

## **PART I: BACKGROUND**

### **THE INFORMATION DRIVEN WORK ENVIRONMENT OF THE FUTURE: AN ABBREVIATED TOUR**

Change (often discontinuous as well as structural change) is the one constant in the environment at the turn of the century. Institutions' success will ever more be defined by their workers' capacity to cope with it.

If anyone has doubts about the likely extent of change in the next 12 years, they have only to review how different the world was twelve years ago. In 1987, the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact were in place and the Cold War was the defining feature of the world security. There was one Yugoslavia and two Germanies. The term "ethnic cleansing" was not yet current. The FTA was yet to be concluded. The notion that there were "global issues" was not yet articulated. European construction had stalled, with the EC in the slump of europessimism. Privatization was controversial in much of the world. Japan was, by common consensus, ready to take a dominant and aggressive role in the world economy with the US a fading model. Apartheid was in place and military regimes were just phasing out in Latin America. The Canadian dollar stood at US \$ .75 and the failure of Meech Lake was still ahead of us. Bio- engineering verged on science fiction. Most important, the information age was in its infancy, the Internet and the World Wide Web not yet suspected of its power to transform the world.

While much else about the future is unpredictable, the change that **Information Technology (IT)** has already brought to society will continue to accelerate. It is only the limits of change IT will induce which are hard to see.

IT's impact is already dramatic on institutions, particularly large, **hierarchical structures**, built around the vertical flow of information, because levels of management responsible largely for transmitting information up and down, have become redundant. Individuals comfortable with IT increasingly refuse to work in structures that assume information is a commodity to be rationed rather than a form of energy to be harnessed and shared.

#### **Governance**

IT is changing the relationship **among public institutions** and **between individuals** and such **institutions**. The advantage in these relationships increasingly goes to those who make best use of IT, not necessarily those who have size or formal power on their side. The **nature of politics** and hence of **policy making** is being transformed by IT - as more players have the capacity to be involved in societal decision making. Individuals and non government entities now have means of collecting, disseminating and managing information and hence shaping opinion that competes with that of governments.