

## **Investing in Public Sector Training—A Smart Choice**

Eugene J. Monaco, Executive Director and Public Service Professor, Professional Development Program

The shrinkage in the half-life of knowledge, now more often measured in months rather than years, coupled with the changing demographics of today's public sector workforce calls for knowledgeable and trained workers. As a result, government agencies at every level are under relentless pressure to ensure they have a knowledgeable and efficient workforce. If government is to keep pace with the changes they face in our globalized world of rapid growth and changing technology, training and educating their workforce is a critical mission.

The need to have a public workforce that is current has accelerated dramatically in contrast to the situation less than a quarter century ago. Then, employees would typically complete their formal education, and the knowledge they brought to their first job would sustain them throughout their career. Today's environment is markedly different. Providing just-in-time education and training programs has now surfaced as a strategy for sustaining and improving the effectiveness, efficiency, and competitiveness of today's public sector workers.

This strategy cannot be executed without cost. Keeping a growing and changing public sector workforce current and technically astute, as well as providing opportunities for employees to acquire the requisite knowledge and skills to remain competitive, requires investments that will come from increasingly scarce resources. Therefore, the challenge for government is to determine how best to invest its limited resources for the creation and delivery of a comprehensive workforce education program that will meet these needs.

A first step in meeting this challenge is to address the specific job performance and behavior requirements needed in today's government agencies and associated entities. This requires stringent assessment of the essential knowledge, skills, and abilities that employees need for

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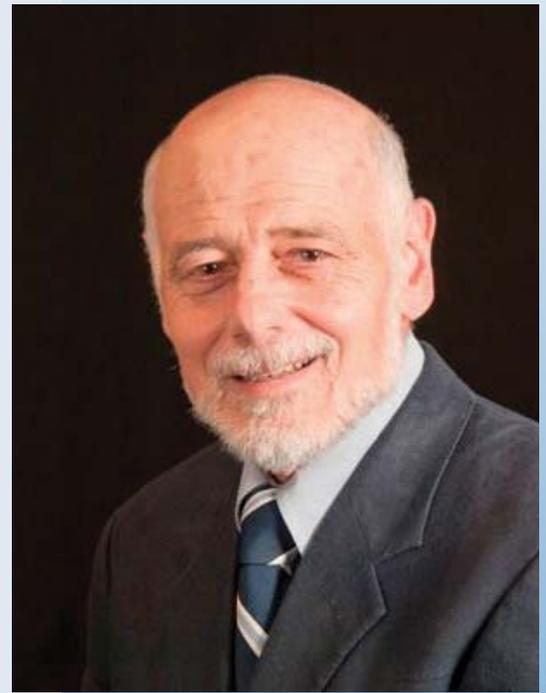
desired job performance outcomes. The next step is to define specific learning objectives that enable the acquisition of the competencies needed to achieve desired job performance outcomes and behaviors. Successful education and training programs incorporate these two basic steps into their program designs. In addition, a final step must be taken, without which even high-quality education and training program designs fail. This is the design and implementation of a comprehensive, summative evaluation tool that provides information about the strengths and weaknesses of the training. This information must then be used to adjust and improve the program, ensuring that the most effective and useful training is being delivered. Carefully considering and adhering to all three steps ensures that the development of new knowledge and skills are targeted to the needs of the government workplace and are accurately measured to determine the ways in which the learning transfers and translates into productivity gains, efficiencies, and competitiveness of the workforce. To its credit, New York State has long recognized the value of investing in education and training programs that support these key points and has adopted these demanding guidelines in partnership with higher education.

A sterling example of New York State's ongoing commitment to improving its workforce is the long-term investment it has made by sponsoring a unique joint labor management undertaking, the Public Service Workshops Program (PSWP). PSWP is a statewide training program administered, from its inception in 1983, by the Professional Development Program (PDP) of Rockefeller College, University at Albany. It has been nationally recognized as high-quality and cutting edge training for state employees in various professional occupations.

PSWP's program offerings are designed to meet the needs of seven broadly defined occupational groups:

1. Auditing and Accounting
2. Information Technology
3. Social Work and Counseling
4. Education and Research
5. Engineering
6. Health Care
7. Law, Criminal Justice and Investigation

PSWP has gained in-depth understanding of the ongoing and anticipated educational needs, job standards, credentialing, and certificate requirements of the professions in these occupational groups. To guide curriculum development and course delivery for these occupational groups, PDP uses subject matter experts from the academic arena and the private sector, as well as state agency experts. By using environmental scanning techniques,



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such as focus groups and trend analysis studies, courses are designed in both traditional and alternative delivery methods in order to fully reach the state workforce. Programs have directly addressed the need to infuse new knowledge and technology in order to keep the state professional workforce abreast of changes in their fields.

This issue of the Communiqué provides an overview of the impact that PSWP has had on the public sector in New York State. It also provides a perspective from one of its expert faculty, Dr. Ellen Rubin, about the importance of knowledge management and knowledge transfer in the public sector. **PDP**

## Knowledge Management, or Avoiding Panic when Your Colleagues Leave the Office for Good

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Many organizations in New York State are faced with downsizing and retirements. The employees leaving these organizations take institutional knowledge out the door. One tool for ensuring that knowledge is not entirely lost is knowledge management. Knowledge management (KM) is more than simply documenting procedures. KM can be defined as systematically creating, identifying, collecting, sharing, and applying knowledge to foster intelligent behavior and efficient and effective decision making for the purpose of achieving the mission and goals of the organization.

Each piece of this definition is important. First, this should be a systematic effort that becomes part of the normal routine of daily business. Second, it involves gathering knowledge and sharing and applying the knowledge. This is not simply hoarding information. Third, this knowledge repository should be used to change behavior, including reforming work processes. When you had five people to complete a task for which there are only two people available now, the process needs to change, and the knowledge gathered gives you information to make intelligent choices. Fourth, and most importantly, KM should help you achieve your organization's mission more effectively. The knowledge you gather and evaluate should be strategically important to the organization and improve the way you do business.

Knowing what knowledge to gather, collect, share, and apply is difficult. The process will vary across organizations. One piece of knowledge



Dr. Ellen V. Rubin

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that is important in one organization will be useless in another. The biggest challenge is likely to be transforming tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge. Tacit knowledge represents beliefs, viewpoints, or perspectives on how to do work that are not easily articulated. This is the information in someone's head developed over years of practice. Conversely, explicit knowledge is written or documented in some form that is easily transmittable. Importantly, not all tacit knowledge can be made explicit; you will never get every drop of knowledge out of someone's head. However, that should not stop you from gathering the most important and useful bits.

Engaging in KM can be highly anxiety-inducing. Many people view knowledge as power; some do not like to share what they know, while others may be afraid of the procedural changes that may result from the effort. There are many reasons why people do not share information, which makes KM efforts difficult. Individuals may not realize that others would find their knowledge useful or helpful, or they may not have the social connections to easily transmit the information. More pessimistically, some may hoard information, using it to wield power over others.

Together, this creates a challenge for managers, union representatives, and employees alike. Managers should publicly support KM efforts, and be clear and consistent about the goals and intentions behind the activities. As noted above, the goals and intentions should be to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of mission accomplishment. Management should seek the participation and support of union representatives from the beginning of the efforts to minimize any employee concerns. Finally, employees should play a key role in contributing knowledge, and analyzing it for strategic opportunities for improvements. Ultimately, KM should become a normal part of doing business, not simply another item in your in-box. *PDP*

## **Profile: Public Service Workshops Program (PSWP)**

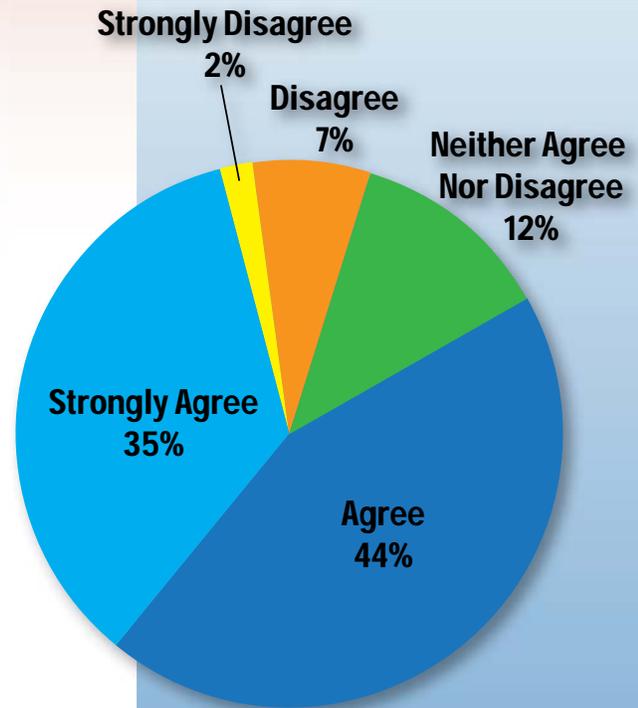
The Public Service Workshops Program (PSWP) is funded through a negotiated agreement between the Governor's Office of Employee Relations (GOER) and the Public Employees Federation AFL-CIO (PEF), which represents over 48,000 New York State employees in professional, scientific, and technical titles. While the program has allowed for limited Management/Confidential (M/C) participation in the past, it is currently being expanded to allow for a higher level of participation and specific professional development opportunities for the almost 10,000 employees in M/C positions. PSWP works with a large network of private and public colleges and universities, professional associations, and other educational providers to develop and deliver non-credit continuing professional education for PEF-represented and M/C employees.

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The Public Service Workshops Program, administered by PDP since 1983, develops and delivers workshops ranging from a half-day to several days in length addressing a wide array of topics related to meeting the educational needs of state agencies and the PEF-represented and M/C workforce. Courses are offered across seven occupational groups, including Auditing and Accounting; Education and Research; Engineering; Health Care; Information Technology; Law/Criminal Justice and Investigation; Social Work and Counseling, as well as additional M/C clerical positions. PSWP coordinated just under 1500 workshops registering over 40,000 employees over the course of the last six years, from January 2006 to December 2011. The overwhelming majority of workshops delivered during this period were evaluated quite high and participants felt that the information gained helped them perform their jobs more effectively, as illustrated in Chart A. Nearly 80% of agency-requested workshop attendees felt the workshops had positive impact on their job performance.

PSWP staff witnessed an increase in agency requests for specific training programs from 2009 to present which appears to be consistent with State budget difficulties, increased pressure on agencies to make cuts, and continuing demands on departments with fewer employees to meet their goals and objectives. This trend of increased agency requests, illustrated in Chart B, is expected to continue throughout the current contractual period (“agency requested” refers to workshops that were requested by one or more agencies and were often customized to meet specific agency needs while “open enrollment” workshops were not developed for or limited to any one specific agency).

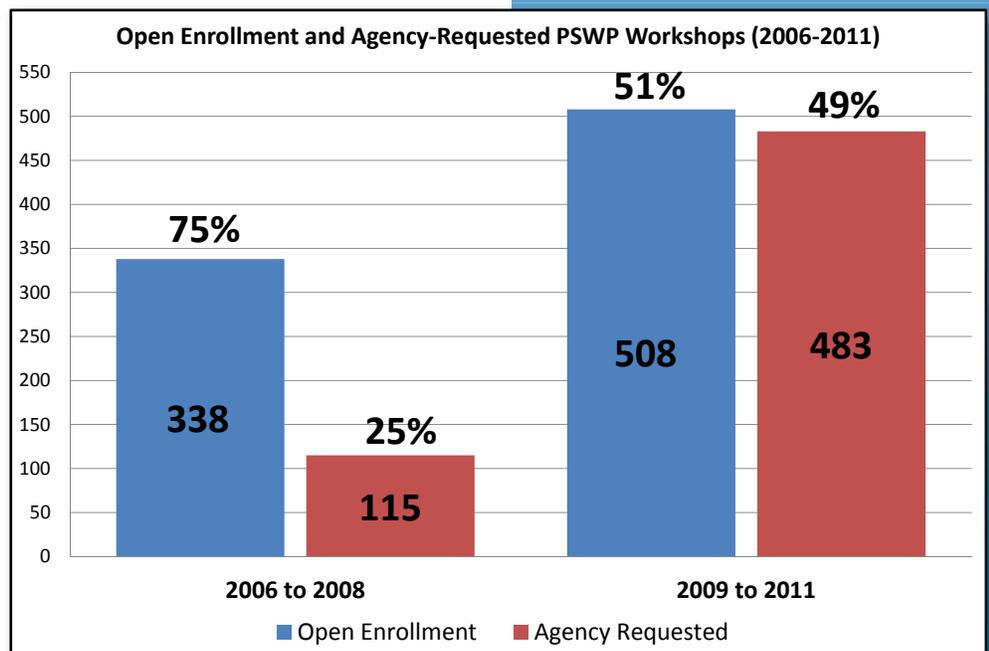
Many of the workshops delivered during this time provided in-depth, highly complex training customized to meet the needs of employees in specific occupations (e.g., Actuarial Instruments for Risk Assessment of Sexual Offenders, Legal and Public Ethics of Social Networking and Online Activity, Nutrition and Disease Management in an Aging Population, On Board Diagnostics Enforcement Training). However, a number of these deliveries were geared toward professionals planning for and dealing with the ramifications of a constantly changing and increasingly challenged State workforce.



**Chart A—Distribution of Agency-Requested Workshop Evaluation Responses (2006-2011)**

Reaction Survey Question 8: “The information gained will help me perform my job more effectively.”

**Chart B—Open Enrollment and Agency-Requested PSWP Workshops (2006-2011)**



Oftentimes, seasoned, knowledgeable staff leave State employment taking existing experiential knowledge with them, while workloads and demands on those remaining increased. These challenges have been ongoing and have been witnessed time and time again by PSWP staff. They have been the impetus for the popularity of, and agency requests for, such topics as Knowledge Transfer, Critical Thinking and Decision Making, Adapting to Change, Leadership Skills in a Changing Environment, Root Cause Analysis, and many others.

Training on knowledge transfer alone was delivered seven times in 2011; three of those deliveries were customized for specific NYS agencies. PDP paired experts from University at Albany's Rockefeller College and Cornell University with the requesting agencies to develop and deliver these offerings to better inform and prepare those being faced with losing knowledgeable staff on how to develop strategies to not only harness that departing knowledge, but to maximize efficiency of the remaining workforce.

Connecting entities with unique knowledge transfer expertise, and its associated components, combined with intimate knowledge of the State workforce with the State agencies in need, provides an example of how PDP, through PSWP, affects positive outcomes in State agency operations through timely workforce development. **PDP**

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