



# The Tansley Lecture

## Implementing the Climate Change Policy Revolution in British Columbia (BC)

**Jessica L. McDonald**

Executive Vice-President, Western & International  
Development, HB Global Advisors Corp.  
and former Deputy Minister to the Premier,  
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## **Introduction**

I am very pleased to be here this evening. It is not only an honour to be asked to speak in the name of Donald Tansley, a leader and champion for all of us in Canadian public service, but it is also very fulfilling to me personally for a number of reasons. Having recently departed the provincial government after six years in the Premier's Office, four and a half of which were as Deputy Minister to the Premier and head of the public service, the topic of BC's efforts to build an effective climate action agenda is close to my heart. In many ways, the story I have to tell is less one of the technical elements of the provincial climate change agenda. It is really about implementation of any broad policy shift, and the elements that are key to success. In part, that success was the result of how government approached this whole initiative in new ways. But I believe that it was also partly the result of how we engaged the 30,000 members of the BC Public Service in that process at the same time.

Some have described British Columbia's climate change agenda as politically reckless. But for me it is better viewed as an example of the fearless and groundbreaking policy actions undertaken in BC in recent years that have helped spur national public policy debates. It also provides an excellent

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illustration of BC's efforts to redefine how its public service works.

With that in mind, I'm going to split this discussion somewhat in two. First, I'll summarize the policy context behind BC's climate action plan and how we managed its implementation. I will then focus on the role of the public service in making that possible and how the climate action agenda fit into our concurrent revitalization of the public service itself.

## ***The Policy Context***

In the Spring of 2007, the Campbell government surprised British Columbians, Canadians, and observers around the world with a bold new provincial program to address climate change. That includes the public service that would be responsible for delivering on an ambitious vision – a vision that would require action by virtually every government ministry and Crown corporation.

The first announcement came in the Speech from the Throne, in February 2007. Throne speeches are, of course, given to covering a broad range of topics. True to form, the 2007 throne speech for BC addressed issues as wide ranging as housing, First Nations, health care, literacy, the Asia-Pacific gateway and the Olympics. But an unprecedented 40 per cent of the speech was dedicated to the topic of climate change alone.

That 40 per cent included daring language like: “The science is clear...climate change is literally threatening life on Earth as we know it... voluntary regimes have not worked... BC will forge new partnerships across national boundaries... we will be relentless...”

And it set out a bold plan with both measureable and difficult targets:

1. Made-in-BC standards would be established for action on climate change.

- B.C.'s greenhouse gas emissions would be reduced by at least 33 per cent below current levels by 2020, reducing emission levels to 10 per cent under 1990 levels by 2020.

- Interim targets would be set for 2012 and 2016 as milestones for reaching the 2020 goal (now 6% and 18%, respectively), and a longer-term target (now 80%) would also be set for 2050.

2. The climate action plan would be linked to the province's energy future.

- BC would be electricity self-sufficient by 2016.
- All new and existing electricity produced in BC would be required to have net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2016.
  - 50 per cent of all new electricity demand would be met through conservation.
  - At least 90 per cent of BC's electricity would be guaranteed to come from clean, renewable sources.
  - Greenhouse gas emissions from the oil and gas industry would be reduced to 2000 levels by 2016.

3. BC would meet or beat the best practices in North America for reducing carbon and other greenhouse gases.

- Government policy would introduce a philosophical shift to personal responsibility, leading to consumption-based taxes, and complementary measures to assist citizen choice such as educational tools, local community planning shifts and in-home energy audits and energy-use meters.
- BC would become the first jurisdiction in North America, if not the world, to require 100 per cent carbon sequestration for any coal-fired project.

4. New innovations and technologies would lead to jobs and investments to create a competitive edge for BC.

- BC would become a net exporter of clean, renewable energy.
- BC would assist in the commercialization of alternative energy solutions. Wood waste would be used to create new power.
  - Wood, with its carbon storage capability, would be required as the primary building material in all public buildings. All public buildings would be required to meet a LEED Gold standard.
  - Owners or operators of waste management facilities – including landfills, composting facilities and sewage treatment plants – would be required to manage waste-generated GHGs either by reducing emissions or capturing them, with the option of tapping into their energy-generation potential.

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5. The entire public sector would be involved to reduce energy consumption and emissions, including municipalities, universities, colleges, hospitals, schools, prisons, ferries, and airports.

- BC would be the first jurisdiction in North America to legislate a requirement to become carbon neutral as a government, to be achieved by 2012, and accompanied by regular public reporting.

One year later, the carbon tax, perhaps the most talked-about element of the plan, was introduced. This was a price on fossil fuels, including gasoline, diesel and natural gas. It made a statement that carbon emissions can be priced, that they can be impacted by personal choice, and that they can be integrated as a tool to change the provincial economy. The carbon tax was to begin at a low level (\$10 per tonne) to allow time for consumer change, and increase by \$5 per year for four years (to 2012). The most distinguishing element, not attempted before, is that it was legislated to be revenue neutral to the provincial government. The estimated \$1.8-billion in revenues generated over the first three years would allow for tax reductions of the same amount in other areas. Personal, corporate and small business income tax rates would all be reduced, linking the climate plan directly to BC's competitive economic edge.

This program was truly groundbreaking, for North America, and the world. In 2006, Quebec introduced the first Canadian program to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Quebec's plan included a number of pioneering elements, such as a form of carbon tax that served as a revenue generator to government. BC's plan went much further. It set the most aggressive reduction targets in North America, and addressed every sector, including the first ever legislated requirement for the public sector to become carbon neutral. And, perhaps most significantly, it included the first substantive, revenue-neutral carbon tax attempted in the world – for the first time, truly involving citizens in making new choices.

BC's plan contained many elements from California, seen as a key ally for BC in developing the markets necessary for new standards to take hold in a cost effective way. By adopting the same new tailpipe emission standards as California, for example, BC could tap into a much larger market

able to push automakers farther and faster. To this end, a major aspect of the plan was to work closely with the governors of Alaska, Washington, Oregon and California. Common environmental standards for all Pacific ports would be pursued, along with electrified truck stops, a Pacific hydrogen highway, and a low-carbon fuel standard.

Working with US jurisdictions would also give BC a leading edge to partner on a system for registering, trading, and purchasing carbon offsets and carbon credits, “cap and trade.” Called the Western Climate Initiative, BC was the first full Canadian partner and has led the development of much of the policy work and technical design of a new cap-and-trade system. This partnership now involves many other Canadian provinces (Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec).

Delivering this policy shift would be a massive amount of work on its own. Then take into consideration that it required intense collaboration by multiple ministries, raising the always challenging reality of “horizontal integration.” That’s something with which governments always struggle because our accountability structure is so focused on clearly defined silos. As if that internal dynamic wasn’t challenging enough, the response to climate change touches on areas of both federal and provincial responsibility meaning that linkages somehow had to be maintained with emerging federal policy and inter-provincial negotiation. Finally, policy and program development would need to occur rapidly, simultaneous with seeking stakeholder consultation and input. Many groups were understandably alarmed and fearful of the potential impacts of the shift. They wavered between whether they should lobby to stop it or instead actively participate in the policy development to ensure their views were addressed. But achieving the ambitious plan set out in the Throne Speech could not be done by government alone. It had to be done by engaging numerous interests and partners outside government.

So that was the context in which we began. No small task. And a task that arguably couldn’t be managed with traditional approaches.

## ***The Government Approach***

To lead the start-up phase of policy and program development, a new Climate Action Secretariat was created in the Premier’s Office. This was not in and

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of itself unusual. Many jurisdictions will locate an important new initiative, especially a cross-cutting one, in the Premier's Office to allow for effective coordination across ministries and to signal the importance of the mandate. However, this was underscored by direct and constant involvement in all aspects by the Premier himself.

A Cabinet Committee on Climate Action was established with the Premier as the Chair, and a non-traditional approach was adopted by the committee. While Cabinet committees are normally closed-door affairs, this one invited presentations from a wide range of groups, including youth, industry and labour unions. A very important aspect of the operations of this committee was that the Climate Action Secretariat would provide the main staff support, leaving just the logistics and the minutes to Cabinet Operations. This was critical so that the frontline staff from the secretariat could hear firsthand the discussions of the committee and be directly accountable for bringing forward the right decisions in a timely way. As obvious as this sounds, it is not normally how access to Cabinet committees, their discussions and decisions, is structured.

Every ministry, without exception, was asked to come forward and present to the committee about how the ministry would incorporate the climate action agenda into its mandate. But even more importantly, staff of ministries were invited to bring forward their personal ideas about how the broader provincial program could be achieved. These ideas were presented in the form of "concept papers" – two page explanations of an idea. There was no expectation that they be vetted by senior levels or have every implication thought through. Rather they were seen as a nimble vehicle to generate and share ideas.

Importantly, the concept paper asked for the name of the staff person who came up with the idea rather than the more typical identification of the supervisor, manager or executive who signed off on the paper. These concept papers came into the committee unfiltered, and staff at all levels of every ministry were asked to sit at the Cabinet committee table to participate in the discussion of these ideas with Cabinet members. For many, this was their first time experiencing this kind of direct access to decision makers. Like the unconventional approach taken at the Cabinet committee, every effort was also made to re-think traditional processes to make them more relevant to the goals government was trying to achieve.

An excellent example of this is a series of reforms to the budget process. As with many, if not all, provincial jurisdictions in Canada, the annual budget process in BC has typically required a significant amount of work by every ministry, with unclear linkages between resource allocation and government priorities. Traditionally, every ministry was asked to make a budget submission, identifying its allocation of current resources and its proposals for new funding. Almost invariably, decisions on new funding would be made on a case-by-case basis, with ministries either told to implement their new ideas with existing resources, or granted new funding as Treasury Board saw fit. There was no overall corporate effort to link new resources to major new initiatives.

In 2007, the budget process was reformed to a new approach heavily influenced by practices in the United Kingdom. Ministries were advised to assume that their upcoming budget would simply be the same as the previous year's rather than going through the arduous process of proposing a new one each year. They were also told that, should new funding become available for the upcoming year, it would be allocated to one of a few defined priorities. Climate action was identified as one of those priorities. Every ministry was then invited to propose how government could achieve its corporate goals in these defined areas, with encouragement to work across ministries to develop collaborative solutions. All of the submissions that came forward relating to each priority area were then sifted through by a designated Cabinet committee to identify those that had the best potential to achieve government's outcomes for the funding available. The Climate Action Committee of Cabinet took on this role in the case of climate action programs. Committees were also able to hold part of the envelope funds in contingency in the event that new proposals would be received during the year. Final recommendations were then submitted by the each committee chair to the Minister of Finance to compile the overall provincial budget.

This process had many benefits. It reduced work substantially for ministries, it invited ministries to be involved in linking budget proposals to clearly identified priorities, and it allowed government's corporate goals to be more clearly linked to the provincial budget. It also encouraged ministries to think beyond their borders and seek out collaborative opportunities.

Overarching this whole process, the Premier consistently made it clear that climate action measures would relate to every possible program in

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government. Whether it was deliberation over potential infrastructure grants, updating the provincial building code, or First Nations policy, ministries could expect serious scrutiny on whether they had meaningfully thought about the relationship of the program to the achievement of GHG emission reduction targets. The message was clear: climate action was to become not just another program or policy, but a fundamental part of how government conducts itself at every level.

Moreover, it's important to remember that the vision didn't just define how government would make everyone else in the province act on climate change – it also committed government itself to lead by example and become carbon neutral in its operations. As part of that, “green teams” were created in every ministry to help develop and implement ideas to achieve carbon neutrality and reduce the corporate impact on the environment. Without replacing the proactive involvement of individuals in the corporate initiatives, the teams work both within and across ministries to introduce new business practices and other changes in individual offices to reduce its carbon footprint, to act as a catalyst to create a green culture through education and enabling an exchange of ideas and solutions and to act as contacts to achieve overall targets associated with carbon neutrality.

All of this wasn't limited to core government either. The Premier called a meeting of every Crown Corporation and government agency Chair and CEO. It was the first time such a meeting had ever been held. A hotel ballroom was filled and these entities heard first-hand together what the climate action agenda meant, and how it would affect them as government worked toward the goal of carbon neutrality. Ideas and questions were invited, and there was good dialogue about the intentions behind the initiative.

Municipalities and regional districts were encouraged to sign a Climate Action Charter to become carbon neutral by 2012, with participating municipal local governments receiving a full annual refund of their carbon tax by the Province.

The full Climate Action Plan was released in June 2008, and was assessed as moving BC to 73 per cent of its 2020 goal once fully implemented. As mentioned, in 2008, the carbon tax was also introduced, and a new Pacific Carbon Trust has been created to source, acquire and retire B.C.-based greenhouse gas offsets. Countless other new measures have been

implemented over the past three years, with the policy shift still very much in line with the original specific vision.

Institutionally, the Climate Action Secretariat has now moved from the Premier's Office to the Ministry of Environment following the last election. That was an important signal to the public service and to the public that it is not just associated with the Premier, but would be a continuing part of core government operations. The Secretariat continues to provide technical staff support to the Cabinet committee, which in turn continued to be chaired by the Premier and to invite comments and views from outside groups.

As an unexpected result of all this work, in 2009 the BC Public Service was also named one of Canada's Greenest Employers. That designation reflects the employer's commitment to become a carbon neutral public sector employer by 2010, the new requirement that new government buildings be constructed to the minimum LEED Gold (or equivalent certification) standard, upgrading existing buildings to reduce energy, a hybrid-first purchasing policy, carbon neutral driver training courses for traveling employees, and initiatives to help employees calculate and choose the best alternatives for both the office and personal living.

And that conveniently brings me to a discussion of just how the climate action agenda fit within the context of what we were also trying to achieve within the public service at the same time.

## ***The Public Service Context***

I've talked about how much of the climate action approach involved bringing others into the process. Whether it was involving staff and ministries in the work of the Cabinet committee in a new way, bringing outside groups like unions and industry into that same room, or bringing every public sector organization together to share a clear understanding of government's vision, the whole process was built around engagement.

In a very real way, that mirrored what we were trying to do with the BC Public Service as an employer around the same time. We were trying to build engagement because we saw how important it was to our future success. We were, in effect, trying to change the climate of the public service.

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In early 2006, the Deputy Ministers' Council had agreed on a major commitment to public service renewal. Similar to the efforts underway in many jurisdictions across the country, BC had become alert to its looming demographic challenge, threatening an involuntary reduction of the workforce by a third within a decade due to a closed hiring model, an aging workforce, and a lack of focus on career planning to retain new recruits. Deputy Ministers came together to define a new strategy for retention, recruitment and individual performance to address this business challenge, with these three areas as the pillars of focus.

Like the climate action agenda, when we were faced with the reality of the labour force challenge ahead it became clear that this was not something we could manage with tinkering at the edges or through our traditional approaches to date. The problem required a significant shift in terms of how we manage our human resources within government. In many ways, the direction we took also mirrored that taken on climate action. It required clear and strong leadership. But it also required the engagement of employees themselves.

A first-ever Corporate HR Plan, called Being the Best, was introduced in 2006 to engage the public service, set targets and establish accountability for our results. (Government of BC: *Being the Best: Corporate Human Resource Plan*, 2006.) Central to this program, and unique to BC, was the level and nature of accountability adopted by the deputy ministers and, later, the broader corporate executive which included Assistant Deputy Ministers. Simply put, deputies recognized that if engagement of employees could not be shifted, none of the other more specific objectives set out in Being the Best, would be achieved. Moreover, not achieving the goals of Being the Best would ultimately undermine our capacity to achieve government's broader policy goals.

An accountability framework was implemented that set out seven quantifiable targets to achieve within the year with a portion of executive salaries held back based on these targets. Importantly, two of these targets related to innovation in the work environment:

1. An approximate value of new ideas implemented to improve programs and processes; and
2. The number of employees who felt their ideas were welcomed

and would be implemented.

We then worked together to use every available opportunity to show the public service that noticeable change in the work environment would be driven by the executive. But we also began with a clear understanding that leadership alone can't build engagement. Employee engagement is commonly mistaken with the general happiness of employees. In fact, it is much more specific – it is the level of commitment employees feel toward their workplace and employer. There is a demonstrated linkage between the level of engagement of employees and their performance, in terms of the level and quality of service provided to the public.

We applied ourselves to building engagement as a fundamental business priority for the public service. Employee engagement increased ten points, with key indicators such as whether the workplace is recognized as welcoming innovation, and whether employees feel they receive feedback on their work also increasing. The external profile of the organization also improved dramatically, with a four-fold increase in the number of job applications, and a doubling of the number of external hires.

These indicators reflect the extent to which the BC Public Service is a more engaged environment than it has ever been. That is valuable not just for its future as an employer but also for its future as a provider of services to citizens – because there is that proven link between engagement, performance and citizen satisfaction. But how did we harness that and align that with government's efforts on climate action at the same time?

## ***The Difficult Truth***

Across any public service in Canada, there is a tremendous level of commitment by public servants to their work. In fact, I believe that it is their ability to make a difference in their specific area of work that is the most direct appeal to public service employees, over and above salary and benefits, the availability of jobs, or any other factor relating to job choice. Simply put, engineers care about the integrity of roads and bridges, lawyers care about justice, social workers care about children and families. The impact individuals can have on their area of work within the public service is profound. But how do you get engineers, lawyers, and social workers and so

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many other professions to be part of delivering a climate action agenda that requires the involvement of an entire public service?

There are many challenges in implementing significant policy change in government. I think this relates to a number of obvious, but often overlooked, factors that I'll talk more about in a moment. But first I think we need to acknowledge there are also some elephants in the room – some difficult truths -- rarely discussed outside of government.

There is a high level of professionalism and ethical conduct in our public service and the public can have great confidence in the delivery of what we might call frontline or over-the-counter services. It is also the role of the public service in democratic governance to develop and deliver the broader policy shifts that an administration feels it has been elected to bring about.

However, there is often a sense within the public service that delivering bold new policies is an optional “add-on” to its transactional role or to pre-existing research and analytical areas that the public service has invested itself in. Worse, there are also times when public servants will take the view that a new direction is misguided and actively resist implementation on the philosophy that it is protecting the public from “political interference” in a program area. There is also short-sightedness on the part of the public service. It is usually said that politicians operate on a short-term time horizon that ends with each election cycle. However, there are times when the public service also resists pursuing long-term commitments and visions because they have little confidence the vision will outlast the current administration.

Such views and resistance do a great discredit to the potential of the professional public service itself. They also run the risk of feeding the tendency of elected officials to underestimate the capacity of the public service. I can also say, as someone who has worked for extended periods under both political parties in BC including seven different Premiers, that there can unfortunately often be a sense of doubt at the elected level as to whether the public service will implement the policy changes that are envisioned by Cabinet. It is, to a large degree, an unfair suspicion. But it's also not entirely unfounded. It's not that the public service can't deliver, but rather that it sometimes consciously chooses not to deliver, however justifiable that choice may seem within the organization. In doing so, the public service

fails not only the government but also citizens. We often, justifiably, bemoan the public and political cynicism about the public service. But at the same time, the public service itself is often the author of that cynicism through its resistance to action.

That's not to say that the public service should always follow blindly. The role of the public service is to question, to analyze, to offer options and identify implications. But, ultimately, it is the elected government's view of the public interest that must drive decisions. As David Zussman noted in his 2008 Tansley lecture:

“Whatever benefit flows from the tension between the public service's view of the public interest and the politicians' view of the same thing, the will of the elected politicians must finally prevail. This is the bottom line of any democracy.” (David Zussman, 2008. *Tansley Lecture*, page 9.)

So how do we overcome these challenges at the very heart of the relationship between the elected government and the public service – what Zussman described as the “yin and yang of modern government?” How do we deal with that so that we can deliver on something as massive and challenging as the climate action agenda in BC? I would argue that it hinges on employee engagement.

## ***Engaging Employees***

Approached thoughtfully, the climate action agenda was a perfect fit for employee engagement. Many people care on a personal level about the environment and are concerned about climate change. And many employees are proud to be associated with an employer that will step forward with such a clear and bold agenda in relation to it.

But what we were trying to do on climate action required more than that. It required the members of the public service to go beyond a sense of commitment to the nature of their particular job or field of work and build a sense of engagement across the public service in support of a concerted effort and an approach that moves away from traditional processes.

I mentioned a moment ago a number of often overlooked but obvious obstacles to making this happen in support of a major policy shift.

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First, people often simply don't know about the shift or what it means. Second, people often don't know exactly what they are being asked to do in relation to their own individual roles. Third, people often don't believe that the new direction will really last. And fourth, people may just not feel personally inspired. The response to these issues isn't complicated, but it does take time and effort. However, the benefit is that it doesn't just build engagement in the project at hand. It also builds engagement overall because it involves the same elements needs to build employee engagement overall:

1. Communicate clearly about the initiative;
2. Make it clear that the new direction will last over the long term;
3. Make it part of the feeling of community or "brand" for all employees, and
4. Convince employees that their individual involvement matters, being clear about how they can have a role.

First, to state the obvious, the public service can't implement what it doesn't know about or doesn't understand in relation to their individual roles. I have already described the announcement of the policy shift in the Throne Speech and the level of fanfare and commentary that accompanied it. But, of course, this moment is usually preceded by a period of intense secrecy. The Throne Speech and budget are tightly held documents until the delay of release. Those closely involved with their development forget they are the only ones who are aware of the content.

Even the publicity generated by the Throne Speech has a very limited impact on the civil service. Moreover, public profile doesn't necessarily mean that a public policy shift has gripped the attention of the public service. How many public servants actually stop what they're doing on the day of the Throne Speech and watch the broadcast or read a copy of the speech themselves? It is a given that the Premier's Office, the communications arm of government, legislative drafters, and of course the key division of the lead ministry will be keenly involved. But it is an overlooked reality that the great traditions of a Westminster-style government amount to little more than ceremony that very few government employees will even be aware of, let alone consider in relation to their own jobs. Press releases are geared toward external audiences, and have little or no ability to communicate internally. It's

the most obvious observation to make, and yet it is a pervasive problem for the public service: we forget to tell people what is happening and to make it clear whether and how it relates to them.

While it is the role of the elected level (the Premier and Minister) to speak to the general public and other groups in the broad external audience about policy positions, it is the role of the executive and managers to communicate within the public service. So, why don't we normally complement formal communications efforts and bring the public service into the picture?

One of the toughest challenges in today's world of freedom of information legislation and the instantaneous nature of internet and social media is how easily informal internal communications can end up before unintended audiences. It can be very difficult to communicate in a way that is timely and clear and that doesn't also pose a threat of interference or confusion with government's own, more formal public communications efforts. It is worth underscoring that these communications do not carry different messages, it is simply that messages written for one audience can be misinterpreted or promoted inaccurately to another – either out of misunderstanding or intentionally to cause mischief. As well, a Deputy Minister's message can unwittingly overshadow the voice of their Minister. A high-profile and controversial policy announcement can be as treacherous as much as it is imperative to communicate internally.

We made great strides in improving our internal communications in the BC Public Service as part of our overall effort on employee engagement. Granted, we started from a base of virtually no real communications. But we ended up building a reasonably solid relationship of some trust between employees and their executive. Throughout that work, however, we also assumed that virtually any information we distributed to employees would almost immediately end up in the public domain, which it usually did.

When it came to the initial communications on climate action, our solution was to gather two people from every ministry into a hotel ballroom. We asked for attendance to specifically not be both the DM and ADM, but to include the people who would actually be working on the policy shift. We talked directly about what the policy shift meant and why it had been introduced. The Premier, myself as the Deputy Minister to Premier and other

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key staff spoke to the room, and then held an interactive session to discuss views and answer questions. Follow-up emails were encouraged, both about the usefulness of the session, and any additional steps that would be useful.

That was a good first step, but more was needed to overcome the tendency in the public service to ignore and shield itself from large-scale policy shifts for fear that they won't last and therefore won't warrant the investment of time and energy.

Because the theme itself was inherently attractive to public servants on a personal level, the climate change program became one of the key opportunities to demonstrate a shift in management style. And we could use that more direct and engaged relationship with employees to reinforce the message behind the climate action agenda. As I made my way around the province to talk to public servants in as many communities as possible about Being the Best, I made a point to reference the climate action agenda and to open a discussion about it.

We also integrated climate action into our overall employee communications agenda, giving it a sense of permanence and prominence. A major thrust of our communications efforts was to build a sense of community across our entire workforce. Our goal was to create a common identity across professions and ministries, and enable a platform to communicate to the workforce as a whole. We did this primarily through regular broadcast emails from the Deputy Minister to the Premier regarding government priorities and issues affecting employees, speaking tours through communities and through a non-traditional website, called “@Work”, that speaks to employees on a personal level and invites their involvement in workplace issues.

This award-winning corporate employee intranet rapidly became a support for communication across the public service to build a stronger corporate culture and a sense of community. It was (and still is) viewed by a remarkable 22,000 employees every month – roughly two thirds of all public service employees. Online polls and other feedback tools give employees a direct voice in shaping Being the Best and approaches to issues such as work-life balance, management practices, work processes, training and, of course, climate action.

In 2007, the BC Public Service also adopted a new brand, “Where Ideas Work.” This brand was developed through consultation across the

public service, and became a promise about the work experience. It was also a vehicle to create an identity with those outside the public service who we may want to recruit. As an example, we used the brand as the launchpad for advertising the vacancies in the Climate Action Secretariat – timed with Earth Day – and ultimately received 800 applications for less than a dozen positions.

Internally, we used this brand as the anchor of our efforts to generate ideas from within the public service across all ministries to get to the emission reduction targets of the climate action initiative. A site off @Work called “Where Green Ideas Work” was accessible to employees to highlight ongoing initiatives and educate employees about “green” alternatives in the office and at home. A new employee transit pass program was introduced to encourage the use of public transit. A new tool and incentive program was established to help employees track their own green actions. An expanded internal and external recognition program celebrated the success of employees across the public service and acknowledges employees who are leaders in promoting environmental action at work and in their communities. Employees across government were given the opportunity to submit proposals for why they should be chosen to join Climate Action Secretariat staff at an Al Gore summit on climate change, instead of these seats being filled by traditional program staff.

All of this supported actions I mentioned earlier – like the involvement of ministry staff in concept paper discussions with the Cabinet committee and the creation of ministry green teams to drive towards carbon neutrality. In fact, many of government’s climate action measures originated from individual public servants in the initial stages of inviting concepts and ideas from every level of every ministry. These ranged from minor steps like eliminating paper paychecks, to involving communities through “walking school buses” to larger visions around how roads are paved and how cars line up during waits at the border.

Together, these steps directly involved employees in the climate action agenda by communicating with them about the vision, demonstrating its sustainability as a policy direction, integrating it into the public service community and empowering employees to feel like they actually could have a role in the outcome.

## ***A Culture of Innovation***

Finally, I want to just touch on one of the lasting impacts of this whole process. If our approach to employee engagement influenced our approach to the climate action agenda in the public service, it is also fair to say that what we learned from that also shaped our subsequent steps in building towards a culture of innovation within government.

Under the “job performance” pillar of the Corporate HR Plan, the executive articulated a specific promise to employees about the work environment. It stated:

“We will ask employees to come up with new ideas to do things differently to make work more rewarding and exciting while at the same time improving effectiveness. We will encourage and reward innovation in the BC Public Service and create a true sense of ability to change processes that hold back performance. Part of this effort will focus on ensuring that there are clear channels of communication to employees to share information about what government is trying to achieve – and to ask for ideas on the best way to get there.” (Government of BC: *Being the Best: Corporate Human Resource Plan*, 2006, page 12.)

The way we engaged employees in climate action was, in many ways, one of our first steps in realizing this commitment. But there was also something different about the policy announcement itself. It was the debut of a new approach in BC that we called “defining positions”. Government often defines policy at a high level in what we might call “motherhood” statements. In an effort to gain broad public acceptance, government ends up avoiding choices and instead communicating objectives that capture every aspect of the public interest. In this case, government took the alternative route. Instead of defining policy in terms that would be hard to criticize, it made very specific specific choices involving hard decisions and tradeoffs.

Instead of a general commitment like “BC will ensure long-term electricity supply” which would be impossible to argue with – and possibly too vague to implement effectively – the government chose “BC will be electricity self-sufficient by 2016.” Instead of a general commitment like “BC will promote conservation efforts,” the choice was “50 per cent of

new electricity demand will be met through conservation.” This has two benefits: for the government, it has connected with the public in a clear way; for the public service, the Cabinet’s intention and therefore the subsequent policy choices that might need to come before Cabinet for direction were immediately clear and also provided consistent long-term direction. It was much more effective for accelerating the work required to be undertaken by the public service.

But defining these positions so clearly also set a bold challenge to the public service. It left little wiggle room. It provided no side door- an opportunity to redefine the commitment down the road. At the onset, it challenged the public service to seek out innovative new approaches to reach these pre-defined targets.

A new set of corporate performance values for the BC Public Service was introduced in 2008 – service, passion, courage, curiosity, teamwork and accountability. Some of these seem obvious choices. But others, like courage, curiosity and passion, are not attributes commonly associated with the public service by the public at large although they do exist in many dynamic people and program areas inside government. Introducing the expectation that the whole public service should care about how it works, not just what it does is, of course, the purpose behind adopting a public set of performance values. Though in the past often suppressed by the elected administration, and more often by the public service itself, these values require the right environment to re-emerge. But they are also the essential ingredients of innovation – of the tireless search for a new and better way to achieve a goal.

I once gave a speech on innovation in the public service to an IPAC audience. I put it in the context of ancient mariners who feared sailing out of sight of land. Traditionally in the public service we have been the same – clinging to the safe harbor of certainty rather than risk what is unproven. But to be innovative is to do the opposite. It is to prepare ourselves as best we can and then sail for whatever is beyond the horizon.

With the climate action agenda and those defining positions, the government effectively turned the public service away from shore and challenged us to navigate. The first step of courage was taken for us. The question was would the public service have the courage to follow? I’m proud to say we did. And I think it is important to note that it probably wouldn’t

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have happened without leadership.

The popular wisdom is that you can't lead an organization to be innovative. That's true to an extent. You can't force it. But leadership can set the challenge and say to people on an individual level, "you have an important role, and we trust you to deliver." And if you demonstrate and reinforce that trust, then the public service can rise to the challenge. But you do need to hold leadership accountable for making it possible.

Innovation in all its forms cannot be corralled and measured and put in a box. But components of it can be. Its outcomes can be. You can chart its progress. You can see its impact. There is some controversy in the academic world as to whether innovation in an organization can be measured. I have always held that it can and, in fact, incorporated it into executive salary holdbacks, as discussed earlier.

Innovation can't happen because of leadership alone, but it also can't happen without leadership.

### ***Conclusion***

Implementation of the climate action initiative very purposefully did not rely on traditional processes like inter-ministry committees and naming of executive "champions" to bring about the cross-government involvement required. Instead, with the support of cross-cutting teams and a broad incorporation into our overall approach to employee engagement, the initiative tried to reach the individual public servant in every ministry and at every level.

The new policy shift challenged all of us with the unexpected and the unconventional. It defied us to work differently – and it needed us to because it was bigger than any single part of government. It challenged me as the head of the public service to take a role in communicating policy shifts to the public service responsible for implementation. The climate change shift in BC challenged our public service leadership to actually lead, not by dictating but by engaging. It invited the public service on a collective but also an individual level to contribute. And, given the opportunity, they did.

# The Tansley Lecture Series

Donald D. Tansley (1925-2007)

Presented by the Johnson-Shoyama  
Graduate School of Public Policy (JSGS)



**B**orn in Regina on May 19, 1925, Don Tansley served overseas with the Regina Rifle Regiment. He joined the Government of Saskatchewan in 1950 after graduating in arts and commerce from the University of Saskatchewan. During his time in government, Tansley played a pivotal role in several areas, including chairing the committee that implemented the country's first working model of medicare. Tansley spent four years as a key deputy minister in the modernization of the New Brunswick government before moving to Ottawa where he served the federal government

in various positions including Deputy Minister of Fisheries and Oceans. Tansley was noted for his great organizational skills and his ability to work in challenging public policy environments.

THE TANSLEY LECTURE ~ Named in honour of Donald D. Tansley and his remarkable career as a senior civil servant in Canada, this lecture highlights the various organizational approaches which have been used to implement innovative and often contentious policy decisions by governments. Each lecturer is selected on the basis of knowledge of, or experience with, using or adapting the machinery of government or the non-profit sector to achieve an ambitious policy objective or better serve the public interest. At times, this requires a major restructuring of government and its agencies or a reorientation of the public sector relative to other sectors in society.

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