Canada’s Pandemic Response: Key Learnings for Building our Future

The Compassion Revolution Series: Article 2

François Morissette, M.Ed., P.C.C.
Queen’s IRC Facilitator
The Compassion Revolution

The first article of the Compassion Revolution series explored a new trend: Why so many public and not for profit organizations are transforming their service delivery models to better meet the needs of vulnerable and at risk populations such as: injured workers, autistic children, people with disabilities, refugees, victims of violence, students with learning disabilities, PTSD sufferers, etc. It also revealed that these transformations require, not only organizational and process redesign, but significant paradigm and culture shifts.

The Compassion Revolution is based on 3 core pillars:

1. **Stewardship:** Acting for the greater good of those under one’s care. It’s about ‘choosing service over self-interest’, states Peter Block in his famous book entitled *Stewardship.*

2. **Client Focus:** Optimizing client experience for maximum value, through practices like: facilitating service access, offering flexible hours, multiplying delivery methods and improving navigation so people can visually grasp the big picture and see where they stand in it.

3. **Systems Thinking & Action:** Aligning the whole system including configuration, design, dynamics and components, in order to enhance its synergy, connectivity, performance and sustainability. This is about connecting the dots to make linkages visible and the rationales clear.

**Context**

But what if the *entire* population becomes vulnerable due a pandemic? The same logic applies… in droves. COVID-19 took the world by surprise, then by storm, compelling us to adapt to new realities which considerably impact our individual, social and professional lives. The Canadian

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Federal Government, responsible for leading the pandemic crisis response, had to take effective and swift action in a rapidly shifting environment, driven by a new and mysterious threat. By contrast, the Peel Region (featured in article 1), made a proactive and strategic decision to implement a new service delivery model for dementia care. Consequently, the organization could exercise more control over timing and actualization. Implementing a multitude of effective responses across the country during COVID-19 posed a significant challenge for the Federal Government with regards to speed, agility and performance.

Process Overview: The 4D

The 4D⁴ is an action learning process invented by my Queen’s IRC colleague Brenda Barker Scott. Simple, sound and powerful, it provides a methodology for systems transformation and will be used throughout the series. Here’s a visual representation and a summary:

- **Define**: Scope the issue and assess its impact on stakeholders and the organization or the system.
- **Discover**: Explore the issue to achieve a deep and complete understanding. This is done through:
  - *Pure research*: analyzing trends, best practices, components, patterns etc. to survey the landscape and context for the issue at hand
  - *Action research*: consulting stakeholders through focus groups, surveys, and interviews to gather expectations, perspectives, suggestions and recommendations (*Client Focus: Compassion Revolution pillar #2)*.
- **Design**: Craft a solution that will move the issue forward, be well-received by stakeholders, and implementable in the current reality.
- **Do**: Pilot the solution, learn from experience, adjust and adapt solution until you are confident a widespread implementation will succeed.

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⁴ Barker Scott, B. (2011). Designing organizations from the inside out. Queen’s IRC. Retrieved June 14, 2019, from https://irc.queensu.ca/articles/designing-organizations-inside-out
The 4Ds of COVID-19

Normally, the 4D process is implemented sequentially. However, during a national emergency simultaneously impacting various sectors and population segments in different ways, multiple strategies are required, which must be implemented quickly and effectively.

DEFINE: Scoping the Issue

Since the virus is new, a permanent solution (vaccine) is still in development. Therefore, how to create an optimal strategy for preventing and containing the virus until a vaccine comes along?

Secondly, how does the virus impact the overall system and its stakeholders: medically, mentally, socially, economically, educationally, environmentally, and how can the Feds respond to these challenges in a consistent manner?

Wisely, the Government of Canada firmly anchored its actions to Stewardship: Acting for the greater good of the country and people under its care. (Compassion Revolution’s pillar #1 Stewardship).

This meant putting in place effective responses to help individuals, communities, and systems, not only to weather the storm, but learn and grow from the experience, enhancing capacity for building a successful and sustainable future (Compassion Revolution’s pillar #3: Systems Thinking & Action). Since the outbreak, the Feds have dealt with several iterations of Define on various issues, building agility, analysis, collaboration and innovation capacity.

DISCOVER: Exploring the Issue and Stakeholders’ Needs

Judging from their actions, the Feds determined that the Discovery process would be ongoing and collective: ‘Let’s learn together.’ For instance, aware that small business owners have more experience and expertise in the field than they do, they engaged in a productive dialogue to ensure important issues were not overlooked, needs were met, critical success factors were considered etc. (Compassion Revolution pillar #2: Client Focus). This, not only brought greater clarity and better solutions, but fostered collaboration between the Feds and a multitude of individual, organizational and collective stakeholders.

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DESIGN: Crafting Solutions that will Move the Issue Forward and Meet Stakeholders’ Needs

Programs had to be designed and implemented quickly. Instead of labelling a new initiative as final, the Federal Government positioned it as a starting point to be enriched through stakeholders’ feedback, innovative ideas, best practices etc. As a result, design became an iterative process.

This learning organization⁶ mindset yielded outstanding results like Canada Revenue Agency’s stellar Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) program, developed and implemented in 6 weeks with remarkable efficiency and effectiveness.

According to many experts, it is poised to replace EI. David Macdonald, senior economist, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, shared his thoughts on the CERB:

> Despite being done quickly, the design benefits of CERB are substantial: it is built for speed, it covers gig workers, it provides a floor on benefits for low-wage workers, it’s dramatically simpler to administer, and it’s easy to understand what you’ll get.⁷

DO: Piloting a Solution, Learning from the Pilot, Implementing Across the System

In many regards, the Feds and other organizations didn’t have the luxury of piloting; it was more about taking a step forward and giving it your best shot and improving over time, as more data and feedback become available. ‘Let’s fine-tune a solution, until we get it right’ is the prevalent mindset… and it’s working.

For instance, grocery stores progressively:

- Implemented Plexiglas barriers to protect cashiers
- Identified the maximum number of customers permissible at one time, and limited entry accordingly

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- Mapped out aisle directions to foster one-direction traffic; provided masks, etc.\(^8\)

People now view this continuous improvement process as normal, if not the norm.

**Leadership**

The crisis has also provided powerful insights on how our social, economic and ecological systems are performing, and what is required to optimize them. But, most significantly, it glaringly exposes leadership effectiveness… or ineptitude.

Jacinda Ardern, New Zealand’s Prime Minister, demonstrated exceptional leadership by acting decisively, quickly and with compassion.\(^7\) Watch this inspiring [video]\(^10\) about her strategy to tackle the Pandemic, and her approach for mobilizing people. As of early May 2020, the pandemic was over in New Zealand.\(^11\)

**PRESENT: Facing the Storm**

Emergencies and crises often create the perfect storm for transformation, as change is primarily driven by the powerful winds of Pain and/or Gain.

Not surprisingly, up to 80% of change is propelled by Pain, a wake up call that pushes us out of complacency, providing opportunities to raise the bar, innovate, shift paradigms, modernize, and make systems work better for more people. Pain compels us to face outdated realities and systems that we are otherwise reluctant to contemplate, infusing us with the courage to do so. See this reference for examples in the world of IT.\(^12\)

**Connecting the Dots and Identifying Improvement Opportunities**

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Pain also entices us to connect the dots. For instance, the pandemic pointed to obvious parallels with the climate change emergency, increasing our awareness, motivation, and sense of responsibility:

Covid-19 is a dress rehearsal for dealing with climate change: telework and virtual meetings show travel can be reduced, with satellite images revealing the dramatic decline in air pollution. While the crisis exposes weaknesses in existing operations, it opens the door to shorten supply chains and make them more transparent, socially conscious and environmentally friendly.13

Bottom Line: as dramatic as COVID-19 is, it highlights significant opportunities to improve our social, democratic, economic and environmental systems.14

Stepping up to the Plate

During crises, people pull together. COVID-19 is not only bringing people, but the whole country together! Driven by caring, compassion and stewardship, Canadians in droves, are volunteering, donating to charities, looking after their communities, celebrating healthcare heroes, grocery shopping for their homebound neighbours, signing up to volunteer at distress call centers… Throughout, people are looking for opportunities that match their talents & strengths, as well as deepening purpose & meaning.

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For example, seeking to offer hope and inspiration, artists are painting rocks with uplifting messages, and dropping them in parks & forests for people to read during daily walks. In this touching picture, a citizen thanks the artist… who then responds!!!

Meanwhile, musicians record comforting, hopeful songs and post them online. Check out this heartwarming video, featuring members of the Crosby family (father and toddler daughter) in a rendition of You’ve got a friend in me from the movie Toy Story.

Recently, Canada’s beloved aerial acrobatics team, the Snowbirds, launched Operation Inspiration, a cross-country tour to pay tribute to all Canadians, especially health care workers working tirelessly to fight COVID-19.

Team members repeatedly express their delight with the initiative, finding it meaningful and rewarding. Meanwhile, Canadians line up in droves with flags to see them: “Snowbirds are always worth seeing,” Kevin Carter said. “They came out to encourage everyone across Canada, so we wanted to encourage them by showing up.”

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Ramping up Capacity

Not only are individuals helping out, businesses are getting into the action: Kitchener’s Ink Smith answered the call for medical equipment and is now taking its contribution a step further.18

Last month, Ink Smith began 3-D printing face shields for frontline workers. According to a news release, that company has the capacity to produce 50,000 face shields per day:

“Over the past few weeks, we have been extremely concerned about the critical shortage of medical equipment that our frontline healthcare workers are facing during this unprecedented global pandemic,” Founder & CEO Jeremy Hedges states in the release. “Using our existing tools and infrastructure, we realized we were in a position to help.”19

They have been ramping up production through a new company aptly called The Canadian Shield. Watch this video from CTV news speaking to the transformation.

Living our Brand

Not only are we pulling together to help, we want our actions to reflect who we are and what we stand for. Yes, we seek to build a successful and sustainable future… but one that looks & feels like us: a future aligned to our identity, vision & values, and our national brand.

As Maclean’s Magazine stated in its May 2020 edition:

“Here in Canada, it…has meant putting some of our core beliefs about ourselves to the test. That we value order. That we compromise. That we unite for the sake of the common good - in this case, nothing less than the preservation of life… We hear from our politicians and leaders that this is what Canadians do. We help each other’, says Kerry Bowman, a bioethicist at

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18 Hedges, J. (2020, March 31). “We’ve been here from 7 a.m. until 2 a.m. every day”: This 3-D printing company is mass-producing plastic face shields for health care workers. Retrieved May 23, 2020, from https://torontolife.com/tech/weve-been-here-from-7-a-m-until-2-a-m-every-day-this-3-d-printing-company-is-mass-producing-plastic-face-shields-for-health-care-workers/
20 Ibid.
And proving, we did: “Food Banks Canada says that donations topped more than $8 million to date, five days after the appeal was made in the ‘Stronger Together’ TV special which became the most-watched, non-sports Canadian broadcast on record.”

PAST: Learning from Experience and Building Capacity

This is not the first time Canada has faced pandemics. What have we learned from past experiences? How can we leverage these learnings, now and for the future? How can we continue to evolve and improve? Here’s a summary of our experience so far.

Overview

Pandemics: Definition

A pandemic is an outbreak of an infectious disease that affects a large proportion of the population in multiple countries, or worldwide. Human populations have been affected by pandemics since ancient times. These include widespread outbreaks of plague, cholera, influenza, and, more recently, HIV/AIDS, SARS and COVID-19.

Pandemics Response: Public Health

Initially, it was about defining Public Health, shaping a national vision for it, and putting in place infrastructures to deliver and manage services:

In order to slow or stop the spread of disease, governments implemented public health measures that include testing, isolation and

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quarantine. In Canada, public health agencies at the federal, provincial and municipal levels play an important role in monitoring disease, advising governments and communicating to the public.24

Over time, as the country experienced different pandemics, Canadians became more aware of the impact on individuals and on economic, educational and social systems. As a result, the Government of Canada is now providing widespread leadership to ensure the well being of Canadians physically, mentally, socially, educationally, and economically.

In an interview with the University of Alberta’s FOLIO Magazine, resident historian Susan Smith stated:

Pandemics do eventually end, and if handled successfully, COVID-19 may reinforce for Canadians the value of their health-care system. One reason Canada has responded with consistent messaging and public trust is that it did learn from the past. A crisis like this is a reminder of why a universal health-care system is so essential.25

Previous Pandemics

Spanish Influenza 1918-1920

During the time of the Spanish Influenza pandemic, the vision of Public Health expanded to encompass the health of all Canadians, not just specific groups, like people suffering from tuberculosis, or recent arrivals to Canada who must be quarantined. 26

Sharpening the Vision

People realized that no one is immune to pandemics, and Canada must optimize health for all citizens regardless of age, gender, religion, class, occupation, etc. In order to deliver such an encompassing vision, Canada needed infrastructures, processes, policies and competent professionals.

24 Ibid.
Setting up Infrastructures

This led to the creation of a Federal Department of Health. “Before the outbreak, public health efforts concentrated on border control, and intercepting and quarantining immigrants, rather than a concern for the wider citizenry. The flu helped convince Canadians that the health of everyone was of national importance”\(^ {27} \) to our society.

“Beyond spurring the creation of the Federal Department of Health and other government innovations, the crisis also inspired a greater sense of community in Canada.”\(^ {28} \)

SARS 2003-2004

“During SARS, Canada’s provincial and federal governments were struggling to share information in an optimal way, as there were no data sharing protocols between jurisdictions. To solve this problem, Canada created the arms-length Public Health Agency of Canada and similar agencies at the provincial level.”\(^ {29} \)

Facilitating Domestic Collaboration

The Public Health Agency of Canada empowers Canadians to improve their health. In partnership with others, its activities focus on preventing disease and injuries, promoting good physical and mental health, and providing information to support informed decision making. It values scientific excellence and provides national leadership in response to public health threats. The Minister of Health is responsible for maintaining and improving the health of Canadians.\(^ {30} \)

The Public Health Agency of Canada is part of the Health Portfolio.

Fostering International Collaboration

The SARS epidemic also exposed a lack of international cooperation, so in 2007, the World Health Organization (WHO) implemented International Health Regulations (IHR), an agreement between 194 countries to build their capacities to detect, assess and report public


health events. Their aim is to help the international community prevent and respond to acute public health risks that have the potential to cross borders and threaten people worldwide.\textsuperscript{31}

**H1N1: 2009**

Instead of focusing on infrastructure, H1N1 shone the spotlight on process as this pandemic occurred while a minority government was at the helm. Seeking to act for the greater good of the overall population, the party in power decided to involve all other parties to find optimal solutions and strategies... together. “Viral pandemics are not the time for partisan politics but for a unified voice on health issues.”\textsuperscript{32}

**Devising a Communication Strategy**

An inclusive strategy was devised for informing and educating the public without raising alarm, involving close collaboration between experts, public servants and politicians. To raise the credibility bar, the most effective group or individual was empowered to lead/speak, according to the topic or intervention. It was also determined to increase communication flow and activities, and to be more accessible to the media. This smart move enabled experts, community activists and social thinkers to share the spotlight with politicians.

**Implementing an Engagement Strategy**

An innovative strategy for cross-party collaboration was put in place to present a united front and align messages and actions. The approach was centered on ‘bringing everyone into the tent’: informing all political parties, seeking their input, investing them in the overall success of outcomes, preventing surprises during the question period, etc. “This strategy significantly raised trust levels in the Parliament, facilitating the passing of three new Public Health legislations…with unanimous support!”\textsuperscript{33} The H1N1 all parties’ involvement win-win strategy is guaranteed to improve outcomes, relationships, climate and learning: could that be a blueprint for the future of parliamentary process?

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
Key Learnings: Summary

Defining Vision

When the need for a new reality erupts (in this case, public health), governments start by defining a vision. Then, they set about configuring a model for optimal results, and for the greater good of people and communities under their care.

Setting-up Systems

Next, they put in place systems required for public policy development and implementation, governance, and service delivery (the building blocks of government), ensuring all the components are aligned, mutually reinforcing, and acting in a synergistic manner.

Fine-tuning Systems

As implementation proceeds, governments inevitably discover that aspects of the context, vision or issue have been overlooked, insufficiently conceptualized, or incompletely mapped out, and they set about finalizing and integrating them.

In recent times, this fine-tuning process has become more participative: including experts, stakeholder groups, best practices and most importantly, citizens. During COVID-19, this continuous improvement process has been highly transparent, for example as the federal government receives feedback & suggestions to improve financial support programs.... The government welcomes, considers and implements many of them, progressively improving efficiency and performance.

A real partnership is starting to emerge, much to the satisfaction of all concerned, proving that ‘participative democracy ’ not only is feasible, but yields better results, enhancing satisfaction for all stakeholders, and instilling a sense of collective ownership and pride.

Using a Collaborative Approach

Our current experience is not unique. Many experiments and much research show that system design greatly benefits from exposure to a variety of perspectives, experiences and know how.34 As the proverb states: ‘Where everyone thinks alike, no one thinks very much.’ All over the world,

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governments increasingly choose to do things with, not to people. This requires engagement strategies, which foster public trust, while strengthening the democratic process. 35

In Canada, British Columbia (BC) has gained extensive experience with engagement through its ground breaking initiative: govtogether.bc

British Columbia is committed to transparent, inclusive and responsive government. There has been an increased mandate since 2012 to involve British Columbians in the programs, policies and services that directly affect their lives...Citizen Engagement is the process whereby citizens provide feedback on programs, policies and services that affect their lives. Bottom-up participation from residents and B.C. citizens leads to more effective and sustainable policy. 36

Pandemic Leadership DNA

History reveals that the leadership styles best suited to pandemics share common characteristics for, during crises, people go back to the lower levels of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, 37 requiring information and signals that touch their emotions and longing for security first, as well as balanced and clear messages that provide hope and confidence in the future. 38

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Stakeholders look for leaders firmly anchored in stewardship: acting for the greater good of the people and entities under their care.

Attributes include:

- Empathetic and compassionate: have stakeholders’ well-being at heart
- Hopeful and positive: maintain a balanced outlook
- Action-oriented: take steps early on, instead of denying or minimizing the severity & dangers
- Strategic and innovative: seek to build the future, instead of lamenting the past
- Steady and safe: exude a calm and kind composure
- Collaborative and humble: listen to feedback, admit mistakes, do not pretend to know all the answers, seek to find solutions...together
- Patriotic & committed: stand by their country’s values, identity, & brand.

In an interview with the University of Alberta’s FOLIO Magazine, resident historian Susan Smith stated:

The historical lesson is that when leaders use strong-arm tactics or conflicting, mixed messages, or provide only limited information, the citizens are reluctant to follow along. Good public co-operation is based on
clear government and public health messaging with frequent and honest communications.39

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau40 is blessed with high Emotional Intelligence (EQ), and naturally adopted an effective leadership style, well-suited to current realities. Regardless of what happens on any given day, he looks calm and quietly confident.

Moreover, he proudly stands by our Canadian values, principles, identity and brand. Watch this video41 here he responds to racist attacks against Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Teresa Tam: “Intolerance and racism have no place in our society. Canada has succeeded because of our diversity. It’s one of our greatest strengths.” 42

Eminent historian and journalist Andrew Cohen remarks:

The Prime Minister appears in public every day, alone, outside his residence. He speaks sensibly, with authority, without hyperbole. This has been his finest hour. Canadians trust him. They may not have voted for him – only about one-third did – but that doesn’t matter now. Nor do we question the competence of his ministers, who are the other faces of the crisis: Chrystia Freeland, Marc Garneau, Patty Hajdu, Bill Blair. All are calm, competent, and professional. This is what we want.43

Interestingly:

Leaders who didn’t adopt a leadership style suited to pandemics, lost their seats in the following election. For example, it took two years for California Governor, Henry Gage, to admit the Spanish Flu existence for fear it would hurt the economy, and it took four years to stamp out the disease, after the Governor was voted out of office for not taking it seriously. The historical

42 Ibid.
lesson is that when leaders use strong-arm tactics or conflicting, mixed messages, or provide only limited information, the citizens are reluctant to follow along.44

FUTURE: Blueprint for Sustainable Success

Building Capacity

A blueprint for the future is beginning to emerge: one that will involve greater use of interactive technology, system-wide collaboration, widespread innovation, improved systems thinking capacity, and stronger recognition and appreciation of the female leadership brand.

Interactive Technology

‘Necessity is the mother of invention’, declared Greek philosopher Plato, in Dialogue Republic, and COVID-19 proves him right. Inventive technology applications are emerging in droves. Here are examples from various sectors.

Libraries

Seeking to find alternatives to Storytime, a popular activity for children & care givers, the Oakville Library launched a number of innovative tech formats:

*Stories by Phone*: pre-recorded stories available any time of the day, *Family Storytime* on Instagram Live and You Tube, as well as a *Kids’ Library Club*!

As for the crafting community used to regular encounters, they can join *Crafty Bees Meetup* to “share what they are working on and gather inspiration from fellow craft enthusiasts!45

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Educational Institutions

When COVID-19 began, universities had to quickly convert courses to online learning, so students could complete their academic year studies. In certain cases, the conversion, so close to year end, proved challenging.

In an innovative move, Ottawa University called upon Athabasca University, the #1 online university in Canada, which has an extensive program repertory and was happy to help. This partnership delighted both parties, not to mention students who could continue learning with minimal disruption and, in some cases, graduate! Could that experiment lead to a new model for the future?

System-Wide Collaboration

Governments

We are witnessing unprecedented collaboration between levels of government as per this statement of principle:

All levels of government and stakeholders need to work in partnership to produce an effective and coordinated response. The Government of Canada is working closely with provinces and territories to ensure that all necessary and appropriate supports are available, to ensure a comprehensive & coordinated response to COVID-19. As the outbreak evolves, the Government of Canada will enhance its coordination efforts to support a larger-scale, harmonized response. This will include working together across jurisdictions to ensure consistent implementation of pandemic responses in the health system.

This statement not only demonstrates a strong commitment to systems thinking and action but to effective, collective leadership.

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Politicians

Politicians are also getting into Collabor-Action: in the Ontario North Oakville/Burlington riding, MP Pam Damoff set up a partnership with MPP Effie Triantafilopoulos and Mayor Rob Burton, in order to provide an integrated ‘info destination’. This blended platform informs citizens on a variety of topics ranging from financial to government and community supports, mental health issues, business innovation etc. It also provides volunteering opportunities, celebrates best practices and local heroes.

The multi-level partnership is a ground-breaking initiative, enabling dedicated politicians to collaborate, regardless of political affiliation: a clear demonstration of stewardship. Together, they are acting for the greater good of the people under their care. Overall, the diversity and intensity of partnerships is staggering: people & organizations who had little to do with each other in the past, are now working together daily. There are a couple of examples of this below.

Scotiabank Arena… turned into a giant kitchen

The same arena floor that saw Kawhi Leonard…propel the Raptors past the Philadelphia 76ers last May, now houses one big food production line. Maple Leaf Sports & Entertainment, in conjunction with its partners, is looking to prepare 10,000 meals a day to go to Toronto’s front-line health-care workers and their families as well as the city’s most vulnerable, via community agencies and shelters.

Partners are providing funding and involving others.

Toronto Libraries… converted into food banks

The City of Toronto…started to convert its closed libraries to food banks to help… vulnerable residents ‘in an effort to ensure that the food needs of vulnerable residents continue to be met,’ after almost 40 per cent of food bank programs in the city have been closed due to COVID 19. The mayor

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said companies like Sobeys and Loblaws have also donated food and other supplies.50

Widespread Innovation

Innovation abounds, from breweries making hand sanitizers, to “researchers at U of T and McMaster’s isolating the virus.”51

Individuals are also getting involved. For instance, Quinn Callander, a 12 year-old Boy Scout from BC, started to make a product to ease the life of healthcare workers.

The device, which goes behind the head… has hooks that attach to mask straps and help take the pressure off the backs of the ears… The family has heard from thousands of people who also have 3D printers and have been motivated to take Quinn's lead, and print the 'ear gears' themselves… The best part is that they’re donating them to their local hospitals all across Canada, the U.S., the U.K.52

“Spurred by the stories of… medical personnel having to make life or death decisions due to lack of equipment such as ventilators, Prime Minister Trudeau called upon industry to step up and help protect our health care workers on March 20th. And did Canadian manufacturers ever step up…

- Portable Electric, a Vancouver-based company, will be producing more of its VolStack power stations to hospitals and emergency service providers to ensure they have uninterrupted battery power supplies.
- Acryl Design in Winnipeg used to produce furniture parts and modular escape rooms, but now it’s making plexiglass shields to be installed at grocery store checkouts to protect cashiers, as well as post office and pharmacy counters.”53

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Enhanced Systems and Strategic Thinking Capacity

There is widespread realization that our systems must be aligned to a shared & meaningful purpose, in synch and mutually reinforcing, in order to solve challenges like pandemic, terrorism and the environmental emergency: we are starting to say *Goodbye* to silo thinking, and *Hello* to systems thinking and action.

Instead of breaking down concepts into smaller components, people are showing greater appetite for connecting the dots in a synergistic, powerful, coherent and cohesive whole. This leads to collective decision-making, problem-solving, and innovation:

**Ontario Government**

For instance, the Ontario Government, aware that children from low income families may not have computers to continue their home studies through the pandemic, sought a system-wide solution.54

This new partnership is between the Ontario government, Apple, Rogers, and provincial school boards. These iPads will have free wireless data and will help students from low-income families continue their learning safely at home during this pandemic. As per Ontario’s release, the iPads will come loaded with Rogers LTE data, which will be available until June. A Rogers spokesperson clarified… that the free wireless data will come at no cost to the ministry, school boards, or families.55

**Canada Revenue Agency**

Implementing the new financial support CERB program was nothing short of pulling a bureaucratic miracle: “It took long hours, nervous nights and a complete rethinking of how government does

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55 Ibid.
business to get the program up and running in record time.”56

For instance:

- “CRA… employees volunteered in the thousands to take on long hours—some of them even doubling their workweeks
- Service Canada’s programmers tricked their outdated programming to accept a new, flat-rate payment with a simple application process
- Senior officials…flipped the typically glacial pace of government on its head… The slow-and-steady bureaucracy relented for the sake of expediency.”57
- To avoid crashing the system with too many applicants, “someone came up with the idea of staggering applications by birth month… Everyone loved the idea, and when it filtered up to the PMO, Trudeau ran with it. In one of his morning press conferences, he asked applicants to wait their turn.” And it worked: Canadians clearly listened… even though they were desperate for cash…58

“The scope and speed of what happened to get the CERB out the door is unparalleled—a truly historic moment for the public service… One of the pandemic’s lessons for how to run a government appears to be that a little risk goes a long way. Millions of Canadians felt relief, at least in the short-term, thanks to billions in fast-tracked aid. But taking on more risk requires politicians, public servants and the public to rethink how government works.”59

Rise of Female Leadership Brand

Inspiring Confidence

Thanks to our predominantly female Chief Medical Officers, constantly in the public eye, there’s increased awareness that women use a highly effective leadership style during difficult times.

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57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
59 Ibid.
“They all come across as fierce advocates for public health, but they are combining it with calm, expert, compassionate dispositions and that increases their ability to influence change,” said Dr. Clover Hemans, president of the Federation of Medical Women in Canada. 60

While Canadians seem to be rallying around the entire medical community, it’s significant that so many women are guiding the country through this pandemic. I think we are so used to seeing men in these roles. There’s never been a time like this, there’s never been an experience like this, and we’ve never had such incredible women at the forefront of something like this. 61

For instance, Dr. Bonnie Henry, B.C. Provincial Health Officer62 has become a symbol of effective leadership during a crisis.

“When we look back at this time for the rest of our lives, I believe that Henry’s role will forever be connected,” says Clara Huber who interviewed Dr. Henry for the Time Colonist.

“This is the time you need to be calm and kind,” Henry said. “Part of my role is to say that this is going to be hard, take a deep breath. Now is not the time to make assumptions about why people are doing what they are doing. As leaders, we need to make allowances for people right now.”63

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Getting Results

Meanwhile, female country leaders are getting extraordinary results with the Pandemic. Recently, Forbes Magazine published an article entitled: “What Do Countries with The Best Coronavirus Responses Have in Common? Women Leaders”.

The article opens with a provocative question:

Looking for examples of true leadership in a crisis? From Iceland to Taiwan and from Germany to New Zealand, women are stepping up to show the world how to manage a messy patch for our human family. Add in Finland, Iceland and Denmark, and this pandemic is revealing that women have what it takes when the heat rises in our Houses of State.

Norway’s Prime Minister, Erna Solberg, held a dedicated press conference where no adults were allowed. She responded to kids’ questions from across the country, taking time to explain why it was OK to feel scared. The originality and obviousness of the idea takes one’s breath away. How many other simple, humane innovations would more female leadership unleash? Generally, the empathy and care which all of these female leaders have communicated seems to come from an alternate universe than the one we have gotten used to. It’s like their arms are coming out of their videos to hold you close in a heart-felt and loving embrace. Who knew leaders could sound like this? Now we do.

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65 Ibid
66 Ibid.
Navigating Turbulence

Meanwhile in Canada, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has officially named Kirsten Hillman, pictured here, as Canada’s next ambassador to the United States – the first woman in Canadian history to hold the position at the Washington mission.68

Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland agreed with the Prime Minister’s assessment of Hillman as a “brilliant lawyer, skilled diplomat, and gifted team leader… In challenging times, as we battle a pandemic unlike any we have seen in our lifetimes, it is more important than ever that Canada’s Ambassador to the United States be steady, calm, competent, and wise.”69

This newfound validation of the female leadership brand will serve us well as a country as we seek to expand leadership capacity to build a successful, sustainable and innovative future: All hands on deck!

**Post-Pandemic: The Keepers**

What’s in store post-pandemic? How will we change given what we learned during the pandemic? A blueprint is emerging: one that will involve greater use of interactive technology, system-wide collaboration, widespread innovation, improved systems thinking capacity, and the rise of the female leadership brand. Here’s some food for thought.

**Greater Use of Interactive Technology**

Because of social distancing, we had to find ways to connect at the individual, organizational and societal levels. Most people who used to ignore computers or use them minimally, are working hard to raise their proficiency levels, as the call for connectivity and community beckons. Likewise, organizations are finding clever and unusual ways to leverage interactive technology. For instance, libraries are inventing *dial a story* to replace live *story time*.

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This trend will continue to expand, if not explode after COVID-19. Interactive technology will become more intuitive, flexible and creative, bridging distance between individuals, organizations and communities. For instance, sooner rather than later, Canada will create a best practice portal that will enable sharing, learning and collaboration.

**System-Wide Collaboration**

The train has left the station and done so without any previous blueprints or models. The whole country is in square-dancing frenzy! Connecting the dots and collaborating is not only the best way to solve system-wide problems, it is fun and stimulating! Everyone learns, grows, looks good and wins.

This energy boosting trend will lead to completely different ways of achieving results, as well as extensive system redesign. For instance, we can expect tighter strategic alignment among government levels: could a National Environmental Strategy be afoot? One where the national, provincial, regional and municipal responsibilities work in harmony to save the planet? Stay tuned.

**Widespread Innovation**

COVID-19 forced us to innovate and much to our astonishment, we discovered we can apply it to any issue. This increased comfort and reduced fear.

No longer intimidated by innovation, we switched paradigms: from infrequent, genius led innovation, to everyone can do it, nothing unusual… way of life. This has significantly enhanced our national confidence and courage, providing the readiness to tackle daunting national issues, such as putting in place an integrated national strategy to combat family violence, (a.k.a. the permanent pandemic). Such a national effort would mean increasing our supply of shelters and low income housing, beefing up financial & emotional support for victims, and harmonizing our provincial laws.70

**Improved Systems Thinking Capacity**

The learning on this front has been considerable:

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The need to align systems to a shared and meaningful purpose, such as Markham-Stouffville’s mission: Care beyond our Walls\textsuperscript{71}, or the Ontario Government’s new mantra For the People.\textsuperscript{72} The penny dropped and we stand behind Simon Sinek’s principle: Start with Why.

The realization that systems must be in synch, synergized, & mutually reinforcing, in order to solve complex or daunting challenges… and that we can do it.

As a result of this huge shift, we should see much organizational redesign according to user experience, more alliances between partners involved in delivering large outcomes such as economic renewal & diversification, and significant alignment between the various levels of government

**Rise of the Female Leadership Brand**

The tremendous success of women in leadership roles during the crisis will lead to a greater endorsement of the female leadership brand. For organizations, it will expand search parameters for leadership talent identification & development. It will also accelerate widespread acceptance that effective leadership styles come in a variety of formats.

For individual female leaders, it will accelerate promotions to management & executive ranks. For aspiring leaders & leadership students, it will send a message that they can be themselves in those roles.

In politics, where women are under-represented, many are predicting that the next leader of the free world (once Angela Merkel retires at the end of 2021) could be another woman: New Zealand’s Jacinda Ardern is considered the strongest contender. It’s a brave new world!

**Conclusion**

Collaborative, innovative, system-wide approaches will not only continue, but intensify and eventually, become the norm. Post crisis, our newfound collaboration capacity could be applied to a variety of settings such as:

- Redesigning organizational structures and workplaces to be more flexible and adaptive
- Selecting appropriate collaboration frameworks to fit different initiatives


▪ Implementing enablers like portals to share information and leverage ideas
▪ Performance management systems that reward team, as well as individual results
▪ Learning and Development programs to help people acquire the mindset, skills and tools for cross functional collaboration
▪ Distributed leadership systems to build and spread leadership capacity

About the Author

Françoise Morissette, M.Ed., P.C.C., has been a facilitator at Queen’s IRC since 1994, and was made a Fellow in 2006. She played a key role in developing and implementing Queen’s IRC’s Organizational Development curriculum and currently teaches on the OD Foundations and Coaching Skills programs. Françoise is a Certified Professional Coach, and she leverages coaching in her leadership practice, as well as training leaders and HR professionals on coaching skills.

Françoise is a major contributor to the OD field, with an emphasis on leadership and systems transformation, helping individuals, organizations and communities enhance their leadership capacity for performance and sustainability. In 2016, she certified as a LEADS facilitator. LEADS, a leadership capability framework originally developed in the Canadian health care system, is rapidly spreading to other sectors and countries. Françoise wrote Made in Canada Leadership, with Amal Henein. It was the product of a large research project on leadership excellence and development. The book also explores ways to refine and leverage our national leadership brand in the global world.
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