

# The Partners

The key stakeholders of OBC are as follows: the community of government process integrators (those responsible for integrating the Ontario government service delivery); the program administrators (mainly the provincial and federal ministries); the community of service delivery partners (private distributors and retailers, partners hosting the interactive workshops, or dedicated stations); the businesses and entrepreneurs themselves; and finally, the political sponsors.

The proposed interaction model of the different stakeholders with the business community is illustrated in Figure 1. The only missing stakeholders are the providers that assist OBC in developing the appropriate technologies for its mandate and those that support its management change efforts.

At the top of Figure 1 are the governmental programs responsible for the policies and information, their processes, obligations, and benefits. Eligibility, specific information of requesters, and databases are all managed at the programs level. The public services manager, in this case OBC, oversees the distributor who acts as middleman between the market of service delivery to the client and the processes and government programs. The distributor updates the registry of Ontario businesses (medium term project), provides authentication, security and transactions services, and keeps a record of all transactions. In addition to being responsible for the distributor, the manager establishes policies and service delivery standards, maintains the business architecture with a responsibility flow chart and develops new delivery systems. The private wholesalers provide retailers with computer systems and applications that allow a variety of value-added products and services of government information for targeted clients. The retailers offer a variety of public and private services to their customers via different distribution channels.

## Figure 1 Business Architecture, OBC (1997)

The concept may seem relatively simple, but its operationalization is quite complex. Most of the necessary technologies are in operation in the private sector. Moreover, the service delivery can be changed without affecting the ministries' current systems thanks to intermediary applications. However, the technological solutions required must be deployed on a larger scale than ever before. In addition, the government must learn to become a partner of the private sector, each side must clearly define its expectations and commitments.

## OBC

The success of OBC is mainly due to the people that make up its project team. They are managers who previously worked for the different ministries and are still quite familiar with them. Their knowledge of the problems and needs of the programs gives them a certain legitimacy with their public-sector colleagues. In addition, their proactivity helped them gain the respect of the private partners who consider them "less worse than the rest of the government." The leader of OBC chose a few people for his team, but many were appointed in order to assure continuity or discrete constraint measures. However, the synergy was such that these people became radically in favor of the objectives of OBC.

A large part of the duties of senior members of OBC consists of communicating the objectives, goals, and conceptual framework of the project, as well as being attentive to the needs and business objectives of the specific programs and private partners. Senior Ontario public administrators recognize that OBC people have the strong analytical skills necessary for the creation of a vision and to the establishment of win-win scenarios which together with solid communication and team building skills lead to a strong collaboration environment. In addition, without the technological experience and understanding of the public and private business processes, the development of the delivery architecture could not have taken place.

The OBC team is made up of 34 people appointed on a permanent basis. Nevertheless, there is a constant turnover of personnel depending on the phases and needs of the project. The team's main functions consist of the management of relations with the private sector and the other public organizations, the private providers, the internal technology providers, and the program managers. The team also has oversees the technical development necessary for secure functions, intermediary systems, and applications usable online that are financed by the OBC budget.

## The Public Partners

The public partners are involved at both ends of the service delivery process: in the creation of policies and programs for businesses and in direct contact with these same businesses. Also to be mentioned are the different IT services that ensure the development and especially the maintenance of the government information systems.

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The speed of change of applications and processes depends on them because they are repositories and keepers of often old but very useful systems of the ministries and agencies. As each partner plays a different role, they have different expectations and resistance which OBC must understand.

## The Government

"Think big, start small, scale fast" is the first motto on the Internet site of the CIO's office (CCIO Internet, 2001) regarding electronic services delivery. Since June 2000, the Ontario government approved speeding the implementation of the Electronic Service Delivery strategy (ESD). The ESD vision is to improve the quality of public service delivery through Internet solutions that focus on the client, and are accessible and cost efficient. The goal is to increase the satisfaction of Ontario citizens regarding government services by becoming a world leader in electronic service delivery. Despite OBC leaders' reputation of being dreamers oriented toward conceptualization, the team's role has become crucial in the achievement of this mission and it is now granted the room it needs to operate. OBC managed to convince the high administration and political spheres that it is not possible to put this vision in place without first giving the power to implement new service delivery methods to a group composed of all stakeholders in the community, including the market forces.

## The Internal IT Providers

The ministries and government agencies' IT services are full partners at OBC. Without them, promising high tech firms' developments would go unheeded. It is crucial that the innovations developed within OBC are operated and maintained by people from the government IT shops. However, the loss of public sector IT experts to the private sector slowed the implementations.

## The Programs

Fifty to 60 provincial programs directly affect the Ontario business community. Targeting those, OBC created a repertory of program rules that will be available to wholesalers who will then be able to provide them under different formulas. The program managers are open to these new forms of delivery but wish to stay in control of the policies, processes, and information, as they are entirely accountable for them.

Changes in the service delivery and their impact on internal processes had to be well understood on both parts in order to avoid potentially dangerous misunderstanding. For example, the collaboration with the Commission of Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB), although one of the first programs offered by the workstations, encountered difficulties during 2001 because of a lack of understanding of the services delivered by OBC. For more than two years, entrepreneurs that registered using OBC workstations believed, in good faith, that they were registering with WSIB. OBC also thought registration with WSIB was done since the new business data were transmitted to the Commission. However, WSIB let the information fall "between two processes" without follow-up realizing only much later that potential clients did not take the additional steps necessary to legalize their situation with the Commission. Protests from businesses of which the Commission demanded arrears and fines were what triggered the alarm. Trust and agreement were restored after stormy discussions.

## The Service Delivery Community

### The Wholesalers

OBC currently recognizes three wholesalers that offer additional value-added services for requests and registrations already available through OBC. The wholesalers are currently limited in their services because of the portfolio of transactions offered by OBC, which hinders the profitability of being a partner in this project. The wholesalers come from sectors that already offer information and services to businesses dealing with the government. They have the financial and technical capacities to develop the necessary IT applications and links to OBC and its retailers. One wholesaler was eliminated (or eliminated itself) because of its inability to meet the service quality standards. Actually it was mostly because it could not invest anymore without a sufficient return on investment. This wholesaler was a small one.

### The Retailers and Organizations Hosting the Interactive Workstations

Several municipalities, governmental agencies and libraries host interactive workstations, and the possibility of

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integrating related transactions or to coordinate services is under study.

Currently at least one local NPO which offered OBC services, Enterprise Toronto, became a retailer for one of the wholesalers, Dye & Durham. The objective was to make the service profitable. Although the service was exactly aligned with the organization's mission, it became demanding in terms of resources required to dedicate in order to maintain the same quality of service. Indeed, the workstations increased the services of their four centers and the manager had to reflect on how to follow-up on this growth without jeopardizing his budget. The workstations are designed to be user-friendly. However, for certain clients, like the immigrant entrepreneurs who don't have a good grasp of the language, assistance from the center's employees is absolutely necessary and is more time consuming compared with the usual paper registration. The solution envisioned added a lump sum to the government price (for example, it costs \$60 to do a name search and they could have charged \$ 75 and put the extra \$15 in their program). However, OBC, as a public organization, excluded this possibility which could have made citizens feel that it was a tax on a tax. OBC was nevertheless open to the idea of Enterprise Ontario becoming a retailer for the private enterprise. Enterprise Ontario was the first organization to wear two hats. The organization signed a MOU with OBC, which provides the workstations, the technology, and the back office operation. It also signed a contract with Dye & Durham, which provides the Internet access and the support software for the transactions and all the connected services. This initiative is considered to be a "test-drive" and can be re-evaluated, but for now, the two partners seem satisfied with it.

## The providers: IT and others

In order to speed up the development process, OBC acquired a list of accredited providers who had to prove that they have the skills and abilities required. Once accredited, a company can respond to an RFP in very little time and with limited competitors.

Each IT project initiation goes first through discussion groups composed of private companies which are usually competitive (but complementary in this case) and government computer services people who together design solutions to the problems put forth by the OBC team. OBC's main strength is its ability to convey the interest that this kind of collaboration provides.