Promoting Public Sector Innovation:
The Role of Schools of Government

13-14 November 2014, OECD, Paris

Highlights of the discussion

TABLE OF CONTENTS

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1. Introduction

A meeting on "Promoting Public Sector Innovation: the Role of Schools of Government," was held on 13-14 November 2014 in Paris. The meeting was attended by representatives from National Schools of Government (SGs), international, regional and national associations of schools of public administration, the OECD secretariat, and other relevant stakeholders. The event took place in tandem with the OECD conference "Innovating the Public Sector: from Ideas to Impact" (OPSI conference) and the 50th session of the Public Governance Committee. Reflecting on the discussion with innovation practitioners during the OECD conference on public sector innovation, the meeting aimed to explore the role of the SGs in building public sector innovation capabilities. It also aimed to facilitate the exchange of practices in this area, drawing on good practices and lessons learned among participants. The meeting also provided an oppurtunity to discuss preliminary results of the 2014 OECD survey on Schools of Government and showcase a new OECD online platform to promote seamless exchange of information between the OECD and SGs.

2. Role of SGs in building public sector innovation capability

During the session, participants were invited to reflect on the lessons learned from the dialogue with innovation practitioners and their impact on the role and activities of SGs; necessary capabilities for individual public servants and organisations to promote and implement innovative ideas; the role of SGs in public sector innovation; and the role of the OECD to support schools in this area.

Moderator: **Prof. Giovanni Tria**, Director, National School of Public Administration, Italy

Lead discussants

- **Mr Carlos Almada**, Vice-President, National Institute of Public Administration (INAP), Mexico
- **Dr Hwan-Seong Lee**, Director, Office of Strategic Planning and **Ms Eun-Jong Lee**, Researcher, Department of Government Co-ordination, Korea Institute of Public Administration (KIPA)
- **Prof. Geert Bouckaert**, President of the International Institute of Administrative Sciences (IIAS), Public Management Institute (Faculty of Social Sciences) of the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium
- **Ms Louise Ann Beehag**, Executive Director and Head of Executive Education, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, Singapore
- **Ms Carmen Gonzalez Serrano**, Deputy Head of Department, International Relations Department, INAP, Spain
- **Mr Daniel Gerson**, Policy Analyst, Public Employment and Management Division, Public Governance and Territorial Development Directorate, OECD

Lessons learned from innovation practitioners: defining public sector innovation

An effective innovation strategy should be based on the interaction between the scientific world, the world of business and enterprise, and government. In this context, public administrations have a double role: innovating as public sector providers and creating as regulators the right conditions to allow these three worlds to interact.

Building on the discussions held during the OPSI conference, lead discussants pointed to the importance of having a pragmatic definition of public sector innovation and it was noted that the administrative culture change should be results-oriented, efficient and globally open., The point was raised that promoting innovation might mean un-doing things, instead of doing new things (e.g. during the OPSI conference, the US mentioned the abolition of some existing procedures as an innovative step). An improved and more innovative public sector requires not only the delivery of new services, but also needs to be able to effectively cope with emergencies and unexpected catastrophes. In addition, cultural specificities of a given public administration (e.g. whether an administration is performance oriented, individual/collective oriented, etc.) need to be taken into account for innovation strategies to be effective. There is no "one size fits all'' strategy for innovation. Thus, "best practices'' need to be interpreted in a way in which they are applicable to the cultural specificities of different administrations. Finally, it was emphasised that innovation within the legislative and judicial branches should not be neglected and is essential to building stronger societies.

Role of SGs

The trade-off between taking risks and promoting innovation was an important topic that was discussed during the OPSI conference. Errors and failures are intrinsic to innovative activities. For instance, one of the capabilities needed for individual public servants to implement innovative ideas is the capacity to measure risk, and to accept more easily a certain level of risk. These capabilities require basic skills of cost-benefit analysis so as to determine levels of impact and risk. It is also crucial for public executives and politicians to learn about how to use performance management and evaluation to foment more innovative behaviour. The role of SGs in teaching performance management, evaluation, and risk management is critical in this regard.

Participants agreed that the role of SGs in sharing good practices is of the utmost importance to promote public sector innovation. Participants highlighted that SGs can teach innovation, but they can also teach how to create space and the conditions for enabling and promoting innovation and cultural change within the public sector. Thus, the role of SGs is both to create and share knowledge of different experiences in public sector innovation. For example, schools can prepare and propose training materials elaborating on real case studies. Case studies from a concrete environment can serve as an important analytical tool for students and others to understand the conditions that promoted innovation and the obstacles that needed to be overcome in order to implement innovative idea with a clear picture of the possible errors and corrections made in each case. Establishing a peer-network database to exchange information and case studies is important as knowledge is generated by learning from shared experiences. In the same vein it was advised to identify best practices and case studies in a practical manner so that materials could be easily adapted for teaching purposes.

Participants acknowledged the important role of the OECD Network of Schools of Government in supporting exchange among national SGs on current policy priorities and capacity-building, policy implementation and research needs as well as strengthening the link between international policy dialogue and national public service capacity-building efforts.

Challenges to be addressed by SGs

Participants noted that SGs mostly address innovation from an academic perspective. In the complexity of increasing societal demands, it is critical to reverse the teaching and learning approaches from a discipline-driven logic to a problem-driven logic.

It was stressed that a professional and engaged workforce is required to foster change and innovation. Therefore, it is crucial to attract those that are talented and possess the right skills to the public sector and to find the means to increase the motivation of public service employees. In this regard, many participants
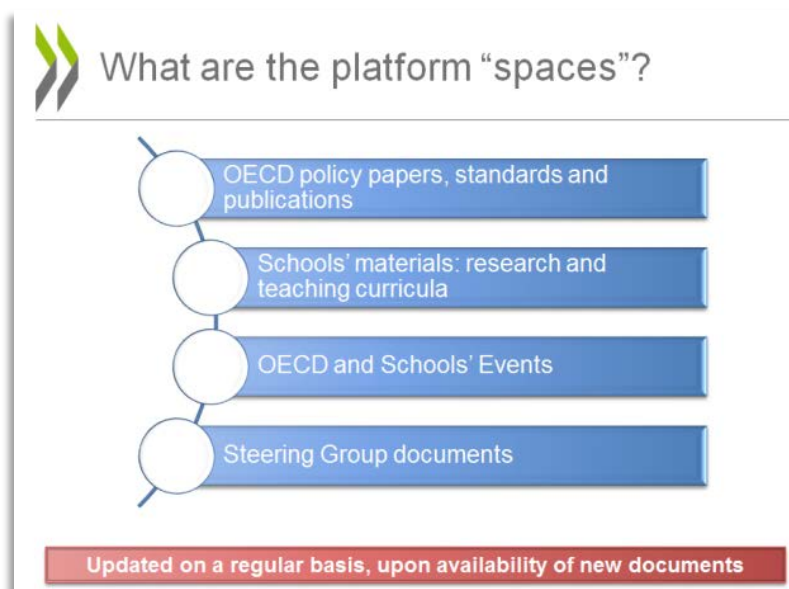
pointed to the remuneration gap between public and private sector employees as an important challenge. The Secretariat noted that the OECD has been collecting data on compensation scales for senior level public civil servants, published in *Government at a Glance 2013*. However, due to methodological difficulties in finding comparable jobs in the private sector, addressing the remuneration gap between these two sectors remains a challenge. Some participants suggested that in order to compensate this imbalance in remuneration and attract talented and skilled employees, the role of SGs could be to enhance the prestige of the public civil service. The issue of the political risks that are inherent to working in the public sector (due to government transitions) were also raised during the discussion. Participants noted the importance of building trust between new incoming governments and SGs to attract dynamic and talented students to serve in the public sector.

The participants from the MENA region pointed to challenges in coping with stability concerns in the region as a priority. In this context, the SGs in the MENA region were increasingly focusing on issues of diversity and inclusiveness. Participants highlighted the importance of investing in human resources and in developing leadership skills in order to create a culture of innovation.

3. OECD Online Platform for SGs

The Secretariat presented the new Online Platform for SGs (the Platform) which aims to promote the exchange of information between the OECD and Network Participants as well as between other Network participants. The Platform includes four main areas:
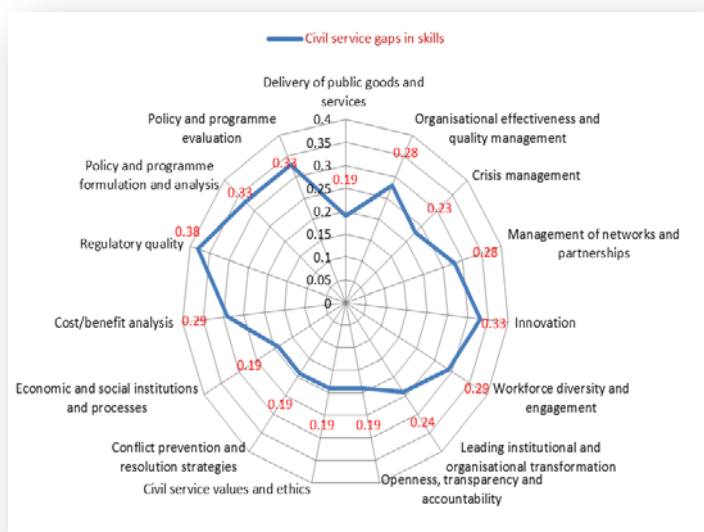
I. **OECD policy papers and publications**, which include public governance publications, recent policy papers from the OECD governance committees (Public Governance Committee, Regulatory Policy Committee and Territorial Development Policy Committee) which have not been published, and governance instruments and recommendations. As a next step, the Secretariat is also planning to include materials from other policy areas beyond governance. In this regard, **schools are invited to indicate their specific priority areas that they would like to see covered on the Platform**, beyond those that are already included.

II. **SGs's materials** - schools are encouraged to share their curricula, teaching modules and research on various governance topics.

III. **OECD and Schools' Events**, which aim to provide the possibility for schools to upload information about their events and find all relevant information on past events of those in the Network.

IV. **Steering Group's documents**.

The Platform offers numerous benefits to the participants, including:

- ✓ Providing exclusive access to the latest OECD materials, including unpublished documents discussed by OECD policy committees,

- ✓ Allowing an opportunity for SGs to showcase and share innovative approaches to teaching, promote their networks and events globally and identify potential partners for joint projects.

- ✓ Facilitating interaction between Network members through online discussions on topics of mutual interest cultivating a community of practice.
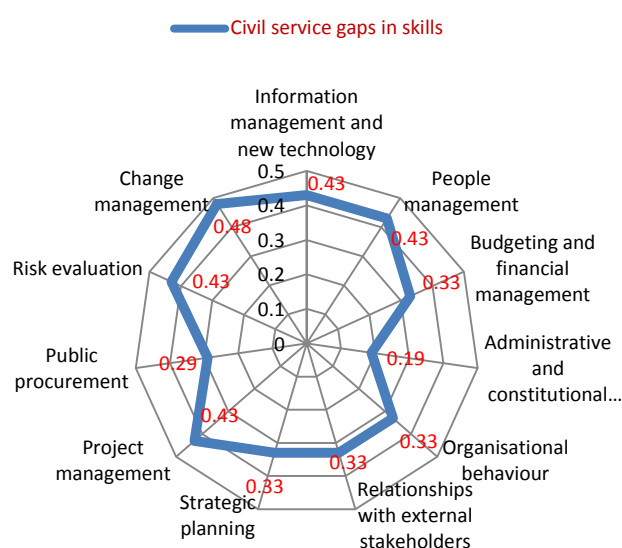
Participants highlighted the critical importance of the Online Platform which will provide free access to OECD policy materials and benchmarks. It was also stressed that the **active participation and contribution of partner schools to the Online Platform**, was necessary order to make it a meaningful and effective tool.

4. Preliminary results of the 2014 OECD Survey on Schools of Government

The Secretariat presented the preliminary results of the 2014 OECD Survey on Schools of Government collected from 23 respondent schools. The survey aims to provide comparative benchmarks on the operations, functions and scope of activites of SGs across OECD and partner countries and deepen understanding of the role of the schools in implementing and informing government priorities. It was noted that the Survey could receive a broader circulation in the next phase by being translated into languages other than English.

Findings highlighted skill gaps in the civil service with regard to management of civil service organisations, improvements of civil service, leadership and values and understanding public policy, with the biggest civil service skill gaps being in the areas of: change management, risk evaluation, project

management, people management, and information management and new technology, regulatory quality, policy and programme formulation and analysis, policy and programme evaluation, innovation, workforce diversity and engagement, and cost-benefit analysis.

5. Priority Themes for Teaching & Primary Responsibilities of Schools

Priority themes for teaching and research in SGs included leading institutional and organisational transformation, organisational effectiveness and quality management, policy and programme evaluation, and people management. In regards to their primary responsibilities, the respondent SGs are overall responsible for providing learning opportunities and honing the skills of current civil servants at all levels of government, as well as for non-governmental stakeholders. At the local level, they are also responsible for providing opportunities for the capacity-building of senior civil service managers and current government employees. At the non-governmental level, they also provide these opportunities to future civil servants. They are responsible for encouraging civil service innovation at all levels of government, as well as for non-governmental stakeholders, and organising events and conferences at the central and local level,. They are also responsible for integrity and values training at the central and regional level, both for government and non-governmental stakeholders.

Required skills are mostly identified via discussions across the civil service, particularly with HR services and senior management, but also with other stakeholders. Workforce planning by individual ministries and performance evaluations and assessments of government programmes and priorities are other frequently used methods for identifying appropriate skills. **Missing or needed skills** are mostly identified via discussions with the aforementioned stakeholders, but can also be identified via international standards and policy advice, or by civil service employee surveys conducted by the Centres of Government or SGs. The most **widespread training methods** in general are: seminars and workshops, in-service training, events and conferences, executive training and coaching, and networking and exchange of knowledge.

Finally, most respondents are primarily engaged in applied **knowledge development** and research. The main knowledge development activities undertaken by respondent schools are workshops, seminars and roundtables, and the least used mechanism for knowledge development are research centres. The main outputs of knowledge development and research are research publications and papers, while the least common outputs are online knowledge management systems. All respondent schools monitor, report and evaluate their activities.

The **main challenges** facing the respondent schools are: limited funding; limited human resources; lack of monitoring mechanisms for learning/training initiatives; limited co-ordination with other entities involved in civil service training and learning; and limited accountability mechanisms.
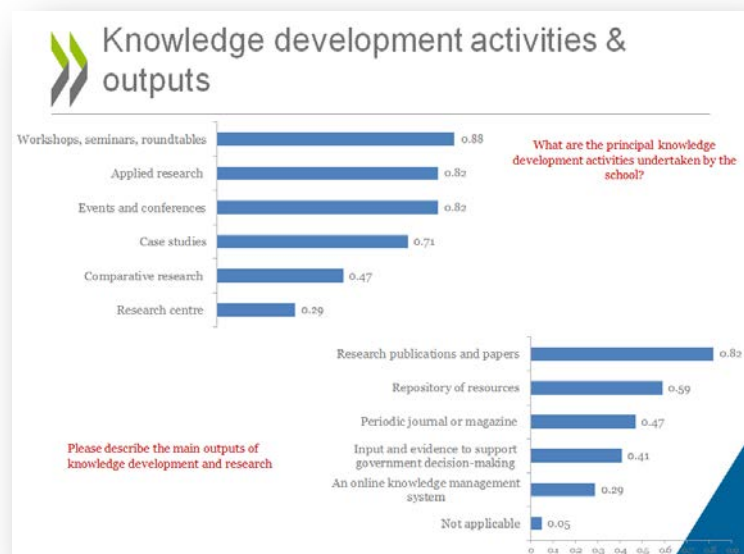
The three factors identified by respondent schools as the most conducive to their **success** in turn are: programme quality and relevance; a specific legislation on civil service training; and a whole-of-government training strategy.

The **three main priorities** for the next two years identified by respondent schools are:

✓ more resources for the development of leadership and effective management in the civil service
✓ better alignment of activities with government priorities (although this already appears to be in good shape, considering it ranks as the least pressing challenge)
✓ an expanded focus to include international issues that affect the quality of governments worldwide.

Most SGs use or have used OECD materials in their teaching and research. The materials that would be most useful to include in teaching and research activities are the *Public Governance and Sectorial Reviews*, *Regions at a Glance* and *Government at a Glance* series. The five OECD instruments that respondent schools would be the most interested in including in their curricula are the Council Recommendations on:

✓ Regulatory Policy and Governance;
✓ Ethical Conduct in the Public Service;
✓ Quality of Government Regulation;
✓ Public Governance of PPPs; and
✓ Managing Conflict of Interest.

In terms of **priorities for future discussions with the OECD and among Network members**, strategies for improving the productivity and effectiveness of civil service appears to be the top choice, followed by evaluation and performance measurement, and open, inclusive, clean and accountable government. The top area in which respondent schools would be interested in partnering and sharing with other members of the Network are best practices in learning, but also in specific areas of governance, management and leadership, as well as partnerships between organisations.

The preliminary analysis of the responses to the survey seem to show that respondent schools have a good understanding of their strengths and weaknesses, as well as a good level of co-ordination with their respective governments. It also shows that members of the Network are keen to work together and learn from each other's best practices, which is the main purpose of the Network. More detailed responses to the survey were expected by 20 December 2014, at which point the Secretariat will be able to produce a full analysis of the results and compile them into a report. The Secretariat also stressed its intention to extend this survey globally to other regions and invited the Network members to contribute to this goal to reach

as many SGs as possible, in order to achieve more comprehensive information sharing and a truly collaborative learning process for all involved.

Participants highlighted the importance of the survey as a tool that allows SGs to reflect on their role from a strategic point of view and to review their curricula.

6. Proposed next steps

– The schools were invited to reflect on how to practically integrate the outcomes of the discussion into their daily work, such as, creating teaching modules and joint curricula.

– Following the discussions that were held in Caserta in February 2014, the Steering Group proposed developing a set of training modules devoted to governance, starting with modules on open government. A working group with several SGs will be set up to advance the development of these modules.

– SGs are invited to consider seconding an expert to the OECD for a limited period of time to help develop open government training modules or other activities related to the OECD Network of Schools of Government.