

WORKPLACE INNOVATION IN CANADA'S PUBLIC SERVICE

HOW COLLABORATIVE APPROACHES, DYNAMIC WORKSPACES,
AND ENABLING TECHNOLOGY CAN DELIVER
GREATER VALUE TO CANADIANS



Public Policy Forum
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Public Policy Forum

Building Better Government

The Public Policy Forum is an independent, not-for-profit organization dedicated to improving the quality of government in Canada through enhanced dialogue among the public, private and voluntary sectors. The Forum's members, drawn from business, federal, provincial and territorial governments, the voluntary sector and organized labour, share a belief that an efficient and effective public service is important in ensuring Canada's competitiveness abroad and quality of life at home.

Established in 1987, the Forum has earned a reputation as a trusted, non-partisan facilitator, capable of bringing together a wide range of stakeholders in productive dialogue. Its research program provides a neutral base to inform collective decision making. By promoting information-sharing and greater links between governments and other sectors, the Forum helps ensure public policy in our country is dynamic, coordinated and responsive to future challenges and opportunities.

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ABOUT THIS REPORT

In an era of fiscal restraint, it is particularly important that governments focus on providing the greatest value to Canadians in the most efficient way. The most common response for those acting under financial pressure is to examine *what* a government does and to choose among competing priorities. However, a complementary approach is often overlooked: Governments must also examine *how* the work gets done.

Across sectors, organizations are continuously improving the way they work. Teams are developing better practices and processes, leveraging new technologies, and building more efficient and inspiring workspaces to generate greater value.

For the purposes of this report, ‘workplace innovation’ is defined as implementing new ways of working that deliver better outcomes and lower costs for an organization and its stakeholders. This includes a range of integrated work process, work spaces, and technology-driven improvements that collectively enhance the way that work gets done. As more and more organizations execute these innovative strategies, it is important that Canada’s federal, provincial, and municipal public services are not left behind. They too must explore and adopt workplace innovation for the benefit of all Canadians.

The head of Canada’s 270,000 member federal public service, Wayne Wouters, has made workplace innovation a central theme in his annual reports to the Prime Minister. In his most recent report, he stressed that the public service “must continue to take advantage of new technologies” and must “nurture a more performance-oriented, collaborative and innovative culture.” He further emphasized the need to “get better at dealing with complexity [which] will require new approaches to creative and collaborative problem solving.”¹

Developing and adopting new and better work practices requires examination and dialogue. The Public Policy Forum joins senior leaders across government in applauding Wayne Wouters’ recommendations, and is working to support the necessary dialogue and action to realize this vision.

In developing this discussion paper, the Forum interviewed leaders from across the federal public service and from the private sector. We sought their input on the importance of workplace innovation, their vision for the future, changes that they believe should occur in the public service, and barriers and challenges

to realizing those changes and benefits. We summarized their input and tested our initial findings with a broad group of public and private sector leaders at our *Workplace 2.0: Adapting Places and Spaces* conference on February 24, 2011. While our research focuses on opportunities and actions for Canada's federal public service, we believe that our recommendations are also applicable to other organizations.

We believe that exploring, applying, and supporting public service workplace innovation can lead to substantial benefits.

Workplace innovation can:

- Drive better outcomes for Canadians;
- Attract, inspire, and retain employees; and,
- Deliver greater value for money.

Developing and spreading these innovations requires strong leadership and sustained engagement. This paper aims to contribute to furthering the dialogue on workplace innovation and to help catalyze the necessary action to improve public service workplaces across the country.

The Public Policy Forum is appreciative of the support and insights of TELUS in realizing this discussion paper. As a leading Canadian telecommunications company, TELUS has successfully championed its own Flexible Work Styles program and is passionate about supporting the public sector in their workplace innovation.

It is our belief that organizations in the public and private sectors can benefit from an exchange of ideas and best practices in workplace innovation.

Sincerely,



David J. Mitchell
President & CEO



A NEW VISION OF WORK: ANYTIME, WITH ANYONE, ANYWHERE

The way we work is changing in all sectors. Organizations are leveraging the opportunities presented by new technologies and applying more flexible management and work practices to drive greater value and results. Public service leaders interviewed for this report hope to capitalize on these trends to improve work conditions and productivity.

Senior executives outlined three underlying factors that characterized workplace innovation, emphasizing that the public service they believe in supports teams that can work *anytime*, *with anyone*, and *anywhere*.

Anytime: Employees should be less bound by rigid schedules, enabling them to work more flexibly to meet deadlines while balancing their work and family lives. Where possible, they should have direct and immediate access to integrated information.

With anyone: Organizational silos should be broken down to enable the coordinated policymaking and program delivery necessary to respond to an increasing number of cross-cutting issues. Ad hoc groups should be easily formed to work on specific issues as required. Collaboration and sharing should be encouraged and rewarded.

Anywhere: Public servants should connect with their colleagues and citizens across the country whether they are in the office, at a hotel, or at home. There should be an increase in telework² and the use of virtual collaboration³ (e.g. telepresence, webcam, conference calls). In the office, employees should have flexibility to work in a variety of configurations including shared spaces and hot desks.





WHY GOVERNMENTS MUST EMBRACE WORKPLACE INNOVATION

Senior leaders identified three inter-related benefits to working *anytime, with anyone, and anywhere*.

They believe that workplace innovation can:

1. Drive better outcome for Canadians;
2. Attract, inspire, and retain employees; and,
3. Deliver greater value for money.

Driving better outcomes for Canadians

Workplace innovation has the potential to improve the quality of service to Canadians and the quality of policy making in Canada. First, workplace innovation can support better communication with citizens. By leveraging new technologies, the public service can provide more citizen-centered service that is better integrated across departments and governments and reaches citizens where they are. Improved communications with citizens can also improve policy and decision making.

Second, flexible teams and improved work processes can help governments provide better services, often at a lower cost. The Dutch National Ministry of Finance significantly improved Tax and Customs Administration by amalgamating staff into a smaller number of offices and implementing teamwork based on functional areas. After transitioning from 250 to 80 offices, teams were able to reduce the tax refund period from 12 months to two weeks, while also reducing operating costs.⁴

Third, workplace innovation can foster a more collaborative and connected public service. By integrating information, public servants can develop more effective and holistic solutions to complex issues, such as energy use and climate change. Integrated information can also enable them to respond more quickly and efficiently to problems as they emerge, including domestic and international disasters.



Attracting, inspiring, and retaining employees

Workplace innovation can help governments to attract, retain, and foster the greatest contribution from employees. For many Canadians, a 9-5 workday is no longer the norm; the use of mobile devices, increased workloads, and the need to balance the pressures of work and home life mean that professionals are working different (and often increased) work schedules. Executives note that personal technology owned by public servants is often superior to technology in their offices, which can make home a richer working environment. To continue to be a competitive employment option, public service workplaces must possess adequate tools to enable employees to get their work done as effectively when they are in the office.

A more flexible and collaborative work culture can empower and motivate employees and improve productivity and job satisfaction. A March 2010 Harris Decima survey indicated that 54 per cent of respondents agreed that flexible work arrangements offer motivation to work harder, while 73 per cent agreed that flexible work has a positive impact on employee productivity.⁵

Productivity improvements from workplace innovation have also been observed in practice. In recent years, Sun Microsystems shifted its entire workforce to telework. Today, the average employee spends about half of his or her time at the office and the other half at client sites or working from a home office. This transition to telework has generated productivity increases of 34 per cent among staff.⁶

Workplace innovation can also expand employment pools in two ways. First, it can make jobs more attractive to employees. A survey completed by a leading Canadian public opinion firm found that 89 per cent of employees believe that the ability to telework makes for a more attractive employer.⁷ Other workplace innovations that promote collaboration, flexibility, and attractive workspaces are also popular with employees. Second, telework can enable organizations to hire talented people from across the country. Some federal employers currently use telework to hire talented people who live in regions without federal offices or to retain people who move.

Telework and greater use of virtual collaboration also have the potential to save employees time and money.⁸ Enabling employees to work from anywhere can lead to savings of up to \$2,000 per year per employee⁹ from reduced transportation, meals, and other daily costs. In turn, time spent on a lengthy



commute or travelling to meetings can be reallocated to higher value professional and personal activities.

Delivering greater value for money

Governments around the world are entering into a period of fiscal restraint. Workplace innovation can reduce costs while maintaining service levels. Strategic investments in smaller, more flexible workspaces that are enabled by appropriate technologies are one promising approach. Through reduced workspace and associated costs, the Government of the UK has, for example, set an operational efficiency goal of £1-1.5B (\$1.6-2.4 B Canadian dollars) in savings by 2013. This is being achieved through departmental efforts to transition staff to telework and to more efficient office spaces.

Through this process, the UK Office for Standards in Education has reduced space needs from 11 buildings to four.¹⁰ Similar efficiencies have been realized in the Government of Canada. Health Canada's move of 500 employees to a brighter, more flexible, functional, and space efficient facility has generated savings of more than 50 per cent in real estate costs and provided a better work environment. Further space efficiency gains may be possible. In Denmark, for example, average office space allocation per employee is less than 7m².¹¹ The Government of Canada standard ranges from 7.4 to 28 m² depending on type of employee.¹²

Enabling and supporting telework also has indirect cost savings and other societal benefits. It can reduce emissions, put less stress on public infrastructure, and can lead to better support for families and communities. In recent years, for example, TELUS transitioned 18,000 employees to telework as part of a broader plan to improve its workplace. This workplace innovation has reduced greenhouse gasses from travel by over 200 tonnes each year, and saved employees time which they can invest in work or family.¹³

Direct cost savings can also be generated by replacing costly travel with alternate forms of meetings. Teleconferences, web-conferences such as Skype, and telepresence meetings can generate savings on airfares and travel time. Cisco Systems Inc. estimates that savings on travel from recent virtual collaboration investments amount to \$1B per year.

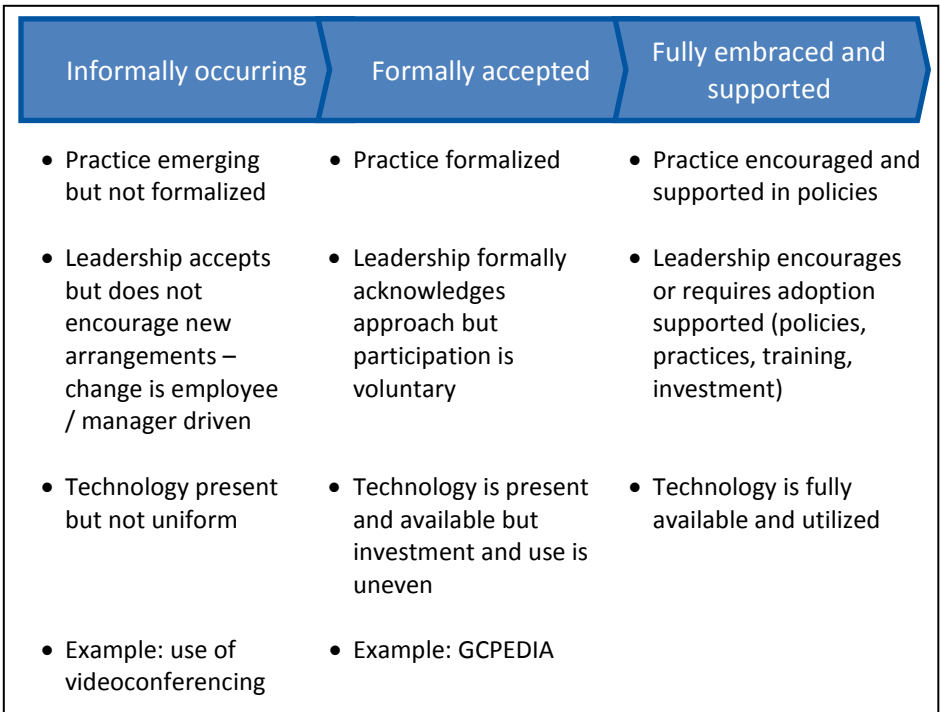




REALIZING THE VISION

From informal pilots to supporting and encouraging full scale workplace innovation

Transformation often happens in stages, and innovation often occurs incrementally. As highlighted in the graphic below, new practices can be introduced informally, then recognized formally, and finally encouraged, supported and required by management.¹⁴ While senior leaders interviewed highlighted many examples of informally occurring innovations and a few examples of formally accepted workplace innovations, most believed that wider adoption of fully supported innovations is both desirable and necessary to fully realize their benefits.



Executives highlighted many ways that the Government of Canada is informally experimenting with workplace innovation. Junior employees in one department are facilitating horizontal collaboration by transforming an old storage room into a shared space for informal meetings and ‘ideas jams’ across units. Management teams are connecting regularly by videoconference. A cross-government network of public servants has created “Workplace 2.0 practitioners group” – more commonly known as #W2P – an online space using Twitter. Employees use this medium to collaborate across departments on a range of issues. Other public servants are using their personal smartphones and other devices (e.g. iPads and laptops) to work in ways that are more familiar and productive to them, helping them to work *anywhere* and at *any time*.

Executives highlighted a few areas in which workplace innovations are formally recognized. The Government of Canada introduced a formal telework policy in 1999 that enables employees and managers to develop flexible work arrangements that deliver the same quality and quantity of work without incremental cost.¹⁵ Public Works and Government Services Canada (PWGSC) has been experimenting with departmental partners to deliver more innovative and motivating environments for employees, such as at the Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada Skyline Project, and the Health Canada campus which recently opened in Kanata, ON. These workspaces demonstrate an effort to experiment with different arrangements within the office, encouraging work *anywhere*, and *with anyone*.

The Clerk of the Privy Council and many Deputies support the use of Web 2.0 technologies that help employees work collaboratively. One successful online pilot, the Natural Resources Canada (NRCan) departmental wiki, has been scaled up to create a government wide wiki, GCPEDIA, which will allow employees to work collaboratively across the public service. Finally, departments including Veterans Affairs, the Canadian Forestry Service and Health Canada are reaching out to Canadians using social media and web tools, such as Facebook, YouTube, and online portals such as not4me.ca.

Executives would like workplace innovation to be fully embraced and supported across the public service. Moving forward, a coordinated push for adopting these ideas is required.



Fostering workplace innovation in the public service

Senior leaders articulated and supported the vision of a workplace that enables employees to work *anytime, anywhere, and with anyone*. While individual employees and managers have important roles in developing and applying innovative practices in their areas, they believe that these practices can and should be expanded. To fully realize the vision across the public service, however, three building blocks are required: universal tools and technology, dynamic workspaces, and policies and work processes that foster collaboration, flexibility, and results. While these three building blocks are described separately it is the coordination of these elements in service of specific workplace improvements that will generate real value.

Enabling information technology

Just as it moved from typewriters to personal computers 20-30 years ago, the public service must smartly invest in the tools and technology required to work effectively and efficiently today. Enabling workplace innovation requires technological consistency and flexibility. This could be enabled through an integrated Government of Canada network with a common desktop, username/login and email system. Currently, a public servant's online identity changes when they move from one department to another. Systems and interfaces must be built to connect the government as a whole and to avoid needlessly separating systems, information, and people.

A fully integrated and connected IT infrastructure must also effectively provide access to integrated information. To foster working anywhere and at anytime, information must be accessible by employees who need it when they need it, whether they are in the office or elsewhere.

Finally, workplace innovation should be supported by smart investment in tools that meet user needs. Business cases should be developed and examined for investment in some or all of the following:

- Wireless laptops and/or tablets or smart phones to provide greater mobility;
- Wireless networks that replace the maze of wires around employee desks; and,
- Webcams for video conferencing and far greater use of telepresence to reduce travel and increase connectedness.



Dynamic workspaces

To attract, retain, and inspire employees, they must feel motivated by their surroundings. Working in a bright, interesting, and attractive environment with ample exposure to natural light can enhance employee productivity. Smaller, more flexible spaces are also beneficial. As one federal department found when exploring office re-design, employees can spend 60 per cent of their time away from their desks. This suggests that having a fixed work space for each employee is likely a poor utilization of resources.

The creation of open spaces with flexible and adaptive workstations - such as docking stations, pods, and hot desks - creates a sense of community and ease of movement for employees to work in a setting that meets both their task-specific needs, as well as new organizational goals. As governments seek to promote innovation through greater collaboration and teamwork, they must create the environment that allows employees to move around, work together, and most importantly, be inspired. In 2002, the Government of Denmark created MindLab, a hub for co-creation and policy design through collaboration. Housed in a dramatically different setting than a typical government office, the space is flexible and adaptive, with moveable furniture, multiple stations, and a neutral décor filled with natural light.¹⁶

On a broader scale, the UK Department for Children, Schools, and Families has leveraged an office re-design to promote collaboration and team work, and to increase employee engagement and operational efficiency.¹⁷ This included eliminating assigned desks and offices, creating multiple types of workstations, and replacing drab office furniture with modern and bright chairs, desks, and couches.

Investment in creating a flexible, dynamic office with a combination of individual and group spaces must be the focus of any new facilities that are being planned. PWGSC and other departments must work together to develop tailored plans for the internal fit-up (e.g. furniture, floor plans) based on a range of options for flexible and adaptive workspaces. Dynamic workspaces extend beyond the office to the home and other locations and should be supported by the technologies described above, and by suitable policies and practices.



Supportive policies, guidelines, and management tools

Most importantly, workplace innovation must be supported by policies, guidelines, and tools that promote collaboration and investments in new ways of working that deliver value. Managers must be empowered to challenge policies and practices that hinder workplace innovations which drive better outcomes. Employees should be actively measured and rewarded based on their outputs and outcomes and entrusted to work where and when they are most productive.

Policies and structures should support flexible teams working toward defined project goals. Collaboration should be fostered by encouraging and helping employees to form flexible, dynamic groups focused on specific goals. In order to facilitate horizontality and collaboration, managers should encourage, and in some cases require, professionals to develop their work in a collaborative space, such as GCPEDIA.

To facilitate knowledge integration and efficiency, digital approval processes and virtual meetings should become the norm. Others should follow Library and Archives Canada's lead of moving toward full digital approval processes at the most senior levels, and should consider emulating the practice of at least one HRSDC technology unit that uses video conferences and webcams to connect a management team that is distributed across the country.

While the Government of Canada has a telework policy, it could provide greater support to the practice. As of January 1, 2011, the Government of Australia required all agencies to have a telework plan to assist with the recruitment and retention of highly skilled workers.¹⁸ The US Government also actively supports telework both through management tools and in legislation. The US Office of Personnel Management recently released a Guide to Telework in the Federal Government, following the passage of the Telework Enhancement Act of 2010.¹⁹





BARRIERS TO REALIZING THE BENEFITS OF WORKPLACE INNOVATION IN THE FEDERAL PUBLIC SERVICE

Federal public servants identified two groups of barriers to greater adoption of workplace innovation: cultural barriers and organizational barriers.

Cultural barriers

Cultural resistance to change was generally the first and most important barrier raised by executives.

Executives cited:

- Resistance by managers to adopting new management styles including a perceived inability by managers to manage employee performance if employees are not on site, a lack of understanding of employee use of new technologies, and resistance to empower employees to work more collaboratively;
- An aversion to perceived information security risk; and,
- The perception that technology is not a necessary tool but a perk or a reward that may cause employees to be *less* productive.

Organizations in all sectors are often inherently resistant to change. Introducing and spreading the adoption of innovative practices requires strong leadership and change management planning. While executives note general support for workplace innovation, they cite insufficient senior leadership to overcome cultural resistance and drive necessary change.



Organizational barriers

Executives also highlighted a series of organizational barriers that limit innovation.

- Many workplace innovations require coordination from multiple partners. Telework, for example, impacts human resource, technology, real estate, and management functions. It is difficult to drive coordination between groups responsible for each of these functions without very strong senior leadership.
- IT activities and leads are distributed across departments, making it difficult to integrate systems, information, and policies.
- Workspace and IT changes often require upfront investments. Existing operating budget and investment structure does not adequately support and enable managers to develop and present business cases for required investment.
- Existing employee contracts make it difficult to manage underperforming employees. This problem may be exacerbated when employees are offsite.
- A split between the responsibility for facility procurement and the responsibility for facility fit-up makes it difficult to develop new workspaces. While PWGSC is responsible for acquiring the building, departments are responsible for providing the internal fit-up. This disconnect presents a challenge to ensuring congruence between available space and office design.

Addressing these and other organizational barriers requires leadership by managers and employees to incrementally improve work practices, and by senior leaders to break down silos and promote valuable changes.





REQUIRED ACTION

Workplace innovation is critical to developing the efficient and effective public service organizations necessary to support good government in Canada. Improving work practices has the potential to provide better service to Canadians at a lower cost. It can not only improve the quality of the public service, but also enhance its attractiveness to current and potential employees. Realizing these benefits requires changes in work culture and processes fostered by enabling information technologies, dynamic workspaces, and supportive policies, guidelines, and management tools. In turn, supporting Human Resource policies is fundamental to the success of workplace innovation programs.

Moving from experimentation to fully implemented and supported innovation requires **coordinated senior leadership**.

1. Senior leaders should clearly articulate the vision of a more modern, better connected public service that efficiently uses space and appropriately leverages technology. This includes formalizing and legitimizing innovations that are occurring informally and supporting, promoting, and expanding those that have formal recognition.
2. Departments should develop coordinated change management plans to improve the way that work gets done. Plans should have clear timelines and targets to drive workplace innovations. These plans should be openly and regularly communicated to employees to ensure that all employees are able to participate and advance change.
3. The Clerk should hold deputy ministers accountable for driving full scale workplace innovation in their performance management agreements.

Managers and employees must focus on driving workplace innovation in their areas of responsibility.

4. Managers and employees should make collaboration the norm within and between departments. Managers should encourage employees to start their work in collaboration (e.g. on GCPEDIA) and to use collaborative approaches to drive it forward.



5. Managers and employees should proactively identify areas for performance improvements and cost savings, including developing more effective work processes, using virtual collaboration to reduce travel and improve connections, reconfiguring and reducing office workspace, and increasing telework.

Managers and employees should be supported with **policies, guidelines, and tools** that help them identify and implement workplace innovation. Human Resources must be involved in establishing these policies and guidelines and in the ongoing support of both managers and employees in innovative workplace programs.

6. The Government of Canada should develop policies, guidelines, tools and other supports to improve workflows and collaboration.
7. The Government of Canada should develop policies, guidelines, tools and other supports to help managers lead remote and distributed teams.

The Public Service should invest in the **dynamic workspaces and enabling information technology** necessary to support workplace innovation.

8. The Government of Canada should develop, and invest in implementing, a long-term real estate modernization plan focused on flexible and dynamic workspaces. PWGSC should act as a hub for departments, creating a centre for co-design.
9. The Government of Canada should work to harmonize its digital infrastructure under the coordination of the government wide Chief Technology Officer. It should explore opportunities to create a common desktop, email, and digital collaboration system that allows public servants to access and integrate information across the government.
10. The Government of Canada should develop and evaluate business cases to invest in virtual collaboration tools (e.g. video conferencing, telepresence) and other technologies (e.g. laptops, tablets, smart phones) to reduce travel requirements and enable remote work and other forms of workplace innovation.



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ENDNOTES

¹ *Eighteenth Annual Report to the Prime Minister on the Public Service of Canada for the year ending March 31, 2011*: Available Online:

<http://www.clerk.gc.ca/eng/feature.asp?featureid=19&pageid=275>

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² Telework refers to employees who formally work outside the office (e.g. at home or on client site). Teleworkers may also work in a corporate office some of the time.

³ Virtual collaboration includes a range of technology enabled ways for people to work together across different locations, including basic videoconferencing, telepresence, wikis, and conference calls.

⁴ European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2005) "EMCC Company Network: Workplace Innovation: 4 Examples"

⁵ *Harris Decima Associates* research reported in *High Road: TELUS – Flexible Work Report.* March 2010

⁶ Sun Microsystems Case Study developed by TELUS.

⁷ Harris Decima "High Road: TELUS Flexible Work Report" March 2010, p.7

⁸ In 2004, the British Government began to look at space as a potential driver of cost savings – a total cost reduction goal of £1.5B has been set. This is being achieved by reducing employee space needs through means such as home work, remote work, and office re-design.

⁹ Based on TELUS and Sun Microsystems experience.

¹⁰ DEGW and Office of Government Commerce "Working Beyond Walls: The Government Workplace as an Agent of Change", 2008. Available online:

<http://www.ogc.gov.uk/documents/workingbeyondwalls.pdf>

¹¹ <http://www.haworth.com/en-us/Knowledge/Workplace-Library/Documents/Revisiting-Office-Space-Standards.pdf>

¹² <http://www.tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca/biens-property/amng-ftp/a3-3-eng.html>



¹³ *The Flexible Work Approach TELUS* presentation – 18,000 employees are equipped for telework; on average, 5,000 telework each day. This approach results in 13,865 hours of commute time savings, \$122,000 cost savings and 204 T reduction in greenhouse gas emissions each year.

¹⁴ *Flexible Workstyles: From Workplace to Any Place* – TELUS Client presentation

¹⁵ <http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/pol/doc-eng.aspx?section=text&id=12559>

¹⁶ Mindlab - <http://www.mind-lab.dk/en>

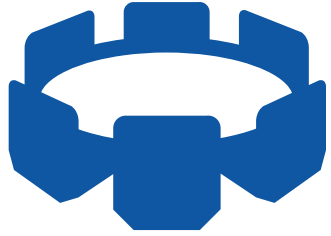
¹⁷ DEGW and Office of Government Commerce “Working Beyond Walls: The Government Workplace as an Agent of Change”, 2008. Available online:

<http://www.ogc.gov.uk/documents/workingbeyondwalls.pdf>

¹⁸ http://www.finance.gov.au/e-government/strategy-and-governance/docs/Tele-working_Policy_for_ICT_Staff.pdf

¹⁹ http://www.telework.gov/guidance_and_legislation/telework_guide/telework_guide.pdf





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