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Editors

Reimagining the Future Public Service Workforce

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Part I
Setting the Scene

Chapter 1

Introduction: Imagining the Future Public Service Workforce



Helen Dickinson, Catherine Needham, Catherine Mangan
and Helen Sullivan

1.1 The Dominant Narrative of Reform

Anyone who has read commentaries of governments and public service organisations over the last decade or so will likely have come away with a keen sense that what is needed is reform, reform and more reform. Despite the fact that it is difficult to identify a country or a policy area that has not undergone reform in recent years (rhetorically at least), there is typically a sense of impatience and urgency to these cries for change. Jarvis (2016), for example, notes that ‘For too long, the Canadian civil service has remained largely immune to disruption and transformation, in part because it hasn’t faced imminent threats from competitors in the same way that a private company or a not-for-profit organization might or even other levels of government have faced. This insulation has had predictable results. Past reform efforts have often fallen short of their objectives, because there were no clear consequences when reform failed. This failure to sufficiently modernize has slowly eroded the civil service’s ability to meet the needs of Canadians’ (p. 1). What is clear from these kinds of accounts is a sense of irritation that governments have not gone far or fast enough in making changes.

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