

Developing the Best

A Corporate Learning Strategy for the BC Public Service

BC Public Service Agency
Bringing out the best



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Introduction

Those of us who work in the BC Public Service are often attracted to the work because we have the opportunity to make a tangible difference in the lives of our fellow British Columbians. We believe that what we do counts and that the more effective tools and support we have to do our daily jobs, the better we can serve the citizens of B.C.

A clear, forward-thinking plan that addresses learning in the current and future context is essential in supporting the uniquely different learning and development needs of the employees who serve this province. We believe that Developing the Best: A Corporate Learning Strategy for the BC Public Service will help us do this.

This strategy factors in present needs and future learning trends, including the ever-increasing spectrum of learning opportunities that extend far beyond the traditional classroom setting. It also talks to the importance of our changing work environments, the role of organizations in creating more flexible access to learning, the impacts of new and emerging technologies and tools, and learning as it relates to understanding diversity and practicing inclusiveness from a social and business perspective. It also addresses the responsibility of individuals and the need to embrace learning opportunities and chart their own personalized learning path.

Learning is not simply attending “training” or a course – although these can be key components – instead it’s an ongoing, complex, organizational and individual undertaking that occurs formally and informally, every day. It doesn’t stop at the completion of college or university or at the entrance to the workplace; in fact, most often that’s where learning really begins. Just as we’ve committed to supporting a diverse and dynamic public service culture, so too we need to commit to and support an ongoing culture of learning across our great organization.

This is an exciting and important journey, and I look forward to our work together to chart an innovative and flexible learning and development path for the BC Public Service.

John Dyble
Deputy Minister to the Premier and
Head of the BC Public Service



Context

The BC Public Service is the largest single employer in B.C. and one of the Top 100 employers in the country. We employ about 30,000 dedicated public servants in 280 communities across the province, operating over 200 distinct lines of business. In short, we've got a lot going on and we rely on a professional workforce of well trained, highly dedicated and innovative employees to serve the constantly evolving needs of the public. With this in mind, it's easy to see that our emphasis and investment in employee development and learning directly benefit the citizens of B.C. in all we do.

In recent years, a number of factors have combined to change why and how we need to approach learning and development differently in the BC Public Service. These include smaller budgets, reduced ability to travel to traditional classroom style courses, increased operational obligations across many lines of business, emerging workforce/demographic and workplace trends and increasingly different public service learning needs, the desire to create a greater culture of performance management and increased performance coaching opportunities for supervisors, the need for greater flexibility and 24/7 access to learning, ongoing business transformation, new technology and social collaboration tools, and the need to find better and more creative ways to support employee engagement and retention in an increasingly competitive talent marketplace. As noted in the Deputy Minister to the Premier's introduction – learning is so much more than just attending training or a course – it's multifaceted, increasingly informal as much as formal, and occurs on a daily basis.

This strategy incorporates input from myriad sources: direct employee feedback (2010 professional

development survey), previous learning needs analysis, research into new learning trends and technology in the competitive global workplace, and best practices that show how continuous learning and improvement allow organizations to remain more nimble and responsive to customers, clients and citizens they serve. The strategy also recognizes that diversity will no longer be a human resources goal, but a business imperative – and that enhancing a culture of learning that supports diversity

and inclusiveness across the BC Public Service will increase our success with the amazingly diverse citizenry we serve. The issue of generational needs and expectations associated with the changing face of the workplace is also explored, knowing that "Millennials" make up a growing percentage of our workforce

and they have learning needs and preferences distinctly different than those of previous generations.

We sit poised at a great confluence of change as a learning organization, where the different streams of our corporate learning experience are merging with a rapidly changing workforce and global workplace.

REMAINING A TOP 100 EMPLOYER

To remain a top employer, the BC Public Service needs to keep pace with these changes and respond to the learning needs of employees in ways that go beyond traditional approaches. To achieve this, we not only need to continue offering new curriculum and build on our existing Corporate Learning Framework (Core and Corporate) and ministry (role specific) offerings, we need to create and support a culture of learning that recognizes and embraces a more dynamic and flexible approach, integrating more informal learning, coaching, mentoring, job shadowing, access to communities of practice and subject matter collaboration, and – equally as important – timely, effective performance feedback.

Let's face it – to achieve our brand promise of One Employer, One Employee Experience and meet our

commitment in Being the Best to “support the diversity and professional development and career aspirations of employees” – opportunities to learn have to fit unique individual and organizational learning needs. A “one size fits all” approach just won’t work.

BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION

The BC Public Service continues to undergo significant business transformation processes, streamlining services for more efficient, responsive and effective delivery to regions, communities, stakeholder groups and citizens across the province. Citizens in turn are requiring that government engage more directly and share information more openly and freely with the public and with each other. The result is that public servants are being challenged in new ways that require different approaches to learning and development to deliver on these activities.

Social media and other collaborative tools are increasingly being used to leverage many of these changes and share information faster and with wider audiences. This strategy explores some of ways we might be able to integrate this technology to help with timely exchange of subject matter expertise and fast, informal learning across organizations, communities of practices and peer groups.

EMPLOYEES WANT – AND LIKE – TO LEARN!

Finally, recent research and surveys with employees points to a very strong linkage between individual learning and development and employee engagement and retention. Establishing a more personalized and flexible approach to unique, individual learning needs will serve to reinforce this fact.

The BC Public Service:
Where *Being the Best* depends on Developing the Best

Overview: A New Vision for Corporate Learning

As BC Public Service employees, how we learn, what we learn, and why we learn is changing as fast as society and the citizens we serve. The BC Public Service is taking a dynamic approach to increased citizen engagement and open government, and we're seeing growing use of collaborative social media tools and higher-than-ever expectations for critical mastery and technical proficiency all layered within a rapidly changing and increasingly diverse workforce. The latest edition of our corporate HR plan, Being the Best, talks about the importance of preparing for a deeper cultural level within our organization so that we're better positioned to:

1. Be a workforce of trusted professionals that champions open communication, a collaborative work environment and flexibility and choice in work styles and tools.
2. Embrace the diversity, professional development and career aspirations of our employees.
3. Support employee safety, health and work-life balance given their influence on professional success and productivity.

This strategy proposes four key goals and associated actions that will help us realise this culture shift and support the ongoing evolution towards a true public service learning organization:

GOAL ONE: CREATING A CULTURE OF LEARNING

GOAL TWO: EMBRACING INNOVATIVE TECHNOLOGIES AND TOOLS TO PREPARE FOR THE FUTURE NOW

GOAL THREE: RESPONDING FLEXIBLY TO LEARNING NEEDS

GOAL FOUR: VALUING DIVERSITY AND ADVANCING INCLUSIVENESS THROUGH LEARNING

Goal One: Creating a Culture of Learning

Being the Best states that the culture of an organization includes attitudes, beliefs and practices that define the employment experience, and that this has a profound impact on employee engagement and performance. The phrase “cultural shift” is used throughout the

corporate HR plan to signal not only a policy shift, but just as important an attitude and behaviour shift that we need to achieve across ministries, business lines and the many approaches to our work.

Figure 2 below illustrates how a culture of learning is built around the individual learner.

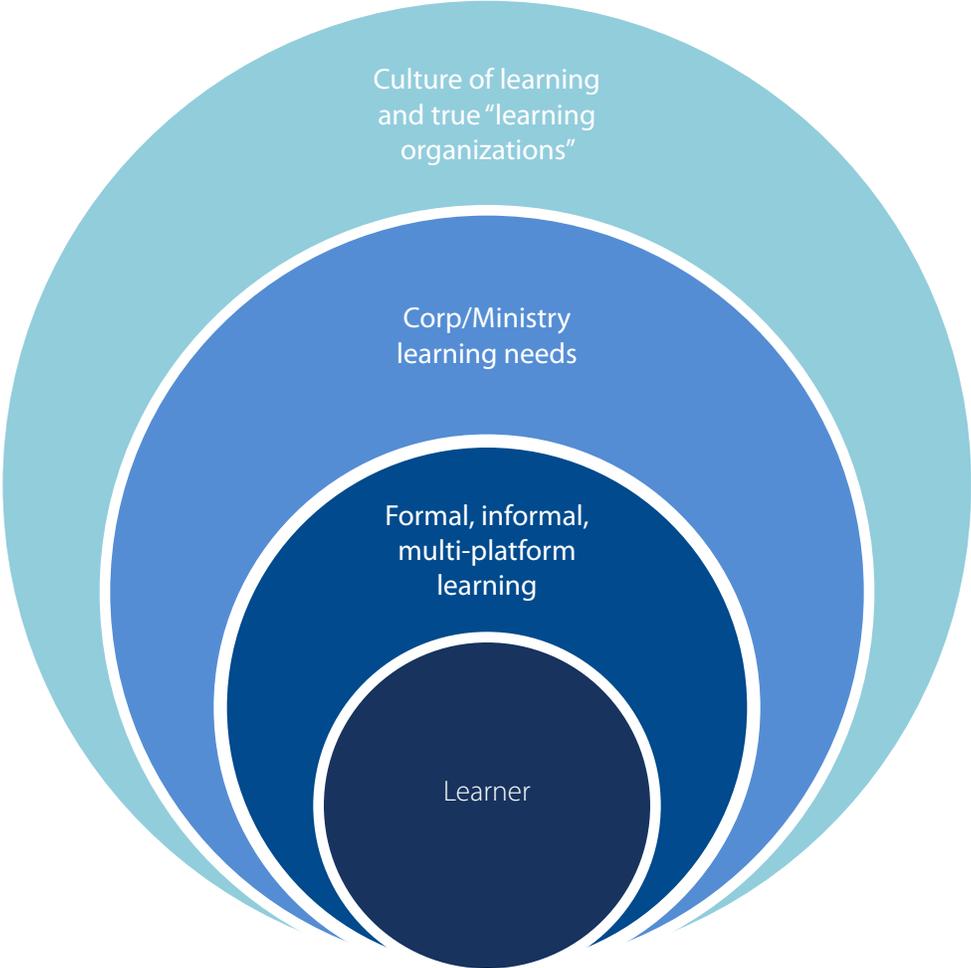


Figure 2. Culture of Learning Circles

Creating a culture of learning isn't about just offering training – it's about building and sustaining an environment that inspires and supports employees to pursue learning through diverse formats, methods and streams. It's about a new and more personalized, inclusive approach to learning that is championed by executives and supervisors at every level.

A culture of learning – one that positively reinforces learning and knowledge transfer – not only gives back to the organization, it gives to individuals as well. For example, the reciprocal benefits of mentoring are just as strong for the mentor as they are for the mentee. The old saying of “we remember about 10% of what we hear, 30% of what we hear and see, 50% of what we do, **and 90% of what we teach to another**” is significant. Benefits of mentoring include: feeling appreciated and valued, sharing program or corporate knowledge with direct benefit to your area, reverse mentoring and including new perspectives in your own understanding,

reinforcing or refocusing your own development plan, and generating new and innovative practices through a more creative and informal approach.

We believe there are **seven key factors** that support the development of a culture of learning:

1. Strong support from executive.
2. Supervisors who empower their staff and promote learning.
3. Recognition that some of our most significant learning comes from careful risk taking and failure.
4. Employees are personally motivated to learn in all types of settings – formal and informal.
5. Ongoing and strategic investment in resources, training and tools.
6. Opportunities to take what you've learned and apply it.
7. A continuous feedback cycle/ongoing adjustment and coaching when needed.

Goal One Actions

Ensure executives “walk the talk.”

- » How and what executives spend their time on sends a strong signal throughout organizations. Encourage executives to spend a portion of their time teaching, coaching and mentoring. Building on the success of the engagement sessions for performance management, introduce executive-lead engagement sessions on learning across the Public Service to address issues that are barriers to learning and explore ways to address them.

Continue to expand learning beyond the traditional “classroom.”

- » Support ongoing opportunities for informal and contextual learning to enhance learning that happens on the job, through social networks, across communities of practice, and via coaches and mentors.

Establish corporate learning targets.

- » As with other leading organizations, establish corporate targets for the number of hours annually that employees should spend participating in formal and informal learning and embed these in each employee’s development plans. Embed knowledge-transfer expectations into key work goals of subject matter experts.

Support supervisors to promote a culture of learning with all their employees.

- » In addition, the Learning Centre will develop curriculum that supports supervisors in creating a culture of learning in their areas.

Recognize that curiosity is fundamental to learning.

- » Consider creating “curiosity” or other awards to highlight and recognize great learners – whether academic, formal or informal – and the positive impact on creating a learning culture within their organizations.

Continue to harness and leverage the incredible talent within the BC Public Service.

- » Encourage, promote and tap into the vast subject matter expertise in the public service to develop and deliver learning opportunities. Support ongoing, proactive collaboration and information sharing between the BC Public Service Agency (Learning Centre) and ministry learning contacts specific to curriculum development, best practices, emerging learning trends etc. to help ensure the Corporate Learning Framework (Core/Corporate) and ministry (role specific) learning is targeted, effective and mutually supportive.

Goal Two: Embracing Innovative Technologies and Tools to Prepare for the Future Now

It's obvious we're experiencing a huge demographic and technological shift in the workplace. "Baby Boomers" are retiring in waves and Millennials (or the "Net Generation") are poised to make up half the global workforce by 2014. As Don Tapscott points out in *Wikinomics*, "This is the first generation to grow up in the digital age, making them a significant force for collaboration. They typically can't imagine a life where citizens didn't have the tools to constantly think critically, exchange views, challenge, authenticate, verify, or debunk." New collaborative and social media tools are continuously being created and adopted by all generations. In Meister and Wilyerds fascinating book *The Workplace 2020*, demographics and new technology are highlighted as major factors in a rapidly changing workplace which places higher expectations and demands than ever on employee training and development.

These shifts are having a profound impact on how people work and on how government and citizens interact. Whatever generational lens you put on it, the BC Public Service needs to adapt to these changes. Ongoing learning is essential for us to keep pace with our current goals and future workplace trends.

Several studies by mainstream social thinkers (Tapscott, Meister and Willyerd, Shirky etc.) have all predicted and outlined new workforce trends, many of which will have a major impact on learning: what we will need to learn, how often and how we learn will develop in response to these trends.

Trend One: The rise of the virtual workforce and continued growth of the knowledge economy will be major drivers and workplace shapers.

Not only will businesses have to compete with regional competitors, but with global players as well. Flexible work options in most careers will continue to expand to attract top talent. Collaborative technologies will allow the formation of project teams across large geographic areas. The knowledge economy will continue to grow, increasing the need to keep employee learning and development as a priority in competitive organizations.

Trend Two: Lifelong learning will be a business requirement for career success.

The rapid pace of change, combined with constant development of new technologies and increasing global competition will make lifelong learning a requirement versus a personal preference or extra-curricular luxury. Ongoing business transformation for cost savings and efficiencies will require consistent updating of skill sets and innovative ways of thinking.

Trend Three: The use of interactive curriculum, online learning, traditional and blended formats will be common.

There is no longer one way to learn, and the previous corporate university model requires updating to a 21st century corporate learning model. Traditional "one-way" mode of delivering curriculum can now be enhanced with several new modes, often combined together, to offer more accessible and responsive blended formats.

Trend Four: Social media literacy will be a job requirement.

Far from being just a flavour-of-the-month phenomenon, the use of social media is fast becoming a daily reality. Clay Shirky, a prominent thinker in the social media field, predicts that such collaborative tools and technologies will become so ubiquitous as to be “invisible” or taken for granted by users, much as being able to use a cell phone is now. The ability to interact on social media sites, blog, tweet or personalize your profile to integrate all aspects of your virtual work life will be part of how most do business.

Moreover, these same tools are important components of the move toward more open government and greater citizen engagement. Therefore they will affect not just internal work practices but will also increasingly be part of how service is delivered to the public. Notably, the conventions and expectations of social media require a more accessible and informal approach to communication than is traditionally practiced in government. There is an increased need for plain language skills, which aligns with the results of a 2010 survey in which employees identified a strong need for training in effective writing.

Trend Five: Diversity will be a business imperative rather than a human resource issue.

We live in an increasingly diverse and rapidly shrinking world through instant communication, global marketplaces, and more engaged citizenry. Learning how to attract and retain top talent from diverse backgrounds including ethnic, cultural, generational and different gender identities and physical abilities is a step toward the full inclusion that will be necessary to succeed in virtually any business area in the future. Employee learning and development will need to adapt to the needs of diverse learners and create a more diverse and culturally competent workforce in the future.

Trend Six: Personalized learning models, “just in time” learning and coaching will be expected.

The arrival of more Millennials and the growing familiarity with social media across all generations create increased expectations for more personalized learning models. Sites that allow users to personalize, choose content, interact and integrate with other platforms will be part of common business practice just as they are part of many employees everyday social interactions.

For the BC Public Service to meet the needs of a dynamic citizenry and remain an employer of choice, we need to respond to these trends now. We’ve already begun to address the future workplace through Citizens @ the Centre: Government 2.0, the new social media guidelines, and the 2010/11 edition of Being the Best. However, given the speed of current change, we can’t merely be satisfied to keep up – instead we need to stay in front of the wave of changes and trends.

Goal Two Actions

Create better awareness of and provide increased access to and choice of online learning, e-learning, podcasts and quick software application courses.

Expedite knowledge transfer through two-way generational mentorship.

- » Harness the talents of our “Net generation” to mentor others to build their confidence in the use of new technologies and in doing so allow others to share their knowledge and experience with those new to the public service.

Evolve towards personalized learning sites.

- » Within the corporate intranet strategy, look to establish a virtual learning site that can be personalized by each employee and that will provide easy access to all their learning tools, regular reminders and puts their learning needs front and centre.

Goal Three: Responding Flexibly to Learning Needs

As this strategy previously notes, we're in the midst of large workplace, demographic, technological and societal changes. Any effective approach to corporate learning must be able to respond quickly and nimbly to identified and emerging needs. As public service employees, we need to learn both for the job we have now and for the job we want in the future.

Learning needs to be personalized and targeted, ensuring that employees can access opportunities that meet their current and future needs. For example, we see a future where employees in different roles at different stages of their career and with different aspirations will be able to personalize their learning profiles to automatically be registered in certain courses or, instead, be notified or receive information about new training that might match their needs. This technology will be tailored to meet different levels such as executive, supervisory, and content-expert, frontline needs, and we envision it to be able to provide updates on the release of new courses in relevant course areas, such as supervision, leadership, communications, Aboriginal relations, etc.

FLEXIBILITY

Learning Styles and Preferences

Although there's been much research into learning styles and ways of categorizing how we acquire and retain knowledge, the simple fact is that different people learn differently. Diversity, cultural and

generational factors may also impact a person's learning preferences. Current research on generational differences in learning also emphasizes the different expectations around training and development that Millennials bring with them into the workplace. There is a greater emphasis placed on contextual learning, coaching, continuous feedback, mentorship, and use of social and collaborative tools, as well as a continued desire for some traditional forms of face-to-face learning where and when appropriate.

Learning Formats and Options

Recognizing that not everyone learns the same way and has different time pressures, commitments and different access to learning, this strategy supports and promotes formal and informal learning, different delivery models (classroom, face-to-face, e-learning, videoconference, podcasts and blended formats that combine the different modes) and informal learning opportunities such as internships, mentorship, job shadowing and temporary assignments.

Different Learning Types

We currently have three formal streams of learning within the public service: core, corporate, and ministry-specific. Through the Corporate Learning Framework established in 2009 the Learning Centre is responsible for all core and corporate learning while ministries deliver learning to employees to equip them for ministry-specific roles.

Learning Type	Definition	Examples
Core	Learning that is accessible for all employees.	Occupational Health and Safety programs, Orientation (Welcome to the Public Service) etc.
Corporate	Programs in high priority areas that equip targeted employee groups with transferable knowledge and skills.	Financial management, procurement training, information and privacy, project management, supervisory and leadership programs etc.
Ministry	Programs that equip specific ministry employee groups with knowledge and skills that are required only in that branch or ministry.	Wildfire management, social work etc.

ACCESSIBILITY

This strategy recognizes the need to be more innovative in promoting course accessibility in rural areas of the province – something that was clear in the findings of the 2009 Learning Needs Assessment. While many learners, executives in particular, want and prefer the online option of self-paced learning, others continue to want access to more traditional forms of learning in the form of face-to-face courses, seminars and conferences. Greater demand and diminishing resources spell a need for innovation in this area.

New technologies, approaches and learning formats such as e-learning and blended approaches can help address accessibility issues in a cost-effective manner.

Integrative and collaborative technology will also assist in faster access to new training, support learning communities of practice and allow individual employees will have access to a range of different training types and formats overall.

RESPONSIVENESS

Being responsive to learning needs includes addressing long-term corporate curriculum needs, as well as more urgent learning needs in response to issues or trends. The recent development and launch of new privacy and information sharing training for thousands of public service employees across the province is an example of a strong corporate response to an emergent need.

Goal Three Actions

Maximize regional offerings and support through a combination of in-person, online, e-learning and virtual collaboration tools.

Invest in instructional approaches and formats that will better accommodate different learning styles, preferences and other diverse cultural and generational needs.

As part of the new approach to performance management and the introduction of performance coaching, promote and encourage increased uptake of learning opportunities.

Goal Four: Valuing Diversity and Advancing Inclusiveness Through Learning

The BC Public Service is committed to ensuring an inclusive workplace and employment experience that reflects the rich diversity that is found in our communities. A learning strategy that enables, facilitates and embraces inclusiveness is essential to support the government's commitment to delivering services that meet the needs of all British Columbians and their families and advances the social and economic fabric of the province.

Studies have shown the positive impact of inclusiveness on innovative business practices and thinking. We believe that organizations that recognize diversity and practice inclusiveness can expect to:

- » **Attract and retain the brightest and best talent.**
- » **Be better positioned in the changing global marketplace.**
- » **Better reflect and respond to citizens' needs and expectations.**

A corporate learning strategy that addresses the issue of diversity will help:

- » **Meet the learning needs of all public service employees by respecting and valuing our unique differences as individuals.**

- » **Increase awareness and understanding of cultural competency and inclusive practices.**
- » **Increase representation within the BC Public Service in order to improve the services and needs of a diverse citizenry through an inclusive approach to developing government services, policies and practices.**

This progressive focus will strengthen the BC Public Service by providing unique learning opportunities in multi-platform formats and increased participation in educational activities that will advance a corporate commitment to inclusiveness. These in turn will contribute to more inclusive engagement and hiring practices, and better business outcomes for government and the citizens of BC as a whole.

The actions aligned with this goal will address our goal of inclusiveness from a learning perspective. Increasing the inclusiveness of the public service requires a multi-level strategy which is already underway.

An important aspect of creating an inclusive learning strategy is that we can't provide knowledge without understanding, awareness without practice, nor expect change without support.

Goal Four Actions

Market the benefits of diversity and increase awareness of diversity issues and inclusive practices.

- » The promotion of diversity-specific themes and concepts through effective marketing in conjunction with an inclusive corporate learning strategy will assist in promoting and building a more diverse public sector. This will result in a positive domino effect increasing awareness levels and acceptance across the organization.

Continue building on the success of the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation's Building Capacity in Aboriginal Relations (BCAR) and other diversity strategies to create "culturally competent" employees and leaders.

- » The corporate learning strategy promotes the leveraging of culturally different perspectives across the learning spectrum, fostering increased awareness, acceptance and learning from a diverse workforce. Culturally competent employees, leaders and learning delivery resources can act as catalysts for further evolution towards the ultimate goal of a culturally diverse and representative workforce.

Embed the principles of diversity into all learning curriculum.

- » Capitalize on existing and new learning curriculum to promote the principles and benefits of a diverse and inclusive workforce. Face-to-face, e-learning and blended learning opportunities provide the perfect opening to further promote the tremendous, culturally diverse learning needs of the public service.

Create opportunities for employees to participate in cultural experiences.

- » Embrace and promote opportunities for BC Public Service learners to share cultural experiences through various learning avenues.

Embrace and promote the best practices of successful diversity programs such as the BC Public Service's Aboriginal Youth Internship (AYIP) Program etc.

- » Programs like AYIP have been successful in promoting greater awareness and acceptance of First Nations culture – continuing to support this and other programs allows for different perspectives, increased understanding and, above all, greater acceptance and inclusion of various cultures within the public service.

Measuring Success

The following are proposed as initial measures of success within 1 year of introducing a Corporate Learning Strategy:

Measure	Target
Increase usage of e-learning	25%
Employees who achieve annual target of formal "learning hours" as part of commitment to employee development	90%
Increase in number of regional employees participating in training	25%
Increase in WES professional development score for 11/12	2 points
Employees who feel they experienced a pivotal "learning experience" (either informal or formal) in the past year	75%