SMART PRACTICES IN
MANAGING PUBLIC SECTOR IT:
EVIDENCE FROM ONTARIO

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Introduction

The rapidity with which a variety of new information technologies (IT) are being adopted within the public sector poses a challenge for a paper concerning smart practices. Without many years of experience in the use of these technologies, how can we say which practices are smart and which are not-so-smart? As a consequence, the criteria for determining whether a new practice is smart tend to be informal. Does the practice work? Has it achieved its objectives? Is there evidence that other practitioners, on hearing about it, were impressed? Did normally sceptical observers such as the media and public sector auditors give it respect? That said, our criterion in this paper, as in this conference, is smart practices, not best practices. If we determine today that a practice is smart, it is possible that in the future analysts using more formal criteria to look over many years of experience would conclude that it is a best practice.

My objective in this paper is to highlight some practices regarding the application and management of IT in the public sector that I believe meet the smartness test. To limit the scope of the paper, I will deal with one jurisdiction, albeit one with a good claim to leading-edge status, and four areas of the management and application of IT. The jurisdiction is the Canadian province of Ontario. The Bertelsmann Foundation (2001) ranked Ontario third in its international study of e-government and the Commonwealth Association for Public Administration and Management gave Ontario first prize in its (biennial) 1998 and 2002 international innovations awards because of its IT-based innovations in service delivery. Ontario has been a persistent innovator over the last decade, as it was in the forefront in employing electronic kiosks, building an all-
electronic toll road, automating its land registry system, and developing an integrated approach to industrial inspections.

The four areas I will discuss include

- the management of a large IT-based project, the implementing of leading-edge electronic tolling technology on a major urban expressway
- the government-wide (corporate) structure for managing IT
- the use of Internet technology by the Ontario Liberal Party, which defeated the ruling Progressive Conservatives in the election of October 2, 2003
- two consultation initiatives launched by the new government, both of which incorporate an electronic component.

These four areas provide breadth because they incorporate different aspects of IT and because they include activities that are overtly political as well as primarily bureaucratic.

This paper is part of a larger study, whose objective is to develop a holistic understanding of the role of IT in the public sector. The study is supported by a major four-year grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada that began in mid-2002, and is engaging the efforts of a team of scholars. The study looks at two arguably leading-edge jurisdictions, the governments of Canada and Ontario, over the period from 2000 to 2005. (More information about the project, and discussion papers, can be found at www.publicsectorit.ca). In terms of US comparators, Ontario’s population of 11.5 million, puts it on a similar scale to Michigan (10 million) and Ohio (11.4 million).

After discussing the smart practices employed in each case, we will conclude by looking at some common characteristics apparent in all four cases.
Highway 407 Electronic Toll Road

Ontario’s Highway 407 runs east-west for 108 kilometers through the northern suburbs of Toronto. It was built to alleviate congestion on the existing east-west highway and to serve drivers in Toronto’s rapidly growing northern suburbs. As an urban expressway, it has entrance and exit ramps every few kilometres. Highway 407 was developed as a toll road because the government was already running large deficits and could not finance the project from tax revenues. Opened in 1997, it incorporates what is still the world’s most advanced electronic tolling technology. All vehicles using the road are billed electronically on the basis of mileage and time of day. The preferred method of billing is transponder, but cars without transponders, representing about 25 percent of the traffic flow of 300,000 trips per day, are videoimaged. Electronic toll roads elsewhere in the world generally have few entrances and exits, are restricted to vehicles with transponders or assign separate lanes to cars with and without transponders, and use videoimaging solely for enforcement purposes.

The highway’s performance has been commendable. (The evaluation of the highway and discussion of smart practices in its development is based on Mylvaganam and Borins 2004). The highway opened only 6 months behind schedule. The roadworks cost approximately $1.5 billion (this and other costs in Canadian dollars) and were completed slightly ahead of schedule. The tolling technology cost $90 million and was approximately $13 million over budget. In terms of practitioner experience with technology projects this performance was far better than the norm (OECD 2001, Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology 2003). The highway’s safety record is
excellent, exceeding that of all other multilane divided highways in Ontario. A measure of the highway’s financial success is that in 1999 it was privatized for $3.1 billion, substantially greater than its development and construction cost of $1.5 billion. (The privatization involved granting the right to toll and obligation to maintain the 108 kilometer-long highway for 99 years, which was expected to produce bids comparable to an outright sale. Bidders also had to agree to build 39 kilometers in addition to the 69 kilometers already constructed by the government, an investment of $500 million.)

A number of smart project management practices, some specifically relevant to IT projects, contributed to this success. These practices are also consistent with those recommended by the OECD (2001) and UK Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (2003).

**Strong leadership from the top**

Highway 407 had strong and committed leadership at both the political and bureaucratic levels. The political leadership of the New Democratic Party (NDP) Government in power from 1990 to 1995 initiated the development of Highway 407 as a toll highway. Premier Bob Rae took a lead role in championing the project publicly as well as within the government. He was enthusiastically supported by Transport Minister Gilles Pouliot. A toll highway and partnership with the private sector to build it were both novel and controversial developments for a socialist government, and support within the cabinet and the caucus was not automatic.

Initially, the project chugged along within the transport ministry bureaucracy. There was little resistance to it, but neither was there any great sense of urgency, especially at senior levels. In January 1993, Premier Rae replaced deputy minister of
transportation Gary Posen, who then retired, with George Davies, a much younger, hard-driving, results-oriented public sector executive, who was expected to provide strong and energetic leadership on two key priorities, Highway 407 and the construction of additional subway lines in Toronto. Davies was able to bring the initial stages of contract award and negotiation to a reasonably quick and successful completion. Construction began in mid-1994, and work on tolling in fall 1995.

The NDP was defeated by the Conservatives in June 1995, but the project continued to receive strong bureaucratic and political leadership. Both George Davies and Jan Rush, his successor as deputy minister appointed in November 1996, saw delivering Highway 407 as a major personal priority. It was also a key component of their performance contracts with the politicians. While neither micromanaged the project, they were both available to staff working full-time on the project and gave full attention at critical moments. For example, when the tolling project fell behind schedule, they both put pressure on company presidents in the private sector consortium to make sure that additional staff were assigned to it. At the political level, the Conservatives Transport Minister, Al Palladini, was as committed as his NDP predecessor to delivering the highway. In addition, given his background as the owner of a very successful automobile dealership, he took an active interest in marketing the highway.

*An expert monitoring agency*

Normally, the Ministry of Transportation (MTO) assumed responsibility for managing transportation projects, doing all the design work, and breaking the project up into small contracts. In this instance, the Rae Government decided on two large contracts, one for the entire roadway and another for the tolling technology. Instead of monitoring
by MTO, Premier Rae and Minister Pouliot chose to establish a small monitoring agency responsible only for that project. The agency, the Ontario Transportation Capital Corporation (OTCC), had the legal status of a Crown corporation, but also many of the characteristics of a federal government service agency (such as Canada Customs and Revenue Agency or Parks Canada), or of what the UK government calls a next steps agency (Zussman, 2002). These included increased managerial and financial autonomy, recruitment of staff with special skills from either the Ontario Public Service or externally, and external directors. Dennis Galange, the President of OTCC, brought expertise from the private sector in corporate finance and project management. The marketing team was also hired from outside. An experienced public servant was seconded from MTO to oversee the engineering and construction aspects of the project. Galange saw this organizational structure as well-fitted to its mission. He described OTCC as a “great project management structure, a high profile team that was different from the ministry. Some had private sector backgrounds and those with public sector backgrounds thought like private sector managers. The people worked very hard and were passionate in their commitment to the highway” (Galange 2003).

OTCC’s board of directors was chaired by the deputy minister of transportation, and included the president of OTCC, the assistant deputy minister of transportation for policy and planning, and deputy minister of finance. It also had three external directors, appointed by Premier Rae shortly before the 1995 election. The external directors brought expertise in transportation policy and financial and project management. They had no political connections with the NDP and, as white males, did not make the board more representative of Ontario society, a key NDP value. These directors were retained
by the Conservative Government, which added two more white males, one with expertise in technology and venture capital, the other a lawyer who had represented the trucking industry. The assistant deputy minister for policy and planning reflected that having a board with a substantial number of external directors created a different dynamic than he had experienced at Crown corporations with internal boards. OTCC staff had an extra measure of accountability, having to justify their actions to the outside directors, and the outside directors could also offer advice to staff (Guscott, 2003).

**Off-book public debt**

The NDP Government had originally expected the construction consortium to finance the highway. When the two consortia that made bids both asked for loan guarantees, the government changed course and decided to finance the project itself. One advantage of doing this is that the interest rates it paid were between 25 and 50 basis points lower than the private sector. Because Highway 407 was being developed as a toll road, the capital markets were willing to treat the government’s borrowing to fund it as off-book. This created pressure on OTCC and the Ministry of Finance to make certain that the highway was developed in such a way that it would actually be self-financing. If that were not to occur, the capital markets made it very clear that they would add loans for the highway to Ontario’s ballooning debt. Undertaking the borrowing itself allowed the government to choose the best debt structure. Following an increase in short-term interest rates in late 1995, OTCC and the Ministry of Finance decided to convert $500 of short-term debt to 30 year 8.25 percent debentures. The subsequent decline in short-term rates for the remainder of the project led to short-term (30 to 90 day) financing at interest rates that fell to 3.5 percent by mid-1997.
Disciplined risk management methodology

An additional source of strength for the project was OTCC’s commitment to risk management as a tool for disciplined thinking. Given the substantial financial and political risk the government was accepting, risk management was essential. Risks were identified and, for each, staff assessed the probability it would occur, rated its seriousness in terms of its consequences, and discussed how to mitigate it. Risk factors were tracked from one board meeting to another, for example for seeing the progress made on each, or by focusing on the “top ten” of the dozens that were being monitored. The risk management framework provided an impetus for OTCC to develop contingency plans in the early months of 1997, a particularly difficult period for management when it appeared possible that the technology would not work with full functionality.

Incentives and penalties for contractors

The construction and tolling contracts both included incentives and penalties. The construction consortium performed well, bettering deadlines and meeting designated quality standards. As a consequence, it earned a bonus of $6 million on a contract of $930 million. Public servants who evaluated the two bids felt that the construction consortium had shaved its margins considerably, so a bonus of $6 million was significant. On the technology side, the consortium contracted to have the transponder technology operational by Dec. 31, 1996 and videoimaging technology by March 31, 1997. In fact, both technologies were operational by October 15, 1997. To be operational, the technology consortium had to overcome thousands of coding bugs. It had to pay for additional staff diverted to the project when it began missing deadlines. The delays also resulted in a penalty of $1 million to the government. To summarize, the government
was able to monitor the technology consortium’s progress and, through the intervention of the deputy minister as well as penalties written into the contract, it put considerable pressure on the contractors. An additional source of pressure was the project’s international profile, because the contractors knew that poor performance would decrease their chances of winning contracts for electronic toll roads elsewhere.

**Ontario’s Centralized IT Management Structure**

The trend of American state governments is towards greater centralization in the management of information technology (Ingraham, Joyce, and Donahue 2003, 85-6). This is occurring for a number of reasons, such as the necessity of ensuring that computer systems in different agencies can communicate with one another, and the opportunity afforded by economies of scale to reduce cost. This centralization is reflected in the creation of a government-wide or corporate Chief Information Officer (CIO) in 42 of 50 states. Ontario is consistent with this trend, but with its own institutions and practices. Ontario’s corporate CIO is a deputy minister in the Management Board Secretariat, the agency responsible for budgeting and management policy. Rather than each department having its own CIO, there are seven CIOs for clusters of related departments (e.g., land and resources, justice, economic development) to facilitate projects that cross departmental boundaries. The cluster CIOs work in a matrix structure, reporting to both the corporate CIO and their departmental deputy ministers.

The corporate CIO is not simply an adviser to the premier with a small support staff, as is the case in some states, but the chief manager of the IT function throughout government, supported by a large staff of 460. There are extensive responsibilities lodged
in the corporate CIO’s office that include: technological forecasting and strategic planning, management of the government’s website, IT procurement, network security, and human resource management for the IT workforce. These responsibilities translate into the following priorities. For basic infrastructure (computers and servers, office, software, networks), the corporate CIO’s priorities are to make sure that the system works reliably, that the government is taking advantage of ongoing improvements in cost and performance, and that it assesses the potential and, where desirable, invests in new technologies. For the website, the priority is to enforce common look and feel and to make progress towards increased online transactional capability. For staffing, the priority is to make sure that the public sector is an attractive employer in terms of salaries and intrinsic interest of the work. (It is interesting to note that, at the senior executive level, IT executives are the highest paid in the Ontario public service, so that, for example, the corporate CIO’s salary is 17 percent higher than that of the cabinet secretary.) For major projects, the priority is to argue for sufficient resources to undertake a portfolio of projects, to evaluate departmental project proposals in advance, to monitor projects under development so as to deal with emerging problems or, if necessary, terminate projects that have run into major problems, thus avoiding cost overruns.

Some aggregate data outline the magnitude of the IT function that the corporate CIO oversees. IT spending for the fiscal year from April 1, 2003 to March 31, 2004 was $1.1 billion. Of this, 50 percent was allocated for infrastructure (desktops, networks, websites, portals), 25 percent for ongoing major applications (tax systems, driver licensing, health insurance, student loans), and 25 percent for major projects. Of the $1.1 billion, approximately $225 million covers salaries and benefits for 3500 IT staff, who
represent approximately 6 percent of Ontario’s 62,000 public servants. The budget for the CIO’s office is $90 million and for the seven departmental clusters is $532 million; hence $622 million is directly controlled by the corporate CIO. The remaining $487 million is located in the ministries and not under the direct control of the corporate CIO. (Office of the Corporate Chief Information Officer, 2004). To summarize, Ontario has put in place a powerfully centralized CIO structure, with oversight over the entire range of IT activities and control over much of the budget.

**The October 2003 Election Campaign**

The Ontario election of October 2, 2003 saw the Liberals, led by Dalton McGuinty, defeat the Progressive Conservatives, led by Ernie Eves. For almost two years before the election was called, the Liberals enjoyed a lead of ten to fifteen percentage points in the polls, but when the campaign began, the polls indicated the Conservatives’ popularity equalled the Liberals. Ultimately, the Liberals won 72 of 103 seats and 47 percent of the popular vote, compared to 35 seats and 40 percent of the popular vote in the previous (1999) election. The Conservatives fell from 59 seats and 45 percent of the popular vote to 24 seats and 35 percent of the popular vote. The New Democratic Party was a distant third in both elections (9 seats and 13 percent of the vote in 1999 and 7 seats and 15 percent of the vote in 2003). Shifts of this magnitude, both between elections and within one campaign, indicate a volatile electorate.

Ontario election campaigns, like others in Canada, are short – a maximum of 42 days – and the date is chosen by the premier or prime minister. Given a volatile electorate and the short duration of the campaign, effective campaigning on any medium, including the
Internet, has the potential to affect the outcome. In contrast, Bimber and Davis (2003, 101-24) found that in high-profile US elections, in which campaigning goes on for the better part of a year, websites are used to maintain committed support as opposed to winning over undecided voters.

**Integrated, effective Internet campaign**

One factor contributing to the Liberal victory was a very effective Internet campaign that was seamlessly integrated with other aspects of the campaign. The Liberal campaign was based on the theme of positive change associated with McGuinty, who was presented as a young and energetic leader. The Liberals also intended to appeal to swing voters, in particular city dwellers, ethnics, and youth.

The party website (with the dual URLs [www.ontarioliberalparty.ca](http://www.ontarioliberalparty.ca) and [www.choosechange.com](http://www.choosechange.com), the campaign theme) reflected this approach. A three-column home page featured stories about and photos of McGuinty as well as his blog dominating the central column. The party platform could be accessed from the right-hand column. It was modularized into five short thematic booklets (education, health, economics, community development, institutional reform) each of which could be downloaded separately. A summary of the platform was available in eleven languages, including French, Spanish, Chinese, Greek, Portuguese, Hindi, Polish, and Tamil. The left hand column included the media room; background on the leader and party; and facilities for visitors to make donations, find their local candidate, and replay television ads. The top of the page had the banners “Ontario liberal” and “choose change,” as well as faces illustrating racial and gender diversity.
Television, radio, and print advertising referred to the platform, and gave the URL \texttt{www.choosechange.com}, thus sending voters to the website. While the website was not interactive, it was valuable for monitoring the campaign. At the height of the campaign, the site was receiving 80,000 visits daily, indicating strong voter interest. As the campaign went on, the majority of visits were to \texttt{www.choosechange.com} rather than \texttt{www.ontarioliberalparty.ca}, indicating that the campaign theme was catching on with voters. Counts also indicated which platform booklets were most popular, thus aiding McGuinty in choosing what to emphasize in his speeches.

In our view, the Liberal website was more effective than either of the other parties. For example, both the Conservatives and NDP had cover pages, which simply delay the user’s connection to the key message. The Conservatives’ home page had a variety of stories scattered all over the page but lacked the Liberals’ focused approach. The NDP platform had to be downloaded in its entirety, rather than in modules.

\textit{Web presence for local candidates}

While election campaigns in Ontario tend to be centralized, the Liberals made much greater efforts to create a web presence for local candidates. Of the 103 local candidates, 89 percent of the Liberals had individual sites, as compared to 45 percent of both the Conservatives and NDP. Local candidate URLs generally included the candidate’s name in either the dot.com or dot.ca domains. Sixty-six percent of Liberal candidates accommodated online donations, as compared to 20 percent for the Conservatives and 16 percent for the NDP. Forty-three percent of Liberal candidates presented personalized policies and positions online, as compared to 22 percent for the Conservatives and 32 percent for the NDP.
Quick reaction on the website

The Liberal campaign staff was young and technology-savvy. They were constantly visiting websites of like-minded politicians (for example Howard Dean and Tony Blair) for ideas. Polling results told them the Liberals were stronger among younger voters than the Conservatives, indicating the importance of an effective Internet campaign, as younger voters are the most likely to turn to the Internet for information. The staff also grasped the value of the website for quick reaction to developments. The webmaster sat beside the communications director and implemented changes immediately. The newsroom on the site was kept up-to-date to reach the media without making individual phone calls. Hours after the televised debate among the three major party leaders, the staff had found and posted favorable reviews of McGuinty by high-profile media commentators. This was much more credible than the Conservative response, which was to grade the three leaders and quote judgments of unknown voters (e.g. Andrea West in Kitchener), or the NDP response, which was to claim victory in a press release.

To summarize, the Liberals’ Internet campaign was a cut above the other two parties in terms of the use of its Internet site to reinforce the overall campaign strategy, the clarity and effectiveness of its website presentation, the speed with which it was able to implement changes on the website, and its use of the website to target swing voters.

The McGuinty Government’s E-consultation Initiatives

The Liberals carried the technical savvy they demonstrated in campaigning into office. When shown the cabinet meeting room during the transition period, Liberal leader McGuinty asked: “where do you show Powerpoint here?” He was told that the previous
cabinet didn’t, and he asked to have that changed immediately. The Conservatives, who formed the government since 1995, the dawn of the Internet age in politics, nevertheless realized the importance of a strong presence for the premier on the government’s home page (www.gov.on.ca). This included a premier’s site that occupies a full right-hand sidebar, topped by a picture of the premier, and providing information on major initiatives. The news section in the center of the page always had several stories involving the premier. During the three-week transition before McGuinty took office, Cabinet Office staff retained the Conservatives’ approach to the premier’s site, but modernized it considerably by adding multi-media (video streaming of major speeches) and interactivity (a quick poll, an idea box, and a mailing list). The change in government also resulted in a change in the color palate of the home page, from Conservative blue to Liberal red.

The Conservative government displayed limited interest in e-consultation. Some departments hosted consultations on particular topics on their own websites. There was a staff-level working group, chaired by a knowledgeable junior policy analyst in the corporate CIO’s office, meeting monthly to compare departmental experience and resolve issues of practice. Because consultation is primarily a political responsibility, the corporate CIO and Cabinet Office were reluctant to move forward on e-consultation initiatives without clear political support.

This support came when the McGuinty government took office on October 23. The Conservative Government had forecast a budget roughly in balance in the 2003-04 fiscal year, and all three parties used this forecast in developing their platforms; in particular the Liberals promised many new initiatives that would be funded by expected
revenue growth and the cancellation of some proposed Conservative tax cuts. During the campaign, independent analysts began to forecast a deficit approaching $5 billion. During the transition period, McGuinty asked a former provincial auditor to analyze the forecasts, and he confirmed the pessimistic view of the analysts. As a consequence, the key issue the Liberals are facing is how to deal with the large and unexpected deficit as well as its implications for their election platform.

The McGuinty Government unilaterally could have made the spending cuts and tax increases necessary to balance the budget. Instead, it launched a public consultation process regarding priorities for budget cuts and speed of eliminating the deficit. In effect, it was renegotiating its mandate with the electorate. The public consultation was conducted by both traditional (travelling legislative committee meetings, meetings between representatives of the Finance Ministry and interest groups, public meetings chaired by MPPs) and new (citizens’ juries and an on-line questionnaire about government priorities and the budget on the government website) approaches. Citizen’s juries and the various meetings heard from a total of 2500 individuals and 540 interest groups or organizations. The on-line consultation site (www.townhallontario.gov.on.ca) was located just below the premier’s site on the home page, and used the slogan “delivering change” and a graphic of diverse faces – both reminiscent of the Liberals’ campaign website. The consultation site was visited by 14,000 people, 1500 of whom completed the questionnaire. In retrospect, it appears that the questionnaire was too long and complicated, which led most of those who visited the site not to complete it. The total of 4000 individuals expressing opinions about the budget is larger than the number who would have been contacted in a traditional public opinion poll, and the time they gave to
expressing (and, in the case of the citizen’s juries, discussing) their views was greater. Another important feature of the multi-faceted approach to consultation is that it solicited views in all regions of the province, and an important finding was that there was minimal geographic variation in the views expressed.

The Ontario Budget was presented on May 18 (http://www.ontariobudget.fin.gov.on.ca/bud04e/pdf/statement.pdf). It focused on health care and education as the two key priorities, set out a three-year schedule for eliminating the deficit, introduced a progressive tax earmarked for health care spending, increased a variety of user fees, and did not attempt to raise revenue through asset sales. All of these directions were broadly consistent with the results of the public consultation.

Setting the budget is clearly a political decision, but in this case e-consultation and citizen’s juries augmented traditional forms of public consultation and policy advice from the public service. The on-line consultation site will be used for future consultations, for example on energy and resource conservation and mandatory retirement.

A comparable budget consultation was conducted by the City of Saint John, New Brunswick, which sought public views about how to deal with a budget shortfall (Culver and Howe 2004). The two principal methods of soliciting views were a questionnaire on the city’s website, which received 228 replies, and a hard-copy questionnaire made available throughout the city, which received 89 responses. Given the city’s population of 70,000, city officials considered this a substantial response rate. It appears that the Saint John city government did less than the Government of Ontario in terms of other approaches, such as public meetings or hearings with interest groups.
A second consultation exercise involved the Ontario Public Service, which was asked for ideas about ways to improve the quality, delivery, and efficiency of public services. This was seen as an initiative to rebuild public service morale, which had been adversely affected by neo-conservative policies and rhetoric of the previous government. McGuinty laid the groundwork for the Ideas Campaign in his acceptance speech the night of the election, referring to himself as a public servant, and he repeated this theme in a letter emailed to all public servants the day he took office. In it, he wrote, “our team is excited about working with you to implement real, positive change. Ontario is fortunate to have a public service that is second to none. I want to assure you that your government respects and values the men and women who dedicate their careers to making this province the best it can be” (McGuinty 2003).

The Ideas Campaign was launched by Premier McGuinty on December 18, 2003 – less than two months after he took office – and used a password-protected Intranet site available to all public servants on a common desktop platform, a call center, and group brainstorming. By the time the Ideas Campaign concluded on January 31, Ontario’s 62,000 public servants made total of 11,500 suggestions, 92 percent of which were submitted over the Intranet site. A response of this magnitude was far greater than expected. The popularity of on-line submission indicates that the vast majority of Ontario public servants have the Intranet available as part of their work environment and have become comfortable with this technology and also that the software employed was user-friendly. Ideas were submitted by public servants at all levels, but the campaign particularly focused on hearing from front-line public servants, who previous research indicates are a fertile source of innovative ideas (Borins 1998). Ideas were posted on-line
during the campaign as long as they did not violate privacy or human rights legislation or harassment and workplace discrimination policies. The government consulted with the public sector unions and agreed not to post ideas that addressed collective bargaining issues. Just seven percent of the total were non-compliant or dealt with collective bargaining issues.

The other 93 percent of the ideas submitted are currently being evaluated by teams of middle managers. If the proof of the pudding is in the eating, the question outstanding is how many of the ideas will be implemented, and what their impact will be. One measure of the popularity of the Ideas Campaign was that many participants suggested institutionalizing it, for instance by maintaining the Intranet site and evaluating submissions on a regular basis.

**Internal management of e-consultation**

Both consultation processes were managed by a small full-time secretariat led by a senior public servant with experience in consultation, and with seven seconded staff, including the junior policy analyst who had chaired the earlier working group, as well as several other participants in the province’s high-flyer recruitment program. The secretariat report to the cabinet secretary and to an oversight committee of deputy ministers and premier’s office staff. An advisory committee of assistant deputy ministers also provided guidance on the mechanics of both consultation processes.

One of the Liberals’ campaign promises was to reduce spending on expensive consultants. Given that the content of both consultations was living within our means, both consultation processes were, as much as possible, managed and implemented internally and at modest cost. In the case of the budget consultation, a think tank with
experience in conducting citizen’s juries was hired to design, run, and report on seven citizen’s juries, at a cost of $200,000. Their final report is available at http://www.townhallontario.gov.on.ca/english/citizens_dialogue_budget04.pdf. Their consultation process also provided the content for the on-line questionnaire. In the case of the Ideas Campaign, private sector intra-organizational consultation software was leased for $50,000 and adapted.

Conclusion

To this point, this paper has discussed smart practices in the management of four different aspects of IT. We think there are a few common features of these smart practices.

Integration

Advanced technologies and more traditional practices were often integrated and presented as different ways of pursuing an over-arching goal. The Liberal’s campaign strategy emphasized a young and dynamic leader, a positive approach to change, and a detailed platform. The party’s Internet site put forward that approach, taking advantage of the Internet’s ability to change information in response to external developments and to tailor messages to constituencies. The campaign also emphasized the leader’s tour, major speeches, and local candidates. Compared to the Howard Dean campaign’s use of participation and interactivity, the Liberals’ campaign was not leading-edge, but it did reinforce the overall campaign messages and reach particular segments of the electorate. It was also more effective than those of the other parties.
The Ideas Campaign and Budget Consultations provide another example of integration. Both used multiple channels for reaching participants. The Ideas Campaign showed that the vast majority of Ontario public servants have Intranet technology available on their computers and prefer sending written submissions electronically, as long as the software is user-friendly. Still, face-to-face brainstorming meetings were an effective way of generating ideas that were then submitted electronically.

Highway 407 also represents an example of integration of traditional and advanced approaches. While the preponderance of spending on the project was for the roadway, the tolling component was what made it a smart road and resolved the financial risk to the government.

The Advantage of Standardization

The Ideas Campaign demonstrated the advantage of a common desk-top display. The campaign icon was placed on virtually every public servant’s computer screen or could be reached from MyOPS, an administrative applications portal also available to virtually every public servant. Providing the entire public service with passwords allayed security concerns, confirming that this exercise would be restricted to Ontario public servants. As discussed in the section about Ontario’s IT management structure, one of the corporate CIO’s roles is to put in place common infrastructure, and this exercise illustrates their rationale.

Shared Vision among Politicians and Public Servants

Several of these cases illustrate the importance of a touchstone of public administration, a shared vision among politicians and public servants. Premier Rae appointed Deputy Minister George Davies to work energetically with Minister Pouliot on developing
Highway 407. Under the Conservatives, Deputy Minister Jan Rush and Minister Al Palladini also constituted an effective team. E-consultation did not progress very rapidly under the Conservatives, but when the McGuinty Government took power, the Premier’s clear personal commitment to consultation challenged the bureaucracy to develop consultation exercises in very short order. Implementing a shared vision involves a political commitment to speak up publicly on behalf of a project and a bureaucratic commitment to assign individuals, reallocate resources, and put in place organizational structures to make the project happen.

**Technology-savvy politicians**

These cases illustrate how a group of technology-savvy politicians effectively employed technology in their election campaign, and then, quite naturally, carried on to apply similar technologies when in power. In such a situation, the bureaucracy’s job is much easier, since it doesn’t have to persuade politicians of the virtues of applying technology, but it need only facilitate the politicians’ plans.

To conclude, the public sector IT picture in Ontario looks bright. The province has a strong corporate CIO dealing with all the major challenges of managing IT, and, following the recent election, a political leadership that is open to using new technology wherever possible in its own work of public consultation and strategic decision-making. Ontario has employed what practitioners consider to be best practices in managing some of its major IT projects, such as Highway 407, though there are other instances of projects which have experienced delays and cost overruns (Borins 2003). While we have not discussed it in this paper, the [www.gov.on.ca](http://www.gov.on.ca) website is effective in providing
services organized on the basis of user characteristics and patterns of demand, as well as a reasonable level of interactivity. In addition, the home page provides a strong presence for the premier, which will facilitate political buy-in. Ultimately, if smart practices in many areas of IT management are combined, one can speak of a smart government, and Ontario has a reasonable claim to such a title.
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