KNOWLEDGE AS POWER IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

By Michael Tremblay

"How quickly they forget" is an adage that could soon have a profound and ongoing impact for public sector organizations in Canada and everyone who depends on them. The issue stems from a looming wave of public sector retirements that is taking hold and is expected to swell in coming years. Studies show that in the next five years, nearly one-third of public sector workers in Canada will pack up their belongings, put on their coats and walk out the front door for the last time.

When they go, they will take with them a vast array of critical information that may not be replicated anywhere else in their organizations. To ensure that taxpayers get the most value for their dollar and the public sector operates as efficiently as possible, measures to mitigate those real and extensive losses must be implemented. One of the ways forward-thinking public sector organizations are coping is by implementing knowledge management capabilities – the systematic capture, storage, analysis and dissemination of corporate information and organizational intelligence. Knowledge management is about enabling people to quickly and accurately access the relevant information they need so they can make the best decisions and determine the optimum course of action.

"By implementing robust search capabilities and preparing to readily navigate abundant and expanding information resources, organizations ensure that tomorrow's employees benefit from today's expertise."

Interestingly, while some segments of the public sector are embracing knowledge management, our experience is that a series of unfounded perceptions are contributing to the delay of its wider adoption. The concerns most frequently cited include fears of a lengthy and complicated implementation, employee reluctance to place information on the system and contribute to its growth, and the difficulty of assessing returns on investment (ROI). However, there are many examples of successful implementations where these perceived problems were readily addressed. In all cases, successful knowledge management rollouts should include a communications strategy to ensure that all employees, even those not directly involved in working with the system, understand its purpose and the benefits that both the organization and the employees will gain from using it.

Clearly, what is required is an ROI approach that provides a fuller picture, including the social and political value of IT investments such as knowledge management. SAP is working with the Centre for Technology in Government (CTG), located at the University of Albany in New York, to spearhead an initiative to develop "Public ROI" – a method for defining, measuring and communicating the economic, social and political returns of government IT programs. CTG is currently working with Canadian, U.S. and European government organizations to develop a public ROI model; the results of this research are to be available late in 2006.

McKee Tremblay (mtremblay@redwater.com) is Senior Vice President, Public Services for SAP Canada Inc., managing federal, provincial and municipal government mandates including health care, higher education and research.

Get dedicated mobile solutions support for the long term from Bell

Let our knowledgeable Wireless Data Specialists and Implementation Team set you up with our innovative Wireless Data Solutions. We have a range of solutions and new technology running on our fast and reliable IX and 1xEV-DO networks. We understand the pressures of IT departments so you'll get top-notch support from our dedicated Business Service Centre. Your own Account Executive is always available to make sure our solutions are not just meeting, but exceeding the changing needs of any business.

For a free consultation with one of our Wireless Data Specialists call 1-866-838-4110 or visit www.bellontethgo.ca/dataconsultation