenda was recently described by then Cabinet Secretary Jocelyne Bourgon to include strengthening policy capacity, modernizing service delivery, strengthening the relationship between government and citizens, and public service renewal. The Centre offers two types of programs: career development programs

aimed at selected individuals within both the executive group and executive-feeder groups, and corporate learning programs, with wider enrollment from across the entire public service. Both sets of programs are congruent with a list of leadership competencies that the public service has identified for all its executives, and both are aimed at the corporate, rather than the departmental level.

A new initiative is its corporate leadership program, open to executives at all levels and linked to government-wide priorities. It has the following five modules: leadership renewal; leadership and learning, with an emphasis on coaching; "putting yourself in other's shoes," or service quality; "going beyond turf and empire building," or coordinated policy development; and continuous learning. Each module is one week or less in duration and the entire program extends over a period of 18 months to two years. Linking learning to work, there are assignments between modules, meetings with coaches and mentors, and assessments. It is hoped that the participants will continue to meet after they have finished the formal program, creating an informal contact network. A group of 40 executives is currently developing the program design as well as participating in its first trial.

CCMD also has a research division responsible for research projects, publications, seminars, lectures, and conferences. Much of the research is priority-driven, for example work on surveying client satisfaction.

The CCMD presentation concluded with the observation that most adult learning happens on the job. For learning to be successful it must be linked closely to work. Modules should be short, usually no longer than a week, but the learning program should be continuous. Coaching and mentoring are important components. Executive development programs should be seen as a way to leverage, accelerate, and guide on-the-job learning. The ultimate test of the effectiveness of educational programs, however, must be the organization's performance. Does training improve the outcomes that it is attempting to influence?

The presentation regarding the UK's Civil Service College noted that, during the Thatcher and Major Governments, the college was a relatively autonomous Next Steps Agency whose mission was to provide middle management training. It was successful at this mission, and was able to survive in a competitive environment, receiving no central subsidies and with departments free to purchase training from the universities or the private sector. The Blair Government feels that the College was less effective at addressing strategic, organizational development, and senior leadership issues of relevance to the entire civil service. This flows from the Blair Government's criticism of the approach to public management taken by Thatcher and Major, which is that they put too much focus on the autonomy of individual agencies. As a consequence, the government displayed insufficient policy coordination. Blair has been promulgating a vision of a "joined-up government" providing both integrated service delivery and coordinated policies aimed at solving major policy problems. One of the most pressing

of such problems is “social exclusion,” which North Americans refer to as the poverty cycle.

As a result of this strategic vision, the Blair Government has incorporated the Civil Service College into the newly-established Centre for Management and Policy Studies (CMPS) in the Cabinet Office. The Director of the CMPS will have permanent secretary rank. While the Civil Service College will continue to provide a variety of programs for middle management, the CMPS will be responsible for strategic core programs for the senior civil service. The CMPS will have a small research budget, much of which it will spend commissioning outside work on key issues. This will be facilitated by the Centre’s director, who is both an academic and a previous director of a government research granting council.

These two presentations have interesting implications. Both Canada’s CCMD and the UK’s CMPS have begun to take on some of the characteristics of traditional universities, such as supporting research and holding seminars and conferences. On the other hand, they are different in that their clientele is limited to the public service and concentrated on the senior public service. While the traditional university seeks to distance itself from power, so that its faculty members may “speak truth to power,” CCMD and CMPS are attempting to get close to power, by affiliating themselves with central agencies and the strategic priorities of the government of the day.

Seminar participants observed a convergence in instructional methodology, with both university-based programs and civil service colleges using adult learning methodology and linking work and training. Coaching and mentoring were also seen as important components of adult learning. In the past, recourse to coaching was seen as an admission of failure. Now coaching is coming to be viewed as standard practice. Participants asked how governments could stimulate mentoring, and felt that both mentoring and coaching should be considered responsibilities of senior public servants.

Coaching and mentoring need not be restricted to those who are currently occupying senior positions. For example, an assignment just prior to retirement could be primarily one of teaching and coaching, and practitioners might well wish to continue these activities after a formal “retirement.” One participant commented that, with early retirement programs in effect in many countries, there soon will be as many practitioners available as resources. Another felt that the challenge in using practitioners lies in finding an effective framework for their expertise. After teaching the first session of a course at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government, former Massachusetts Governor and presidential candidate Michael Dukakis remarked that he had used up all his anecdotes and wondered what to do next. One proposed solution was collaboration between practitioners and academics, with academic theoretical expertise providing a conceptual framework for practitioner experience. The co-authored book by former

Saskatchewan premier Allan Blakeney and Professor Sandford Borins (Blakeney and Borins, 1998) was cited as an example.

Another issue raised was the split between purchaser and provider. Prime Minister Blair has made it clear that he considers policy advice to be contestable, in the sense that the senior public service had no monopoly on it and that his Government is open to outside consultation, for example with think tanks and advocacy groups. Similarly, participants see line departments or central agencies as purchasers of management training, either from internal civil service colleges or from outside contractors. For example, the modules of the corporate leadership program in Canada are being delivered by a number of outside providers, generally consultants or think-tanks, rather than universities.

A further issue relating to the purchaser-provider split is that of funding for management training. Two possible approaches are for the department to pay on a per-person per-course basis or for the program to be financed centrally. The virtue of the former is that it forces a department seriously to consider whether it is receiving value for money. When programs are intended for people viewed as a corporate resource for the entire public service, central financing is more likely. This is the case in both the UK and Canada. If such courses are to be financed centrally, it is important that there continues to be careful consideration of whether the money is well spent. This could be done centrally, for example by the Treasury or Finance Ministry. Another way would be to assess departments for at least part of the cost of corporate programs. This would encourage them to remain conscious of cost and ready to question whether they are receiving value for money.

Training Elites

A number of Commonwealth countries use entry level examinations to identify future senior public servants and have specialized training programs for these elites (in UK parlance, high flyers). The seminar heard about such programs in Canada, India, and Singapore.

The Canadian public service's Management Trainee Program (www.psc-cfp.ca/mtp/mtppeprog.htm) began in 1991, during a period of down-sizing. Because the government's priority has now shifted to public service renewal, especially because 70% of the government's current senior managers will be able to retire within 10 years, the Management Trainee Program has expanded substantially in recent years. The trainees are selected from either recent master's degree graduates or junior officers in the public service. The Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade has merged its training program for foreign service officers with the Management Training Program, and other functional groups (for example, information technology) would like to join as well.

The program lasts for 4 years and includes 40 days of training. Job assignments include rotations in regional offices, central agencies, and line departments. Training activities include site visits, case studies, small group exercises, and personal learning plans, with the trainees' preference being experiential, rather than classroom, education. The trainees are particularly interested in learning how to balance work and personal life. Even though trainees are considered to be the public service's high flyers, they do not automatically see themselves as careerists. Their commitment to the public service depends on the work providing continuing stimulation.

The core of public administration in India is the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), an elite group of 6000 career officers who hold the most senior appointed positions in district, state, and national government. Each year, a group of fewer than 100 officers is chosen from the 400,000 applicants who take demanding written and oral examinations. These officers will usually spend their first 10 years as district magistrates, in charge of the public service in a district of 500,000 people. Their next 10 years will be spent in senior positions in state governments, with the remainder of their careers in senior positions in the national government.

The Lal B. Shastri National Academy of Administration (www.lbsnaa.ernet.in) is responsible for training members of the IAS. Their initial training is a two-year induction course, involving academic training, language training for the district to which they will be assigned—invariably a different part of India than their home—and professional training. A substantial component of the latter is experiential, involving placements in a district government, a large public sector organization or NGO, as well as time spent in a poor village and with the military on the front lines.

Throughout their careers, members of the IAS take compulsory refresher courses. After 6 to 9 years, the refresher course focuses on the skills needed to move from work in the field to more senior roles in state government. A second refresher course, after 10 years, deals with policy development at the national level for various sectors of the economy. Later courses involve self-learning, and the sharing of experiences with members of their peer group as well as junior colleagues in the IAS. Specialized training programs, for example in functional areas such as IT and human resources, are available throughout their careers.

The presentation identified a number of new trends in elite level training. These include:

A larger proportion of the entrants to the IAS are now professionals, such as engineers, doctors, and computer scientists, rather than generalists.

More open IAS training as a reflection of India's greater receptiveness to the outside world. For example, IAS officers are attending programs oriented at the private sector (MBAs) as well as programs overseas.

A move by the Shastri Academy to go beyond its traditional role training the IAS to support training throughout the entire public service, for example by

creating training software and by working with training institutes for state governments.

In contrast to India's millions of public servants and 6000 person IAS, Singapore's public service, excluding teachers, consists of only 40,000, with an administrative service of 290 officers (www.gov.sg.pmo/adminsvc/ao/home.htm). Members of the administrative service receive several months of induction training, including a two-week study trip to other ASEAN capitals. They also have postings of several weeks in MP's offices, private sector firms, unions, or NGOs. After three or four years, they attend a compulsory one-week program focusing on supervisory skills. Deputy secretaries are required to take a four-week program on policy development that emphasizes identifying and testing the assumptions underlying particular policies and anticipating the impact of socio-economic change on policies. Training continues at the senior level, with deputy secretaries taking advanced management programs overseas and permanent secretaries going on sabbaticals at pre-eminent overseas universities or research institutions.

While the Singapore public service has a strong elite training program, it also takes the view that training is necessary for all public servants and that none are too busy to train. It has established a target of 100 hours of training per year, and directed supervisors to meet annually with each of their supervisees to lay out and then revise a training road map. This approach to continuous training in the public service is consistent with Singapore's larger policy of continuous training for the entire society. Singapore has a Civil Service College, but civil servants generally are not required to attend if outside courses better meet their needs.

These three presentations provided interesting points of comparison. First, with respect to learning methodology, all three showed a preference for experiential learning over more traditional classroom approaches. For instance, trainees want to experience what it is like to live in poverty or to stand in a long queue for public services. They will then draw their own conclusions based on this direct contact. It is questionable, however, whether one particular experience is representative. Meetings with experts would offer valuable interpretation and context after the initial experiential contact.

A second common element of all three countries' programs is the influence of the world outside the public sector. All programs want to provide opportunities for trainees to see, and learn about, the private and NGO sectors. If we expect that governing will involve increasing contact and partnership with civil society, then it makes sense to provide training in both understanding and negotiating with civil society. Participants from the UK mentioned the Node Program in this context. Established approximately thirty years ago, this training program brings together a select group of high flyers from the public sector and an equal number of high flyers from the private sector. Its goal is to make contacts that will facilitate the building of bridges between the two groups.

The world outside the public sector also has an influence on the relative attractiveness of public sector jobs. In Canada, the public sector has to compete with the private sector for the best talent, not only at entry level, but also beyond. Ongoing contact between public servants and the private sector means that public servants would be employable by the private sector throughout their careers. In India, the fact that the IAS has become more attractive to graduates with technical and professional training means that these graduates will have a greater influence on the shape of India's public sector than in the past.

A third issue these programs raised is what happens after training. How do trainees take what they have learned and integrate it into their work? Seminar participants noted that if people return to the same work after training, and if the training has no influence on their work, they are likely to become frustrated. To some extent the training programs for elite public servants may avoid this problem. Because their career paths are often clear, training can always be oriented towards the next type of assignment. This is less likely to be the case, however, for other public servants.

A fourth issue raised by the discussion is the role of elitist training in the public service as a whole. All three programs are based on the assumptions that administrative talent can be identified early on, primarily on the basis of academic accomplishments and performance on examinations, and that it is this elite who will provide creativity and dynamism to the public service throughout their entire careers. As a consequence, these programs invest very heavily in lifelong training for the elite. On the other hand, more recent management theories are much less elitist. They view front-line staff as a source of ideas. They emphasize the importance of involving all staff in shaping an organization's vision, and of using training to reinforce understanding of, and commitment to, that vision. One indication that public services may simultaneously hold both views is that elite training institutions are playing larger roles in providing training for the entire public service. Thus, there is a demand for participation in Canada's Management Trainee Program by a number of functional groups within the public service. Similarly, the Shastri Academy is recognizing its responsibilities for training all public servants in India.

TRAINING FOR DIVERSITY

Many Commonwealth countries have embarked on programs to ensure that their public sectors reflect the diversity of their societies, and the seminar heard presentations about two such programs. On April 1, 1999, the Territory of Nunavut, in Canada's eastern Arctic, began operations. Nunavut, previously part of Canada's Northwest Territories, has a small and dispersed population of 27,000 living in 26 communities. Eighty-five percent of its population is Inuit. The inherited public service consisted of 1700 people, half of whom were Inuit, but

with no Inuit in managerial positions. In addition, socio-economic indicators among the Inuit are at the lowest level of the entire Canadian population.

The Nunavut government is hiring another 600 public servants, most of whom will be Inuit. Its objective, shared by the federal government, is to create a public service that is representative of the population of Nunavut. The first head of the public service is Inuit, as well as three of eleven deputy ministers. The federal government supported training efforts for this new cadre of Inuit managers. The training, delivered both onsite in the Arctic and in the Canadian Centre for Management Development in Ottawa, was intended to rapidly improve the management skills of the new Inuit managers, enabling them to perform well in the positions to which they had been appointed.

This initiative presents two paradoxes. Because the Inuit lack formal measures of achievement, such as higher education, recruitment to senior positions has been on the basis of achievements in the community, for example playing major roles in advocacy organizations. Work in the public service, however, is very different from leading an advocacy organization. Indeed, public servants must negotiate with such organizations, and will ultimately be unable to provide all they ask for. Thus, the potential for conflicts of culture and professional responsibility is evident. Additionally, government-supported training is creating a labor market for trained Inuit where none existed, and many of the Inuit trained by the government will be hired away by other employers.

The UK government established a Transitions Program for the members of the Northern Ireland Assembly elected in June 1998. The Assembly includes 108 members from 13 parties, many of whom have been bitter political enemies and none of whom have had experience in governing. The Transitions Program brought these parliamentarians into the same room for the first time to participate in a learning process. The program included such topics as the management of public spending, the relationship of the Northern Ireland Assembly to the UK and European Parliaments, and political decision-making in situations involving large minority populations. The Assembly is currently awaiting a resolution of the dispute over the decommissioning of weapons before a Cabinet can be formed.

In this context, diversity training is a vehicle for promoting dialogue and understanding among members of diverse groups. Members of the Assembly were working together on an enterprise other than the one on which they must ultimately collaborate. Training was preparation or practice for cooperation, undertaken in a low risk environment. This type of diversity training would be applicable to groups with a potential for conflict, but which realize the benefits of cooperation. Seminar participants reported on similar training exercises for ministers and senior public servants, business and government leaders, and NGO and government leaders.

Another type of diversity training allows people of diverse backgrounds to understand the organizational implications of their diversity. For example,

coworkers may not understand each others' customs and observances (ceremonial clothing, holidays, etc.). Diversity training would provide them with an opportunity to explain their cultures and religions and ultimately to make accommodations so that diversity can be respected.

Learning to recognize the latent sources of diversity in a group represents yet another form of diversity training. This involves understanding different skills or different psychological approaches to work. An example would be administering a Myers-Briggs questionnaire to all the members of a workgroup, examining the diversity of psychological profiles produced, and exploring ways by which the group can benefit from that diversity.

CONCLUSION

I have previously outlined the following key characteristics of the New Public Management (Borins, 1998).

Emphasizing the role of public managers in providing high-quality services that citizens value;

Advocating managerial autonomy, particularly by reducing central agency controls;

Demanding, measuring, and rewarding both organizational and individual performance;

Recognizing the importance of providing the human and technological resources that managers need to meet their performance targets; and

Maintaining receptivity to competition and open-mindedness about which public purposes should be performed by public servants as opposed to the private sector or NGOs.

This seminar demonstrated the relevance of the new public management to training. The new public management can be understood as an agreement between politicians and civil society, on the one hand, and the public service, on the other. Politicians and civil society are demanding a public sector that is more service-oriented and more performance-oriented. In response, they are willing to give public sector managers more autonomy and better tools to do the job. Training is an essential tool. A decade ago, observers were noting that the private sector was investing much more in training than was the public sector as measured by annual days of training per employee, for example. This seminar indicates that at least some Commonwealth governments are moving to correct this imbalance and are investing considerably more in training, even during a decade of constrained overall expenditures.

Just as the entire public sector has become more performance-oriented, public sector training has become more performance-oriented. Governments are asking whether their training dollars are being well spent. This question is being asked of participants in programs, both immediately after the program and some time after completion. Ultimately, governments want to know whether training is producing a more capable, effective, and creative public service.

Competition, the fifth element of the new public management paradigm, has also proven to be relevant to public management training. Civil service colleges do not have a monopoly on training, and public sector departments that purchase training are free to contract with outside agencies. This has led to greater responsiveness to needs on the part of both civil service colleges and outside providers.

One apparent effect of competition is the growing convergence between civil service colleges and some university-based programs on the importance of designing training in accordance with adult education principles. These include the integration of training and the workplace, the value of project and group work, the usefulness of experiential education, the importance of coaching and mentoring, and the necessity of participant involvement in assessment. The most responsive university-based programs are those based in business-schools and/or autonomous units dependent on the revenues they earn, rather than in traditional political science departments.

The discussion of training also illustrates another type of competition, namely competition between the public sector and the rest of society, in particular the private sector, for the best talent. It is indicative of the extent of this competition that, in Canada, even high-flyers may leave the public sector for more challenging careers elsewhere. Despite the pressures of competing with the rest of society for talent, the seminar recognized the importance of dialogue and greater mutual understanding between the public sector and the rest of society. Training that brings together public servants and people from the private sector and NGOs was seen as a way of fostering such dialogue.

Elitism continues to be an important issue in management education, as this seminar showed. Traditional public sector bureaucracies are steeply hierarchical. The most comprehensive training is ear-marked for those who have been identified very early as the "high flyers," expected to take the positions at the top of the hierarchy. This model also assumes that those who reach the top of the hierarchy are "perfect," needing no further training. If they are to be involved in training, it is only through mentoring of high flyers.

This model is challenged by a more egalitarian view of the public service, one in which there is much less hierarchy, and much greater recognition of the talent and creativity inherent in middle management and those at the front lines. This model advocates greater training for all public servants, regardless of rank. It appears in fact that the elite training institutions established under the hierarchical

model are now coming to play a greater role in training for the entire public service. This is due, in part, to a recognition that these organizations have capacity that can be called upon to train other trainers. It is also due to a recognition of the importance of training for all.

Consistent with this broader view of the role of public sector training institutions is a realization that they can help the entire public service become a learning organization. Agencies like the Canadian Centre for Management Development and the UK's new Centre for Policy and Management Studies are pointing the way, in that their missions include commissioning research, hosting conferences and speakers, and maintaining relationships with the academic community. In short, they are performing some of the activities traditionally associated with a university, with the public service as their client.

This article has provided a variety of perspectives on the training of public servants. It is hoped that it will challenge and stimulate the thinking of readers of this journal, in particular those based in universities who have an interest in the mid-career education of public servants.

APPENDIX: SEMINAR PARTICIPANTS

Ms. Margaret Amoroso,
Visiting Deputy Minister, The Leadership Network,
Government of Canada

Mr. A.K. Arora,
Joint Secretary (Training),
Department of Personnel and Training,
Government of India

Prof. Richard Batley,
School of Public Policy,
University of Birmingham

Prof. Sandford Borins,
Chair, Division of Management,
University of Toronto at Scarborough

Dr. Jeanine Comma,
Director, Centre for Management Development,
University of the West Indies,
Bridgetown, Barbados

Ms. Cathy Downes,
Director General, Career Development Programs,
Canadian Centre for Management Development

Mr. Gordon Draper,
Consultant, Commonwealth Secretariat,
London

Mr. Effiom Lawrence Eyo,
Chief, Division for Norms and Procedures,
Ministry of the Public Service and Administrative Reforms,
Government of Cameroon

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian,
Executive Advisor on Federal-Nunavut Relations,
Government of Canada

Mr. Edward Gretton,
International Consultant in Public Administration,
Civil Service College,
Government of the United Kingdom

Ms. Lim Soo Hoon,
Deputy Secretary, Public Service Division,
Prime Minister's Office,
Government of Singapore

Mr. Denis Ives,
Consultant and former Public Service Commissioner,
Government of Australia

Dr. Mohan Kaul,
Director General, Commonwealth Business Council,
Commonwealth Secretariat, London

Dr. Ian MacDonald,
Professor of Public Policy,
Schulich School of Business,
York University,
Toronto, Canada

Ms. Gillian Mason,
Director of Programming and Marketing,
CAPAM

Mr. Sam Mitha,
Deputy Director, Learning Strategy Division,
Civil Service Management Command, Cabinet Office,
Government of the United Kingdom

Mr. Job Mokgoro,
Director General, North West Provincial Government,
South Africa

Ms. Florence Mugasha,
Head of the Public Service and Secretary to Cabinet,
Government of Uganda

Mr. Max Mwanahiba,
Training Specialist, Management and Training Services Division,
Commonwealth Secretariat,
London

Prof. Alex Owen, Director,
International Centre for Management in Government,
Monash Mt Eliza Business School,
Monash University,
Melbourne, Australia

Ms. Annie Rubienska,
Lecturer, School of Public Policy,
University of Birmingham

The Hon. Dr. Zola Skweyiya,
Minister of Public Service and Administration,
Government of South Africa

Dr. Janet Smith,
Chair, Task Force on a Truly Representative Public Service,
Government of Canada

Ms. Manisha Sridhar,
Deputy Director (Senior),
Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration,
Government of India

Mr. Taron Sridhar,
Deputy Director (Senior),
Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration,
Government of India

Mr. Art Stevenson,
Executive Director, CAPAM

Sir Kenneth Stowe,
former Permanent Secretary for Northern Ireland and for Health,
Government of the United Kingdom

Mr. B.V.R. Subrahmaniam,
Deputy Director,
Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration,
Government of India

Dr. Philip von Brockdorff,
Director, Staff Development Organisation,
Office of the Prime Minister,
Government of Malta

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