

**Leading the Future of the Public Sector: The Third Transatlantic Dialogue
University of Delaware, Newark, Delaware, USA**

May 31–June 2, 2007

Workshop 3: Training and Developing Leaders

**Is Public Sector Leadership Distinct?
A Comparative Analysis of Core Competencies in the Senior Executive
Service**

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ABSTRACT

Following the lead of the private sector, which widely embraced the use of competency-based management in the 1990s, many governments have created their own competency models for recruiting, assessing, developing and compensating their most senior public service employees. Using a comparative case study approach (Canadian, Ontario, American and Australian Public Services), this paper will critically analyze the efficacy of using core competency models as an integral component of public sector leadership development strategies. The paper argues that effective leadership competency frameworks must be sufficiently parsimonious that they can be actually be meaningfully utilized in hiring, compensation and promotion decisions but suitably nuanced so that they recognize that leading in the public sector, while in many respects similar, is not completely analogous to leading in the private sector. In doing so, it examines the extent to which the competency models developed in these four cases effectively capture the essence of leading in the public sector by clearly establishing a distinctive public sector leadership brand.

Introduction

The federal government in Canada is confronting a severe public sector human resources challenge. Not only has working in the public sector become much more complex – with the impact of globalization, advances in information technology and the concomitant desire for greater transparency and timeliness with respect to government action, the increased horizontality of public policy issues and changing public attitudes, which tend to be quite negative and cynical – but also the public service is facing a number of new pressures that threaten its ability to fulfill its role as a “vital national institution” that can meet the needs of Canadians.¹ Specifically, the challenge is to recruit and retain the best and the brightest to work in the public sector at a time when governments are trying to hire in a much more competitive labour market, the Canadian population is becoming much more diverse and the demand for new employees with the ability to lead others, particularly at the most senior levels, is so great. For example, today the majority of federal public sector employees are over 45 years of age, whereas fifteen years ago the converse was true. The situation is equally dire at the executive level: about three quarters of all public service executives are between the ages of 45 and 59, with an average age over 50. Furthermore, nearly 20 percent of this group is currently eligible to retire.²

In response to this situation, Kevin Lynch, the current Clerk of the Privy Council, has identified leadership, along with accountability, teamwork, excellence and renewal, as the key areas requiring both immediate and long-term investments. While his predecessors also acknowledged the critical importance of recruiting and retaining as well as identifying and developing those civil servants who will comprise the public service leadership cadre of the future, the preliminary evidence suggests that Lynch has a more concrete plan for realizing that objective. At the heart of this plan is a proposed leadership framework built on four core public service leadership competencies that outline appropriate behaviours for those public servants at the supervisory level and above.

However, neither the challenges nor response identified above is unique to the federal government or to Canada more broadly. The average age of the Ontario public service (OPS) workforce, for example, is 44 years and nearly half of the senior management group (SMG) is eligible to retire within the next ten years. To exacerbate the problem, only 20 percent of OPS employees are under the age of 35, whereas the under-35 demographic comprises 37 percent of the broader provincial workforce.³ Moreover, many OECD member countries are currently grappling with similar challenges.⁴ Both Australia and the US have been equally preoccupied with maintaining high-performing public sectors, which increasingly have been seen to be dependent on robust leadership. And in each case the primary concerns have been identified: survey results of public servants that demonstrated a frustration with the existing leadership,⁵ and huge loss of expertise and talent as a result of massive impending retirements. The Australian Public Service (APS) also has an aging workforce; in June 2006, the median age for members of the senior executive service (SES) is 48 with about 43 percent being over age 50. Moreover, some 70 percent of the SES and 55 percent of the Executive Level 2 employees (the feeder group for the SES) are now at least 45 years of age and will be eligible for retirement within 10 years.⁶ The Australian Public Service Commissioner was not yet ready to label the situation a crisis in 2004, but he noted it had the potential to become one within 5-10 years if appropriate actions were not taken.⁷ Similarly, in the US the average age of members of the SES in 2004 was 52.4 of which more than 45 percent were retirement eligible.⁸ These statistics are troubling but the

human resources problem is exacerbated by the fact that the middle ranks were not seen as containing ready replacements, recruitment had become a challenge and the best new recruits were not being retained.⁹

Moreover, like the federal and Ontario governments in Canada, both the US and Australia have adopted core competency models as a means of selecting and developing senior public sector leaders. That all these governments have done so is not really that surprising given the pervasive influence of New Public Management (NPM) with its emphasis on rectifying the perceived shortcomings of public bureaucracy by adopting private sector management principles and practices. But just as some public management scholars eventually started to critically evaluate the extent to which NPM reforms are appropriate for the public sector and have actually delivered the promised results,¹⁰ so too is it important to assess whether leadership competency models are a sensible approach for identifying and developing public sector employees.

The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to critically analyze the efficacy of using core competency models as an integral component of public sector leadership development strategies. A number of key questions underpin this research, which, through an examination of the Canadian, American and Australian examples, employs a comparative case study approach. Firstly, in each case is there a sufficient uniformity in the use of these competency frameworks across the various levels of each government and, if not, is that problematic? Secondly, are these models too complex to be meaningful tools for developing and rewarding leadership in the public sector? Thirdly, even if it is acknowledged that there are benefits to adopting leadership competency models, given the fact that the identified core competencies tend to be fairly generic, do they serve to effectively capture the distinctiveness of leading in the public sector?

Despite the fact that leadership competency approaches have unmistakable benefits and will likely continue to be an important element of public sector human resources management, this paper argues that they must be utilized with caution. Effective leadership competency frameworks must be sufficiently parsimonious that they can be actually be meaningfully utilized in hiring, compensation and promotion decisions but suitably nuanced so that they recognize that leading in the public sector, while in many respects similar, is not completely analogous to leading in the private sector. In other words, the context of leading in the public sector is very different from the private sector – just as is the case with management. As such, scholars and practitioners alike must not lose sight of that fact in their quest for the holy grail of enhanced efficiency and effectiveness in the public sector. The challenge, then, is to use these competency models to effectively create a distinctive public sector leadership brand. The paper begins by surveying the evolution and perceived advantages of employing leadership competency frameworks. It then outlines the models that have been adopted in Canada (both federally and in Ontario), the US and Australia respectively, focusing on how they are being used and highlighting the key similarities and differences between them. Finally, the paper concludes with an assessment of the effectiveness of these particular public sector competency frameworks.

Impetus for Competency-Based Management in the Public Sector

As Lodge and Hood noted, “‘competency’ is a word that seems to have crept into the language of public administration and policy relatively recently.”¹¹ While there has been a debate in the literature as to whether competency-based management in the public sector is merely a fad or represents a paradigm shift,¹² this does not detract from the fact that it is a concept that has

become firmly ensconced in the theory and practice of public administration. The trend is undeniable. Competency-based management has become part of the lexicon of the public sectors in a wide range of countries, including the US, Australia, New Zealand, the UK, Germany, Belgium, The Netherlands and Canada.¹³

Like many administrative reforms over the past three decades, virtually all of these countries looked to the private sector for innovative human resource practices that could be adopted to serve the needs of their respective public services. The competency movement itself is typically traced back to the pioneering work of both David McClelland in the early 1970s as well as the work of the McBer management consultancy firm for the American Management Association, which sought to identify the attributes of successful managers.¹⁴ However, it was not until the 1990s when interest in leadership and leadership development grew that leadership competency frameworks have been in vogue throughout the private sector. Today a majority of private sector companies rely on competency models for leadership development. Notably, one study found that nearly 75 percent of all companies used competency modelling as a method of leadership development.¹⁵ Horton has attributed the ascendancy of the movement to the "...new business and human resources agenda that needs to deliver business performance in an increasingly competitive or resource limited environment. The improvement of the performance of individual managers and all employees is seen as a key factor in achieving this."¹⁶

Given the widespread adoption of competency models in the private sector, it was a natural evolution for public sector organizations in all of these countries to similarly embrace the logic of adopting competency-based management as a means of selecting suitable employees, both in terms of recruitment into the organization and promotion to the various ranks, as well as for training so as to ensure that these managers and organizational leaders were prepared for the responsibilities associated with their positions. While it may be true that a lot of what "is written and discussed about competencies today is not new" and that "much of what it [competency-based management] encompasses is not unfamiliar to those working in public sector environments,"¹⁷ NPM with its emphasis on managerialism gave rise to a number of new public service values, in particular innovation, accountability for results and leadership, all of which served to accentuate the importance of using competencies in the public sector to become a high performing organization. Many governments responded by developing initial competency models for their public sector organizations, while others, like Canada, looking to the example of many private sector companies, adopted a standard approach in the implementation of competency-based management. The intent of this approach was to base competencies on the organization's corporate culture and values; define competencies so as to enhance performance; position competency-based management as part of an overall business strategy or change process; and to integrate competencies into the broader human resource system.

The US, however, does appear to be a notable exception in this regard. Whereas most governments followed the lead of these private sector companies, the US was a clear vanguard. The reality is that the US government first implemented a series of executive core qualifications (ECQs) when the SES was created in 1979, which essentially pre-dates both the NPM revolution and the fascination with competency-based management. The US was clearly not 'catching up' to the private sector and, in fact, there were a number of antecedents which suggest that the government moved at the same time as, if not earlier, than the private sector.¹⁸

Advantages and Limitations of Competency Approaches

Competencies have been defined in many different ways in the literature, which has given rise to a great deal of confusion and misunderstanding. Having said that, definitions typically refer to the knowledge, skills, abilities and personal behaviours or characteristics that are thought to be linked to organizational objectives and producing results. Lodge and Hood identified four broad schools of thought regarding competencies; they have been variously seen as: “1) subject expertise or individual accomplishment; 2) the capacity of organizations; 3) behavioural traits associated with excellence; and 4) the minimum abilities required to tackle specified jobs.”¹⁹

For the purpose of this paper, the focus is on the broader system of competency-based management, which “involves identifying the competencies that distinguish high performers from average performers in all areas of organizational activity and using this framework as the foundation for recruitment, selection, training and development, rewards and other aspects of employee management.”²⁰ There are really three ways that the relevant organizational leadership competencies can be developed. They can be extrapolated on the basis of competencies that have been identified as being relevant in other organizational contexts; competency profiles can be created through in-house research resulting from focus groups and interviews with high performers; or a combination of the two approaches can be employed. While it is a much more time-consuming and costly option for an organization to develop its own in-house competencies, they have the advantage of being more context specific and, consequently, legitimate for the end-users. If generic external competencies are being adopted, at the very least they must be tested through a suitable validation exercise. In the cases to be examined in this paper, the tendency has been for the governments to develop their own; this is unquestionably the right approach to take since leading in the public sector is distinctive and, therefore, merits a distinctive set of competencies.

Historically, leadership competency models have been one of two types: single-job competency or one-size-fits-all. As the name suggests, in the first type of model competencies are identified for each unique position within the organization, whereas the latter type involves producing a set of competencies for a broad range of jobs, for example, senior executives. Eventually, however, a multiple-job approach to competency model building was advanced. This approach makes it possible to use both a common conceptual framework for the entire organization and to customize for specific jobs. Essentially this approach relies on the development of a series of “building block” competencies that can be used to create profiles for any job.²¹ As this paper will demonstrate, this is the model that is evolving in the governments under investigation in this comparative case study.

Given the pervasiveness and persistence of competency-based management it is obviously thought to have some unmistakable advantages for the management of human resources processes. Conger and Ready have articulated the benefits as being clarity, consistency and connectivity. By adopting competency models “organizations [can] set clear expectations about the types of behaviours, capabilities, mind-sets, and values that are important to those in leadership roles.”²² This is beneficial to employees because they see that such models contribute to a fairer and more transparent recruitment and assessment process; in addition, they serve as a useful tool that employees can use in their self-development.²³ Further, these models provide a common framework and language for discussing leadership development throughout the organization. Finally, they allow for the integration (connectivity) of a number of interrelated

human resources processes, such as performance management, compensation, recruitment, and succession planning. For the Canadian government, the benefits are perceived both narrowly and broadly: “By establishing competencies...it is possible to set standards and directions on career progression, learning strategies and succession planning – all foundational elements needed to support the renewal of the public service.”²⁴

However, it is important to note the competency-based management is not without criticism. For some, leadership models have become too complicated, conceptual and are undermined by virtue of the fact they are built on past or current realities rather than future organizational needs. “[Leadership competency models] are not flawless tools. Their tendency to become complicated rather than simplified, to portray ideals of leadership rather than realities, and to focus on today’s rather than tomorrow’s competencies all seriously work to undermine their benefits.”²⁵ No single set of characteristics is thought to adequately describe effective leaders, particularly when they are divorced from a given situation or context. It has been stated that competencies may be useful in terms of establishing minimal acceptable standards for leadership but that organizations seek leadership excellence not effective leadership.²⁶

Public Sector Leadership: The Evolution of Four Competency Models

This paper considers the competency models that have been adopted for the most senior public service leaders in Canada, the province of Ontario, Australia and the US. These cases were chosen for very different reasons. The competency model adopted by the Ontario Public Service (OPS) has been included because Canada is a federal system of government, and yet little scholarly attention is actually given to provincial administrative reforms. Ontario is the country’s largest province with a population in excess of 12 million people; it also comprises a public sector with more than 72,000 employees of whom approximately 1,800 are in the Senior Management Group (SMG) that includes Deputy Ministers (DMs), Assistant Deputy Ministers (ADMs), Directors and Senior Managers. Significantly, like the federal government, the OPS is attempting to position itself as an ‘employer of choice’ and, therefore, is an important competitor for the best and brightest employees.

Australia was chosen because it is a country that closely resembles Canada in that it too is a Westminster-style parliamentary democracy with a federal system of government. Moreover, the two countries often look to each other in terms of identifying potential public sector reforms and neither one embraced the NPM reform agenda with the same zeal as did both the UK and New Zealand.²⁷ As such, there was an expectation that public sector leadership development in the Australian Public Service (APS) would be very similar to that which has emerged in Canada. Finally, the paper examines the US, which may appear, *prima facie*, to be a less obvious comparison for Canada. After all, it uses a presidential model, which is very different from the Canadian parliamentary system of government. One obvious point of differentiation between the two systems is the fact that the American bureaucracy is highly politicized; in addition to filling appointments from the ranks of the senior executive service (SES), many appointments are overtly political. This dual structure of political positions and career positions – leading to the creation of what Ingraham and Getha-Taylor refer to as a “bifurcated ‘organization within the organization’ model”²⁸ – has important ramifications in terms of both the development of skills and competencies and succession planning within the respective systems. Nonetheless, it is virtually impossible for Canada to buffer itself from being impacted by the public sector reforms of its neighbour to the south.

One notable commonality between the four public services is the fact that they have all found it beneficial to deal with their most senior public servants as a separate entity. In Canada, this is referred to as the executive group (EX 1 to EX 5) at the federal level and the SMG in Ontario, while Australia (SES Band 1 to SES Band 3) and the US (supervisory, managerial and policy positions above GS-15), have both labelled this group the SES. In all cases these are the individuals who have the responsibility for providing government-wide leadership, direction and oversight. A particularly interesting feature of the US system is that, in order to maintain experience and continuity, a minimum of 70 percent of the SES positions must be filled with individuals who have a minimum of 5 years of current, continuous service.²⁹ Such a policy can help to alleviate fears that public service values and ethics will become diluted as more external recruits are brought into the senior levels of the public service, which is a definite fear as a country like Canada, without such a stipulation, relies more heavily outside appointments.

The absolute necessity of attracting and retaining the most effective leaders possible to fill these upper-tier positions is self-evident. Traditional models of top-down, hierarchical leadership may have been displaced in favour of more diffuse, collaborative ones, but the reality is that leadership at the most senior levels of the public service continues to be paramount. It is natural then that these governments have chosen to unveil leadership competency models to assist in the recruitment, training and development of these key individuals. The remainder of this section outlines each of the models selected for this study beginning with the one adopted by the US, which was the first jurisdiction to embrace the use of competencies.

United States

Under the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978, in July 1979 the US designated a SES in order to improve public sector management by developing highly competent individuals with “shared values, a broad perspective of government, and solid executive skills.”³⁰ In short, the aim was to foster management and leadership excellence. Coinciding with this reform initiative was the introduction of a number of so-called Executive Core Qualifications (ECQs), which ultimately “describe the leadership skills needed to succeed in the SES” and “reinforce the concept of an ‘SES corporate culture.’” From 1979 to 1994, there were 6 executive activity areas that defined the executive functions and competencies in the federal public service and the Qualifications Review Board, an independent body consisting of three existing members of the SES from different agencies that certifies the executive qualifications of aspiring entrants to the SES, required demonstrated proficiency in at least four of the six management areas.

In 1994, the Office of Personnel Management revised the ECQs, outlining five new skills required to manage programs and processes. New members of the SES had to either be fully qualified in each of the five ECQs or outline a plan for achieving competence across all areas. The important point to note is that these ECQs, while they covered essentially the same subject areas as the ones that were updated in September 1997 (and remain the core to this day), revolved around management rather than leadership competencies. Consequently, the update that occurred in 1997 was designed to shift the focus from management to leadership and the ability to drive change, which is commonly cited in the literature as being a primary task of any organizational leader. The transformation was described in the following terms: “The basic qualifications are substantially the same, but executives and executive candidates need to think and act in new ways.”³¹ Members of the SES are now expected to lead change, not just have strategic vision; lead and motivate people, not just manage human resources; produce bottom-

line results, not just ensure efficient processes; and use communication for building teams and partnerships as opposed to representing the organization.

A further refinement was made in 2006 as a result of a review of the ECQs and their related competencies: 1) there was a revision to ECQ-specific competencies; 2) some fundamental competencies were introduced into the model; 3) modified definitions of each ECQ were provided; and 4) key characteristics, which identified the activities or behaviours associated with the ECQs, were removed.³² As Appendix 1 reveals, there are still a total of five ECQs in the US model (leading change, leading people, results driven, business acumen and building coalitions), which mirror the 1997 ECQs except the final one, building coalitions, used to be referred to as “building coalitions/communications.” Furthermore, there are some 22 ECQ-specific competencies. For example, in the case of the first ECQ, leading change, the following competencies have been identified: creativity and innovation; external awareness; flexibility; resilience; strategic thinking; and vision.

The main difference is that prior to the 2006 revision, there were 27 competencies dedicated to the five specific ECQs whereas now there is a total of 28 competencies.³³ In the current model, developing others, which is one of the competencies identified for leading people, has been added as a new competency. More significantly, six of the competencies identified previously that were ECQ-specific, namely interpersonal skills, oral communication, integrity/honesty, written communication, continual learning and public service motivation, have been reclassified as fundamental competencies. The rationale for this change is that each of these six competencies is thought to be the foundation for success in all of the ECQs. Finally, it should be noted that technical expertise is not the focus of the ECQs; rather, they have been designed to ensure executive experience and potential. Each individual agency will determine whether or not a candidate is the best candidate for a particular job, while the ECQs will assess the extent to which a candidate possesses the necessary skills to perform successfully across a range of SES positions.

In terms of application, in the US example the ECQs and competencies are used across government as a critical component of an agency’s selection, development, and performance management system. They are also a critical component of training and development. Services dedicated to management and leadership needs in the US are extremely comprehensive, far more so than is possible to adequately evaluate here.³⁴ Suffice it to say, courses and development programs are offered through one of four venues: the recently established Centre for Leadership Capacity Services (CLCS) at the Office of Personnel Management head office in Washington; the Federal Executive Institute (FEI) in Virginia; or the two Management Development Centres (MDCs) in West Virginia and Colorado. The approach adopted in this particular case is worthy of emulation by governments in the other jurisdictions since all of the programs and services offered by the CLCS are firmly rooted in the ECQs and the associated leadership competencies. Too often the training programs offered by governments are not directly related to the core competency models that have been established. As the organization itself notes, “Compared to private sector training companies, we better understand government leadership training needs because we are government.”³⁵ Through participation in the various sequential leadership development programs offered by the Centre, therefore, public servants across the US government have meaningful opportunities to grow as leaders from the pre-supervisory to executive level.

A program called Leadership Succession Planning is provided at the CLCS and involves several key elements, including the two-year Presidential Management Fellows Program (PMF) for men and women with graduate degrees, the Senior PMF for those who have both a graduate degree and leadership experience and are aspiring SES candidates, and a relatively new program called the SES Federal Candidate Development Program (Fed CDP). This latter program, which is based on the five ECQs for SES entry, takes 14 months to complete. Candidates can be both internal to government (level GS-14) or external and take up an SES appointment upon completion of the program. A number of core leadership programs are also offered (see Table 1), such as the Leadership Potential Seminar (emerging leaders), Leadership for a Democratic Society, Supervisory Leadership Seminar (new supervisors), and the Seminar for New Managers (new managers) and the Management (mid-level and experience managers) and Executive Development Seminars (senior leaders and SES Fed CDP). There is a third stream of programs known as Continuing Development for Managers, Supervisors and Professionals at the MDCs, which actively promotes continuous learning; a fourth category called Continuing Development for Executives at FEI, whereby the focus is on organizational leadership, leadership performance and leadership in a global policy environment; and finally, different custom-designed services can be offered as required.

While the programs on offer are largely directed to mid-level and senior public servants, there is a course called Leadership Foundations Seminar, which takes place over 4 days and provides participants with a fundamental understanding of leadership. The aim is to develop “influential leaders regardless of position or title” and it is targeted to technical and administrative support specialists and professionals who are neither supervisors nor managers.⁹⁴ Unlike the Canadian public service, therefore, the US appears to have a program that could be characterized as truly being designed to foster leadership in all employees.

Table 1: US Office of Personnel Management Core Leadership Seminars



Canada – Federal Government

Like the US, the federal government in Canada has a long history of using competency-related concepts across various human resources processes. As has been noted elsewhere, “the need for demonstrating the defensibility of human resources practices within a merit system has always required the use of competency-related concepts.”³⁶ In the Canadian context, the public service has always relied on statements of qualifications, which are public statements about the competencies necessary for various public service jobs, because the merit system that has been fully operational since 1918 has dictated that all candidates for public service jobs must be assessed against common standards. Accordingly, public service managers have had to identify the knowledge, abilities and personal qualities for all positions on a statement of qualifications. This would ensure that the selection process awarded jobs to the most meritorious candidates.³⁷

In Canada, the use of competency measures by some federal government departments actually dates back to the 1980s and by the late 1990s the practice had become fairly widespread. In the early 1980s, for example, a manager profile was developed and then in 1990 the Profile of Public Service Leaders and Managers was implemented. A survey of 57 public sector organizations conducted by the Public Service Commission in 1998 discovered that 32 of them had already adopted some form of competency-based project. Further, that survey suggested that there was a great of interest in expanding the concept even further.³⁸ Ultimately, the Treasury Board Secretariat endorsed the use of competency-based management within the Canadian public service as long as it was done in a “consistent, thorough and fair manner in line with the unique legislative parameters of the public service and sound competency-based management practices.”³⁹

The precursor to the Key Leadership Competencies model currently being used in the federal government was La Relève Leadership Competencies, which were developed in 1997 and revised in 2001 to emphasize diversity management. La Relève, which stands for leadership, action, renewal, energy, learning, expertise, values, excellence, was a reform initiative launched by Jocelyn Bourgon, former Clerk of the Privy Council, in response to the so-called “quiet crisis” in the public sector. Bourgon believed that the potential for massive retirements in the executive group, a reality that had largely been ignored, threatened the future of the institution. In response, La Relève was presented as “our challenge, our commitment, and our duty to develop and pass on a vibrant institution staffed by highly qualified and committed professionals.”⁴⁰ The Clerk was careful to note that this challenge was the responsibility of all public servants; commitment was required from all levels of the organization, not merely executives or ‘high flyers.’ If the government intended to avoid the pitfalls of PS 2000, a previously unsuccessful reform effort, it needed to ensure that there was input, commitment and buy-in at all levels of the public service.

A total of 14 competencies separated into six clusters were identified in the La Relève Leadership Competencies model, including two intellectual competencies (cognitive capacity and creativity), one future-building competency (visioning), four management competencies (action management, organizational awareness, teamwork and partnering), two relationship competencies (interpersonal relations and communication) and five personal competencies (stamina/stress resistance, ethics and values, personality, behavioural flexibility and self-confidence). The sixth cluster was knowledge, which allowed functional community and departmental tailoring to suit their specific needs. Three to five appropriate behaviours were also listed for each of the 14 competencies. For example, for the cognitive capacity competency

ADMs were expected to exhibit the following behaviours: 1) formulate long-term (5-10 years) strategies; 2) conduct visionary analyses to compare current directions with future aspirations; and 3) deal with overarching, cross-functional domains of information to grasp the essential meaning of complex environments.⁴¹

However, for a number of reasons this particular competency-based model was ultimately replaced. First, there were concerns that it comprised too many competencies to be used effectively. Second, this model applied from the supervisor to the ADM level, but not to the DM cadre. Therefore, there was no competency profile for the government's most senior leaders, which was considered to be an important application that needed to be addressed. Finally, there was a sense that the model should make a directly link with public sector values and ethics.

As a result of these issues, in February 2004, the Committee of Senior Officials struck an advisory committee comprising members of the Public Service Human Resources Management Agency, the Public Service Commission, Privy Council Office and the Canada School of Public Service to review and revise the leadership competency profile. Several key criteria were identified for the profile update: it should adopt a common language; it was to have a simplified structure; the model should be targeted, prioritized and measurable; finally, the desire was to make it applicable in integrated human resources management.⁴²

The critical incident technique was employed in order to ascertain effective and ineffective behaviours across the leadership continuum from supervisor to manager to director to director-general to ADM to DM. Consultation and input was received at all levels, including 30 of the 32 DMs. The support of this group was particularly important because if the target group does not recognize the profile it will not be meaningful.

In October of 2004, the Committee of Senior Officials endorsed the Key Leadership Competency model. Clearly cognizant of the priorities and direction that it had been given, the advisory committee produced an elegant new model. It is described in the following terms: "From a foundation of values and ethics, public service leaders deliver results through strategic thinking, engagement and management excellence."⁴³ Instead of 14 competencies, the new model, as outlined in Appendix 1, had a simplified list of four required competencies (values and ethics, strategic thinking, engagement and management excellence), each with their own specific effective behaviours across the six levels of the leadership continuum – DM, ADM, Director General (DG), Director, Manager and Supervisor. For the first time, it also identified a list of ineffective behaviours for leaders at all levels of the public service. This can be considered to be one of the key strengths of the new model as well as the fact that financial management, a competency that was only weakly represented in the La Relève Leadership Competencies model as part of the action management competency, has been given greater prominence.

The intention is that the Canadian variant of competency-based management will apply to a number of other human resource management systems; this would include job classification, resourcing, performance management, learning and development, awards and recognition and human resource planning. According to the Treasury Board Secretariat: "It is virtually impossible to have a meaningful competency-based management system in the absence of a meaningful job analysis and evaluation system."⁴⁴ The reality is that in Canada the human resource management regime is very much position-based, which dates back to the classification exercise of 1919 when all public service jobs were first systematically described and classified. This process of matching individuals with the relevant skills and qualifications to the appropriate position is clearly amenable to the adoption of a competency framework. In fact, a deputy head

or his or her delegate has the authority to enhance a position’s statement of qualifications with competencies as the basis for assessment and selection. Competency-based management can also be used for human resources planning by identifying organizational strengths and skills deficiencies that need to be overcome. Furthermore, it has become an integral component of both the performance management and competency frameworks of the executive group.

With respect to training and development, the federal government has been positioning itself as a learning organization for more than a decade. This trend was formalized in May 2002 when the government formally adopted *A Policy on Continuous Learning for the Public Service of Canada*, which placed the onus for learning on all members of the public service.⁴⁵ The acquisition and enhancement of competencies, therefore, can be built into individual learning plans. Similar to the US, Canada offers a wide range of centralized training and development opportunities through the Public Service Human Resources Management Agency of Canada (PSHRMAC), specifically The Leadership Network, one of PSHRMAC’s key business lines, and its portfolio partner, the Canada School of Public Service, which supports the common learning and development needs of the public service by developing, updating and delivering the relevant learning content. As Table 2 demonstrates, public servants in Canada have access to a number of highly specialized leadership development programs. All of the development programs have been revised to build on the leadership competency profile and efforts are being made to work with the Canada School of Public Service to ensure that its other course offerings actually do develop the relevant competencies.

Table 2: Leadership Development Programs in the Canadian Public Service

Advanced Leadership Program	ADM Level
Accelerated Executive Development Program (EX-01 – EX-03) Interchange Canada Executive Leadership Program (Public Service Foundations)	Executive Level
Career Assignment Program Direxion Middle Managers Orientation Program (Public Service Foundations)	Manager Level
Management Trainee Program Advanced Economist Trainee Program Supervisors Orientation Program (Public Service Foundations)	

Australia

Australia initiated its own version of the SES in 1984; it too was focused on the development of managerial skills, but the intent was also to create an executive group that would be internally mobile and infused with new members from outside government.⁴⁶ As is the case elsewhere, the expectations placed on this particular group of public sector leaders are formidable. Members of the SES are relied upon to serve their ministers with dedication; understand the legislative, ethical and regulatory frameworks that govern their actions; model the values of the APS; achieve results; contribute to their agency's corporate strategy; manage stakeholder relationships; and build networks to achieve better outcomes. Not surprisingly, then, there is a need for this group to provide cohesion to the broader APS. That being the case, there is an expectation that all senior executives will "exhibit common capabilities, share common values, common ethical standards and a common commitment to development and collaboration."⁴⁷

Competency-based management has proven to be useful in this regard and its adoption in the APS has followed a similar pattern to Canada. While the APS took this approach much more seriously towards the late 1990s, the use of competencies actually had made headway a decade earlier. Dixon noted that "by the end of the 1980s it was broadly accepted within the APS that the correct management development path to follow to prepare civil servants for management roles was the competence-based approach..."⁴⁸ A series of 7 critical competencies were thought to be successful middle management job performance: apply knowledge of the APS and agency context at work; plan for results; lead and develop people; interact with people; manage resources; manage change; and manage own performance.

But while there is little doubt that the introduction of the SES was a milestone in the evolution of the APS, it did not really take leadership development seriously until the introduction of the *Public Service Act, 1999*. With the implementation of this legislation, the Public Service Commissioner was formally given responsibilities for fostering leadership, coordinating training across the APS, career development and promoting public service values. It was that same year that the Senior Executive Leadership Capability (SELC) Framework was unveiled to be used as the common selection criteria for the leadership abilities deemed essential for admittance into the SES. SELC was revalidated in 2001 and most departmental secretaries chose to retain the framework without modification.

As outlined in Appendix 1, SELC essentially identified 5 core capability clusters that have been deemed to be critical for successful performance as an APS leader, which are quite comparable to the four core competencies identified for the Canadian public service and the 5 ECQs that buttress the US model of leadership development. Candidates for the SES, therefore, are assessed against the following criteria: 1) shapes strategic thinking; 2) achieves results; 3) exemplifies personal drive and integrity; 4) cultivates productive working relationships; and 5) communicates with influence. This framework also includes a total of 22 specific competencies with 3 to 5 behavioural indicators specified for each one. It is noteworthy that these 22 capabilities listed under the 5 clusters are not considered to be additional criteria that must be satisfied before an appointment can be made. Selection advisory committees are directed to assess candidates "against the selection criteria, taking account of particular capabilities where they have been identified as relevant to the duties being filled."⁴⁹ Furthermore, as long as the Commissioner approves, agencies are allowed to include other selection criteria to address special requirements for particular SES vacancies. The reality, however, is that very few requests

are made. For example, in the last 6 months of 2004 only 24 such requests were made, which is why a change was made in early December 2004 to allow agencies to add one extra selection criterion without seeking approval from the Commissioner.⁵⁰

More recently, there have been two significant modifications to this particular competency framework. The first was that the SELC framework was expanded in 2004 to include the non-SES employees by developing the Integrated Leadership System (ILS). With this modification, the so-called “leadership development path” is now applicable for all public servants employed at Executive Level 1 through to SES Band 3, although it must be noted that the this system is not mandatory for agencies of the APS.⁵¹ As a result, the core capability clusters that have been outlined for the SES now cascade down to the executive level. In essence, the difference between the SELC framework and the ILS lies in the behavioural indicators for each cluster. In some cases these indicators are quite subtle, while in others they are more pronounced. Generally, the most significant distinctions in the identified behaviours reside in the shapes strategic thinking, achieves results and cultivates productive working relationships clusters. The second notable reform initiative is that efforts are underway to develop the ILS model even further so that it is applicable to those at lower levels of the public service (APS level).⁵²

Interestingly, the ILS is not considered to be a traditional leadership model in that it “balances the relationship between leadership, management and technical skills in public service careers.”⁵³ Andrew Podger, the former Australian Public Service Commissioner, described the challenge in the following terms:

...‘leadership’ also runs the risk of being too rhetorical, rather than hard-nosed, and of being ‘faddish’ rather than real. Therefore, we have tried to emphasize the hard management skills such as financial management, project management, corporate planning and risk management that are built into the framework. Again, we are trying to strike a balance, and to emphasize that leadership is absolutely essential – but alone it is not enough.⁵⁴

In this model, then, all APS leaders are thought to possess technical competence, management expertise and leadership capabilities, but the exact balance will vary according to an individual’s seniority. For example, technical skills tend to be greater at the lower levels of the service where there is little room for leadership, while the converse is true for members of the SES.

A number of potential applications have been identified for the competency model adopted in Australia, some of which are clearly identifiable while others remain somewhat vague.⁵⁵ The first obvious one would be for selection. Since 1999, the SELC framework has been the selection criteria for entry into the SES, both for the Senior Executive and Senior Executive (Specialist) classifications. As noted above, although the ILS builds on these SES core competencies for members at the Executive Level (EL 1 and EL 2), there is no requirement that agencies actually use them in their hiring decisions. Performance management, short- and long-term planning for the SES and broader organizational development initiatives were other applications listed, but it is unclear how competencies are specifically utilized in those instances. For example, it is not known whether the pay of members of the SES is specifically tied to performance with respect to the various competencies.

Finally, leadership development is an area where these competencies are being applied at least to some extent. It is the Programmes Group within the Public Service Commission that oversees the complement of leadership, learning, and development activities created for all

Australian public servants, including the SES.⁵⁶ This division assumes responsibility for the Integrated Leadership System as well as a range of development programs specifically targeted to the different levels of the public service – APS 1-6; Executive Level; SES; and Graduates. Although the APS seemingly offers an equally broad range of segmented programs as are provided by the both Canadian and US public services, they do not appear to have the same breadth or depth of learning associated with them. For example, Leadership Mastery, a residential program for the SES Band 3 group, the highest ranking officials in the APS, is described as a “highly challenging simulation” to test their abilities to forge collaborative relationships and receive results.⁵⁷ But it is merely a three day exercise. As such, it hardly compares with either the AEXDP in Canada or the SES Fed CDP for senior public servants in the US. Both the SES Leadership Development Programs and the Career Development Assessment Centre explicitly link the program curricula to the SELC framework, but the other programs available for Australian public servants do not. Whether they make a similar connection to the competency clusters is difficult to gauge.

Canada – Government of Ontario

While the concept of competencies is not new to the OPS, it has relatively less experience with this type of approach than the other jurisdictions examined in this paper. A formal competency approach involving 15 corporate core competencies for the SMG was first introduced by the government’s Centre for Leadership in 1997. Five competencies were identified for the SMG 1 group (innovates, builds networks, negotiates/resolves conflict, plans and achieves 1 year operational goals, makes operational decisions), an additional five for the SMG 2 (Director level) group (leads change and organization management, conceptualizes 1-3 year future for organizational unit, communicates and influences stakeholders, influences policy process and outcomes, political acuity) and a final five competencies for the SMG 3 (ADM level) group (champions best model of delivery, manages medium-term risk, synchronizes goals and resources to achieve short and medium-term objectives, communicates strategically, zooms in, out and across). As was the case with the Canadian federal government’s model, this one did not apply to either the Associate DM or DM levels. In addition to these competencies, there was a separate model comprising 8 competencies for the Management Compensation Plan (MCP) managers: communications planning and management; customer service orientation; drive to deliver results; financial management; human resources management; leadership; networking; planning, organizing and coordinating. There was also something called the OPS Competency Dictionary that was used for staff-level positions.⁵⁸

Both the SMG and the MCP competency profiles were revised in 2005 in response to requests from OPS managers who wanted updated leadership competencies to reflect the current reality of managing and leading in the public sector. As a result, the government unveiled a new OPS Leader-Manager Competency Model that serves as an integral component of the its overall approach to talent management, which is defined as “an ongoing process of systematically identifying, acquiring, and developing talent in order to ensure that capability for all key positions continues to be available and developed.”⁵⁹ In common with these other jurisdictions, therefore, the OPS is currently focused on implementing a strategy for attracting, recruiting and retaining the human capital it needs to be a modern public service, one that emphasizes the provision of quality public services.

Three reasons have been offered to explain why the leader-manager competencies were amended. First, it was felt that it was too difficult to remember 15 distinct competencies; a simpler model was required, one that demonstrated a much clearer progression of skills, knowledge and behaviours throughout the organizational hierarchy. Second, the previous model focused too much on results and deliverables, ignoring how those results were achieved through people within the public service. Third, there was a desire to accentuate the fact that leadership occurs at all levels within the OPS.

With the four simple competencies of delivers, transforms, inspires and connects (see Appendix 1), the new model has been designed to “integrate task-based capabilities with a people focus.”⁶⁰ In common with the Australian ILS, the OPS model has been designed to fuse both managerial and leadership skills. There is a recognition that “all levels of management must excel at both managing and leading” so the current strategy intends to “strengthen and enhance the management group into a leader-manager force.”⁶¹

Each of the four competencies that comprise this model is listed on a leadership continuum from practitioner (those who contribute) to champion (those who lead the organization and public service – in short, those at the ADM and DM level) with those who manage and those who lead other leader-managers as the levels in between. At each level of the continuum there are anywhere from 2-5 appropriate behaviours listed. As one moves up the hierarchy to more senior and complex roles there is an increasing emphasis on strategic abilities. Underpinning these four competencies are two fundamental personal attributes that are considered essential for dynamic leadership: self-awareness and integrity. In the first instance, OPS leaders are expected to be both aware of their leadership practices and cognizant of how their emotions affect the behaviour of others – essentially they need to possess emotional intelligence (EQ); in the case of integrity, public servants are to hold themselves to the highest level of accountability and to act in ways that support the values, principles and professional standards of the OPS.

It is envisioned that this particular model will be used in numerous ways to support the human resources function. As outlined earlier, the competencies will be used as part of the talent management strategy. In this context, talent will be assessed annually based on three key criteria: 1) employee performance (outstanding, fully effective, conditional achievement or requires significant performance management); 2) willingness to assume greater responsibility (employee is willing to assume a new role and the OPS has the capacity to accommodate that desire); and 3) readiness (promotion priority – 3-6 months, promote with development – within 24 months, contribute in current level). This latter determination would be made on the basis of demonstrated success with the competency profile. A critical element in this process is the employee learning plan.⁶² Competencies will also be an important component of the recruitment process for hires to the OPS. Prospective candidates will be assessed against the leader-manager competency requirements that have been identified for a position. Similarly, competencies can be integrated into both performance management and learning and development initiatives. In the first instance, competency language will be incorporated into the development of performance measures while in the case of learning and development these competencies can help determine the courses and development programs that employees identify as part of their learning plans.⁶³

In 2005, four separate corporate training offices in the OPS were amalgamated to create one new organization called OPS Learning and Development. It now has responsibility for a number of functions: the governance of learning across the OPS; the determination of corporate

priority learning areas; content alignment; and the quality of curriculum design. While corporate learning and development programs are now offered centrally, individual ministries still provide their own technical or ministry-specific training for staff. There are several leadership programs available to OPS leaders at various levels. A new program called Management Foundations, intended for managers and supervisors, was offered as a pilot project in 2006. Leadership Orientation is a 4 day residential program that focuses on leadership; it is intended for senior managers and directors. There is a program for ‘high potential’ employees called LEADS (Leadership Education and Development School), which is offered as four sessions per year. The focus is to broaden senior managers to develop leadership, high level change, transformation and strategic management skills and networking opportunities. Approximately 30 Directors per year also benefit from external executive programs offered through universities and the Niagara Institute, a private training facility. Another program piloted in 2006 was DM Orientation, which was designed for newly appointed DMs from inside and outside the public service. It was primarily intended to provide networking and mentoring opportunities. At this point, there is little indication that any of these programs effectively integrate the OPS competency model.

Assessing the Models – A Distinctive Public Sector Leadership ‘Brand’?

One of the questions outlined in the introduction to this paper was whether the competency models that have been adopted by the public sector in various jurisdictions are actually distinct from the ones used by private sector organizations. In other words, to what extent have these governments been able to brand their leadership, that is to say create a “distinct leadership culture that permeates the entire organization?”⁶⁴ Distinctiveness can be understood, firstly, between different public sector jurisdictions themselves and, more importantly, as a point of differentiation between leadership in the public and private sectors. While some might argue that there is little need for each public sector to have branded leadership given the similar role that they fulfill, surely it is absolutely critical for leadership in the public sector as a whole to have a distinct brand when compared with private sector organizations.

The reality is that despite the fact that it is possible to identify a series of general management functions that are common to both the public and private sectors, a compelling argument has been advanced that these functions “take on rather different meaning in public and private settings” and that “public and private management are at least as different as they are similar, and that the differences are more important than the similarities.”⁶⁵ Contrary to the view of Kellerman and Webster, who argued that “the differences generally do not outweigh the similarities,” this could have just as easily been written about public and private sector leadership.⁶⁶ Based on a survey of public and private sector leaders in May-June 2006 conducted by the Public Policy Forum there is certainly palpable dissonance between leaders in the public and private sector with respect to the skills of leaders in both realms. While the vast majority of private sector leaders surveyed (92 percent) believed that the public sector should adopt leadership skills similar to the private sector, only 43 percent of their public sector leader counterparts concurred.⁶⁷ Furthermore, members of the Commonwealth Association for Public Administration and Management have similarly suggested that there are real and important differences between public and private sector leadership: “the breadth of competencies required in the public sector is different from that required in the private sector. Specifically, public servants require more than technical skills; they require a broad spectrum of knowledge, skills

and abilities, plus a firm grounding in public sector values and ethics.”⁶⁸ The imperative for building a public leadership brand, therefore, is persuasive.

Therefore, the challenge is to actually do so. At first blush, however, none of them overtly appear to have created a set of competencies geared exclusively for leaders in the public sector. On the basis of the competencies that have been outlined for each model, it would be very easy to assume that these were competency-based management frameworks for private sector organizations. That should not be completely unexpected given that these elements were typically identified on the basis of extensive research on the successful attributes of leaders in both the public and private sectors. More importantly, there are relevant points of convergence between the prerequisites for effective leadership in the public and private sectors. Specifically, leaders in both arenas need to be adept at ‘big picture,’ or strategic thinking; they are also be skilled at aligning people, work and systems in pursuit of that strategy; and they have mastered the art of affecting real change that maximizes results. Ultimately, leaders in both sectors are striving to achieve management excellence for their respective organizations. Given these commonalities, one would expect to see some overlap in the leadership competencies identified for senior executives.

The question that remains to be answered is whether there is a discernable public sector leadership brand. An absence of one would not be unusual given that Intagliata and his colleagues discovered that while many organizations have adopted leadership competency models, very few have actually been able to create a distinctive leadership brand. However, there is perhaps no greater need for one than in the public sector. Ultimately, they argued several elements are critical to successfully realizing that end result. First, the competency model must reflect the organization’s current business strategy as well as its core capabilities and values. As discussed further below, in the context of the public sector the importance of values cannot be overstated. Second, the competency model that contributes to branded leadership should not only identify a limited number of core competencies (usually 6-8 of them) for all employees in the organization, from individual contributor to CEO, but also each competency must clearly distinguish expectations according to the demands of the various roles in the organization.⁶⁹

Measured against the second of these criteria, the Canadian and OPS competency models must be assessed favourably. Although both jurisdictions at one time had adopted models that were much more complex with 14 and 15 core competencies respectively,⁷⁰ recent human resources reforms have resulted in models that are much more succinct. While both models currently apply only to the middle and upper echelons of the public service, the federal government is in the process of expanding the model to include the individual contributor level while it is the intention of the OPS to do so eventually as well. In each instance, the behaviours associated with each competency build on each other throughout the organizational hierarchy. As noted earlier, Australia is perhaps the frontrunner in this regard and will unveil an expanded ILS framework that includes the entire public service this year. It too has a model that distinguishes effective behaviours at the different levels.

However, this latter model is not without its limitations. Although Australia with 5 capability clusters and the US with its 5 ECQs appear to have equally parsimonious models, the former is built upon 22 competencies while the latter relies on 28 competencies, 6 of which are considered fundamental and bridge all of the ECQs. The complexity of these models is palpable. Consider, for example, that the document outlining Australia’s ILS is 111 pages in length. It is difficult to imagine that such an unwieldy document is effectively employed on a day-to-day

basis. The one redeeming feature of this model, as noted earlier, is that appointments are made on the basis of demonstrated capability in the five clusters more broadly rather than all of the 22 specific competencies. But another limitation of the Australian ILS is that beyond appointment to the SES, the use of the competencies is optional and in 2005-2006 some 45 percent of agencies reported not using the ILS at all.⁷¹ Of all the models examined in this paper, the US one relies on the greatest number of competencies. Ingraham and Getha-Taylor, in their assessment of the US experience, concluded: “Existing notions of competencies – for the political appointees; the leadership echelons of the career service; the rest of the career service; the entire government; central agencies; individual agencies; and badly needed future leaders – not only suggest superhuman abilities, but also contain seriously conflicting expectations.”⁷²

The other measure for developing a distinctive leadership brand is to ensure the competency model reflects the organization’s current strategy as well as its core capabilities and values. Competencies, therefore, must reflect where government is headed, not what was required in the past for success, which is a commonly cited weakness of many such models.⁷³ All of the four competency frameworks examined in this paper fare reasonably well in this regard. This is not really that surprising given that they have all been revised within the past three years and, as such, would have been reviewed with an eye to incorporating the governments’ ongoing priorities and leadership challenges. In particular, with the retrenchment of the state under the NPM paradigm governments have been moving towards a governance model whereby other departments, other levels of government as well as private and non-profit sector partners are being relied upon to deliver programs and services to citizens. This trend is known as ‘horizontal management’ or ‘governing by network’ and the expectation is that, if anything, governments will rely increasingly on this approach in future.⁷⁴ A particular skill set will be required to operate effectively in this environment and it appears as though each model has identified a core competency that addresses this issue (connects in the case of the OPS; engagement for the federal government; cultivates productive working relationships in the APS ILS; and building coalitions in the US model).

Of some concern is the extent to which these competency models actually reflect all of the four governments’ respective core capabilities and values. Both of these elements are either downplayed or non-existent in these models. What is missing is an overt expression of the core function of the public sector, which is to serve the public interest. This can occur in many ways, but the provision of a wide range of high quality services to citizens is clearly a central component. Even though governments have embraced business principles to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the public sector, it is essential that we do not lose sight of the fact that much of what governments do is not amenable to the bottom-line profit considerations that drive private sector organizations. An effective competency model should probably in some way reflect that fact.

The other critical aspect of any well constructed competency model for this sector is the unique values and ethics that sustain the public sector. To some extent shared values and ethics as a means of building organizational commitment is a competency that outstanding public and private sector leaders have in common.⁷⁵ However, in the public sector, values and ethics are much more encompassing than in the private sector, which add a degree of complexity. Ingraham and Gertha-Taylor have written that “the most serious deficiency is the failure of most competency frameworks to focus on the ethical and moral dimensions of public work.”⁷⁶ While there are tangible elements of the distinct public sector values and ethics present in each of the

four cases examined in this paper, the Canadian model is perhaps the best exemplar in that respect. There is no mistaking the importance of values and ethics in that model, because it is listed as one of the four key competencies. Moreover, this is reinforced in the construction of the model since values and ethics are specified as the foundation upon which the other three competencies are built.

For the Canadian public service, the core public service values have been separated into four overlapping and inter-related categories: democratic values, professional values, ethical values and people values.⁷⁷ Democratic values refer to anonymity and accountability, due process, loyalty, the rule of law and the public interest, which are generally not part of the lexicon of private sector organizations. Even accountability, a concept that is common to both sectors, is much more intricate in the public sector than it is in the private sector. This stems from the fact that accountability in its various forms is absolutely critical to the exercise of legitimate power in any democratic government. First, accountability can be understood as the relationship between the public and the elected government. In essence, this is accountability as ensured through the democratic process and includes the rules set out in the constitution, electoral procedures, parliamentary procedures and rules of order, ministerial responsibility, the role of the opposition parties and parliamentary committees. Second, accountability can be understood in terms of an individual department and its head, the DM. The accountability of DMs has taken on renewed importance in recent years with the dilution of ministerial responsibility, but it is a very nebulous form of accountability. DMs are potentially accountable to several individuals or institutions: to the prime minister who appointed them; the minister who heads the department; the Clerk of the Privy Council; and a variety of central agencies such as the Treasury Board and the Public Service Commission. Third, accountability can be framed in the context of the hierarchy of the department. Officials below the level of DM clearly must be accountable for their performance.

Excellence, professional competence, continuous improvement, merit, effectiveness, economy, frankness, objectivity and impartiality in advice, and speaking truth to power were considered to be the professional values of the public service. Again, many of these values have little in common with those exhibited by professionals in the private sector. These values were differentiated from the new or emerging professional values (quality, innovation, initiative, creativity, resourcefulness, service to clients, partnership, and teamwork), which are heavily inspired by professional values of private sector employees.

Under the umbrella of ethical values are, among others, the values of integrity, honesty, impartiality, probity, prudence, fairness, and equity. These ethical values are quite similar to the ones one would expect to find endorsed and promoted by any professional body. What makes these values unique in the context of the professional public service, however, is that public servants must display complete integrity to uphold the public trust that has been placed in them as part of this institution. All of the actions of the public servant must elevate the common good above that of any private interest or advantage.

The final category of values, which has not received much attention in the literature, is dubbed people values. These are values such as courage, moderation, decency, responsibility, reasonableness; they also include a host of values that should guide public servants in their interactions with others, be they co-workers, parliamentarians or citizens: respect, civility, tolerance, benevolence, courtesy, openness, collegiality, and caring. Like the ethical values,

people values are not unique to the public sector. What makes them distinctive is the way in which these values intersect with democratic and professional values.

As noted above, each of the other three models does include at least some mention of public sector values and ethics, but this aspect of each approach is less than adequate. In the case of Australia, despite a conscious effort to develop a model that "...reflects a symbiotic relationship between leadership, management and technical skills," which suggests a much more market compatible approach to leadership, the Commissioner noted that APS values are firmly embedded in the model.⁷⁸ More specifically, one of the clusters in the Australian model is 'exemplifies personal drive and integrity' and includes 'demonstrates public service, professionalism and probity' as one of the relevant competencies. One of the two fundamental personal attributes buttressing the Ontario model is integrity and the 'inspires' competency involves having public sector leaders communicates the values of the OPS. Finally, one of the six fundamental competencies in the US ECQ model is 'integrity/honesty.' The problem, however, is that the full range of public sector values and ethics are not fully captured in any of these constructs.

Conclusion

Organizations, both private and public, have utilized individual competencies and competency models for roughly two decades and the evidence overwhelmingly indicates that competency-based management is firmly entrenched in their human resources systems. As Conger and Ready concluded, "Leadership competency models are here to stay."⁷⁹ While a number of limitations of this approach have been cited in the literature, the fact remains that competencies can be useful even if to date they have not necessarily been used to their full advantage. But it is important to keep perspective. Governments that have embraced the use of competency models must be realistic in terms of what they can accomplish with respect to public sector renewal and leadership development. They are not the holy grail of public sector leadership development; at the end of the day, they are but one tool available to governments for addressing the significant human resources challenges that they face. Governments need to spend as much time implementing, utilizing and supporting the competency models as it spent to develop them in the first place. Furthermore, they need to be evaluated so as to be able to determine whether or not they are actually working because "despite significant investments made by organizations in competency frameworks, they have not always produced the expected outcomes."⁸⁰

This paper concludes where it began – with a discussion of the human resources challenge confronting the public sector. In the most recent reports on the state of the public service in both Canada and Australia, the Clerk and Public Service Commissioner identified the need to position their respective public services as a "career of choice" in the minds of young people.⁸¹ In noting this need, Kevin Lynch actually stated that successful recruitment required effective "branding." It was an interesting choice of language to describe this challenge, one that corresponds nicely with the argument advanced in this paper. To be truly effective, competency models must actually serve to develop a distinctive public sector leadership brand. Relying on generic competencies that seemingly capture the essence of leading in both the public and private sector is misguided. Irrespective of the trend towards managerialism in the public sector, neither public sector management nor public sector leadership is completely analogous to that which is

found in the private sector. Public sector leadership is distinct; it is imperative that we remain cognizant of its uniqueness and recruit and develop our leadership cadre accordingly.

Appendix 1: Leadership Core Competencies for Senior Public Service Employees

CANADA		AUSTRALIA	UNITED STATES
ONTARIO Leader- Manager Competency Model (2005)	FEDERAL Key Leadership Competencies Model (2004)	Senior Executive Leadership Capability (SELC) Framework (2001) & Integrated Leadership System (ILS) (2004)	Executive Core Qualifications (2006)
Transforms (Transforms the OPS to maximize our investments and meet the changing demands of internal and external clients, stakeholders and the public)	Strategic Thinking (Innovating through analysis & ideas)	Shapes Strategic Thinking (Inspires a Sense of Purpose & Direction; Focuses Strategically; Harnesses Information & Opportunities; Shows Judgment; Intelligence & Common Sense)	Leading Change (Creativity & Innovation; External Awareness; Flexibility; Resilience; Strategic Thinking; Vision) Fundamental Competencies
Connects (Builds successful relationships with individuals, staff, teams, stakeholders and partners)	Engagement (Mobilizing people, organizations and partners)	Cultivates Productive Working Relationships (Nurtures Internal & External Relationships; Facilitates Cooperation & Partnerships; Values Individual Differences & Diversity; Guides, Mentors & Develops People)	Building Coalitions (Partnering; Political Savvy; Influencing/Negotiating) Fundamental Competencies
Delivers (Delivers excellent results for the OPS and is accountable)	Management Excellence (Delivering through action management, people management and financial management)	Achieves Results (Builds Organizational Capacity & Responsiveness; Marshals Professional Expertise; Steers & Implements Change & Deals with Uncertainty; Ensures Closure & Delivers on Intended Results)	Results Driven (Accountability; Customer Service; Decisiveness; Entrepreneurship; Problem-Solving; Technical Credibility) Fundamental Competencies
Inspires (Communicates the vision and values of the OPS, gaining consensus and motivating people to action)	Values and Ethics (Serving with integrity & respect)	Exemplifies Personal Drive and Integrity (Demonstrates Public Service, Professionalism & Probity; Engages with Risk & Shows Personal Courage; Commits to Action; Displays Resilience; Demonstrates Self-Awareness & a Commitment to Personal Development)	Leading People (Conflict Management; Leveraging Diversity; Developing Others; Team Building) Fundamental Competencies
		Communicates with Influence (Communicates Clearly; Listens, Understands & Adapts to Audience; Negotiates Persuasively)	Business Acumen (Financial Management; Human Capital Management; Technology Management) Fundamental Competencies
***Fundamental Personal Attributes self-awareness, integrity			***Fundamental Competencies interpersonal skills, oral communication, integrity/honesty, written communication, continual learning and public service motivation

(Source: Ontario 2006; US OPM, 2006; Canada TLN, [2005]; Australia APSC, 2004.)

Endnotes

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⁵ Patricia Wallace Ingraham and Heather Getha-Taylor. “Leadership in the Public Sector: Models and Assumptions for Leadership Development in the Federal Government” in *Review of Public Personnel Administration*. 24, 2, June 2004, 95-112.; Andrew Korac-Kakabadse and Nada Korac-Kakabadse. “Best Practice in the Australian Public Service: An Examination of Discretionary Leadership” in *Journal of Managerial Psychology*. 12, 7, 1997, 433-491.

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⁷ A.S. Podger. “Innovation with Integrity – the Public Sector Leadership Imperative to 2020” in *Australian Journal of Public Administration*. 63, 1, March 2004, p.14.

⁸ United States. Office of Personnel Management. *Federal Civilian Workforce Statistics: The Fact Book, 2005 Edition*. February 2006, p.72.

⁹ United States. National Commission on the Public Service. “Business for America: Revitalizing the Federal Government for the 21st Century” in Robert Klitgaard and Paul C. Light, Editors. *High Performance Government: Structure, Leadership, Incentives*. (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2005), p.21. This is also referred to as the Volker Commission.

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- ³⁴ For a comprehensive list and description of these various programs, see United States. Office of Personnel Management. *Leadership Guide: FY 2005*. (Washington: Centre for Leadership Capacity Service, 2004).
- ³⁵ United States. Office of Personnel Management. www.leadership.opm.gov/AboutUs/LeadershipJourney/index.aspx.
- ³⁶ Bonder, 1999, p.9.
- ³⁷ Recent changes to the *Public Service Employment Act* have resulted in a more liberal interpretation of merit. Rather than hiring the highest rank-ordered candidate for a job, public sector managers can now hire anyone as long as they meet the essential qualifications of the job.
- ³⁸ Canada, Treasury Board Secretariat, 1999, p.7.
- ³⁹ Canada, Treasury Board Secretariat, 1999, p.6.
- ⁴⁰ Canada. Clerk of the Privy Council and Secretary to the Cabinet. *Fourth Annual Report to the Prime Minister on the Public Service of Canada*, 1996, chapter 6.
- ⁴¹ See Canada. Public Service Human Resources Management Agency of Canada. "Competencies." Available online at www.hrma-agrh.gc.ca/mtp-psg/competencies_e.asp?printable=True.
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- ⁴⁴ Canada, Treasury Board Secretariat, 1999, p.28.
- ⁴⁵ Evert Lindquist and Gilles Paquet. "Government Restructuring and the Federal Public Service: The Search for a New Cosmology" in Evert Lindquist, Editor. *Government Restructuring and Career Public Services*. (Toronto: IPAC), 2000, p.94.
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- ⁴⁹ Australia. Public Service & Merit Protection Commission. *The Senior Executive Service*. 2001, p.19.
- ⁵⁰ Australia. Australian Public Service Commission. *State of the Services Report, 2004-2005*. 2005, chapter 10.
- ⁵¹ Australia. Australian Public Service Commission. *The Integrated Leadership System*. 2004.
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- ⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.4.
- ⁵⁴ Podger, 2004, p.17.
- ⁵⁵ Australia. Australian Public Service Commission. *Developing Leadership: Who? What? Where?* November 2003, p.1.
- ⁵⁶ Australia. Australian Public Service Commission. “About Us – The Organization.” Available online at <http://www.apsc.gov.au/about/introus.htm>.
- ⁵⁷ Australia. Australian Public Service Commission. “SES Residential Programs.” Available online at www.apsc.gov.au/seslearn/sesresid.htm.
- ⁵⁸ Lynda Shephard. *The Ontario Public Service Leader-Manager Competency Model*. Powerpoint presentation, 2006.
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- ⁶¹ Ontario, [2005], p.26, p.9.
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- ⁶⁴ Jim Intagliata, Dave Ulrich and Norm Smallwood. “Leveraging Leadership Competencies to Produce Leadership Brand: Creating Distinctiveness by Focusing on Strategy and Results” in *Human Resource Planning*. 23, 3, 2000, p.13.
- ⁶⁵ Graham T. Allison. “Public and Private Management: Are They Fundamentally Alike in All Unimportant Respects?” in Jay M. Shafritz and Albert C. Hyde. *Classics of Public Administration*. (Toronto: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1997), p.386, p.397. See also, Mirko Noordegraaf. “Professional Sense-Makers: Managerial Competencies Amidst Ambiguity” in *The International Journal of Public Sector Management*. 13, 4, 2000, 319-332, for an interesting discussion of the work of public sector managers.
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⁶⁷ Public Policy Forum. *Today's Leaders: Bridging Skills and Career Trends of Canada's Private and Public Sector Leaders*. (Ottawa: Public Policy Forum, 2006).

⁶⁸ Commonwealth Association for Public Administration and Management. *In Pursuit of Excellence: Developing and Maintaining a High-Quality Public Service*. A Report on a CAPAM High-Level Seminar of Commonwealth Training and Development Institutes, October 2005, p.5.

⁶⁹ Intagliata et al., pp.18-21.

⁷⁰ Keep in mind, however, that the literature indicates that many competency models employ significantly more competencies than either the federal or Ontario government did originally. Richard S. Mansfield. "Building Competency Models: Approaches for HR Professionals" in *Human Resources Management*. 35, 1, Spring 1996, p.11; Lyle M. Spencer and Signe M. Spencer. *Competence at Work: Models for Superior Performance*. (Toronto: John Wiley and Sons, 1993), p.19. Silzer suggested that as many as 10-20 competencies are manageable. See Hollenbeck, McCall and Silzer, 2006, p.402.

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⁷³ Richard Bolden and Jonathan Gosling. "Leadership Competencies: Time to Change the Tune?" in *Leadership*. 2, 2, 2006, 147-163; Jay A. Conger and Douglas A. Ready. "Rethinking Leadership Competencies" in *Leader to Leader*. Spring 2004, 41-47; Jon P. Briscoe and Douglas T. Hall. "Grooming and Picking Leaders Using Competency Frameworks: Do They Work? An Alternative Approach and New Guidelines for Practice" in *Organizational Dynamics*. Autumn 1999, 37-52.

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⁸⁰ Thomas N. Garavan and David McGuire. "Competencies and Workplace Learning: Some Reflections on the Rhetoric and the Reality" in *Journal of Workplace Learning*. 13, 4, 2001, p.160.

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