This special issue of **Optimum** summarizes the results of a major study, begun in May 1998 and completed in January 1999, on the career development of knowledge workers* in the Canadian Federal Public Service (PS). The objectives of this research were to:

- Identify the career goals and aspirations of knowledge workers in the federal PS.
- Identify career development strategies currently in use in the PS.
- Identify ways in which the organization (supervisor, department, PS) supports the career development goals of PS knowledge workers,
- Impedes the career development goals of PS knowledge workers.
- Identify changes that would make it easier for knowledge workers in the PS to meet their career development goals.
- Use a number of critical outcome measures to evaluate organizational success concerning career development (i.e., satisfaction with ability to meet career goals, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, intent to leave current positions).
- Identify key “changes” that would make it easier for knowledge workers in the PS to meet their career development goals.
- Examine how the following affect the above issues:
  - gender,
  - job type,
  - whether or not a person has been promoted in the last five years, and
  - participation in a federal career development program.
- Highlight state-of-the-art practices concerning career development through a series of case studies of career development systems in best-practice organizations.

Three research studies were undertaken to meet these objectives:

- Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 254 PS knowledge employees. Just under half of those in the interview sample participated in the following federal career development programs: the Management Trainee Program (MTP), the Career Assignment Program (CAP), the Accelerated Executive Development Program (AEXDP), and the Assistant Deputy Minister Prequalification Process (ADMPP).
- A random sample of 2350 PS knowledge employees representing 13 federal government departments (Defence (civilians only), Finance, Health, Justice, Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Environment,

*That is, employees who occupy positions in the executive, scientific and professional, and administrative and foreign service categories.*
Industry, Human Resources Development, Natural Resources, Public Service Commission, Revenue (IT Branch only), Statistics, and Treasury Board Secretariat) were surveyed regarding career aspirations, career strategies, work attitudes and behaviours and work history.

Case studies were conducted with 14 public and private sector organizations which are considered to be “best-practice” organizations concerning their career development programs and practices.

This special issue of Optimum consists of seven papers. Paper one, “Listen carefully: you will hear what people are thinking” written by Peter Harder, Secretary of the Treasury Board of Canada and Comptroller General of Canada, provides the context for this research by outlining why it is important to understand human resources management in a deeper and more fundamental way. Papers two, three and four were co-authored by the researchers, Linda Duxbury, Carleton University, School of Business; Lorraine Dyke, Carleton University, School of Business; and Natalie Lam, Faculty of Administrative Studies, University of Ottawa. Paper two, “Career development of knowledge workers in the federal public service: the view from the trenches” provides readers with a summary of key findings from the interview study. Paper three, “Career development: taking the pulse of the public service” discusses the key findings from the survey study, while paper four, “Career development in best-practice organizations: critical success factors” outlines the career development and career planning practices of “best-practice” private sector organizations. The fifth paper, “On career development at Statistics Canada” was written by Dr. Ivan Fellegi, Chief Statistician of Canada, and describes the career development practices of Statistics Canada, a “best-practice” employer in the Public Service.

The special issue wraps up with two papers which focus on next steps. The first of these by L. Duxbury et al., “Where should the federal public service go from here? Key recommendations arising from the research” represents the researchers’ views of what actions the federal government should take on the career development of its knowledge workers. These recommendations were developed from all three sets of research data. In the second of these summary papers, “Facing Facts?” Peter Harder outlines what the government hopes to do about the career development of its knowledge workers. Interested readers can get more details on these studies by referring to the full report entitled Career Development in the Federal Public Service: Building a World-Class Workforce which is on the Treasury Board Web site: www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/Pubs_pol/partners/workreport_e.html